

## EARLY GREENFIELD HISTORY

The history of Greenfield goes back to the laying of the Illinois Central Railroad tracks in 1873. The huge green fields of wheat swaying back and forth in the wind on either side of the tracks are said to have inspired the engineer of the first train to give the town its name.

East of the railroad, there was a small community called "Old Hall," but in 1874 these people decided to move closer to the tracks. The first building to be erected on what is now Front Street, the main thoroughfare, was Ward Brothers Store. As the population grew, more stores were built. Some of the pioneer families in Greenfield were the Ward's, Elam's, Baker's, Barton's and Moseley's. More of the first families were Ezell's, Hillis', McAdams', Deuberry's and Priestley's. The original settlement was made on the lands of Joseph H. Ward and Samuel Baker.

The first dwellings were built in the same (1874) year by John W. Ward and James M. Ward. The Post Office was also established in this year. The first hotel was erected by Gilbert Patterson in 1874.

According to Goodspeed Publishers (1887) Greenfield was incorporated November 9, 1880, although existing official records show it was incorporated in 1905. It is entirely possible that, following the custom of the times, there was an incorporation in 1880. It merely took a majority of the votes to incorporate a town.

Greenfield at this time was a pleasant little place, growing from 150 population in 1873 to 550 in 1874.

The first physicians were J. J. Edwards and J. E. Shannon. Also, at this time Greenfield had five general stores, two dry goods stores, six groceries, two drugstores, three saloons, one grist and sawmill, two steam cotton gins, two box factories, one hotel, one livery stable and several other industries of minor importance. The Tennessee Box and Basket Factory was established in 1885 by N. B. Hall, C. J. Tulley and Company. They manufactured berry and fruit boxes and employed from 30 to 50 people. The Greenfield Box and Package Factory of A. W. Wells and Company was established in 1886. They had extensive buildings and employed from 50 to 75 men.

The Washington Lodge of F. and A. M, No.129 was started in Greenfield around this time.

It is novel to note that no part of the commercial section of town has moved east of the railroad, where they were originally erected. Practically the only type of commercial establishments west of the railroad are service stations and one restaurant.

Several of the churches are older than Greenfield. Much of the land in and around Greenfield was originally owned by Samuel Baker, and many of his direct descendants still remain. In fact, a

former Mayor is married to the great great granddaughter of Mr. Baker, Elizabeth (Lib) Baker Williams.

The present Greenfield Banking Company was established in 1935, replacing the Fruit Growers Bank and the Old Greenfield. Both of these were casualties of the great depression of the early 1930's.

Greenfield has suffered two major fires. In 1915, about half of one business block on Front Street burned. Then, in 1921 the entire block from Belew Drug Company eastward was hit by fire. The modern sewer system and the paved streets were completed in 1928 and 1929, respectively.

### **PHYSICAL SETTING**

Greenfield is located in Weakley County in the Northwest section of the State 25 miles south of the Kentucky- Tennessee line on U. S. Highway 45E. It also has two other principal highways, Highway 124 leading to McKenzie, and Highway 54 leading to Dresden, Tennessee, the county seat of Weakley. Greenfield lies between the South Fork and the Middle Fork of the Obion River. Jackson, Tennessee, is 45 miles to the south, and Memphis, Tennessee, is 100 miles southwest. The town is approximately four square miles in size.

The climate is of the humid subtropical variety with an annual mean temperature of from 59 to 61 degrees. The average annual rainfall is from 48 to 52 inches distributed evenly throughout the year. The latest killing frost falls around April 10, and the earliest from October 20 to October 30, making an average growing season of from 200 to 220 days.

Greenfield sits on a low hill which is typical of the topography of this area. This hill slopes gently to the north and south respectively, to the Middle and South Forks of the Obion River which drains the area. They flow in a westerly direction where they join each other and the North Fork to eventually empty into the Mississippi River. The majority of the soil is of the sandy loam type which is quite fertile, but with some red clay which is fair to poor in fertility.

The water is quite plentiful since the heavy rainfall keeps the underground water table well replenished. The city water is furnished from a deep well and farm dwellers, in most cases, sink their own wells. These wells are generally 30 to 50 feet in depth.

There are no major mineral resources in the area, but there are a few scattered clay and gravel quarries nearby. The forest resources have been very nearly depleted with very little virgin forest remaining in the area. The most abundant trees are maple, pine and elm.

Until recently Greenfield was strictly an agricultural center, with its main function being a shipping point for the great variety of truck crops that are grown in the area. These include

strawberries, beans, tomatoes and okra. In fact, Greenfield was once widely known as the "Okra Capital of the World." In recent years there has been a decrease in these truck crops with an increase in such crops as soy bean and feed grains for livestock. There has been some cotton grown in the area for many years, although not nearly as much as in the areas just to the south and west. There is enough grown, however, to employ the use of two cotton gins.

