The
Court Houses
of Middle Tennessee

Bedford County (Shelbyville)
Cannon County (Woodbury)
Cheatham County (Ashland City)
Clay County (Celina)
Coffee County (Manchester)
Davidson County (Nashville)
Dekalb County (Smithville)
Dickson County (Charlotte)
Fentress County (Jamestown)
Franklin County (Winchester)
Giles County (Pulaski)
Grundy County (Altamont)
Hickman County (Centerville)
Houston County (Erin)
Humphreys County (Waverly)
Jackson County (Gainesboro)
Lawrence County (Lawrenceburg)
Lewis County (Hohenwald)
Lincoln County (Fayetteville)
Macon County (Lafayette)
Marshall County (Lewisburg)
Maury County (Columbia)
Montgomery County (Clarksville)
Moore County (Lynchburg)
Overton County (Livingston)
Perry County (Linden)
Pickett County (Byrdstown)
Putnam County (Cookeville)
Robertson County (Springfield)
Rutherford County (Murfreesboro)
Sequatchie County (Dunlap)
Smith County (Carthage)
Stewart County (Dover)
Sumner County (Gallatin)
Trousdale County (Hartsville)
Van Buren County (Spencer)
Warren County (McMinnville)
Wayne County (Waynesboro)
White County (Sparta)
Williamson County (Franklin)
Wilson County (Lebanon)

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

Text and Photos by Mark Zimmerman

Bedford County
Founded: 1807
Area: 474 sq. mi. (44th of 95)
Population: 44,696 (34th of 95)

Bedford County was established in 1807 from Rutherford County and was named for Thomas Bedford, Jr., officer in the Revolutionary War. The county seat of Shelbyville was named for Evan Shelby, father of Colonel Isaac Shelby. Cabins located around the Big Spring had been called Selby's Village for some time.

The current court house was built in 1935 and is the fifth; it was built to replicate the fourth. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Big Storm in May 1830 demolished Shelbyville; in 1833 cholera decimated the populace. Twice the court house was burned during insurrection or riot.

During the Civil War, Shelbyville was known for its Unionism. A soldier in an Ohio regiment called the city "an oasis to a traveler in a great desert."

Reportedly, Governor A.H. Roberts was persuaded to support the 19th Amendment (women's right to vote) during an impromptu meeting with suffrage leaders in the lobby of a Shelbyville hotel in 1920. Tennessee was the last state needed to pass the national amendment.

At that time, Shelbyville was a prominent manufacturer of pencils, due to the local abundance of cedar trees.

Bedford County may best be known for the Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration, which began as a three-day horse show in 1939.

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

Text and Photos by Mark Zimmerman

Cannon County

Founded: 1836

Area: 266 sq. mi. (82nd of 95)

Population: 13,804 (79th of 95)

Cannon County was established in 1836 from Rutherford, Smith, and Warren counties and named for Governor Newton Cannon, veteran of the Creek War and War of 1812 and Tennessee's first Whig Governor, 1835-39. Cannon was known as a fierce opponent of Andrew Jackson and his allies. Cannon lost one gubernatorial election to Sam Houston and another to James K. Polk.

In 1836, this new county was supposed to be named Marshall County after U.S. Chief Justice John Marshall but the names were switched in the legislature due to a copying mistake and it was named Cannon County.

The county seat of Woodbury, originally Danville, was named for General Levi Woodbury, Secretary of the Treasury.

The current court house, the fourth, was built in 1936 in the Colonial Revival style. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The first court house was built in 1836 by William Bate, a future governor. He added a spread eagle of gilded gold to the cupola which the county refused to pay for and ruled that it could not be removed. Bate climbed the cupola one morning, crowed like a rooster, and removed his eagle. The building was washed away by a freshet in 1850. Cannon County remained isolated until the building of the Memphis-to-Bristol Highway in the 1920s, which has now been replaced by Interstate 40.

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Text and Photos by Mark Zimmerman

Cheatham County
Founded: 1856
Area: 303 sq. mi. (74th of 95)
Population: 39,396 (39th of 95)

Cheatham County was established in 1856 from Davidson, Robertson, Dickson, and Montgomery counties and was named for Edward S. Cheatham, Speaker of the state Senate, 1855-61. Ashland City was established in 1856 after county incorporation. Proceeds from the sale of lots were used to built the court house and jail. The court house was replaced in 1869, and then in 1914 with the current one. The current court house was completed in 1918 and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The 1869 court house was retained at the rear of the new structure, partially surrounded by Criminal Justice Center, built in 1986.

The 1869 court house was 42x48 and cost $12,000. The first-floor offices and the courtroom on the second floor are still in use today.

In 1818 wealthy ironmaster Montgomery Bell and his slaves blasted through solid rock at a hairpin curve of the Harpeth River, producing a 16-foot drop in elevation and a water fall, which powered an iron forge. The site is now a state park at the Narrows of the Harpeth.

Sycamore Mills was one of two large gunpowder mills in the South at the beginning of the Civil War and was shut down by Union troops. Machinery from another mill in Augusta, Ga. was moved to the site after the war and E.I. Du Pont de Nemours Co. produced gunpowder there until 1904.

The largest manufacturer in the county, State Industries, produces 2.3 million water heaters per year.

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Clay County
Founded: 1870
Area: 236 sq. mi. (84th of 95)
Population: 7,794 (89th of 95)

Clay County was established on the Kentucky border from Jackson and Overton counties in 1870 and named for Henry Clay, congressman and senator from Kentucky, Speaker of the House, Secretary of State under President John Quincy Adams, and three-time candidate for president. The county seat of Celina was named for a daughter of pioneer educator Moses Fisk, who was instrumental in the formation of Smith, Jackson, and Overton counties.

The simple court house with pointed tower is the original, built in 1872-73 by local craftsman D.L. Dow and listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It contains the orginal handmade wooden pews. The first session of the county court met in Mary Roberts' store in Butler Landing.

Right off the Public Square, a bridge spans the Obey River near where it empties into the Cumberland River. Upstream, a dam built in 1943 created Dale Hollow Lake, known for its deep, clear waters and recreational opportunities. Due to the lake, however, the eastern part of Clay County is accessible only by traveling through Overton County. Clay County is sparsely populated and covered with heavy timber, one of its main industries. From 1870 to 1940, giant 300-foot-long rafts composed of logs were floated down the Cumberland River to saw mills in Nashville.

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Text and Photos by Mark Zimmerman

Coffee County

Founded: 1836
Area: 429 sq. mi. (54th of 95)
Population: 52,134 (28th of 95)

Coffee County was established in 1836 from Warren, Franklin, and Bedford counties at the same time as Cannon County and was named for Major General John Coffee, cavalry leader, veteran of the War of 1812, and a close friend of Andrew Jackson. The county seat of Manchester was named for the city in England in hopes the town would become an industrial giant.

