

First Presbyterian Church USA, Cookeville, Tennessee
by Michael E. Birdwell, Ph.D.

Introduction

Though the cornerstone on the First Presbyterian Church, USA, reads “1910,” formal history began in 1909 as a result of a series of Tennessee and U.S. State Supreme Court cases stemming from a single Chancery Court case that began in Lincoln County in 1906 challenging the attempted merger between the PCUSA and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. That case, *Landrith v. Hudgins* caused a chain reaction, leading to dozens of cases that began in Chancery and made their way through the appellate system, eventually involving the Cookeville congregation and one of its Ruling Elders, Tennessee Supreme Court Justice D.L. Lansden. He chose not to recuse himself when the surprising verdict in *Landrith v. Hudgins* was challenged, and weighed into the controversy with a curious decision in *Bonham v. Harris*. Though largely forgotten, those court cases set in motion a series of events that shaped the early history of the church in Cookeville. Though it began as a Cumberland Presbyterian Church after the Civil War, reunion with the Mother Church coincided with events on a larger stage. The relatively brief period of 1909-1911 were heady years internationally and at home. A snapshot of what happened on the international, national, state and local level from 1909-1911 provide context for the era in which the church was founded.

The year 1909 that set the stage for the creation of First Presbyterian Church in Cookeville was an eventful one. Dr. Sigmund Freud visited the U.S. for the first time, conducting lectures about his new “talking cure” he called psychoanalysis. Post-Impressionist artist Henri Matisse painted one of his most famous works, “The Dance” with its stylized nude

figures holding hands and cavorting against a flat blue background. Inspired by popular music Russian painter Vasily Kandinsky pioneered abstract painting, breaking the bonds of representation, while trying to capture rhythms on canvas. Avant-garde Italian poet Filippo Marinetti issued the *Futurist Manifesto* which embraced “the beauty of speed and danger.”¹ Iconoclastic architect Frank Lloyd Wright designed and oversaw construction of his Prairie Style masterpiece Robie House outside of Chicago. Gustav Mahler composed his last, magisterial Symphony #9, with its somber meditations on death. Russian producer Sergei Diaghalev organized the influential *Ballet Russe* which introduced the West to the genius of Vaslav Nijinsky, who revolutionized modern dance. The brilliant German Jewish physician Paul Ehrlich developed the first effective treatment for syphilis, Salvarsan, which earned him the Nobel Prize in Medicine. On Sunday July 25 French engineer Louis Bleriot, successfully accomplished the seemingly impossible when he flew a monoplane across the English Channel. American explorer Robert Peary trekked across the frozen wilderness, becoming the first man to arrive at the North Pole. Belgian chemist Dr. Leo Baekeland launched a new era in product construction and design when he created Bakelite, the world’s first plastic. Fashion changed dramatically with the introduction of the “permanent wave” that allowed women straight hair to have luxurious curls. Germany shocked the world when it declared public universities were now open to women.² In December, 1909, *Women’s Home Companion* published drawings by illustrator Rose O’Neill, depicting mischievous cherubs she called Kewpies. Appreciation of her drawings

¹Philip Blom, *The Vertigo Years: Europe 1900-1914* (New York: Basic Books, 2008): 261-262.

²Blom, 249-276.

led to the creation of Kewpie Dolls, popular among children and adults alike for decades.

The Tennessee legislature established a public university for African Americans, Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial Institute, (now TSU) in 1909, and the facility opened in Nashville in 1912. That same legislature mandated the creation of three new Normal Schools to train new teachers at Clarksville, Murfreesboro, and Johnson City, as more citizens clamored for access to public education.

