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THE TENNESSEE VALLEY IN AMERICAN HISTORY

The Old Valley: Land of Challenge and Contention

By James W. Livingood*

East Tennessee has frequently been the focus of interest in the course of American history. The dramatic removal of the Indians, the great battles of the Civil War, the Dayton Trial, and the developments of the Tennessee Valley Authority have been events of national importance. But on the whole the area is relatively unknown. Except for the work of the late Judge Samuel Cole Williams, Professor Stanley Folmsbee and his students at the University of Tennessee, and the recent volumes by Donald Davidson of Vanderbilt University in the *Rivers of America* Series, the plow of historical research has turned few furrows here.

This article represents an effort to present in synthesis a brief account of the major historical developments in this area before the establishment of the Tennessee Valley Authority in 1933. Although in many respects it is a study of America in microcosm, certain factors produced unusual developments of both local and national importance.

At the outbreak of the American Revolution the farthest westward push of the white settler on any section of the frontier was on the upper tributaries of the Tennessee River. Since the first settlement in 1768 at the Watauga Old Field, accretions to the population had settled in the valleys of the Holston, the Watauga, and the Nolichucky. A miniature melting pot representing English, Scotch-Irish, German, Irish, Welsh, and Huguenots was in the making.¹ But they were not direct immigrants. Rather, they were the typical two or three generation Americans usually found in the vanguard of civilization.

The Valley of East Tennessee into which they moved is an extension of the Shenandoah Valley and, like it, is a part of the great trough which parallels the highlands from Pennsylvania to Georgia. Through it the Indian trails led and the Great Road from Virginia bore the mark of families on the move. Two nearly parallel mountain ranges, the Blue Ridge and the Alleghanies, virtually

*This paper was read at the annual meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association held at Rock Island, Illinois, April 22, 1948.

¹Samuel Cole Williams, *Tennessee During the Revolutionary War* (Nashville, 1944), 3.

excluded people from eastern Virginia and the Carolinas from competing for what looked like "good country" at this time.

In the numerous fertile valleys and coves which scored the topography of upper East Tennessee these folks settled without any aid from the government. In fact, it was very uncertain as to whether the area was under the jurisdiction of Virginia or North Carolina. In near isolation behind mountain ramparts the settlers went about their business of hewing, plowing, and planting. At the beginning of the Revolution there were but two merchants in the Tennessee country. Corn, pigs, and cattle were the chief exchange items. Fortified stations stood as harbors of protection in case of Indian trouble, while Taylor's meeting house near the site of Blountville was the only prepared harbor for the soul. A future which challenged their expansionist minds and hardy dreams lay ahead.

Undoubtedly the river pointed the way ahead, but it was a stream of inconsistency and many unknown beds, shoals, and sawyers. The Tennessee River had dug out a devious path for itself: "being cramped for room it was obliged, like a tall man in a spare bed, to coil up." From the junction of the French Broad and Holston rivers the main stream flows south, west, and north for 652 miles to the Ohio. In its upper reaches the waters of many tributaries pyramid together, draining the fertile bottom lands and high ridges of the parallel valleys. Then, in its southwestwardly course, it moves through the valley of East Tennessee flanked to the east by the high Unaka chain and on the west by the Cumberland plateau. These table lands rise abruptly to elevations above 2,000 feet with bold cliffs along the brow that wall in the valley and virtually prevent any east to west passage across the area. At the present site of Chattanooga the stream sharply turns from its apparent course southward into a mountain canyon which carries it through the Cumberland highlands. In this section it was described as "foaming, boiling, and roaring, in its frantic struggle to find an outlet to the lower country." This stretch of about twenty miles was known as "the Narrows" in early days, but certain features of it were given more colorful names as the Suck, Boiling Pot, Skillet, and Tumbling Shoals. Here the constriction of the river by rocky mountain walls and a peculiar rock formation in the bed produced near deterrents to upstream navigation and made downstream travel dangerous.

After resuming its southwestward course, the river flows on for approximately 100 miles to where Gunter'sville now stands. There

²*Chattanooga Times*, June 12, 1877. This description was used by Major W.R. King of the U. S. Engineers.

