

CHAPTER XV

TOWNS—*Continued*

LARISSA

IN 1846 a group of Tennesseans, led by Thomas H. McKee, established what became known as McKee Colony in the northwest part of the county, near the Killough settlement. The following year he had a town site laid out on the southwest part of the Absalom Gibson survey, some five miles west of the present Mt. Selman. His son, Reverend T. N. McKee, gave it a name, the Greek word Larissa, prophetic of the high ideals which characterized its future citizens. Some four years later it was incorporated.

Among Larissa pioneers, widely known for their loyalty to the church and their love for education, were the McKees, Newtons, Ewings, Erwins, Bones, Campbells, Yoakums, and Longs.

During its earlier years Larissa rivaled Old Jacksonville as a trading center. Christine Rierson, a native of Norway, opened the first store. Among other mercantile houses around its public square were Dewberry & Johnson, Dunning & McKee, Wadley's Grocery, A. M. Denman, Billik & Westheimer, Clapp & Brown, Barnett & Harrington and J. W. Brooks. McKee Inn, operated by S. L. McKee, was a noted hotel. The Masonic Lodge (1849) and Royal Arch Masons (1852) had strong organizations. The Old School and the Cumberland Presbyterians, the Methodists, the Baptists and the Christians had churches. The famous Larissa College and Stovall Academy, named for Reverend S. K. Stovall, made the town an educational center.

According to local tradition the first match game of baseball ever played in Texas was played in Larissa in 1875, Larissa defeating Afton Grove. Millard Stevens and C. P. Linder, two Alabama settlers, introduced the game in Larissa and other Cherokee towns quickly organized teams.

Despite the loss of population due to the closing of the college and the subsequent building of a railroad through Jacksonville, Larissa continued its existence until the establishment of Mt. Selman. By 1910 the last white man was gone. Today the popu-

lation consists largely of the descendants of old slaves, many of them occupying the decaying homes of former masters. No modern map even lists the aristocratic old town. Each August, however, ex-Larissonians and their descendants come together in a grove near the town site for one day of happy reminiscence. The spirit of Larissa is immortal.

TALLADEGA

Talladega was located just south of Larissa on the James Cobb survey. The chronology of the founding of the two towns is a matter of disagreement. One group maintains that Larissa was established because the staunch Presbyterians in the neighborhood disapproved of the sale of whiskey in Talladega. The other holds that when the McKees refused to sell a lot for a saloon in Larissa, Talladega was established to kill it. Whatever their relation may have been, Talladega's life radiated about its saloon, gambling hall and race-track.

According to tradition, Jesse Duren, the notorious land speculator who promoted the town, offered a lot to any one who would build on it. The population grew rapidly but the rowdy element drove the trade to Larissa. After a brief period of rivalry Talladega gave up the race. By 1852 it had disappeared.

MT. SELMAN

In 1884 four Larissa citizens—Doctor R. D. Bone, J. W. Wade, W. T. and J. N. McKee—bought homesteads on the newly-built railroad, now the Cotton Belt, and called the settlement Selman for Doctor Selman, the former owner of the land. Later the Post Office Department changed it to Mt. Selman. The McKees opened the first store, moving their business from Larissa. Among other early citizens were T. Carlton (also a merchant), E. R. Alexander, G. A. McKee, T. L. Wade, R. W. Shamblin, J. S. Matkin and Alf Long. Later business firms included Dublin Brothers, Burton & Newton and the C. H. Edwards Drug Store. Two disastrous fires have swept the town, the first causing frame buildings to be replaced by brick business houses, the last destroying the bricks. The Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians now have churches. Mt. Selman was long a leading peach and tomato shipping center.

KNOXVILLE

A second group of Tennesseans, settling in the northeast part of the county, on the Engledow survey, in the late '40s, named

the village, which soon sprang into existence, Knoxville, in honor of a home-state city. Thomas Norman, grandfather of W. T. Norman, Rusk attorney, owned the land upon which was surveyed the town site later to become one of the important pre-railroad towns. Among other prominent residents of Knoxville were W. A. Pope and A. Carmichael, Norman's partners in the promotion of lot sales; Thomas Bell, W. G. Engledow (captain of a company in Confederate service), James H. Salmon, William P. Henry, F. R. Gilbert, W. S. Maris, A. J. and D. D. Coupland, James Childers, Joel Cross, M. V. Shaw and James Rountree. Among its merchants were F. R. Gilbert, Buggs & Eidom, and Cameron & Pope, afterwards Pope & Gready. In 1853 the old Carmichael voting precinct was changed to Knoxville. After some three decades of activity, the town was dealt a fatal blow by the establishment of Troup on the new International Railroad. W. A. Pope was the last merchant to give up the fight and move to the rival town. Only the cemetery is left to mark the deserted site.