## **COMMUNICATIONS AND UTILITIES**

For a rural area, Greenfield is blessed with communications media. There is access to four daily papers and three weekly newspapers. There is also a wide choice in television viewing. With long range antennae and rotor equipment, it is possible to receive three television channels from Memphis, one from Jackson, two from Nashville, one from Paducah, Kentucky, and one from Cape Girardeau, Missouri. There is no telegraph agency in Greenfield; however, messages are handled by the agent for the Illinois Central Railroad. A new modern Post Office was built in 1962. As for transportation, the I. C. R. R. furnishes freight service, but no passenger stops are made here. The town is served by the Dunlap Bus Company which makes one round trip to Memphis daily from Martin to Memphis, and by Trailways Bus Company.

Electric power is furnished by the Weakley County Municipal Electric System, which purchases its power from T.V.A. Greenfield first used T.V.A. power in the fall of 1938. An average electrical bill will range from \$6 to \$8 with several electrical appliances. Gas is furnished by the West Tennessee Gas Company. Many are heating with gas since this company ran its pipes through here several years ago. Coal and oil are shipped in and handled by local concerns. Water is furnished by the city by means of a deep well for the small monthly fee of \$2.50.

## **TELEPHONES**

Cumberland Telephone Company put in the first telephones in Greenfield. The first office was in the north block of the business district over what was then Baker's Barber Shop. It was in operation before 1900, starting approximately in 1878, and was called the "old pea vine system." In 1915 the office moved upstairs over what is now the Greenfield Drug Company and stayed in this location until 1953. Southern Bell Telephone Company bought the Cumberland Bell System and took over the operation in 1918. Mrs. Laverne Parrish Nowlin was the first telephone operator. Managers have been Bob Cooper, Will Campbell, Walter Grooms, Neal Freeman, Vance Killebrew, Mr. Metz, Tom Berry, Carl Sills, Hugh Cordle, Richard Maxwell, Bertha Lowrance, Marjorie Canada. In March, 1953, the telephone changed to the dial system and at that time an office was built adjoining the City Hall. Marjorie Canada was in the office until 1959, Nester Woodruff was in the office until 1961. There is no office now, only the Plant Department. Bills are collected at the Greenfield Banking Company.

## CEMETERIES

The oldest cemetery in Greenfield is Pattersons, which began in August 1852. The first grave was that of James Hatcher, who died August 21, 1852.

"Old Hall" is another small cemetery that is indeed old and only one-half mile from Pattersons. Dr. Shannon, his two wives and several Moseleys were buried there in the middle part of the Nineteenth Century. Highland Cemetery is located west of Greenfield, only a few blocks from the school district. There are many small rural cemeteries, too numerous to mention, which are connected with the rural churches.

### SOME EARLY NOTES ( 1900-1920)

Reminiscences of older citizens of Greenfield who have been long time residents throw some interesting highlights on activities in the City at the turn of the century and for the following fifteen or twenty years. Since they were recalled only from memory, the following notes may not be completely historically accurate, but they are interesting in their own right.

**Tent Shows.** Traveling tent shows provided much entertainment during this era. In Greenfield, many of them set up on the "Grooms lot" across from the present M. & B. Motor Company. Handbills announced their coming, and the crowds were good. Admission was 50 cents for "box seats" (folding chairs) and 15 cents for the "chicken roost." Apparently the "chicken roost" got the bulk of the crowd.

"Barkers" at the front enticed the audience, and peddled boxes of candy for as much as \$1 per box; the boxes contained very little candy together with a "prize"-usually a ten cent item when stripped of its glamour.

The tent shows generally presented short plays, of which many were "Westerns" complete with shooting; sometimes local citizens were used to fill out the cast. These tent shows were not generally stable financial institutions, and it was not unknown for a town to be forced to take over the equipment if the tent show management could not meet its promised rental payments.

**Chautauquas.** This was entertainment on an entirely different level, although it was popular during the same era as the tent show. The coming of the Chautauqua was eagerly awaited as the cultural and literary event of the season; Chautauquas were usually sponsored by local literary societies or groups.

The Chautauqua programs were presented by first rate traveling actors and singers, and more nearly resembled Little Theater productions, In Greenfield, the Chautauquas generally located on Main Street, and the admission charge was one dollar. The Chautauqua stayed about a week each time, and school students wrote themes about the programs.