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the Tennessee flirts with the headwaters of the Gulf-flowing Black Warrior River but again contrarily abandons its way for a westward course across northern Alabama to plunge into the Muscle Shoals area where for some forty miles the river fell more than three and one half feet per mile. Rapids and reefs, rocks and whirling water made the Muscle Shoals a much greater barrier than the Narrows. Beyond this turbulent area the Tennessee again chose to run counter to what appeared natural. Rather than seek the Gulf at a third opportunity or join the Mississippi, the stream flows northward to the Ohio.

In addition to the two major obstructions and the circuitous route, numerous bars and ledges impeded navigation as did uncertainties of depth resulting from seasonal variation in rainfall and rapid run-off. Davidson scarcely exaggerate when he says, "To get up and down the Tennessee one needed not only to combine the virtues of the horse and alligator, but to add something of the frog, snapping turtle, raccoon, buffalo, and shikepoke."

The valley of the Tennessee is not a unit but three distinct districts. In the east is the upland region of Tennessee; the middle course at the Great Bend borders the deep cotton South, while the lower river flows through a border land toward the open prairies of the West. These divisions make the history of the area most complex and make advisable a narrowing of this article to but one of the divisions—the Upper or East Tennessee Valley. This region is in the South but not of the South. It is a narrow hill and vale country varying in width from approximately fifty-five miles in the north to thirty-four in the South.

Obstacles to navigation here presented more difficult problems of transportation than were found on other western rivers, and, along with the mountainous borders, caused conditions of extreme isolation. Such a situation made it possible for the Indians to remain in the more secluded parts of the narrow valley and its neighboring mountains longer than in other areas east of the Mississippi. Trade with the Cherokees had early attracted both the French and British, but ingress into the area was difficult for the former because of Muscle Shoals and the Narrows while the British coastal centers were to the east of the Appalachians. But the traders from Carolina, especially those operating out of Charleston, made persistent attempts to develop this trade while serving as the diplomatic agents for the British at the same time. The high water mark of their activity

³Donald Davidson, *The Tennessee, I, The Old River: Frontier to Secession* (New York, 1946), 7.

came with the building of Fort Loudoun on the Little Tennessee in the very heart of the Cherokee country. But in three years this isolated post in the green mountains fell before the attack of the Cherokees, who, encouraged by the French, were becoming restless under the growing contacts with the settlers.

The same year Loudoun fell Daniel Boone visited Watauga and left his famous legend carved on a beech tree. New settlers soon followed, moving into the northeastern section. The Indians found the pressure from these pioneers almost irresistible, although the Proclamation of 1763 theoretically reserved the region as Indian country. Before the Revolutionary War a number of treaties were made calling for land sales, culminating in 1775 in Judge Richard Henderson's purchase which was made with a view of launching his astonishing Transylvania Colony. This sale was too much for the younger element of the tribe who, under the impulsive Dragging Canoe, organized themselves as a semi-independent group known as the Chickamaugas. They soon moved into the mountain district along the turbulent waters of the Narrows. Here, led by British agents, they had a natural bastion that controlled the river. From this position a web of international intrigue was spun and the bloody fingers of the war reached out toward the frantic settlements. Retaliation brought rear guard action of the Revolution into the Indian retreat, but no decisive result was achieved.

National independence did not alter the picture. Spanish agents stepped in to replace the British in the South while contacts were made with Henry Hamilton in the Old Northwest. Defiance and ceaseless raiding continued, but the pioneer frontier pushed on while its political organization went through a metamorphosis from the Watauga Association through the State of Franklin and the Southwest Territory to statehood in 1796 for Tennessee. Indian troubles continued under the new Constitution as the federal government followed a conciliatory policy fearful of agitating the delicate Spanish relations of the period. In direct defiance to this policy, settlers from the Cumberland settlements, assisted by recruits from Kentucky, took the challenge in their own hands. In September, 1794, they administered a total defeat to the Chickamaugas; from letters found they learned that Spain had advised the Indians that they could no longer give aid because of troubles produced by the French wars. On their way home the frontiersmen learned of Wayne's victory at Fallen Timbers to which their efforts were a southern parallel. The web of international intrigue would no longer be spun in the valley; tomahawk diplomacy was a thing of the past. As the

remnant of the Chickamaugas filtered back into the Cherokee group, peace came to the valley.