The intricate Italianate-style court house was built in 1873 and is the second. The first court house burned in 1870, with arson suspected after an official was found short in his books. The current court house was renovated in 1973 despite some efforts to build a newer, modern building. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Located near the city is Old Stone Fort State Park, the site of an ancient Native-American ceremonial enclosure. The site was used for at least four centuries, but its exact purpose is unknown. Also located in Coffee County, at Tullahoma, its largest city, is the Arnold Engineering Development Center, which tests jet and rocket engines. The county also boasts the George Dickel Distillery, the only producer of Tennessee sippin' whiskey other than Jack Daniel's Distillery, and has hosted the Bonnaroo Music Festival since 2002.

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Text and Photos by Mark Zimmerman

Davidson County

Founded: 1783
Area: 502 sq. mi. (37th of 95)
Population: 626,144 (2nd, to Shelby County)

Davidson County was established in 1783 by the North Carolina legislature and named for Brigadier General William Lee Davidson of North Carolina, who was killed in 1781 during the Revolutionary War at Cowan's Ford, N.C. The county seat of Nashville, known first as Nashborough, was named for General Francis Nash, who was killed in battle at Germantown, Pa. in October 1777.

The Public Square was situated on high ground overlooking the Cumberland River. Five court houses have occupied the grounds, including the current one built in 1937 in the Art Deco style and funded in part by the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works. The building abounds in symbolism. The three etched glass panels above the doors represent the three great law-givers: King John of England, Moses, and Justinian. Colorful murals by Dean Cornwell adorn the lobby. The building is on the Federal Register of Historic Places. A monument notes the site of the first Methodist Church (1787) in the Cumberland settlements. Another includes the inscription: "To the Heroes of 1776. Not dead, but living in deeds such lives inspire." The first court house, a log cabin, was built in 1783.

A new park was created on the square in 2006, the city's 200th anniversary, and features the Founders Pavilion, with a tower for each of the city's two founders–James Robertson and John Donelson.

On this square, in 1813 at the City Hotel, Andrew Jackson was wounded in a gun battle with the Benton brothers.

The most famous court house was built in 1857 by Francis Strickland. The Greek Revival design very much resembled the nearby State Capitol, which had been designed by Strickland's father, William.

In 1962 Nashville merged with Davidson County into a countywide Metropolitan Government. Thus, City Hall is also located at the court house. The county features six National Historic Landmarks and other attractions too numerous to list here.

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

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DeKalb County

Founded: 1837
Area: 304 sq. mi. (73rd of 95)
Population: 18,694 (68th of 95)

DeKalb County was established in 1837 from White, Warren, Cannon, Wilson, and Jackson counties and was named for Baron Johann DeKalb, a Bavarian officer who accompanied Lafayette to America, became a Major General in the Continental Army, and was killed at Camden, S.C. in 1780. Reportedly, near death, he said, "...I die the death I always prayed for: the death of a soldier fighting for the rights of man." The county seat of Smithville was named for Samuel Granville Smith, the Tennessee secretary of state, 1831-35.

The current court house was built in 1971 and is the fourth.

Liberty is the oldest town, dating back to 1807. The first settler, Adam Dale, arrived from Maryland in 1797.

DeKalb County furnished almost as many soldiers for the Union as it did for the Confederacy during the Civil War and bitter feelings about the war lasted for decades. The Battle of Snow's Hill was fought on April 3, 1863 near Liberty, engaging about 4,000 men.

The Public Square in Smithville is the site of the annual Fiddlers' Jamboree, held since 1971. In 1948, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers created Center Hill Lake, which attracts many boaters and fishermen.

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

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Dickson County

Founded: 1803
Area: 490 sq. mi. (40th of 95)
Population: 47,884 (31st of 95)

Dickson County was established in 1803 from Robertson and Montgomery counties and named for Dr. William Dickson, a Nashville physician, Speaker of the State House, and U.S. Congressman (1801-07). The county seat of Charlotte was named for Charlotte Robertson, wife of James Robertson, the "Father of Middle Tennessee." Mrs. Robertson, a hardy pioneer, was the heroine of the Battle at the Bluffs in Nashville in 1781 when she released the hounds from the fort and drove off attacking Indians.

The current court house (National Register of Historic Places), built in 1833, is the oldest court house in the state, and is the second. The first court house, built in 1812, was destroyed in 1830 by a tornado which leveled the town and blew county records all over the countryside.

The new court house had four rooms downstairs and the courtroom upstairs, with an identical entrance on each of its four sides. The roof featured a cupola with bell tower.
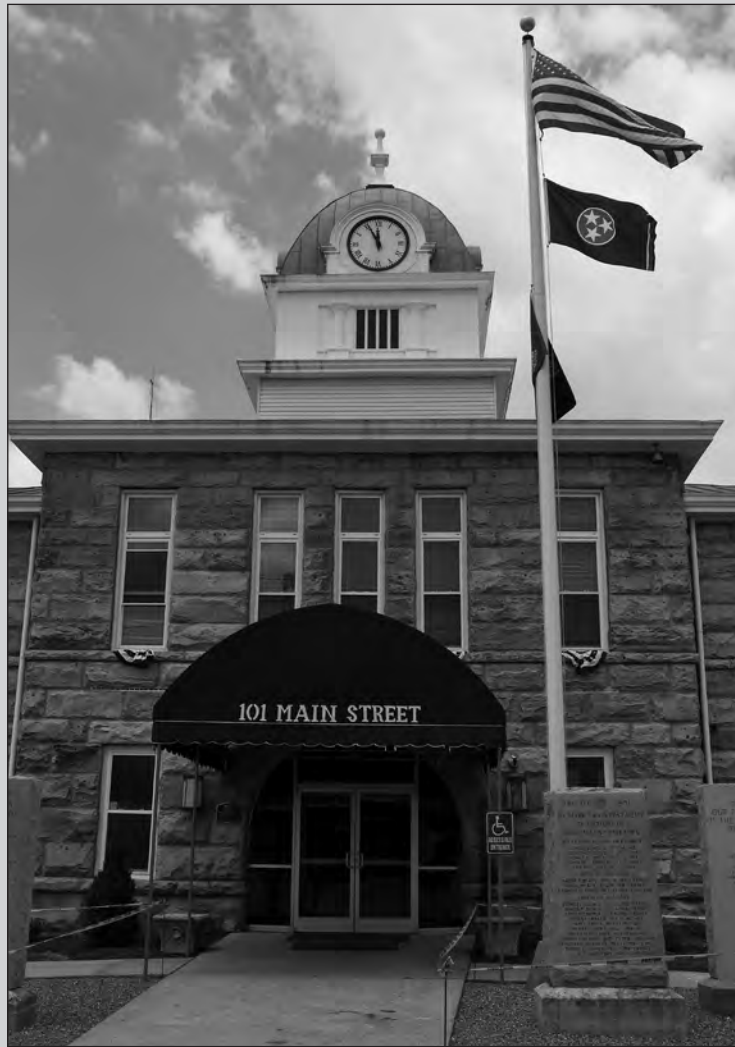
In 1899 county business was split with Dickson, a railroad town and the county's most populous. In 1927 a referendum designated Charlotte as the sole county seat (Dickson won more votes, but two-thirds was required to move the county seat). In 1930 wings were added to allow for five more offices downstairs, enlargement of the courtroom, plus a witness room, jury room, and an additional office upstairs.

