

Roane County

Established 1801 County Seat: Kingston

Early History

Roane County received its name for Archibald Roane, the second governor of Tennessee. The county seat, Kingston, was named for Major Robert King, a prominent landowner. Roane County is located at the juncture of the Tennessee, Clinch, and Emory Rivers. The Avery Trace, an important early road, also passed through the area. In 1792, a blockhouse was built at the location where the Clinch River flows into the Tennessee River. The location represented the boundary of U.S. Territory and Cherokee territory as set by the 1791 Treaty of the Holston. As tensions between the Cherokee and settlers increased, Territorial Governor William Blount sent John Sevier to the region to protect travelers heading west. In 1797, Fort Southwest Point was built one half mile downstream from the blockhouse. The fort housed federal troops who escorted travelers across Cherokee lands to the settlements in Middle Tennessee. Over time, the mission of the fort's soldiers shifted to protecting the Cherokee from the encroachment of settlers on their land.

As part of the Third Tellico Treaty of 1805, the Cherokee agreed to cede the Cumberland Plateau region to Tennessee. Additionally, they agreed to cede extra land around Fort Southwest Point as a location for the State Assembly to meet. On September 21, 1807 Kingston became the capital of Tennessee. However, the treaty was not specific as to how long Kingston had to remain the capital, the State Assembly voted to return to Knoxville that same day.

Civil War and Reconstruction

During the Civil War, Union Colonel John Wilder traveled through Roane County and noticed that the area had deposits of both iron and coal. Wilder and a group of investors established the Roane Iron Company and the town of Rockwood in 1868. In 1890, another group of investors established the town of Harriman. These investors were strict prohibitionists who wanted to create a town with sober workers and a variety of industries. The town of Oliver Springs gained national attention for its resort and mineral springs. The resort had nearly 200 hundred rooms, electric elevators, a wine cellar and dance pavilion. After a fire in 1905, the resort was not rebuilt.

Twentieth Century

The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) has been responsible for sweeping changes in Roane County in the twentieth century. In 1939, TVA began construction of the Watts Bar Dam to both generate electricity and help control flooding in Chattanooga. The dam was completed in January 1942. The reservoir created by the dam has 772 miles of shoreline and 39,090 acres of water. A coal fired steam plant was completed near Kingston in 1955. The plant generates about 8 billion kilowatt hours of electricity per year. On December 22, 2008 a dike at the plant failed, releasing 5.4 million cubic yards of

coal ash into the Emory and Clinch rivers and covering 300 acres of land. It was the worst coal ash spill in U.S. history.

Avery's Trace

The story of Avery's Trace began when Tennessee was still a part of North Carolina. To encourage settlement on its western lands, North Carolina ordered that a road be built from the south end of Clinch Mountain to Bean's Lick in 1787. A hunter living in the Washington District named Peter Avery was hired to blaze the trail. The trail followed a wandering course across the Clinch River into the Cumberland Mountains and eventually made its way to the settlements in the Mero District that would become Nashville. A number of notable figures traveled along Avery's Trace, including General William Davidson, Judge John McNairy and Andrew Jackson. Avery's Trace would not have been recognizable as a road to modern people. It was simply a series of marks on trees that indicated the direction that travelers should take. For many years, only horses or people on foot could navigate the trail. As travel to the Cumberland region increased, the trail was expanded so that by 1795, it was referred to as a wagon road. Today's Interstate 40 follows much of the route of Avery's Trace from Kingston to Nashville.

For More Information see,

[Fort Southwest Point](#)

TVA Archaeology: Seventy-Five Years of Prehistoric Site Research, edited by Erin E. Pritchard