The federal policy had had an ameliorating effect on the Cherokees. Although this tribe gradually retreated before the pressure of white settlement in the upper valley, they continued to live by the Tennessee River until removed in 1838. Frontier contacts, educational and spiritual activities of missionaries, and the large number of intelligent whites who had married into the tribe were contributing factors in their amazing progress. So, too, was the Federal Road built through the Nation connecting Augusta, Georgia, with both Nashville and South West Point (Kingston), for along this road moved ideas as well as goods and mail. By 1826 the Cherokees possessed 22,000 cattle, 7,600 horses, 46,000 swine, 2,500 sheep, 762 looms, 2,488 spinning wheels, 172 wagons, 2,942 ploughs, 10 saw mills, 31 grist mills, 62 blacksmith shops, 8 cotton machines, 18 schools, 18 ferries, and a number of public roads, and one district alone had upwards of 1,000 books.⁴

But this was not all. In 1827 the Cherokees began the publication of a national newspaper in their native language, the characters of which had been worked out by the unschooled but scholarly Sequoyah. Political advancement kept pace with the economic and social growth. A written constitution, modeled after that of the United States providing for an executive, a two-house legislature, and a judicial system was adopted. In 1828 John Ross became the principal chief and soon gained national recognition as he led the fight on behalf of the Cherokees to resist removal.

Both the virtues and the vices of the pioneer settlers added pressure against the redman, while in the White House President Jackson was frozen in his thinking on the issue of removal. In Congress Senator Benton said the speeches "were characterized by a depth and bitterness of feeling such as have never been excelled in the slavery question."⁵ Final ratification of the removal treaty by the United States Senate which led to the "Trail of Tears" was obtained by only one vote. In the valley of the Tennessee the Cherokees had made a consistent stand. They were ennobled by deep attachment to their native homeland and their progress toward civilization. They had attempted to meet the challenging issue of their day; but elements whose estimation of Indian virtues were weighed on different scales had finally wrested the whole valley from the redman who left behind only a legacy of colorful place names.

⁴Niles' Weekly Register, XXX, 143.

⁵Thomas Hart Benton, *Thirty Years' View*, 2 vols. (New York, 1854-1856), I, 625.

During these years settlement in the valleys of the upper tributaries continued. About the time Tennessee became a state the eight counties in the eastern division of the state gave a census return of 65,338, but the 1820 census showed only 135,312. The increase was thus comparatively small for a frontier area and could not rival the rapid growth in the Cumberland area. Many of the newcomers either turned away northward up the Wilderness Road through Cumberland Gap to answer the lure of Kentucky or moved to the Nashborough community. The presence of the Indian in the southeastern part of the state and the difficulties of river transportation prevented all but a few bold souls from using the Tennessee to migrate beyond. Some, like the famed Donelson party, tried the river in the winter of 1779-80. This party, including the fifteen year old Rachel Donelson who later married Andrew Jackson, were on the way from December 22 to April 24, journeying from Fort Patrick Henry on the Holston to Nashville on the Cumberland.

During these years East Tennesseans were almost completely dependent on overland trade with Richmond, Baltimore, and Philadelphia for the sale and purchase of goods. Drove moved in the direction of these centers as well as toward Charleston, South Carolina. Some did try the river; whiskey, bar iron, bacon, line, and flour make up the bulk of their cargoes which left with a "tide" from the upper regions to gamble with the Narrows and Muscle Shoals and spend many days on the 2,000 mile trip to New Orleans, always mindful that their contrary river frequently ran in the wrong direction.*

These marketing conditions made the establishment of a progressive economy difficult. Domestic industry with its requirements for toil served only a low level of living. Credit was difficult to obtain and barter was frequently used. Socially and psychologically this isolation was reflected in a provincialism that still prevails. Likewise, this lack of convenient markets had its effect upon agriculture which was the basic way of life. In 1823 one traveler found "a system of miserable husbandry" which he attributed to the isolation existing in the area. On the other hand isolation did contribute to small developments of the iron industry and tanning along with processing activities to reduce bulky commodities to their lightest weight. Moreover, as a result of its isolation East Tennessee was ever conscious of the need for improvements in transportation. The American System of Henry Clay and the Whig party program

*William F. Rogers, "Life in East Tennessee Near the End of Eighteenth Century," East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications, No. 1 (1929), 27-42.