At Sale Creek, Tennessee, north of Chattanooga a functionally illiterate visitor to a tent revival, George Wentworth Hensley, founded his own church. Due to a misinterpretation of Mark 16:18, he encouraged his congregation to literally “take up serpents,” adding a little excitement to his services. Snake handling soon caught on among some charismatic, evangelical, and holiness Christian sects. It also created a subculture that continues to exist in southern Appalachia.³

Due to an infamous murder trial Tennessee went “Dry” in 1909, outlawing the manufacture and consumption of alcoholic beverages. This proved both costly and controversial move because distilling was the number one industry in the state with over 1500 operations (only 700 of which were licensed) within its borders. Five saloons ringed the public square in Cookeville, where the city’s elite met informally and carried out business. Distilleries at Double Springs and elsewhere throughout Putnam County provided steady employment for hundreds of workers. Because distilling played such an important role in the Volunteer State’s economy, voters elected a “Wet” candidate for governor in Malcolm Patterson the year before, bucking the

³Dennis Covington, *Salvation on Sand Mountain: Snake Handling and Redemption in Southern Appalachia* (New York: Penguin, 1996): 92-93.

growing national trend toward Prohibition. During the campaign his “Dry” opponent, Edward Ward Carmack, published a series of acrimonious articles in the *Nashville Tennessean* slandering one Patterson and his advisors, including Duncan Cooper. This led to a confrontation between Carmack and Cooper’s son Robin who ran into each other near the construction site of the Hermitage Hotel in Nashville on November 8. Guns were drawn and five shots rang out, resulting in the death of Carmack. Dry advocate and founder of the *Nashville Tennessean* Luke Lea turned Carmack into a martyr for Prohibition. He accused the Duncans of conspiring to murder Carmack, going so far as to implicate Patterson in the supposed plot. The ensuing murder trial forced a referendum on the issue which ended the legal sale of spirits in Tennessee until 1933. Today a statue of Edward Ward Carmack stands on the south lawn of the state capitol grounds, though few people remember him or his place in state history.⁴

On the local level 1909 witnessed the opening of the new “pagoda-styled” Cookeville Depot. The architectural curiosity brought more people and products to town. Jere Baxter, founder of the Tennessee Central Railroad (TCR) was determined to bring more trains and commerce to the region. His grand vision never came to fruition, but he did connect the Upper Cumberland to the broader world. Construction of the TCR began in 1893 between Harriman and Monterey, with convict labor doing the most grueling work. Several hardships and mishaps occurred during the railroad’s construction, from a small pox epidemic to the destruction of the famed Standing Stone once held sacred by Native Americans, and the former name of the community currently known as Monterey. The railroad reached Cookeville in 1890 and a

⁴Bill Carey, “A Century Later, No One Really Knows Nashville’s Most Famous Murder,” *The City Paper* (November 10, 2008).

wooden depot was erected there. As traffic increased, with up to six trains daily, the need for a better and more permanent structure arose, resulting in the distinctive Cookeville Depot with its elegant Asian roof line.⁵

Independent and self-sufficient, the black community at Silver Point came to the attention of the newly created Church of Christ. Organized in 1906, it grew out of tensions within the Disciples of Christ over a number of doctrinal issues, among them ordination of ministers, purpose of baptism, instrumental music in worship, and congregational autonomy. A significant number of African Americans embraced the “Restoration Movement,” associated with the Church of Christ. Three black former Disciples ministers—appropriately named Alexander Campbell, Union veteran Sam Womack, and the forceful, charismatic, one-armed G.P. (George Phillip) Bowser (1875-1950)—led the way in founding the Church of Christ among African Americans. It was Bowser, however, who had the greatest impact in the Upper Cumberland.

A native of Maury County, G.P. Bowser’s father died early in his life and his mother Cherry Elizabeth raised five children as a single parent. Lacking formal education, she was determined that her children learn more than the basics. She moved to Nashville to enroll her children in Walden University, a Freedman Aid school sponsored by the Methodist Church.⁶ A highly intelligent student, G.P. Bowser mastered six languages by the time of his graduation from college—English, French, German, Greek, Hebrew and Latin. Destined to preach, he became an “exhorter” in the Methodist Church in 1893 and was ordained a minister in 1895, serving his first

⁵Mary Jean Delozier, *Putnam County, Tennessee, 1850-1970* (Nashville: McQuiddy Publishers, 1979): 93-105.