One of the first ironworks in the Old Southwest was established by Robertson at Cumberland Furnace; later it was sold to ironmaster Montgomery Bell of Pennsylvania. The Cumberland Presbyterian Church was founded in 1810 at a wilderness cabin in what is now Montgomery Bell State Park.

In the late 1800s a socialist utopian colony was created by Julius A. Wayland at Tennessee City and later moved to Ruskin Cave. A socialist newspaper, *The Coming Nation,* was published, and Ruskin Ready Remedy cure-all was produced there. The colony disbanded in 1899.

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

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Fentress County

Founded: 1823
Area: 499 sq. mi. (38th of 95)
Population: 17,667 (72nd of 95)

Fentress County was established in 1823 from Overton and Morgan counties and named for James Fentress, Speaker of the State House. The county seat of Jamestown (Jimtown) was also named for Fentress, although it was originally called Sandy Springs. John Clemens, the father of Mark Twain, was one of the commissioners who built the first court house in 1828.

The current court house was built in 1906 and is the third. It was enlarged and renovated in 1974.

Coal mining was a major industry in Fentress County, which is located near the Big South Fork National Recreation Area. The most famous native son is Sgt. Alvin C. York, the most decorated enlisted man of World War One, despite growing up as a pacifist. Coming home, he founded the York Institute to educate the young people of the county. In 1936, socialist Kate Bradford Stockton of Fentress County was the first woman to run for Tennessee governor.

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

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Franklin County

Founded: 1807
Area: 555 sq. mi. (25th of 95)
Population: 41,165 (35th of 95)

Franklin County was established in 1807 from Warren and Bedford counties and was named for Benjamin Franklin. The county seat of Winchester was named for General James Winchester of Sumner County, a general officer in the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 and co-founder of the city of Memphis.

The court house was built in 1937 as a New Deal public works project and is the fifth. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Following the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860, Tennessee voters decided in a referendum not to leave the Union or join the Confederacy. Lincoln County subsequently voted to secede from Tennessee and petitioned the Confederate state of Alabama to annex it. After Lincoln called for volunteers to invade the South, Tennessee voters changed their minds and elected to join the Confederacy, "rendering further action needless."

A native of Winchester is Frances Rose "Dinah" Shore (1917-1994), popular singer, actress, and television personality. She had 71 hit records.

The Tims Ford Dam and Lake is a popular recreational destination.

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

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Giles County
Founded: 1809
Area: 611 sq. mi. (12th of 95)
Population: 29,184 (50th of 95)

Giles County was established in 1809 from Maury County and was named for U.S. Senator William B. Giles of Virginia, who strongly advocated for Tennessee's admission as a state. Andrew Jackson suggested the name in opposition to State Senator Thomas Hart Benton, who wanted to name it after Isaac Shelby. The county seat of Pulaksi was named for Count Casimir Pulaski of Poland, a cavalry leader who fought in the American Revolution and died at the battle of Savannah, Ga. in 1779.

The current neoclassical court house was built in 1909 and is the sixth. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Busts of three native sons who served as governor–Aaron V. Brown, Neill Smith Brown, and John C. Brown–are located in the foyer. The fifth court house was designed by renown Nashville architect Adolphus Heiman. Federal troops occupied the building during the Civil War. South of the court house on the square is the statue of Sam Davis, a young Confederate scout who was hanged as a spy by occupying Union forces. Offered clemency if he would reveal his cohorts, Davis replied, "If I had a thousand lives, I would lose them all here before I would betray my friend or the confidence of my informer."

Giles County was the birthplace of the Ku Klux Klan in 1866 and the birthplace of Moses McKissack, founder of one of the nation's oldest African-American architectural firms.

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

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Grundy County
Founded: 1844
Area: 361 sq. mi. (63rd of 95)
Population: 14,220 (77th of 95)

Grundy County was established in 1844 from Coffee and Warren counties and was named for Felix Grundy, a Virginian who came to Nashville via Kentucky, served in both houses of the U.S. Congress and as U.S. Attorney General under President Van Buren. At one time, he was considered Tennessee's most capable criminal court lawyer. Grundy was dealing in lands in the area at the time of the county's formation.

Altamont, formerly Wooten Cabins, was named the county seat in 1848. The current stately court house is Tennessee's newest, built in 1995. It is the third court house, the second one was destroyed by an arsonist in 1990.

Coal mining has long played the major role in Grundy County's development, first found in the 1840s while Ben Wooten's sons were digging out a groundhog from beneath a stump. Samuel F. Tracy of New York and others bought land and formed the Sewanee Mining Co. The first shipment of coal from what is now Tracy City was in 1858. In 1873 the company was reformed and built the Fiery Gizzard Coke Iron Furnace and proved the quality of local coal for making coke to supply blast furnaces.

In 1869 Swiss emigrants established the community of Gruetli. Temperance organizer John Moffat established Monteagle in 1870. The Highlander Folk School in Summerfield trained labor organizers from 1932 to 1962 and became involved in the civil rights movement.

The South Cumberland Recreation Area contains four parks of rugged beauty, drawing thousands of visitors each year.

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

Text and Photos by Mark Zimmerman

Hickman County

Founded: 1807
Area: 613 sq. mi. (11th of 95)
Population: 23,841 (59th of 95)

Hickman County was established in 1807 from Dickson County and was named for Edwin Hickman, long hunter, explorer, and surveyor killed by Indians in 1791 near the mouth of Defeated Creek on the Duck River not far from Centerville. Centerville became the county seat in 1823 and was so named because it is in the center of the county. Vernon was the first county seat.

The court house was built in 1926 and is the third. The earliest records burned in 1866 during a fire at the Freedman's Bureau and Post Office.

At one time, Hickman County was known for its sulphur-spring health spas and iron manufacturing industry, although the county is mostly agricultural. Two famous female entertainers come from Hickman County: Beth Slater Whitson (1879-1930), author of "Let Me Call You Sweetheart," among others; and Sarah Ophelia Colley (1912-96), better known as the Grand Ole Opry's Minnie Pearl.

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Houston County

Founded: 1871
Area: 200 sq. mi. (88th of 95)
Population: 8,137 (87th of 95)

Houston County was established in 1871 from Dickson, Humphreys, and Stewart counties and was named for Sam Houston, governor of Tennessee and Texas (the only man to serve as governor of two states). The county seat of Erin was named by the Irish railroad workers in the area (Erin is Irish for Ireland). Arlington was first selected as the county seat, but it was moved to Erin in 1878 because the railroad wouldn't build a station at Arlington due to the grade being too steep. The Arlington court house became the Arlington Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

The current court house was built in 1957 and is the third.

The bridge over the Tennessee River was fought over during the Civil War, changing hands several times. (There is no current bridge.)

An annual week-long Irish festival is held in Erin in March. One side of the main road through Erin is festooned with Irish flags, the other side American flags.

Timbering and early-era iron manufacturing were large industries here. A major factor in the county's growth was the coming of the railroad in the 1850s.