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Naturally they turned first to the improvement of their river and to visionary schemes to get "short cuts" to the south. East Tennessee became a stronghold for state aid as well as federal aid sentiment. Their plans ran from channel improvements to thoughts of connecting the Tennessee with the Tombigbee or to a canal or road across the mountains of East Tennessee to link the upper tributaries of the Hiwassee with those of the Coosa, a branch of the Alabama River. This interest in the river was raised to fever pitch when the steamboat *Atlas* docked at Knoxville on March 3, 1828. Captain J. D. Conner was the first master to bring his boat safely through the Muscle Shoals and the Narrows.

While Knoxville interests were preparing to launch regular steamboat service, Tennessee enacted an appropriation bill in 1830 which provided funds to improve parts of the river. East Tennessee had pulled for such schemes for a long time but was thwarted because some said the federal government should aid; others noted that the state was poor and enjoyed but small proceeds from sales of public lands. However, the main difficulty had been sectional jealousies within the state as its three geographical regions grew into three natural political divisions.⁷

But the Tennessee River did not enjoy the prosperous river trade that came during these steamboat years on other western rivers. Numerous steamers did appear on the upper Tennessee, but for lack of water the navigation season was limited to the months from November to June. Furthermore, when steamboats did ascend the Muscle Shoals, few ever went below again but remained on local runs on the stream above, usually managing to pass through the Narrows but not without danger, delay, and damage.

Some cold water was thrown on the enthusiasm for steamboats when the first one arrived in Knoxville. Dr. J.G.M. Ramsey, whose historical writings are still authoritative for early Tennessee, was selected to address the crowd. He took the occasion to point out that East Tennessee had to look to some form of "land communication" for her destiny. Shortly after, the railroad fever which was spreading in certain eastern areas leaped into this region. An "Association of Gentlemen" in little Rogersville expressed the extent of this interest in their bi-weekly newspaper, the *Rail-Road Advocate*, which was published from July 4, 1831, to June 14, 1832, and had the distinction of being the first such journal in America.⁸

⁷Stanley J. Folmsbee, *Sectionalism and Internal Improvements in Tennessee, 1796-1845* (Knoxville, 1939), *passim*.

⁸*Ibid.*, 88-89.

The people of the area were also deeply interested in what was going on at Muscle Shoals, where a company, incorporated by Alabama in 1830, was constructing the first railroad west of the Appalachians. Two years later the original project was widened into the Tusculum, Courtland and Decatur Railroad Company, an organization that had a road almost forty-three miles long in operation by the beginning of 1835. Back in East Tennessee another project took shape when the Hiwassee Railroad was chartered in 1836 to thread a line through the valley from Knoxville to a point on the southern boundary of the state.

Meanwhile outside interests were thinking of bigger plans. The cotton South was in need of the corn, pork, and other country produce of East Tennessee. If the supply area could not reach the consumer, then why shouldn't the demand region plan internal improvements? Momentum came chiefly from Charleston, South Carolina, which was feeling the pinch of cotton's westward march. Their plan was to enter the area through the mountain passes into northeastern Tennessee. But the people of Georgia were also interested in railroads at this time and won the race into the valley by routing their line around the southern shoulder of the Appalachians to the Tennessee River at Chattanooga. The Western and Atlantic Railroad was the capstone of their system, which tied in with the South Carolina lines. In 1850 this state-owned road linked Chattanooga with Atlanta, and the Tennessee Valley had through rail contact with the port cities of Savannah and Charleston. Although often overlooked in our general histories, this was the first railroad system from the coast to reach a tributary of the Mississippi River.

The success of the Western and Atlantic spurred on other railroad activity and within ten years Chattanooga was one of the most important rail junctions in the South with trains arriving from Memphis, Nashville, Atlanta, and Knoxville, and through service available to such cities as Louisville, Kentucky, and Richmond, Virginia, not to mention the southern coastal centers.²⁰ Where the river had failed the iron horse had succeeded. The Tennessee River became a feeder for this new medium of transportation which stimulated new economic hope for the region and especially for the recently developed town of Chattanooga.