GRIFFIN

In the early '50s, on the northeast corner of the I. Kendrick league, the town of Griffin was flourishing. By 1854 it had become a voting precinct. Judging from the number of deeds executed, I. T. Kendrick must have been the town site promoter. Its chief store was operated by Comer, Fariss & Dial, as one in their chain of Cherokee County stores. Although the Griffin post office existed until the present century, official records of the late '80s refer to the "old town of Griffin." Evidently Knoxville competition had proved too strong. During the early part of the present century, however, Griffin was a flourishing community centering around its school.

Among the citizens of its heyday were the Quaides, Kendricks, O'Hairs, Flowers, Jennings, Martins, Dodsons, Greadys, Dutys, Evans, and Jones. John B. Kendrick, whose colorful career as cattle king, state senator, governor and United States senator in his adopted state of Wyoming, attracted nation-wide attention, was born near Griffin, September 6, 1857.

LONE STAR

Lone Star, first burdened with the much less pleasing name of "Skin Tight," dates its existence from the early '80s when H. L. Reeves, allegedly a skinner, established its first store. Among its influential pioneers were the Dolbys, Tiptons, Pierces, Conners, Morrisises, McCrimmons, Balls, Drakes, Cleavers and Blacks.

In its heyday it had five or more stores, three churches, a lodge and the Lone Star Institute, a school of more than local prominence. Today Scott Arnwine owns its only store. Like many another once thriving business town, it was ruined by a new railroad rival—Ponta.

PONTA

Ponta had its beginning in 1901 in the would-be village of Donoho, so named because of its location on the Donoho survey. When the final survey of the Texas and New Orleans Railroad missed Donoho, L. D. and W. T. Guinn, together with W. T. Norman, promoted the present town site, first named Hubb for Hubbard Guinn, the surveyor, and afterward changed to Ponta.

Pioneer families in the Ponta territory included the Dalbys, Jones, Baileys, Montgomerys, Summers, and Bowlings. E. P. Dalby opened the first store. He was soon followed by D. T. Applewhite, Robert Montgomery, who moved his business from Donoho, C. S. Bolton and Tipton & Adams. Among the town's colorful characters was John Atchinson, who for more than two decades supplied picnic and fishing parties on Stafford Lake with boats. Ponta business and professional men of today include A. R. Redden, J. L. Bailey, W. G. Waldrop, C. W. Darby, M. V. Sessions, Jerry Liles, B. H. Everett and Doctor P. E. Jones. The town has three churches, a Masonic Lodge and a five-teacher school. When the timber business was at its peak, Ponta was a leading shipping point. In recent years plant farms have effected a significant increase in its volume of business.

REKLAW

Reklaw, which bears the surname of the owner of the town site, Margaret L. Walker, spelled in reverse order, was established as a result of the building of the Texas and New Orleans Railroad. In 1908 it was made a voting precinct. Among the early citizens were the Gilbreaths, Irwins, Talleys, Avaras, Russells, DeVaneys, and Richeys. J. B. Parnell had the first store. John Irwin soon followed. Its 1934 merchants include V. M. Holmes, S. P. Holmes, W. G. Weatherby, Tom Summers, and F. C. Steagall. The town has three churches and a six-teacher school.

SUMMERFIELD

Pioneers in the Summerfield neighborhood, whose coming antedates the establishment of the town by several decades, include the Dotsons, Dodsons, Tennisons, Gills, Fullertons, Sowell, Dick-

sons, Nicholsons, Tiptons, Summers and Truitts. The town of Summerfield, named for the Summers family, owners of the site, dates from the late '90s when Isaac W. Tipton opened the first store. He was also the first postmaster. In 1934, Summerfield business men include E. M. Nicholson, T. J. Heath, A. G. Tipton, A. Dickson, J. T. Darby, Ted Stovall and Clyde Richardson. A nine-teacher school, housed in a modern brick building, is the pride of the community. Three churches also play an important rôle in community life. The Methodist Church, a brick building, is the descendant of the pioneer Union Chapel Church, located a mile southwest of Summerfield. Recently opened highways have brought new life to the town.