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

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Humphreys County

Founded: 1809
Area: 532 sq. mi. (30th of 95)
Population: 18,149 (69th of 95)

Humphreys County was established in 1809 from Stewart County and was named for Judge Parry W. Humphreys of the Superior Court. The county seat of Waverly was named for Sir Walter Scott's Waverly novels. The first county seat in 1816 was Reynoldsburg, named for Congressman John B. Reynolds. When Benton County was established in 1835 from part of Humphreys County, the county seat was moved to Waverly.

The court house was built in 1952 and is the fifth. The bell displayed on the grounds came from the 1899 court house and possibly the 1836 and 1878 court houses.

During the Civil War, Federal authorities established a major river and railroad shipping center at Johnsonville on the Tennessee River. In November 1864 the depot was essentially destroyed by raiders led by General N.B. Forrest.

Timber has always been a big industry in the county, along with general agriculture. From the 1880s until the 1920s peanut farming was emphasized, the county producing one-third of the state's crop. The New Deal and TVA played a major role in the county's development. A TVA steam plant is located at New Johnsonville, along with other large industrial plants.

A major tourist site is the Hurricane Mills home of Loretta Lynn, the coal miner's daughter.

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

Text and Photos by Mark Zimmerman

Jackson County

Founded: 1801

Area: 309 sq. mi. (71st)

Population: 10,847 (86th of 95)

Jackson County was established in 1801 from Smith County and was named for Andrew Jackson, member of the first state Constitutional Convention and seventh U.S. President. The county seat of Gainesboro (Gainesborough) was named for General Edmund P. Gaines, veteran of the War of 1812 who fought with Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans, and is one of the oldest towns in the state. Williamsburg was the first county seat.

The current court house was built in 1927 and is the third. The first court met in the log home of John Bowen on Roaring River. In 1806 the county seat was established in Williamsburg and moved to Gainesboro in 1817. Many of the county's historical records were destroyed in a fire in August 1872.

Jackson County is known as the "Switzerland of the Cumberlands," situated at the edge of the Cumberland Plateau. Cordell Hull Lake is located there. Fort Blount on the Cumberland River was built in 1794 before Tennessee was a state. Agriculture and timber are the major industries.

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

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Lawrence County

Founded: 1817
Area: 617 sq. mi. (9th of 95)
Population: 40,954 (36th of 95)

Lawrence County was established in 1817 from Hickman and Maury counties on land obtained by treaty from Chickasaw Indians and was named for American naval officer James Lawrence (1781-1813). During the War of 1812, Captain Lawrence commanded the *USS Chesapeake* in a single-ship action against the *HMS Shannon*. Mortally wounded, his dying command "Don't give up the ship!" is still a popular naval battle cry. The county seat of Lawrenceburg was also named for him.

The court house was built in 1974 and is the fourth. The court house is of modern design and located several blocks from the Public Square, which features a statue of David Crockett, a pavilion, historic signage, a museum, and several shops.

David Crockett lived in the county for about five years and served as one of the first justices of the peace. His property is now David Crockett State Park.

Lawrenceburg sits on the old Military Road that Andrew Jackson used to journey to Natchez, Miss. The Natchez Trace Parkway today crosses a small portion of the northwest corner of the county.

Three historic migrations brought newcomers to the county: German Catholic farmers and craftsmen in the 1870s; Alabamians in the early 20th Century; and Amish farmers in the 1940s, who settled at Ethridge.

Lawrenceburg is known nationally as the capital of gospel music and is home to the James D. Vaughan Music School and Publishing Company.

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

Text and Photos by Mark Zimmerman

Lewis County

Founded: 1843
Area: 282 sq. mi. (77th of 95)
Population: 11,564 (84th of 95)

Lewis County was established in 1843 from Hickman, Maury, Lawrence, and Wayne counties and was named for Meriwether Lewis (1774-1809), explorer of the Lewis & Clark Expedition through the Louisiana Purchase. Lewis died of gunshot wounds at Grinder's Stand, an inn on the Natchez Trace in what is now Lewis County. His death was ruled a suicide but debate continues as to whether he was murdered. Lewis was buried at the site, which was marked with a broken-shaft monument in 1843. Today the site is a National Monument on the Natchez Trace Parkway. "This monument, about 25 feet high, in an obscure place, is now neglected, in a bad condition, and forgotten by almost everybody," Historian Austin Foster wrote in 1923.

The court house was built in 1939 and is the second. The county was dissolved in 1869 due to sparse population and then re-established by the legislature ten months later.

The first county seat in 1846 was Gordon and moved to Newburg two years later. In 1897 the county seat was moved to Hohenwald, a centrally located community founded by Swiss emigrants. The name means "high forest." There were three waves of Swiss-German immigration, including newcomers from Milwaukee, Wisc. and Omaha, Neb. Several communities were German and Swiss in cultural and social influence until anti-German sentiment during World War One. One factory in Hohenwald began making Hamburg lace for baby clothing and was converted during the war to making emblems for military uniforms.

From 1834 to 1880, the Napier Furnace produced tons of pig iron each day.

The county furnished three companies of men to the Confederate army during the Civil War.

In the 1884 "Tennessee Massacre," a mob descended upon a small Mormon community in the county. The result was the deaths of several Mormons, with the remainder fleeing the county.

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

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Lincoln County
Founded: 1809
Area: 570 sq. mi. (20th of 95)
Population: 33,116 (44th of 95)

Lincoln County was established in 1809 from Bedford County and was named for Major General Benjamin Lincoln, Revolutionary War veteran. Lincoln was present at the U.S. victory at Saratoga and surrendered his forces at Charleston, S.C. Lincoln formally accepted the surrender of the British at Yorktown, effectively ending the war. The county seat of Fayetteville was named for the French hero of the American Revolution, Marie Joseph Gilbert de Motier, Marquis de Lafayette.

The current court house was built in 1972 and is the fourth. The Colonial Revival-style structure was patterned after Independence Hall in Philadelphia. The grounds feature a statue of a Confederate soldier and a water fountain with a statue of a Greek maiden commemorating the women of the Confederacy. On the lawn are two large cannons which had been mounted at Fort Morgan, Ala. during the Spanish-American War. They were moved here in 1905. The third court house, in the Italianate style, served for almost a century before it was demolished.

Lincoln County furnished 21 companies of volunteers to the Confederacy during the Civil War.

According to the official city website, "Fayetteville was perhaps the second county seat in the United States to be laid out by legal mandate with a courthouse square at its center."

Also, "...prior to 1903, saloons on three sides of the square were interspersed with dry goods stores, groceries, hardware businesses, tailoring establishments, drugstores, banks, doctor's, and lawyer's offices. In those days, no lady walked unaccompanied across the square."

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

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Macon County

Founded: 1842
Area: 307 sq. mi. (72nd of 95)
Population: 21,838 (62nd of 95)

Macon County was established from Smith and Sumner counties in 1842 and named for Nathaniel Macon of North Carolina, veteran of the Revolutionary War, U.S. Senator, and Speaker of the U.S. House. The county seat of Lafayette was named for the French hero of the American Revolution, Marie Joseph Gilbert de Motier, Marquis de Lafayette.