One of the first settlers to come to the latter community wrote that he selected that site because it was a spot where the corn and

²⁰J. W. Livingood, "Chattanooga: A Rail Junction of the Old South," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, VI, No. 3 (September, 1947), 230-250.

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²¹R. E. Barclay, Jr.

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cotton country met. Now his idea was justified. By 1860 the community, although claiming but about 3,500 people, represented what was later to be termed "the new South." Railroading and steamboat bills of lading occupied their minds and industry had also taken hold. *The Tennessee State Gazetteer and Business Directory* published that year lists an iron furnace and an "extensive foundry and machine shop," a rolling mill under construction, a planing mill, one tannery, a distillery, and two flour mills. There were also two pork packing houses and six commission merchants, two carriage and wagon makers, and a marble worker who advertised that his work was done "at northern prices." Two banks and three weekly newspapers were also doing business.

While agriculture remained the main source of livelihood throughout the valley, processing plants, small iron works, coal and iron mining, and marble quarrying were going ahead although most were in their formative stage. On the rim of the region, mining of copper began at Ducktown, Tennessee, in 1850 amid scenes similar to those of a great gold rush. By 1860 it is estimated that 1,000 employees were working in this business.¹⁰

On the whole, the valley's population did not grow rapidly. Like other southern areas it was shunned because of the slavery issue and the greater attractiveness of western soils. But in East Tennessee there was a strong Union tradition rather than a loyalty to sectionalism. The old Whig party had been vigorous here where slaves were relatively few. When the great issue broke with the election of 1860, the region voted for Bell. In two state referenda on secession, it voted twice for the Union by a wide majority, the last time on June 8, 1861, after the fall of Fort Sumter. Even after the state left the Union a futile effort was launched to permit East Tennessee to withdraw from the state.¹¹

The section then resorted to other methods. East Tennessee sent an amazingly large number of her sons into the Federal army. Unionists at home began efforts to obstruct Confederate war plans while the Confederate sympathizers, who were a minority but who possessed a great deal of influence and power, fought back in desperate civil strife that was a class warfare in character and which led to early Confederate occupation of the valley. The local fighting between Lincolnites and Rebels was bad enough, but the region was destined to play more than a local role in the war. Chattanooga's

¹⁰R. E. Barclay, *Ducktown: Back in Raht's Time* (Chapel Hill, 1946), 31, 86.

¹¹Verton M. Queener, "East Tennessee Sentiment and the Secession Movement, November, 1860-June, 1861," *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications*, No. 20 (1948), 59-83.

junction facilities and the long rail arms which reached out to link the Tennessee Valley with the port cities made it a controlling point of southern supply. The bloody battle of Chickamauga, the siege and important victory at Chattanooga, along with the siege of Knoxville made the whole area a scene of mighty operations.

Bushwhacking and guerilla activities continued after these engagements, egged on in the upper valley by the bitter, Federally supported press of Parson Brownlow. Chattanooga, which remained a Union supply base, "grew suddenly old"; engineers and quartermasters became the town's new architects.

Economically the valley suffered severely. Livestock was depleted, movable property was carried off, barns and houses burned. The foraging operations of the armies left the food and stock supply scant, and inflated prices made purchase impossible for most people. However, since the Unionists were in control, gifts and aid from many parts of the nation to such organizations as the East Tennessee Relief Association alleviated conditions which were most desperate in the northern part of the valley. By 1865 progress had been made to put the valley on the road to economic recovery, although bitterness between neighbors frequently revealed itself as in the pension issue when Federal veterans received pensions while their neighbors who were ex-Confederates had only the privilege of paying taxes."

A depleted population and lack of capital were the greatest factors of adversity to be faced. Tennessee like other southern states began bidding for economic carpetbaggers to develop industrial enterprises. Governor Brownlow made an initial plan in 1865 and two years later a State Board of Immigration was created which published a book on the attractions of the state in which East Tennessee received most attention. Among other things it said that the people of East Tennessee had "come to the conclusion that they are too poor to do without manufactures," for an over-emphasis on agriculture was making them "poorer every day."

