

Cumberland County

Established 1855 County Seat: Crossville

Early History

Before European settlement, Native Americans used the area now known as Cumberland County as a hunting ground. As Tennessee grew, many people passed through the area on their way to the Cumberland Settlements to the west. A number of toll roads crisscrossed the region. Weary travelers rested at inns along the often treacherous roads. Cumberland County was established by the legislature in 1856 from land in Bledsoe, Roane, Morgan, Fentress, Rhea, Putnam, Overton, and White counties. Crossville, once known as Scott's Crossroads, was selected as the county seat because of its central location.

Civil War and Reconstruction

Though no major Civil War battles were fought in Cumberland County, the war brought devastation nonetheless. Residents were divided with some remaining loyal to the Union and others supporting the Confederacy. The divisions of sentiments, along with the rugged geography of the region led to intense guerilla activity. Following the war, the arrival of the Tennessee Central Railroad increased opportunities for farmers to ship their produce and livestock to Nashville or Knoxville. The region's coal and timber resources were also developed.

The Twentieth Century

During World War I, two Cumberland Countians were honored for their extraordinary bravery while serving in Company G, 119th Infantry, 30th Infantry Division. Sergeant Milo Lemert received the Congressional Medal of Honor, and Sergeant Litton Thurman received the Distinguished Service Cross. The construction of Interstate 40 through the county proved a boon to the county's economy. A number of thriving retirement communities including Lake Tansi Resort and Fairfield Glade have brought thousands of new residents to the area. A number of golf courses and other amenities, including the Cumberland County Playhouse, continue to bring visitors to the area.

Cumberland Homesteads

By 1933 the ravages of the Great Depression had left many miners, mill workers, and mountain farmers desperate to feed their families. One of the many programs of President Roosevelt's New Deal was the creation of subsistence homesteads. Cumberland Homesteads was a planned community designed by architect William Macy Stanton. Each homestead included a house, barn, and other farm outbuildings. The houses were very modern with indoor plumbing and wiring for electricity, which TVA began supplying in 1937. Community buildings, including a school, were also constructed.

Prospective homesteaders had to meet rigid requirements before being approved for the homestead project. The men who worked as laborers on the project received part of their wages in cash, and the rest was returned to the government to pay for their homestead.

Unfortunately, the land was not suitable for farming, and the communal industries failed as well. Many men were forced to leave the community to find work in order to pay for their homes. Eventually, the Cumberland Mountain State Park was created inside the original boundaries of the project.

Camp Crossville

Beginning in November 1942, German and Italian prisoners of war were housed in an old Civilian Conservation Corps camp known as Camp Crossville. The prisoners had many freedoms including leaving the compound for weekly walks, purchasing musical instruments, publishing a newspaper, and working in the local area. Many local farmers took advantage of the ready workforce for help in farming and lumbering. The prisoners were generally well treated by the local population, and many choose to return to the Crossville area after the war was over. Some former POW's even brought their families from Germany and settled in the area.

For more information, see

[“To Win Our War with Butter and Beefsteaks” Camp Crossville and the Treatment of Axis Prisoners of War](#) by Gregory Kupsky

[Cumberland Homesteads](#)

[Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture: Cumberland County](#)

The Civil War Along Tennessee’s Cumberland Plateau by Aaron Astor

Rural Life and Culture in the Upper Cumberland, Michael Birdwell and W. Calvin Dickinson, editors