⁶Walden University offered instruction from the primary grades through college-level classes.

congregation in Cleveland, Tennessee. His initial foray leading a congregation failed to go smoothly. Racial prejudice hindered his abilities to be an effective pastor, and Bowser soon left Cleveland, returning to Middle Tennessee.⁷

For personal reasons, Bowser grew disappointed with the Methodist church and abandoned the ministry. He tried to find a more satisfying religious experience, and attended a number of other churches, including Baptist and Disciples of Christ congregations. He was baptized into the Disciples of Christ by immersion in 1897. Taking an active role in his adopted church, Bowser launched *The Christian Echo* in 1902, the first periodical for black members of the Disciples of Christ. A successful forum for ideas and expressions, *The Christian Echo* weighed into the debates that led to the creation of the Church of Christ in 1906. After the split G.P. Bowser transformed *The Christian Echo* into the black equivalent of David Lipscomb's *Gospel Advocate*. In 1907, Bowser and Sam Womack established the first Church of Christ sponsored school for black children on Jackson Street in Nashville, creating a model that could be reproduced elsewhere.

Flush with the success of the Nashville school Bowser and Womack moved their families to Silver Point in 1909 to establish the Putnam County Normal, Industrial and Orphan School, commonly known as the Silver Point Christian Institute. It acted as a public, not a private school, and the campus included dormitories for males and females, a dining hall, the Laurel Hill

⁷R. Vernon Boyd, *Undying Dedication: The Story of G.P. Bowser* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 2001), 16-22. In 1896 he suffered a personal tragedy when courting his future wife, Fannie Billips. While crossing adjoining train tracks, Bowser was struck by an oncoming train, which broke one leg in two places and severely mangled his left arm. The leg healed poorly and he walked with a permanent limp, while the arm had to be amputated above the elbow.

Church of Christ, and the office/print shop for *The Christian Echo*. Bowser quickly earned the respect of people in Silver Point and Cookeville. An effective negotiator, Bowser brokered a deal with Putnam County officials to provide a modicum of support for the school. He convinced commissioners that the Silver Point Christian Institute was necessary and provided a vital service to the county. They agreed to partially fund the school, providing revenues for up to four months annually. Students from Silver Point and beyond received not only a classically-based education, they also learned practical trade skills through hands-on activities.⁸

For Bowser Silver Point presented the ideal location for his mission to educate African Americans and challenge the racial prejudice he experienced in Cleveland and Nashville. As Vernon Boyd observed:

The residents of the community [Silver Point] were unusual in that there seemed to be several white people with a mild attitude toward race. . . . In Silver Point, some whites, but not all, openly admitted that a black relative was their cousin or aunt, etc., and visited and socialized freely back and forth. This was in sharp contrast to the nearby town of Baxter which had very bitter opinions about blacks. . . . But in Silver Point the white people were tolerant and peaceful.⁹

⁸Boyd, 37-38. For those who could afford to board at the school the fee was six dollars per month. People who could not afford the expenditure were allowed to work in the print shop, the kitchen, or elsewhere. The school was also referred to as the Silver Point Christian College. Alexander Campbell and Sam Womack served on the board of directors. By 1916 the board was composed of nine men, four of whom were white.

⁹G.P. Bowser, "Putnam County Normal, Industrial and Orphan School, Silver Point, Tennessee," *Gospel Advocate* 57 (July 29, 1915), 1145-1167; Boyd, 33-34. Bowser was invited to be a guest minister in 1909 and blew the congregation away with his enthusiasm, intelligence and charisma. They prevailed upon him to move the Nashville school to Putnam County.

The school Bowser and Womack established in western Putnam County lay between the Walton Road (current Highway 70) and the Tennessee Central Railway, the main east-west arteries across the county. Wagons and trains stopped there frequently and black and white members of the Silver Point community intermingled at area businesses or at the railroad siding.¹⁰ Black people operated freely in the Silver Point community without fear of molestation, and set the tone for future race relations in Putnam County and the region.