**Early Soup Street.** In the early years of this century, the activities on the old block of near-downtown property called "Soup Street" did not add favorably to Greenfield's reputation in the surrounding area. While the many years that have passed have probably exaggerated the recollections, there seems no doubt that decent and law-abiding citizens of Greenfield avoided Soup Street completely during this time. This small area attracted those on the fringe of the law ( or possibly some outside of the law entirely) .

Soup Street was known to be the headquarters of unsavory groups such as the picturesque "Dirty Dozen," a gang of petty thieves and roustabouts who operated in Weakley , Gibson, Carroll and Obion Counties, According to recollection, the "Dirty Dozen" would steal stray animals, buggy tires, or any other item that was available and marketable, and then realize what proceeds they could from the "find." In addition, the group took delight in terrorizing socials and "barn" dances, and have been described as "just devils on two feet."

"The Crack" was the name of the establishment on Soup Street which the Dirty Dozen and others, and perhaps more dangerous groups, made their gathering place. Memory has it that "the Crack" was an unfailing source of near beer and "Home Brew," which was kept chilled by lowering it into a cistern in the rear by buckets operated by a well windlass.

**Aydelotts Show-**, Moving Pictures and Illustrated Songs had its headquarters in Greenfield from its organization about 1904. Mr. Aydelott showed in school houses for a year or so, then bought a tent and used wagons and teams to transport the equipment from town to town. Joe F. Pitts, Sr., of Sharon (who still lives there) was the featured singer in the shows from 1907 on until the closing of the 1921 season.

Each year Mr. Aydelott expanded the territory to finally cover parts of Tennessee, Kentucky, Missouri and Arkansas, showing from about May 1 until November 1. At the beginning of the 1917 season he bought a tractor to pull one large long wagon, but this did not prove successful. He then bought two Smith Form-a- Trucks. These trucks were driven by chain drive from small sprocket wheels on the rear axles of the regular T -Model cars on to larger sprockets on the solid tire rear wheels. He later changed in 1918 to the first T -Model worm gear trucks. He continued to use this model until his retirement and death on December 13, 1929, in Greenfield. His wife, Martha Hunter, died in Greenfield about 15 years ago.

Mr. Aydelott was a large man weighing about 264 pounds. During the winter season he traveled by rail to Mississippi, Alabama and Northern Florida.

Politically he was a Socialist, and Universalist in religious belief. He as a great talker, and many gave him the credit for the first talking pictures, as he described them as he turned the machine by hand. The largest crowd was at Hornersville, Missouri, in 1912, showing a replica of the sinking of the Titanic. The admission price was 15 and 25 cents.

Two feature pictures were The Great Train Robbery and The Runaway Horse.

**Old Opera House.** Started by John and Tom Coats in 1905, and completed in 1906, the Greenfield Opera House was one of the few in this part of the country. Shows coming out of Cairo, Illinois, would play in Fulton, Kentucky, and Greenfield on the way to Jackson, Tennessee. The shows would stay three days in Greenfield, presenting a different play each night, and the performers would stay at the Old Commercial Hotel, operated by Mrs. McCorkle. The plays drew local crowds as well as large audiences from neighboring towns. In these early days the Opera House had a balcony all around it, and it was from this balcony that the "barker" with a megaphone would advertise the shows. The Opera House had a full orchestra pit, and would seat about 500 people. Formal, or "Sunday dress" was the rule.

The Opera House boasted the first electrically operated piano in this area. Arthur Keel painted the front curtain and back-drop, which were later moved to the old Training School. The schools also used the Opera House facilities to stage school plays.

A restaurant, serving reputedly fine food opened on the lower floor of the Opera House, in the section now occupied by Blands Grocery, and patrons of the shows used it extensively.

### **LARGEST U. S. CYPRESS IS KING OF FOREST**

Standing stately and serenely in the forest of southwestern Weakley County is the king of the bald cypress, a tree which is believed to be the oldest and largest of its kind in the country.

The massive tree, which is believed to be more than 1,300 years old, is on timber lands owned by Eli Tillman in the Kimery Community about seven miles northwest of Greenfield, and just north of the Middle Fork Canal of the Obion River.

The huge tree towers 150 feet, as tall as many 15-story buildings. Even so it is far less than its original height because several years ago the top section broke off and a bushy growth, now dead, extends from it. Below this growth, however, the old giant lives on, still standing where it stood long before Columbus discovered America. Its age is estimated at 1,343 years, based on tests made by Tennessee State Forester J. O. Hazard. The circumference of its base, at chest height, is 68.8 feet, more than twice as large as the cypress recently reported near Brazil, Tennessee. The diameter of the tree's base is 18 feet, a size larger than many living rooms in homes being constructed today. The base, however, is hollow and when weather conditions are dry, a person can stand inside the hollow and holding a 14 foot pole horizontally, turn a complete circle without touching the inner walls of the hollow.