TURNEY

Turney, established about 1903 on the newly-built Texas and New Orleans Railroad, was named for J. A. Turney, the pioneer settler who promoted it. Among other pioneers already living in the neighborhood were the Priestleys, Flings, Hendersons, Jenkins, Coles, Arnwines, Slovers, Morrows, Evans and Chandlers. Matt Chandler operated a mill near the town for almost half a century. The Peacock crate and basket factory is older than the town itself, having been started in the near-by woods as the Slover Crate Factory. I. A. Bounds is the oldest merchant, having sold goods since 1904. Early firms included J. E. Herrington, and Slover & Son. The Baptists have the only church in the town.

GALLATIN

After donating switching ground to the Texas and New Orleans Railroad, J. W. and Miss S. A. Chandler had a town site surveyed on their adjacent land in 1901. Asked to name the new town, C. H. Martin, a Rusk attorney, chose the name of his native Tennessee town, Gallatin. Two stores were opened before the railroad was completed: Hood Melton, drugs; and J. W. Chandler, drygoods. S. A. Jenkins, J. E. Turney and S. G. Odom & Company were also early merchants, the last two still being in business. J. A. Garner opened his hardware store some twenty years ago. The town has three churches, their sites being donated by the Chandlers. The Gallatin school was the first consolidated school in the county, the Gallatin district the first independent rural district. Although the town itself is relatively new, the Gallatin section had settlers before the county was organized. Among the pioneers were the Jenkins, Henrys, Bridges, Davises, Taylors, Van Zandts and Thompsons.

In 1928 a Gallatin farmer, J. D. Dickinson, brought distinction to Cherokee County by winning first prize at the International Grain Show for the best five ears of corn.

CRAFT

The first station established on the Kansas and Gulf Short Line Railroad south of Jacksonville in the early '80s was originally called Independence, the name the early settlers in the section had given their community. Thomas Craft opened the first store and, in his honor, the name was soon changed. Among other pioneers were the Thompsons, Taylors, Rosses, Rudes, Felps, Dicks, Meadors, Caseys, Jarratts, Goodsons, Aults, and Walkers. C. A. Walker cleared the first farm in the community. Craft merchants included P. H. Morton, Will Lunsford, C. Haws, and W. S. Ault. The Ault store, occupying the old frame schoolhouse, now has the business field to itself. The Baptist Church and a modern brick school building complete the "town."

In 1889 the alleged discovery of gold by two transients claiming to be old miners created wild excitement among Craft citizens. One farmer is said to have refused five hundred dollars an acre for his land before geologists punctured the bubble. The miners slipped away.

The next decade, however, brought real gold in the form of fruit. In 1897 the first car of tomatoes ever shipped from Texas went from Craft. For the next few years it was the state's chief tomato center.¹

DIALVILLE

Dialville, first called Dial, was named for J. J. Dial, a pioneer settler who donated the town site. Comer, Fariss & Dial opened the first store about 1882. Some four years later the failure of their chain of five stores scattered through the county left Dialville merely a flag-station until it took a fresh start, about 1902, with the opening of the John Bailey store. Among other early merchants were Miller & Meazles, Odom & Odom, P. B. Harris, and W. F. Jones. Other pioneer settlers in the Dialville section included the Dements, Lindseys, Moores, McKnights, Ackers, Thomasons, Durrets, Cribbs, Halberts, Johnstons, Burnetts, Sides, Glasses, Grishams, and Dovers.

Two newspapers had brief careers. The *Dialville News*, established by W. M. Ellis of Rusk in 1913, with Will T. Read as

¹Two Craft schoolboys, Earl Morton and J. C. Ross, Jr., furnished material for this sketch.

publisher, was soon sold to Clyde Ratcliff, formerly connected with Ratcliff and Alto papers. A little later Ed Scott became editor. In 1920, Charles Benge was gaining wide comment by his editorials in the Dialville *Searchlight*. In its heyday the town had a bank, a band and a picture show.

Following Craft's lead in tomato culture Dialville has been for many years an important shipping center. Earlier it was one of the leaders in the peach industry.

Today Dialville has seven stores, three churches, including the old Rocky Springs Church, and a consolidated ten-teacher school. Doctor J. W. Moore has been a practicing physician for thirty-five years.

PINE TOWN, JAVA AND GHENT

Three communities went into the making of Maydelle—Pine Town, some three and one-half miles southwest; Java, about two and one-half miles south; and Ghent, around two miles north of the present Maydelle.

