

# Grainger County

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*Established 1796 County Seat: Rutledge*

## **Early History**

Grainger County's history dates back to the beginning of Tennessee statehood. The county was established in 1796 from parts of Hawkins and Knox counties. It once included land that is now part of Campbell, Claiborne, Hamblen and Union counties. Grainger County is the only county in Tennessee named for a woman, the Territorial First Lady, Mary Grainger Blount. The county seat of Rutledge was named for General George Rutledge, who succeeded John Sevier as the commander of the Tennessee militia when John Sevier became state governor. While some small businesses existed, most of the county relied on agriculture to support their families.

One of the first settlers in present-day Grainger County as well as Tennessee was longhunter William Bean. He moved his family to Tennessee in 1776 and built a fort at the crossroads of the Cherokee Great Warpath and the Old Wilderness Trail. The fort came to be known as Bean Station and was well known to travelers in the region. The fort provided travelers with a welcomed respite from the road and settlers with a place to take refuge during Cherokee attacks.

Bean's Station's location at the crossroads of two important routes led to the growth of taverns in the area. By the early 1800s, three taverns existed, but the most important was the tavern operated by Jenkins Whiteside. The tavern began in 1814 as a two story log cabin. A red brick addition in 1825 added 40 rooms, a parlor, a ballroom, and a well-stocked wine cellar. It was the largest inn between Washington D.C. and New Orleans. Many famous visitors came to Bean's Station including Andrew Jackson, James K. Polk, Andrew Johnson, Henry Clay, John Sevier and Jesse James.

## **Civil War and Reconstruction**

Like many areas of East Tennessee, Grainger County experienced significant guerilla warfare during the Civil War. An important skirmish happened near Blaine in December of 1862. In late 1863, a battle was fought at Bean's Station between Confederate General James Longstreet and Union General J.M. Shackleford. The Confederate surprise attack failed due to mistakes on the part of Longstreet's staff. The skirmish ended the Knoxville Campaign. After the war, a thriving tourist industry developed around the mineral springs at Clinch Mountain. Tate's Springs Resort attracted many famous families including the Rockefellers, Firestones, Fords, and Mellons. Tate's Springs even had one of the world's first Ford dealerships. Jarnigan Motor Company moved to Rutledge when the resort declined and remains in operation today.

## **Twentieth Century**

The Great Depression ended the Tate's Springs' prominence. The hotel was sold to a school and burned down a few years later. The coming of World War II brought other changes as well. Cherokee Dam was

constructed by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) to provide low cost electricity for aluminum production. Work on Cherokee Dam began on August 1, 1940 and was completed on December 5, 1941. The project required the relocation of over 800 families and a historic tavern in Bean Station. Agriculture continues to play an important role in the economy of Grainger County. Grainger County tomatoes are a regional favorite and are celebrated each July with the Grainger County Tomato Festival.

*For more information, see*

[Town of Bean Station](#)

*Tennessee Frontiers: Three Regions in Transition* by John R. Finger