Towns in the valley keenly supported this program. For a time in 1868 *The Daily Republican* of Chattanooga carried an invitation which read in part: "those who wish to come can be assured that they will NOT BE REQUIRED TO RENOUNCE THEIR POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS TENETS, as the jurisdiction of the Ku Klux and other vermin does not extend over these parts." This announcement was addressed particularly to "those having capital, brains, or muscle. . . ." The Knoxville Industrial Association

²²James B. Campbell, "East Tennessee During the Federal Occupation, 1863-65," *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications*, No. 19 (1947), 64-80.

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²³Barclay, *Ducktown*

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These invitations were not unanswered. Many soldiers who had campaigned through the valley were attracted by its natural beauty and economic potential. Veterans of both Union and Confederate armies, who were mainly young men, settled together. They were natives of many localities as is demonstrated by a check of the 1878 census of Chattanooga. The adult male population of the town hailed from all but four states then existing and from nineteen foreign countries. Although the newcomers engaged in various activities the principal drawing card was the mineral wealth. Ducktown saw the copper mines reopened to produce approximately twenty-four million pounds of copper between 1866 and 1878.²⁸ But the greatest interest was focused on the iron industry.

Among the leaders in this field was the ex-Federal officer, John T. Wilder, under whose trained eye the Roane Iron Company was incorporated in 1867 at Rockwood with a capital of \$100,000. Three years later this organization purchased a foundry which had been built at Chattanooga by the Union army to reroll twisted railroad iron. In this Chattanooga plant the first steel made in the South was produced, and in 1887 the first Bessemer furnace in the same area was blown in. Other large operations begun shortly after the war were the Knoxville Iron Company, headed by another Union officer, the Chattanooga Furnace, launched by Nashville capitalists, and the Southern States Coal, Iron, and Land Company which, chartered in 1875 by English capitalists, had three furnaces in blast by 1888 at the newly developed town optimistically named South Pittsburg.

By 1878 the people of Chattanooga recognized that the vanguard of the New South was in their midst. In their annual fourth of July celebration the floats of a parade told the story. The first float noted "Cotton was King," the second heralded, "Iron is King Now," while a third announced, "Coal is Prime Minister."

In the next decade three other companies were organized. The Tennessee Coal, Iron, and Railroad Company started its furnace at Cowan; the Citico Furnace at Chattanooga was blown in; and Scots financed the Dayton furnaces. Small and, by comparison, primitive operations continued throughout the valley on a pre-war scale. Coal and iron lands were eagerly sought and "prospectors from Pittsburgh" registered frequently at the hotels. Various allied industries also were started, especially those to fabricate the pig iron and lumber of the valley. Interest in new rail lines ran high, especially in regard

²⁸Barclay, *Ducktown*, 155.

to the construction of the Cincinnati Southern by the city of Cincinnati from that city to Chattanooga.

But the furnaces never made great profits. In the 90's only two new ones were completed.¹⁴ The big boom in the valley was over by then. A speculative real estate boom in Chattanooga started the decline, but more important were the facts that the local ores failed to possess the qualities needed for making steel and that the rich Birmingham district just opened set such a high competitive pace that the efforts in the valley were defeated.

Thus the bottom was knocked out of the optimism which had brought so much confidence to the valley and which had constantly been voiced by the journals of such publishers as Adolph S. Ochs. But there had been positive results. Impetus had been given the economy of East Tennessee. Towns like Knoxville and Chattanooga had grown into cities. Other industries, more remunerative than iron, had been established. One person who had grown up in a family devoted to the iron industry and who is himself a retired leader in that field recently wrote: "So well established was the progress throughout the district that the subsequent blowing out of East Tennessee's furnaces at intervals affected only the communities in which they were situated and had small effect on the general welfare."¹⁵

Even more important was the climate of understanding and tolerance which came to the area and put it very early on the "road to reunion." This was no doubt easier than in other parts of the South, for Tennessee had suffered little from the political debacle of Reconstruction. But in pioneering a New South the newcomers in the region forged a community spirit with the residents. Prejudices weren't surrendered immediately, but the hum of industry in the towns forced an amelioration of feeling as cooperation was essential to the business world. These diluted differences in economic life soon had their social and political influences. John T. Wilder expressed the full meaning of industrialism in East Tennessee in an address in 1884. Speaking of Chattanooga, although his remarks would have applied to other parts as well, he said: "One's politics, religion or section is not called into question here. This is the freest town on the map. All join together here for the general good and strive, to a man, for the upbuilding of the city." Such was the feeling of a former Federal officer who had directed an early cannonading of the city about which he spoke.