The court house was built in 1933 and is the fourth. Renovations were made in the early 1970s. The three prior court houses all burned. Most records prior to 1900 were destroyed, possibly due to arson. The 1901 court house had a domed clock tower.

Macon County is one of the few counties never to have a rail line. It is chiefly agricultural, noted historically for its burley tobacco. Red Boiling Springs was a famous resort in the 1920s and 1930s, featuring five types of mineral springs and nine hotels. Three historic hotels survive and tourism still thrives there.

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

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Marshall County

Founded: 1836
Area: 375 sq. mi. (61st)
Population: 29,731 (49th of 95)

Marshall County was established in 1836 from Lincoln, Bedford, and Maury counties (part of Giles County was added in 1870) and was named for U.S. Chief Justice John Marshall. The county seat of Lewisburg was named for Meriwether Lewis, one of the leaders of the Lewis and Clark Expedition in 1803. James K. Polk practiced law in Lewisburg from 1841-44 right before he was elected President.

In 1836, this new county was supposed to be named Cannon County after then-Governor Newton Cannon but the names were switched in the legislature with another new county due to a copying mistake and it was named Marshall County.

The current court house was built in 1929 and is the third. It features roofline clocks on all four facades. Near the Public Square is the Ladies Rest Room (1924), a house specifically built for country women to rest, relax, and eat during their town visits.

Marshall County was the world's largest producer of Jersey cattle, site of the U.S. Dairy Experiment Station and the Tennessee Walking Horse Registry. Henry Horton State Park and the birthplace of General Nathan Bedford Forrest, the Confederate "Wizard of the Saddle," lie within the county.

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

Text and Photos by Mark Zimmerman

Maury County

Founded: 1807
Area: 613 sq. mi. (10th of 95)
Population: 81,938 (16th of 95)

Maury County was established in 1807 from Williamson County and was named for Abram Maury of Williamson County, who surveyed and laid out the counties of West Tennessee. He served in the state House and the state Senate from Williamson County. The county seat of Columbia was named for Christopher Columbus.

The court house was built in 1906 and is the fourth. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Renovations took place in 1972-73. The impressive clock tower, topped by a pole and ball, rises 132 feet above the Public Square. An earlier court house was occupied by both Union and Confederate forces and badly damaged during the Civil War.

A plaque on the court house says that James K. Polk was a successful lawyer in Columbia before becoming the 11th U.S. President, defending "pugilists, horse thieves, counterfeiters, and murderers." Defendants who lost their cases, however, were often "branded or whipped on the Public Square, or hanged on the gallows near the Duck River."

A rich agricultural county, Maury was the wealthiest county in Tennessee by 1860 and home to many fine antebellum plantations and estates, some of which survive as tourist sites. Columbia is well-known for its annual Mule Days in April. Phosphate mining was once a large industry in the county. The Saturn car manufacturing plant is located here.

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

Text and Photos by Mark Zimmerman

Montgomery County
Founded: 1796
Area: 539 sq. mi. (28th of 95)
Population: 154,756 (8th of 95)

Established in 1796 from Tennessee County at the same time as Robertson County and named for Colonel John Montgomery, who founded Clarksville along with Martin Armstrong. In 1779 Montgomery participated in the punitive expedition against Indian chief Dragging Canoe, and accompanied John Donelson on his river voyage to Nashville in 1780. He was a signer of the Cumberland Compact and first Sheriff of the district. He commanded territorial troops in the Nickajack Expedition in 1794, and was killed by Indians later the same year.

The county seat of Clarksville was named for General George Rogers Clark, "Conquerer of the Old Northwest." The commander of the Kentucky militia during the Revolutionary War, Clark's forces captured Kaskaskia and Vincennes (today located in Illinois and Indiana, respectively), which greatly weakened British influence in the Northwest Territory. He accomplished these feats before the age of 30; he died in relative poverty and obscurity.

The first court house was built near the banks of the Cumberland River. By 1811, the fourth court house was built of brick on the Public Square. After the Great Fire of 1878 destoryed the fifth court house, the current court house was built east of the square, designed by George Bunting of Indianapolis. Five years later a tornado damaged the roof, and in 1900 fire damaged the building and destroyed the clock tower. On Jan. 22, 1999, a tornado heavily damaged much of downtown Clarksville, including the court house. A newly rebuilt court house was dedicated on the fourth anniversary of the disaster. Informative signage at the new plaza tells the story of the court house, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Clarksville is also known as "Queen of the Cumberland" and "Gateway to the South." The city has a strong relationship with nearby Fort Campbell, home of the Screaming Eagles 101st Airborne Division.

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

Text and Photos by Mark Zimmerman

Moore County

Founded: 1871
Area: 129 sq. mi. (94th of 95)
Population: 6,195 (93rd of 95)

Moore County was established in 1871 from Lincoln, Franklin, Coffee, and Bedford counties and was named for Major General William Moore, who had lead militia forces, which included David Crockett, under Jackson in the Creek War and the War of 1812. The county was formed several months after Moore's death. The county originally had 300 square miles but was reduced by more than half because acreage had to be returned into Lincoln County, according to rules in the state Constitution.

The county seat of Lynchburg was reportedly named for a man named Lynch who administered lashings at the Public Square whipping post.

The current court house was built in 1885 and is the first and only. The small brick structure is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The brick walls are 20 inches thick. Renovations were made in 1967-68. Moore County is the second smallest county in the state and home to the historic Jack Daniel's Distillery despite the fact that the county is "dry." In 1876, the county had 15 whiskey distilleries. Tours of the distillery are popular and free to the public. Miss Bobo's Boarding House is a favorite attraction. The Public Square features many quaint stores and shops directed at the tourist trade.

Moore County and Lynchburg now form a combined county-city government.

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

Text and Photos by Mark Zimmerman

Overton County

Founded: 1806
Area: 433 sq. mi. (51st)
Population: 20,975 (63rd of 95)

Overton County was established from Jackson County in 1806 and named for Judge John Overton, co-founder of the city of Memphis, intimate friend of Andrew Jackson, and Judge of the State Supreme Court, 1804-09. The county seat of Livingston was named for Edward Livingston, Secretary of State under President Andrew Jackson. In 1835, the county seat was moved from Monroe to Livingston upon a controversial vote in which Livingston won by only four votes.

The court house was built in 1869 and is the third. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the building was remodeled in 1979. One prior court house was burned down by Confederate raiders during the Civil War.

Overton County sits on the escarpment of the Highland Rim in the west and on the Cumberland Plateau in the east. The county experienced an economic boom as logging and coal mining flourished from 1890 to the 1940s. Educator Moses Fisk created one of the first schools for women in 1806 at Hilham. A native, Albert H. Roberts served as governor and helped ratify the 19th Amendment, giving women the right to vote. In 1920, he ran for re-election and women voters helped run him out of office. Another native, James T. Davis, is the first name on the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C., sacrificing his life in combat at Bien Hoa, Vietnam, in July 1959. A monument stands to his memory at the county court house.