Pine Town, located in a virgin pine area, existed in the middle '40s. The name, however, was partially a misnomer. The community had neither store nor church. Later it became a station on the stage line between Rusk and Palestine but its citizens continued to worship at Mt. Comfort Church near by and haul supplies from distant stores. Among prominent Pine Town settlers were the Pardews, Beards, Nortons, Broomes, Ballews, Campbells, and Crumes. In 1866, Mrs. N. C. Crume was postmistress. Community life centered in the A. Jackson Masonic Lodge and the school. In the '70s the excellent Pine Town school was the educational center for the surrounding territory. Among its teachers were P. Williams, Joab Moore, J. H. Cannon, and Miss Maggie Taylor. The present Maydelle precinct is the old Pine Town voting box established at James Beard's house in 1848 and changed to Pine Town in 1850.

Java dates from the late '80s. According to a story told to J. L. Brown of Jacksonville while on a fishing trip on the Neches River in the '90s, a young lady's loss of her petticoat at a community ball supplied the name. Still visible lettering proclaimed the garment was originally a Java coffee sack. The post office, established while the lady's misfortune was a current topic, was called Java. Wayne Watson was Java's only merchant, the lack of business establishments gaining the nickname, "Needmore." After the railroad was built Java was moved to Pine Town.

The naming of Ghent, credited both to W. S. Branhan and

Doctor Scurlock, for the Belgium city gives further proof of the cultural note in pioneer life.² Branhan had the first store. In the '80s, Ezell, McCracken & Company was the leading firm. The post office was in their store, J. L. McCracken being postmaster. Among other merchants in the '80s and '90s were Russell S. Starkey, Charles Bengé, Montgomery & Sherman (Frank) and Doctor Scurlock. Among Ghent teachers in later years were Walter Whitman and Miss Birdie Branhan, now Mrs. Alvin Sherman of Rusk.

MAYDELLE

Although the town itself is little more than two decades old, the Maydelle section had settlers in the '40s. Among its pioneers were the Herndons, Odoms, McCrackens, Meadors, Allens, Dendys, Brigmans, Wallaces, Balls, Shermans, Roaches, Watsons, Boltens, Moores, and Poseys.

Visioning the possibilities of a town on the State Railroad, supported by the truck and sawmill industries developing in the adjacent territory, C. D. Jarratt, N. A. (Jack) Slover and J. S. Sherman, in 1910, bought five hundred acres of state-owned land and announced the opening of a town. A formal lot sale was unnecessary. Before the survey could be completed, two-thirds of them were sold and buildings were under construction. The name, Maydelle, was given in honor of Governor Campbell's daughter.

Jim Holsomback opened the first store, a drug store now run by his widow. J. A. Arnwine, J. W. Russell, and Lively & Son, all general merchants, soon followed. J. S. Sherman, present merchant and postmaster, began business in 1913 by the purchase of the Russell stock. As the sawmill and truck industries declined, Maydelle business suffered. In 1934 the town has seven stores, two churches (Baptist and Methodist), Masonic and Woodman lodges, and an excellent school system resulting from the consolidation of the Maydelle, Pine Town and Ghent districts.

CUNEY

Cuney, a negro town on the Texas and New Orleans Railroad, was promoted by Dennis Thomas, who saw in it an opportunity for providing his people with a better market. It was named for Cuney Price, the son of a Palestine negro real estate dealer who assisted Thomas in the establishment of the town. Cotton farming

²According to another tradition, the name originated in the salutation, "Howdy, Gent."

has been the chief source of wealth. Thomas was the first merchant. The town now has four stores, two lodges, two churches and a five-teacher school. Its pioneer settlers include the Sneeds, Burwell, and Braggs.

In addition to the town of Cuney there are in the county a number of prosperous negro communities. Among these are Shady Grove, "Ellum" Grove, Woodville, Pine Hill and New Hope.

REESE

In 1895, Miss Angie Lane was appointed postmistress of a new office just east of the present Reese for which, in order to prevent its being named for herself, she suggested the name Andy, in honor of A. J. (Andy) Chessher, then the Jacksonville postmaster. When the Texas and New Orleans Railroad built a switch called Reese, in honor of Reese Lloyd, a conductor on its line, John H. Henderson, who had succeeded Miss Lane as postmaster, had the name of the office changed to Reese. Henderson also promoted a town site around the new station. Among the early Reese merchants were John Plair and Etheridge & Owens. Today J. J. Larson has the only store. Among other pioneer families in the Reese neighborhood were the Mitchells, Dodsons, Smiths, Lewises, Murrays, Russells, Pinsons, Coates, Reeves, and Liles.