G.P. Bowser bristled at the injustices of Jim Crow. Like W.E.B. Du Bois—who once taught school at nearby Alexandria, Tennessee before moving on to create the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)—Bowser believed that the key to success for African Americans and improving race relations lay in education. He encouraged students at Silver Point to be respectful and courteous, but to also stand up for their rights. Bowser, who refused to enter commercial establishments through the back door or in any way demean himself, found life comfortable in Silver Point.¹¹ He earned the respect of people in the black and white communities; everyone referred to him as “Brother Bowser.”¹² The one-armed black man with a pronounced limp “never turned anyone away from school. People were never too old or too young for him to try to help them” and race simply was not an issue in Silver Point

¹⁰Boyd, 34, 37-38.

¹¹Robert E. Hooper, *A Distinct People: A History of the Churches of Christ in the 20th Century* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 265-266. Bowser was involved in the creation of five African American schools during his career.

¹²Boyd, 38. Because he was more highly educated than most in the Silver Point area, white people often came to him to enlist his aid in filling out paper work. During World War I he helped white and black citizens complete a variety of things including conscientious objector forms.

and other parts of Putnam County, Baxter excluded.¹³ The school prospered until World War I adversely affected it, which siphoned off students, much needed materials, and people from the Silver Point community who enlisted or were drafted into service, or moved away to work in wartime industries.¹⁴

Cookeville businessman Jere Whitson sold fourteen acres of land to the Churches of Christ for \$1750 north of the square on Dixie Avenue. Church leaders intended to establish a Christian College at Cookeville, and Dixie College soon opened its doors. Though not really a college *per se*, it acted more like a high school in its original incarnation. Dixie College consisted of only one building (now Derryberry Hall) that housed administrative offices, classrooms, and other facilities. Controversy soon gripped the school as several financial backers reneged on their promised donations. David Lipscomb and *The Gospel Advocate*, the most influential leaders of the Church of Christ, questioned the true mission of the school, fearing it would embrace secularism, missionary societies, and worse, allow the teaching of instrumental music in its curriculum. Special scorn was heaped upon financial agent and promoter of the school W.K. Azbill who appeared to digress from the rigid doctrines of the Church of Christ. The ten board members who oversaw the school tried to broker a compromise, saying that no person could ever be the director of the school without being a member of the Church of Christ

¹³*Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 62-63; "Report of Silver Point Bible School for Negroes." *Gospel Advocate* 58(August 9, 1917), 748; L.W. Lankford, "The School at Silver Point," *Gospel Advocate* 62 (January 15, 1920), 22. Bowser tendered his resignation in 1918 and moved to Louisville, Kentucky. Bowser left Silver Point frustrated with white members of the board of directors and the lack of support from the white Churches of Christ. He went on to establish schools in Kentucky, Michigan and Texas.

in good standing.¹⁵

In the meantime financial irregularities took a toll. Master brick mason Joseph Francis Scott, who failed to be paid on time, threatened to halt construction. Because of internal turmoil, external pressures, and fiscal peculiarities the school never lived up to its expectations. People such as Oscar King (O.K.) Holladay, an attorney, politician, and prominent member of the Methodist Church, convinced Governor Thomas Rye to purchase the property and turn it into a state-sponsored college.¹⁶ This outraged Dr. John Ziegler, Superintendent of the Chattanooga school system. He claimed, “The act creating the Tennessee Polytechnic Institute was conceived in sin, born in iniquity, and should be repealed.” His wish was nearly granted when the state legislature revisited the issue in 1916. Tennessee Polytechnic Institute won its lease on life as a state institution of higher learning by the margin of one vote.¹⁷

In 1909 the Tennessee Supreme Court, in a four-to-one ruling, declared that the union of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America both unconstitutional and illegal. Though both denominations in Cookeville shared the same sanctuary on alternate Sundays, Anti-unionists were emboldened by the State Supreme Court’s decision in *Landrith v. Hudgins*. Antis, accompanied by their lawyers, demanded that the Presbyterians, USA, surrender the property on the corner of Madison and Broad Streets to the

¹⁵Harvey G. Neufeldt and W. Calvin Dickinson, *The Search for Identity: A History of Tennessee Technological University, 1915-1985* (Memphis, Tennessee: Memphis State University Press, 1991): 1-11; Leigh R. Capshaw, *Dixie University: Dixie College—A Historical Vignette* (Cookeville, Tennessee: Self-published, 1989): 4-44.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷Capshaw, 44.

Cumberland Church. After sober consideration the Session of the PCUSA reluctantly turned their keys over to the Antis in October. In November they allowed the Building Committee to purchase from the property where First Presbyterian Church now sits at the corner of Broad and Dixie from Jere Whitson. They held a ground breaking in November and sought shelter elsewhere to worship while awaiting construction of their new church home.

1910

Due to western incursions into China following the Boxer Rebellion, the power of imperial China faced a number of serious internal and external challenges. The four-year-old infant emperor Pu Yi toddled about the Forbidden City. Under pressure from Western reformers the Chinese government abolished slavery. So-called radicals led by Sun Yat-Sen, who had lived in Japan, the U.S. and Britain, called for progressive reforms. He wanted to strike a balance between the industrial might of the West and centuries of Chinese tradition.

In the world of sports, racing legend Barney Oldfield set a new land speed record of 133 miles per hour in a Mercedes-Benz. Oldfield's prowess on a race track made him a household name, and encouraged intrepid adventure seekers to enter the dangerous world of autor racing. Controversial African American heavyweight boxer Jack Johnson defended his title against Jim Jeffries, who turned out not to be the Great White Hope. Boxing captivated audiences around the world, and was a truly international sports sensation.

An omen appeared in the skies as Halley's Comet returned. The father of modern American literature, Mark Twain, who was born the year the comet appeared eighty years earlier, died upon its return. He imagined leaving the earth when the comet came back in a curious novella *Captain Stormfiel's Visit to Heaven*. Other luminaries who joined Twain in death that

year included psychologist and author William James, Mary Baker Eddy, founder of Christian Science, songwriter Julia Ward Howe, post-Impressionist painter Henri Rousseau, celebrated nurse Florence Nightingale and Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy.

Multi-millionaire turned philanthropist Andrew Carnegie established the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace with the intention of making the world a safer place. Having already given millions to build libraries across the United States and the impressive music venue Carnegie Hall in New York, he dedicated his remaining years to the prospect of ending warfare once and for all. The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace investigated human rights violations while promoting non-violence as a means of political reconciliation.

A new phenomenon became popular in the United States as more and more people enjoyed the “week-end.” First introduced in England as the Industrial Revolution made it possible for more people to work fewer hours for better pay, the “week-end” gave factory workers more time to spend with friends and family. Social reformers believed that the “week-end” would provide a much needed break from the monotony of factory life and rejuvenate the work force.

Giacomo Puccini staged his delightful opera *Girl of the Golden West*, while Igor Stravinsky and Sergei Diaghalev nearly caused a riot with their notorious production of *The Firebird*. Vaslav Nijinsky’s suggestive dancing and Stravinsky’s primitive musical score with its emphasis upon percussion outraged audiences in Paris who booed the show. Many stomped out in disgust. The negative reviews, however, inspired curious audiences to pack the houses after

opening night.¹⁸

The city commission of Spokane, Washington, created a new local holiday that later went national, Father's Day.¹⁹ Decades earlier Julia Ward Howe, author of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," threw down the gauntlet with her "Mother's Day Proclamation of 1870," demanding that women be treated more civilly and given their just due. She even proposed that the 4th of July be recognized as "Mother's Day" as well as "Independence Day." Popular fiction at the turn of the 20th Century depicted mothers as long-suffering, understanding, patient, pious creatures who were the vanguards against barbarism, corruption, and sin. In 1908, U.S. Senator Elmer Burkett of Nebraska penned the legislation designating "Mother's Day," as a national holiday. Father's Day, by contrast had to wait a while to catch on; it did not become an official U.S. holiday until 1972.