¹⁴Morrow Chamberlain, *A Brief History of the Pig Iron Industry of East Tennessee* (Chattanooga, 1942). All above references to this industry are taken from this study.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 28.

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Buoyant years, years of hope and faith in country and self, years of busy toil in building made many spots in East Tennessee look like Yankee-land. In their effort to master their environment, bitter issues and memories of the people were mended in the cloth of activity. One example of this can be found in the names of two colleges in the area; certainly no other locality in the South could have had in the 1890's anything similar. At the upper end of the valley was Lincoln Memorial University while at Athens and Chattanooga were the branches of the U.S. Grant University sponsored by the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Of course no Utopia was created. Isolation's grip on the area was and still is relatively strong. In the narrow coves and mountain rim, the influences of materialism rarely penetrated. Provincialism continued to breed distrust for any outsider; it still nourished such a strict and narrow adherence to religious fundamentalism that the Dayton Trial was a natural phenomenon. In certain sections Republicanism has always been an exception in the generally solid South. Many are the miles of intolerable roads which separate family from church, doctor, and school. Many are the good people who still rely on native ability alone to see them through life.

Most of these conditions are found in areas of poor soil which itself spells out the word poverty. Since they practiced the worst kind of land butchery, the farmers' soil grew worse. The muddy waters of the rivers of the valley were East Tennessee in solution, for many were the spots where the old story of the wife's looking up the chimney to see if her man was still plowing on the overhanging hill was but little exaggerated.

As mill and shop drew labor from the rural areas into the urban centers the impact of their social, cultural, and religious ways frequently left strange results that other regions scorn or smirk about without a realization of the real forces behind them. The large number of cultists and eccentric happenings which have flourished here, when embroidered, as they usually are, sound like "tall tales" from the roaring frontier.

But through all this the people of the valley never lost sight of a hope they found in the river, although railroads and later highway developments reduced its importance as a carrier. In a memorial drawn up in 1877 and presented to the federal government, they said of the Tennessee River: "It binds together all by the ligaments of commerce, and the work of its improvement, therefore, can be no less national in character than that which guards against national

foe."¹⁶ Even then the government was at work on a new Muscle Shoals canal which was completed in 1890. But this project was not a satisfactory solution and the leaders of the region, led by Chattanooga business men who desired better navigation and who also wished to bring down rail rates, organized the Tennessee River Improvement Association.

Through their efforts constant attention was focused on the problem when still another idea added its weight to the call for river control—the idea of hydroelectric power. Beginning in 1898 efforts were made in Congress to get a dam or dams at Muscle Shoals to combine navigation and power developments. Chattanooga had the Narrows in mind for a similar improvement. At the latter point a dam authorized in 1903 was completed ten years later as a combined effort of private and governmental interests. Known as the Hales Bar Dam it was leased for ninety-nine years to the Tennessee Electric Power Company with title resting with the government.

Meanwhile the Muscle Shoals project didn't get past the talking stage, and it was not until the First World War that it was started as a national defense measure. In 1926 Wilson Dam was completed. It immediately became the center of a struggle as the government put it to no use and private interests eagerly sought control. From 1921 to 1933, when the Tennessee Valley Authority was created, 138 Muscle Shoals bills were introduced in Congress.¹⁷ Although navigation facilities had been improved by the two dams, the river was still the subject of stormy controversy. Contention and challenge which have been mighty forces in the shaping of the history of this isolated section of our country were thus still active when the Tennessee Valley Authority was launched.

¹⁶J. H. Alldredge, et al., *A History of Navigation on the Tennessee River System*, House Documents, 75 Cong. 1 sess., No. 254 (Washington, 1937), 98.

¹⁷Donald Davidson, *The Tennessee, II, The New River: Civil War to TVA* (New York, 1948), 188.

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