TECULA

In 1875, Galusha A. Grow, president of the International and Great Northern Railroad Company, established the station, Reynolds, which proved a great convenience to the pioneer settlers in the neighborhood, including the Rosses, Pierces, Hensleys, Alexanders, Burns, Stocktons, Northcutts, Dutys, McKinleys, Clarkes, and Adams. When the post office was established, L. E. Burns was made postmaster. Among early merchants were John Boone, Joe McKinley, Riley Pierce, and T. A. Herring. In 1913 the town was almost destroyed by fire. The post office was discontinued for some years and when it was reestablished the name had to be changed, another Reynolds having come into existence during the interval. The Post Office Department chose Tecula. J. T. Waites is the only merchant in 1934. Howard Clark has a filling station. The Baptist and Methodists have churches and a six-teacher school serves the community.

IRONTON

C. H. Martin, immigration agent for the International and Great Northern Railroad Company, promoted the Ironton town

site. The near-by ruins of the old Chapel Hill Manufacturing Company's iron plant suggested the name. Among the pioneers living in the section prior to the establishment of the town were the Barnes, Benges, Pritchetts, and Hardaways. Among early merchants were T. F. Prigmore, C. C. Brittain, J. W. Patton, and W. B. Bates. W. J. Pool was the first postmaster. Doctor J. M. Brittain was a pioneer physician. In 1905, Martin donated the site for the "Town Hall of Ironton, to be used for preaching, public speaking, union meetings and a school." Today the town has one store, two churches and a five-teacher school.

FOREST

Although the present town of Forest dates from the building of the railroad in the middle '80s, the original Forest, located about three-fourths of a mile to the west, existed before the Civil War. According to tradition, a traveler stopped under a tree. When asked why he stopped he answered, "For rest!" His explanation of his presence gave rise to the name "Forest." Wylie Thompson was the only merchant in the village, his store being the voting place for the precinct and also the post office. Mail, however, was extremely uncertain. The negro carrier rode a most temperamental mule. There was also a gin and a mill, both run by water. Among the earliest settlers were the Carrs, Dials, and Burkes.

The Grange opened the first store in the present town. Dick Durham, the first postmaster, bought it. In 1888, J. S. Derrough, Jeff Latham and Hugh Henry donated a lot for a school and a church. Three stores, one church building, which houses two congregations, and a five-teacher school serve Forest citizens in 1934. Miller Dial is postmaster.

WELLS

In 1885, Major E. H. Wells and the Kansas and Gulf Short Line Railroad Company established a town on the new railroad, named Wells for the Major, who was a railroad engineer. Thus pioneer settlers in the section, including the Bowmans, Chapmans, Spinks, Humphreys, Odoms, Rozelles, Falveys, Warners, Rawls, Goodwins, Baileys, and Simpsons, were furnished a closer market.

Among the early merchants were John Bailey, William Herrington, W. H. Spinks, Kemp Davidson, and Winsel Hilencamp, who moved his business from Cheeseland in Angelina County. The first hotel proprietor, W. A. Smith, soon sold to J. A. Brewer. For some thirty years Doctor J. C. Falvey served the community.

Today Doctor J. L. Dubose is the only physician. Among present merchants, J. N. Shamass, B. H. Bowman and Rube Sessions have the longest service records. The town now has sixteen business houses, a thirteen-teacher school and two churches. The Methodist Church is the pioneer Mt. Hope Church. For a quarter of a century J. R. Oliver has distributed Wells mail.

Those other communities not dignified by the name of "town," yet forming one of the most important bases for the county's continued existence, include so many that the author hesitates to mention them for fear some may be omitted. Most of them have for a nucleus the church and schoolhouse which are always the focal point of American pioneer and rural life. One of the oldest is Sardis, originally settled by a band of South Carolinians, including the Berrys, Martins, Colemans, Nickersons, and Jennings, and noted for its community spirit and singing schools. Another is Atoy, settled in the '40s by the Hatchetts, Looneys, Jacobs, Manesses, Sessions, and Ashmores. The list also includes Central High, Primrose, Barsola, Bulah, Salem, Redlawn, Lone Oak, Mt. Hope, Emmaus, Mixon, Corine, Concord, Holcomb, Oakland, Blackjack, Cove Springs, Henry's Chapel, and Campground.