The Aluminum Corporation of America purchased 7000 acres near Maryville, Tennessee to create a company town, ALCOA, to manufacture aluminum. A large smelting plant was constructed as well as 150 homes for employees and managers.²⁰ People from all over East Tennessee relocated to Blount County to find work in the spacious new facility, and provide a better life for their families.

Southern Engine and Boiler Works of Jackson, Tennessee, generated some success in designing and manufacturing automobiles. The company came to the attention of wealthy

¹⁸Modris Ecksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (New York: Doubleday, 1989): 9-20, 39.

¹⁹Blom, 277-307; Ecksteins, 39, 272.

²⁰Tara Mitchell Mielnik, "Alcoa," *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* (Nashville, Tennessee: Rutledge Hill Press, 1998): 16-17.

Nashville businessman, Augustus H. Robinson, who assembled a group of investors and purchased the automobile division, relocating it to the vacant Phoenix Cotton Mill building in north Nashville. After discovering that another manufacturer was producing cars named Southern, designer William Collier renamed his cars “Marathon” in honor of the 1904 Olympics. Marathon expanded its line from the original A9 Touring Car and B9 Rumble Seat Roadster and by 1911 five models were offered; by 1913 produced twelve different car designs. A tremendous success, production barely kept up with demand, and Marathon dealerships existed in every major city in America. By 1912, 200 cars rolled off the assembly line each month, with plans for 10,000 yearly. Marathon Motor Works would have remained a major contender in the automotive industry if not for the intrusion of the First World War.²¹

Wealthy businessman, lawyer, and social leader Lawrence Tyson of Knoxville courted controversy from his peers when he promised to end child labor in his textile mill. While his contemporaries employed children as young as age four to toil in the mills, Tyson promised not to hire anyone under the age of ten. He organized the “Southern Conference on Women and Child Labor” in Memphis which called for a number of labor reforms that failed to materialize.

Knoxvillians witnessed a huge spike in tourism due to the Appalachian Exposition dedicated to mountain industries (e.g. logging and mining), native crafts, and traditional music. The first airplane ever to land in Tennessee created quite a stir as it rumbled above the fairgrounds. Theodore Roosevelt attended the event and enthusiastically praised the

²¹George Zepp, “After a Bright Start, Marathon Auto Plant Here Sputtered to a Halt,” *Nashville Tennessean* (July 18, 2006), 3B; Margaret Binnicker, “Marathon Motor Works,” *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, 570-571.

celebration.²²

A gubernatorial election year, prohibition continued to be an issue as many people wanted the law repealed. Former U.S. Senator Robert Love “Our Bob” Taylor ran for the governorship, but tried to evade the issue of alcohol. He told a crowd in Johnson City, “I come to you today with a harmonica in my mouth, with an olive branch in one hand and a Bowie knife in the other, and with a heart full of good will to my fellow man, provided that my fellow man votes for me for governor.”²³

The reaction against prohibition came swiftly. Lem Motlow, owner and operator of the Jack Daniel Distillery, contested the law, leading to the supreme court case *Motlow v. State* that upheld prohibition. Under the court ruling only those operations that manufactured alcohol with a proof of 188 or higher could remain in operation, for they provided “medicinal grade alcohol” to physicians and pharmacists. The Chattanooga Medicine Company, makers of the infamous emetic Black Draught, had produced Wine of Cardui since the late nineteenth century for “difficult menstruation, leucorrhoea, backache, headache, dizziness and general female diseases.” It contained jasmine, chamomile, and rose hips infused in generous amounts of potable alcohol. Suddenly, men throughout the Volunteer State developed women’s ailments as sales of Wine of Cardui went through the roof, earning it the nickname the “Temperance Tipple.”²⁴

²²Robert B. Lukens, “Appalachian Exposition of 1910,” *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, 20-21.