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

Text and Photos by Mark Zimmerman

Perry County

Founded: 1819
Area: 415 sq. mi. (55th of 95)
Population: 7,753 (90th of 95)

Perry County was established in 1819 from Hickman County and was named for Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry, who fought at Tripoli and at the Battle of Lake Erie in 1813 under the "Don't Give Up the Ship" battle flag. After victory, Perry exclaimed, "We have met the enemy and they are ours." The county seat of Linden was named for the linden trees in the area.

The court house was built in 1928 and is the fourth. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The first county seat was at Perryville on the west bank of the Tennessee River. In 1846, the portion on the west side of the river became Decatur County and the county seat was moved briefly to Harrisburg before settling at Linden in 1848. The court house, a Colonial Revival design by Nashville architect C.K. Colley, was finished in 1928.

The county is sparsely populated and heavily wooded, with timber being the main industry. The county's population has changed little since the Civil War. The county seat of Linden is barely 1,000 people. During the war, residents fought for the Confederacy and the Union. Considering its population, Perry County probably sent as high of a percentage of its men to fight in the war as any other county in the state.

Outdoor recreational opportunites abound on the Tennessee and Buffalo rivers and at Mousetail Landing State Park.

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

Text and Photos by Mark Zimmerman

Pickett County

Founded: 1879
Area: 163 sq. mi. (92nd of 95)
Population: 4,801 (95th of 95)

Pickett County was established from Overton and Fentress counties in 1879 and named for Howell L. Pickett, state representative from Wilson County, who along with fellow legislator Lem Wright worked to organize the county. The county seat of Byrdstown was named for Colonel Robert Byrd of Kingston although at first it was to be named Wrightsville after Lem Wright. Byrd was against Tennessee secession and fought with the Union Army during the Civil War.

The court house, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, was built in 1935 with nearby Crab Orchard mountain stone and is the second.

Pickett County has the smallest population and lowest population density of any county in Tennessee. It is the newest county in Middle Tennessee and the second newest in the state. Logging was a major industry from 1870 to 1930. Recreational opportunities can be enjoyed at Dale Hollow Lake and Pickett State Park. The most famous native is Cordell Hull, who served as Secretary of State under President Roosevelt during World War Two and won the Nobel Peace Prize for helping create the United Nations.

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

Text and Photos by Mark Zimmerman

Putnam County
Founded: 1842
Area: 401 sq. mi. (58th of 95)
Population: 71,160 (18th of 95)

Putnam County was established in 1842 from White, Overton, Jackson, Smith, and DeKalb counties, dissolved due to legal disputes, and re-established in 1854 and named for Major General Israel Putnam of the French and Indian War and Revolutionary War. The county seat of Cookeville was named for Major Richard Fielding Cooke, who was largely responsible for the re-establishment of the county.

The current court house was built in 1900, remodeled in 1962, and is the third. The first court house burned during the Civil War. The second court house burned in 1898 with all records lost. A monument on the grounds honors Jere Whitson (1853-1928), who helped establish Tennessee Technological University on land he donated.

Putnam County is located in three distinct geological regions: the Great Basin, the Highland Rim, and the Cumberland Plateau. Transportation has always been a critical factor. The east-west Walton Road ran through what is now Putnam County during the early 1800s. Although the Memphis-to-Bristol Highway bypassed Cookeville and the county, Interstate Highway 40 is now a major route, with Cookeville located about halfway between Nashville and Knoxville. The railroad came to the area in the 1890s, bringing new settlers and better markets for local farmers. Coal mining, lumbering, and manufacturing also emerged. By 1928, Cookeville was known as the Hub City of the Upper Cumberland. It is also the home of Tennessee Technological University.

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

Text and Photos by Mark Zimmerman

Robertson County

Founded: 1796
Area: 477 sq. mi. (43rd of 95)
Population: 64,898 (20th of 95)

Established in 1796 from Tennessee County at the same time as Montgomery County, Robertson County was named for James Robertson, the Father of Middle Tennessee. Robertson led the first white settlers to Nashville from the Watauga settlements in East Tennessee. The first settler was Thomas Kilgore, who lived in a cave on the South Fork of the Red River in 1776 or 1777 and lived to the age of 108. The county seat of Springfield, named for the various natural springs nearby, was laid out in 1796, the same year that Tennessee became the 16th state. William Fort, an early settler, handwrote the original Tennessee Constitution, as he was considered the best penman among the delegates.

During the 19th Century, Robertson County was known for its whiskey distilleries. This agricultural county is also known throughout the world for its high-quality dark-fired tobacco. In the early 1900s, a dispute between tobacco growers and a group of buyers called The Trust led to the Black Patch War in which night riders terrorized those farmers who chose not to break with The Trust. In 1911, the "war" dissipated when the U.S. Supreme Court ordered the dissolution of The Trust.

The present impressive court house, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, was built in 1879 and is the third. The clock tower and wings were added in 1930. Renovations occurred in 1973 and 1982.

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

Text and Photos by Mark Zimmerman

Rutherford County
Founded: 1803
Area: 619 sq. mi. (8th of 95)
Population: 249,270 (5th of 95)

Rutherford County was established in 1803 from Davidson, Wilson, Williamson, and Sumner counties and was named for Major General Griffith Rutherford, Revolutionary War hero and member of Southwest Territory legislature. The first county seat was Jefferson but it was moved to Murfreesboro in 1811. Murfreesboro was first called Cannonsburgh for Gov. Newton Cannon (1835-39) but was soon changed to Murfreesborough by Revolutionary War veteran Colonel William Lytle, who donated land for the Public Square, to honor his wartime friend, Colonel Hardy Murfree. For a brief time, 1819-1825, the Tennessee state legislature met in Murfreesboro.

The first court house, built in 1812, was used as the capitol of Tennessee and burned in 1822. Murfreesboro could have become the capital of Tennessee but local officials refused to pay the $100 fee to move public records from Nashville. In 1834 the State of Tennessee hired Professor James Hamilton to find its geographic center in order to locate the state capital as near as possible to the center of the state. In 1976, half a mile northeast on Old Lacassas Road, an obelisk was placed by the Rutherford County Historical Society at the state's geographic center.

The current court house was built in 1859 at the cost of $50,000 in the Greek Revival style with some Italianate features. In 1908 a remodeling included additions. In 1960 lower wings were added on the north and south. It is a two-story central block with two main entrances on the east and west, each with four massive columns. The cupola has a clock and bell tower. Each of the clock's four faces are seven feet in diameter. The court house is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In 1997 the interior of the court house was restored to its distinguished 19th-Century appearance.

In 1862 the court house was occupied by Federal troops but was recaptured in a raid by Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest to rescue Confederate prisoners scheduled to be hanged. Scars from bullets can still be seen in the brickwork.

The Stones River National Battlefield is in Murfreesboro, interpreting the bloody battle of Dec. 31, 1862 to Jan. 2, 1863. In terms of casualties, it was the tenth bloodiest battle of the War Between the States.