## **GREENFIELD CITY GOVERNMENT**

Greenfield is governed by a Mayor and Board of eight Aldermen, who are elected every second year. The Mayor and Board have the power to enact laws and ordinances, change those laws on record, levy and collect city taxes, and have the responsibility to protect the health and welfare of the citizens of Greenfield, as well as to protect community and private property.

The Greenfield City Hall is the seat of the local government. The Office of City Recorder is located there, and the Mayor and Board hold scheduled monthly meetings in the City Hall.

Greenfield employs a three man Police Department, and has one 1 modern patrol car. The Police Department provides twenty-four hour protection.

The Greenfield Fire Department is of the volunteer type, and consists of a chief and eight firemen. In 1963, the Board purchased a new fire truck 'of the most modern design.

The City employs a full time Engineer and Water Superintendent, and has full equipment for street and utility maintenance, adequately staffed.

There are approximately 800 registered voters in Greenfield proper, !with about 1400 registered in the Ninth County District of which Greenfield 'is a part. A large majority of the voters are Democrats.

While the Mayor and Board may levy local taxes, bond issues for long-term financing must be passed by referendum of the voters. Bond issues voted in the past include:

### **CITY BOND ISSUES**

\$50,000.00 Water Works Bonds Issued October 1, 1919 @ 6% Interest Interest Payable April 1 and October 1.

\$20,000.00 Electric Light Bonds Issued October 1, 1919 @ 6% Interest Interest Payable April 1 and October 1.

\$50,000.00 Sewer Bonds Issued June 1, 1927 @ 5~ % Interest ~nterest Payable June 1 and December 1.

;\$50,000.00 Street Improvement Bonds Issued June 1 @ 5~% Interest Interest Payable June 1 and December 1.

\$125,000.00 Street Improvement Bonds Issued April 1, 1929 @ 5~% ! Interest Interest To Be Paid April 1 and October 1.

\$25,000.00 Street Improvement Bonds Issued April 1, 1930 @ 6% Interest [nterest Payable April 1 and October 1.

The present assessed valuation of Greenfield property is \$518,500. The ,City tax rate on property is currently \$2.70 per hundred dollars of assessed property value. In addition, Greenfield citizens pay a Weakley County property tax at the present rate of \$3.65 per hundred dollars of assessed value. !

## HISTORY OF GREENFIELD CITY GOVERNMENT

The political and governmental history of a city is recorded best in the official minute books of the City Board. Greenfield's official history as a city began on April 7, 1905 when the Tennessee General Assembly granted the first charter for Greenfield during the administration of Governor John I. Cox.

The charter established the official boundaries of Greenfield and the format for the operation of the City's business, and in addition contained many provisions which are especially interesting to us today. Among these were:

1 to 13. To provide for the establishment and regulations of fire companies and the sweeping of chimneys.

14. To dig wells and cisterns and otherwise make arrangements and contracts for supplying the town and inhabitants thereof with water, and make contracts for lighting the town with gas or electricity and otherwise regulate such gas and electric light companies. Also to regulate all telephone or electric light companies, especially in the matter of where poles for holding the wires are placed and the manner in which they are placed.

17. To regulate or entirely prohibit the running at large in said town or the keeping thereof of any horses, mules, asses, sheep, goats, hogs, geese, turkeys, or any other live- stock or fowls, also of all dogs.

Section 123. It shall be unlawful for any person to ride or drive any horse or mule or other animal hitched to any vehicle, at any unusual and dangerous rate of speed upon any street, square, or alley within the corporate limits of the Town of Greenfield, and any person so doing shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and upon conviction therefore shall be fined not less than two nor more than twenty-five dollars.

Because of their historical significance, the full minutes of the first Greenfield City Board meetings are recorded below. Following these first minutes, significant extracts from the minutes of Board meetings through the years until the present time are listed chronologically.

Mayors of Greenfield, Tennessee

R. B. Brasfield (1905-1913)

J. N. Ray (1907-1916)

W. E. McAdams ( 1917-Resigned)

W. M. Orr (1917-Resigned)

John West (1917-1918)

Clyde Ezell ( 1919-1922)

P. D. Harris ( 1923-1938 Resigned)

Al Stout (1938)



W. Harry Whitis (1939-1944) .  
C. B. Foust (1945-1946)  
Richard Jobe (1947-1948)  
Thomas Akin ( 1949-1950)  
N. A. Johnston (1951-1952)  
Conyer Rawls (1953-1954)  
Joseph A. Barton ( 1955-1956)  
Roy Overton ( 1957-1960)  
J. Samuel Williams (1961-1965)  
Jack Huggins (1965- )