²³Quoted in James B. Jones, Jr., *Everyday in Tennessee History* (Winston-Salem, North Carolina: John F. Blair Publisher, 1996): 203.

²⁴Michael E. Birdwell, “Chattanooga Medicine Company,” *Encyclopedia of Appalachia* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003): 476-477.

1911

The Mexican Civil War finally came to an end in 1911, while Wilhelm II of Germany sparked international controversy with the Agadir crisis between Germany and France in Morocco, foreshadowing a world war to come. Italian pilots used airplanes as offensive weapons for the first time in history when they attacked Tripoli. Western educated Sun Yat-Sen successfully led a rebellion in China, ending the Manchu dynasty and establishing the Chinese Republic. Norwegian Roald Amundsen and Englishman Robert F. Scott led competing expeditions to Antarctica in hopes of reaching the South Pole. Amundsen's crew became the first in history to reach the pole, while Scott and many of his crew perished in the frozen wasteland. The world recoiled in shock and anger when thieves stole the *Mona Lisa* on August 21, from the Louvre. The painting of the patrician woman with the wan smile was not recovered until 1913. The caper was the work of a former Louvre employee familiar with the guards and security of the museum, Vincenzo Peruggia.²⁵

A significant cultural shift transpired in the United States when the Nestor Company opened Hollywood's first film studio in an old tavern on the corner of Sunset and Gower. Shortly thereafter Cecil B. DeMille, D.W. Griffith, Jesse Lasky, and Adolf Zukor established Paramount Studio. They began making movies in California because of its open space, moderate climate and considerable distance from the lawyers and thugs employed by Thomas Edison in New Jersey. Edison's practices placed a stranglehold on films and filmmakers. With the freedom offered in California, modern Hollywood was born, and with it came American

²⁵Blom, 308-333; "Find 'Mona Lisa,' Arrest Robber," *New York Times* (December 13, 1913): 1.

domination of the motion picture industry for over a century.²⁶

Back in Tennessee, the General Assembly called for judicial reform. They passed laws creating a juvenile court system to try non-adults. Recognizing the need for separate penal facilities to separate juvenile offenders from hardened adult criminals, legislators called for the creation of two reformatories. Because of Jim Crow laws that rigidly enforced segregation, the facility at Pikeville was for white offenders while the one at Jordania housed African Americans.

Chattanoogans Jack Lupton, Joseph Whitehead and Ben Thomas, all attorneys and entrepreneurs, made history when they were the first to challenge the new federal statute known as the Pure Food and Drug Act. Sole owners of the right to bottle Coca Cola, their product was accused of containing a “strange and deleterious substance.” That substance was caffeine, not cocaine. They successfully convinced the judge that Coke held no more caffeine than the average cup of coffee. The high profile of the case made Coca-Cola a national soft drink rather than just a regional one.²⁷

It was in this climate that First Presbyterian Church, USA emerged in Cookeville. Rapid changes in technology, from airplanes to automobiles to movies captured the attention of people throughout the Upper Cumberland. Those days saw the emergence of Cookeville as the most important town in the region, slowly eclipsing both Sparta and Monterey. What follows is not a traditional church history, for this narrative looks not just at a congregation over time, but also the city of Cookeville and the Upper Cumberland.

²⁶Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies* (New York: Vintage, 1994): 33-85.

²⁷Jeff McEwen, “A Strange and Deleterious Substance: Coca-Cola versus the Pure Food and Drug Act,” (Chattanooga, Tennessee: Unpublished Conference Paper, 1999).

This book examines the relationship between the church and the community over one hundred years, because institutions of any description do not exist in a vacuum. Churches, schools, and people exist and interact with each other, reacting to events that transpire around them. The story of the First Presbyterian Church in Cookeville, Tennessee is a story of people not a brick and mortar building. It is a story of people acting both courageously and cravenly. It is a tale of struggle and triumphs, pain and joy, and endurance. So prepare to take a trip back in time, and rediscover the history of one congregation's interaction with the region.