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

Text and Photos by Mark Zimmerman

Sequatchie County
Founded: 1857
Area: 266 sq. mi. (81st)
Population: 13,580 (80th of 95)

Sequatchie County was established in 1857 from Hamilton County and was named for the Sequatchie Valley, which had been named for the Cherokee chief who journeyed to Charleston, S.C. in the early 1700s to sign a treaty with the colonial government. Sequatchie means "opossum, he grins and runs." The county seat of Dunlap, formerly Coops Creek, was named for William Dunlap of Knoxville to enlist his support for the creation of the new county.

The court house was built in 1911 and is the first. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Although settled in 1806 the county was created 50 years later. Subsistence agriculture was practiced until the 1880s when the Nashville, Chattanooga & St. Louis Railway built a rail line through the Sequatchie Valley. By the turn of the century, coal companies were conducting large-scale operations at Dunlap, including the operation of hundreds of beehive coke ovens. The coke is produced from coal and used to fire iron industry blast furnaces. When the mines closed in 1922 due to overproduction of coal, the county's residents were hard hit and many moved out.

County business was suspended during the Civil War. In October 1863, Confederate Major General Joseph Wheeler led a cavalry raid against a Union supply train in the valley that was attempting to relieve besieged Federal troops at Chattanooga. Wheeler burned an estimated 800 to 1,000 wagons of supplies.

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

Text and Photos by Mark Zimmerman

Smith County

Founded: 1799
Area: 314 sq. mi. (70th of 95)
Population: 19,107 (65th of 95)

Smith County was established in 1799 from Sumner County and was named for General Daniel Smith (1748-1818), officer in the Revolutionary War, surveyor and drawer of the first map of Tennessee in 1794, U.S. Senator replacing Andrew Jackson, and one of the founding fathers of Middle Tennessee. The county seat of Carthage was named for the ancient Phoenician port in North Africa. The city was an active river port from 1820s to 1920s. The massive Cordell Hull Bridge over the Cumberland is an impressive structure. Carthage was built on land owned by the first settler, Col. William Walton, builder of the Walton Road. It was named the county seat in 1804 after a contentious contest between supporters, called the moccasin gang, and proponents of Bledsoesborough, called the polecats. Walton's furnishing of refreshments, including whiskey, may have determined the outcome.

The current court house was built in 1875 and is the second. The majestic Second Empire-style building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

U.S. Senator Albert Gore, Sr. and son Al Gore, Jr., former U.S. Vice-President, are natives of the county. The lake created by the building of Cordell Hull Dam proves outdoor recreation.

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

Text and Photos by Mark Zimmerman

Stewart County

Founded: 1803
Area: 458 sq. mi. (47th of 95)
Population: 13,226 (81st)

Stewart County was established in 1803 from Montgomery County and was named for early pioneer and speculator Duncan Stewart. The county seat of Dover was named for the cliffs on the Cumberland River, which faintly resemble the cliffs of Dover, England.

The current court house was built in 1965 and is the fourth. The court house, along with most of the town, was destroyed by Federal troops during the Civil War.

The county is dotted with the remnants of blast furnaces, the early-era iron manufacturing industry predominating for nearly a century. Timbering and burley tobacco are other major commercial activities.

Stewart County features both the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers and the popular Land Between the Lakes federal recreation area. History buffs can tour Fort Donelson National Battlefield, where U.S. Grant won his first big victory in 1862 and opened the invasion route to Middle Tennessee. Later, Federal troops burned Dover to the ground to prevent it from falling into the hands of Confederate raiders. Before the war, Dover was the second busiest river port on the Cumberland.

Stewart County was the last county to maintain a combined judicial and legislative body, changing in 1978.

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

Text and Photos by Mark Zimmerman

Sumner County

Founded: 1786

Area: 529 sq. mi. (32nd of 95)

Population: 155,474 (7th of 95)

Sumner County, Middle Tennessee's second county, was established by the North Carolina legislature in 1786 and named for Major General Jethro Sumner, veteran of the French and Indian War, Revolutionary War, and War of 1812. The county seat of Gallatin wasn't established until 1802 and was named for Albert Gallatin, Secretary of the Treasury under President Thomas Jefferson. Gallatin was a Swiss-born Congressman from Pennsylvania who fought hard to have Tennessee admitted as the 16th state in 1796.

The current court house was built in 1940 and is the third. A grant from the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works of $78,000 helped fund the court house. Renovations were made in 1974-75 and 1993. The second court house, a two-story brick building with a cupola topped with a ball, was in use for 100 years.

Sumner County was home to many early long hunters and settlers, such as Anthony and Isaac Bledsoe, Thomas "Big Foot" Spencer, Kaspar Mansker, Daniel Smith, and James Winchester. Winchester's Cragfont and Smith's Rock Castle were two of the finest mansions on the western frontier and are modern tourist attractions. Fairvue Plantation was a world-renown thoroughbred horse breeding farm during the late-1800s era of horse tracks, whiskey distilleries, and paramutuel gambling.

Hendersonville, a suburban city on the outskirts of Nashville, is known as the home to many country music stars. In the 1950s, Sumner County benefitted from the building of a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers lock and dam which converted the Cumberland River into Old Hickory Lake.

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

Text and Photos by Mark Zimmerman

Trousdale County

Founded: 1870
Area: 114 sq. mi. (95th of 95)
Population: 7,822 (88th of 95)

Trousdale County was established in 1870 from parts of Sumner, Macon, Smith, and Wilson counties and was named for Governor William Trousdale (1849-1851), who served with Andrew Jackson in the War of 1812, a brigadier general who commanded the 14th U.S. Infantry in the Mexican War, and minister to Brazil. The county seat of Hartsville was named for James Hart, owner of the property where the town was built.

The court house was built in 1905 and is the fourth. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The first court was held in 1870 in the Methodist Church. All three of the prior court houses burned, and all of the county records were destroyed. An obelisk in front of the court house honors the veterans of the War for Independence, the War of 1812, the War Between the States, and the Spanish-American War.

Trousdale is the smallest county in Tennessee and the first one created after the Civil War. Hartsville, once known as Damascus, traces its roots to 1795. At one time it was known for its active horse-racing track. In 1862, during the Civil War, dashing cavalry commander John Hunt Morgan led a successful raid on the Union garrison at Hartsville in what became known as The Hartsville Races. For a long time, Hartsville has been home to a thriving loose-leaf tobacco market. Prosperity came to Trousdale County in 1977 when the TVA began building the Hartsville Nuclear Plants (the largest in the world) near the Cumberland River, but the huge construction project was cancelled by the agency in 1984.

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

Text and Photos by Mark Zimmerman

Van Buren County

Founded: 1840
Area: 274 sq. mi. (80th of 95)
Population: 5,481 (94th of 95)

Van Buren County was established in 1840 from White, Warren, and Bledsoe counties and was named for Martin Van Buren, who was U.S. President at the time. The county seat of Spencer was named for legendary long hunter Thomas Sharp "Big Foot" Spencer, who was killed in 1794 by Indians within the county.

The western third of the county lies on the Highland Rim, while the eastern portion lies on the Cumberland Plateau and is 1,000 feet higher. Fall Creek Falls State Park covers 19,000 acres and contains gorges or gulfs formed by the Caney Fork River cutting through layers of sandstone. The park contains four major water falls, including Fall Creek Falls, which at 256 feet tall is 90 feet higher than Niagra, making it the highest waterfall east of the Rocky Mountains.

Burritt College (1848-1939) was the first coeducational college in the South, established by Elihu Burritt of Massachusetts.

Spencer was burned to the ground by Union troops during the Civil War, due to the county contributing four companies of men to the Confederacy.

The charmingly simple current court house was built in 1906 and is the third. Its construction was delayed when a tornado ripped off the roof.

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

Text and Photos by Mark Zimmerman

Warren County
Founded: 1807
Area: 433 sq. mi. (52nd of 95)
Population: 39,842 (38th of 95)

Warren County was established in 1807 from White County and was named for General Joseph Warren, a Revolutionary War hero killed at Bunker Hill in 1775. The county seat of McMinnville was named for Joseph McMinn, speaker of the state Senate and a future governor of Tennessee (another county is named for him).

The red brick court house was built in 1897 and is the fourth. The architectural style is modified Norman. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Legend has it that Judge Joshua Haskell (Eighth District Court) was impeached in 1829 for eating a watermelon behind the court house while a case was being tried.

Warren is known as the "round county" because newer counties subsequently formed from it had to have boundaries at least 12 miles from the county seat of McMinnville, thus creating an arc with a 12-mile radius around the county seat.

Lumbering was a big industry during the latter 1800s, and other industry developed after World War One. The beautiful countryside around McMinnville is well known for its orchards and nurseries. Apple brandy was a major cash crop during Reconstruction.

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

Text and Photos by Mark Zimmerman

Wayne County

Founded: 1819

Area: 734 sq. mi. (2nd of 95)

Population: 16,614 (73rd of 95)

Wayne County was established in 1819 from Hickman and Humphreys counties and was named for General "Mad" Anthony Wayne (1745-96), a fiery commander in the Revolutionary War and victor at the Battle of the Fallen Timbers in Ohio in 1794, which ended the Northwestern Indian War. Later in his life, he resided in Georgia. The county seat of Waynesboro was also named for him.

The general assembly created Wayne County in 1817, but the engrossing clerk failed to sign the act, and it had to be passed again when the legislature next met in 1819. The current modern court house was built in 1975 and is the fifth. Early county court meetings were held at the Natural Bridge, which became known as the Rock Court House. One of the more unique court houses in the state, the structure features a modernist design of severely angled concrete and glass walls and a tall, slender clock tower at the center of a more traditional Public Square.

The first court house was of logs and small, with a dirt floor and "big cracks" for windows. The second was a larger log structure, the third of frame constuction, and the fourth in 1840 was about 30x40 and made of brick.

One of the largest counties in the state, it borders on Alabama. The Natchez Trace Parkway runs through the county.

During the Civil War, on Dec. 15, 1862, a Confederate force of 1,800 under the command of General Nathan Bedford Forrest crossed the Tennessee River at Clifton, named for its high cliffs, to raid behind Union lines and thwart the campaign against Vicksburg, Miss. Citizens were left destitute by large armies of both sides passing through the county during the last months of the war.

Wayne County is heavily wooded, with the main industry being timber production, along with several small manufacturing plants.

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

Text and Photos by Mark Zimmerman

White County
Founded: 1806
Area: 377 sq. mi. (60th of 95)
Population: 25,129 (58th of 95)

White County was established in 1806 from Smith County and was named for John White, early settler and officer in the Revolutionary War. The county seat of Sparta was named for the ancient Greek city.

The court house was built in 1975 and is the fourth. The first court house was built of logs in 1810.

The historic Rock House east of Sparta was a tollhouse on the Nashville-Knoxville highway in the early 1800s. Bon Air Springs was an early mineral spa. Coal mining came to White County in 1882 and by 1920 the county was the sixth leading producer of coal in the state. The lumber industry took shape in the early 1900s. In the 1920s the Memphis-to-Bristol highway was built through Sparta. Bluegrass legend Lester Flatt is a county native.

Recreational opportunities can be found at Virgin Falls State Natural Area, Burgess Falls State Natural Area, and Rock Island State Park.

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

Text and Photos by Mark Zimmerman

Williamson County

Founded: 1799
Area: 583 sq. mi. (16th of 95)
Population: 171,452 (6th of 95)

Williamson County was established in 1799 from part of Davidson County and was named for Dr. Hugh Williamson, surgeon general of the North Carolina Militia during the Revolutionary War, a member of the Continental Congress, signer of the U.S. Constitution, and a friend of Benjamin Franklin, after whom the county seat of Franklin is named. The Public Square was built on land owned by Abram Maury, who was a close friend of Dr. Williamson.

The antebellum Greek Revival court house was built in 1856-58 and is the third. It sits at the southeast corner of the Public Square, which is anchored by a prominent monument of a Confederate soldier. The court house, like every other structure in the town, served as a military hospital following the bloody Battle of Franklin in November 1864. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Its walls are 24 inches thick and were once painted white. The four 30-foot-tall columns are made of iron forged at the Caney Fork Furnace. The estimated cost was $12,000, but the actual cost was $20,000. Major renovations occurred in 1976.

In 1864 a camp follower who had been arrested fell out of the jury room window to his death.

The historic Franklin Public Square and quaint commercial district attracts both tourists and shoppers throughout the week. The Carter House interprets the Battle of Franklin and Carnton features the largest private Confederate cemetery, the setting of the recent bestselling novel "The Widow of the South."

Williamson County is the fastest growing county in the state (1990-2000) and also the wealthiest, ranking first in per capita personal income. It is home to many country music entertainers and businessmen. Nissan USA recently moved its U.S. headquarters to the county.

The Court Houses of Middle Tennessee

Text and Photos by Mark Zimmerman

Wilson County

Founded: 1799
Area: 571 sq. mi. (19th of 95)
Population: 109,803 (12th of 95)

Wilson County was established in 1799 from Sumner County and was named for Major David Wilson (1742-1804) of North Carolina, a Revolutionary War hero and Speaker of the state House. The county seat of Lebanon was named for the biblical Lebanon due to the abundance of red cedar trees (actually Virginia juniper). Cedars of Lebanon State Park is located nearby.

The county was predominantly agricultural until around 1900, when various small industries located there. Lebanon is the corporate headquarters of the Cracker Barrel restaurant chain. Cumberland University was formed in 1842 and was known for its renown legal school. Castle Heights was a military academy that operated in Lebanon for many years (Mussolini sent several Fascist cadets there in 1931). During World War Two, extensive war manuvers were conducted in Wilson County in preparation for the 1944 invasion of Europe at Normandy.

The Public Square features many antique stores, a statue of Confederate General Robert Hatton, who was killed near Richmond, Va.; and a replica cabin near the old Town Spring where city founder Needy Jacobs lived. Coming to America, Jacobs had been shipwrecked off the North Carolina shore and rescued by Indians.

The current court house was built in 1966 several blocks east of the Public Square and is the fifth. The third court house was built in 1848 and designed by William Strickland, architect of the Tennessee State Capitol. The structure burned in 1881.

The 1953 trial of Sullins and Kirkendoll was the first to be televised in Tennessee.