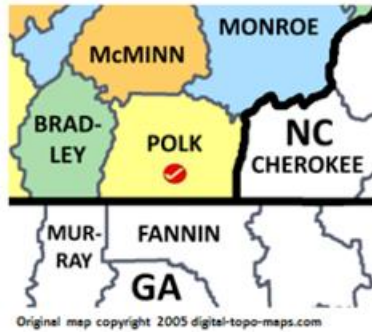


Polk County Locality Guide (23 June 2023)

Geographic Area and County History



Polk County was named for then-governor and future president James K. Polk. The county is located in the southeastern area of the state. ([FamilySearch Wiki](#))

Established by the Tennessee General Assembly in 1839, Polk County was named to honor newly elected Governor James K. Polk. It is located in the extreme southeastern corner of the state, bounded by North Carolina and Georgia. Most of the county's 436 square miles lie within the Chilhowee and

Unaka mountain ranges and contain some of the most scenic beauty in the country, including Parksville, the Ocoee, Conasauga, and Hiwassee Rivers and 150,865 acres of Cherokee National Forest. The rapids of the Ocoee River are internationally known to white-water enthusiasts as the scene of the Twenty-fifth Olympic kayaking events.

Polk County's known Indian heritage extends back at least two thousand years to the early Woodland Indians. In 1540 the Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto camped near Columbus, a thriving trading post on the banks of the Hiwassee River. The Treaty of 1819 opened the territory north of the Hiwassee to white settlement, and the 1835 Treaty of Removal forced the Cherokees to give up their final land claims in Tennessee.

Acting on the petition of some 100 citizens, the Tennessee State Legislature created Polk County from parts of Bradley and McMinn counties on November 28, 1839. David Ragen, as acting sheriff, was authorized to hold the first election after the commissioners divided the county into seven civil districts. In the February 4, 1840, election, McKamy's stock stand, located on the Old Federal Road, was chosen for the permanent county seat and named Benton in honor of Thomas Hart Benton, U.S. senator from Missouri. The new town was surveyed and laid out by James McKamy and John F. Hannah into 223 lots, which were sold at auction for a total of \$11,386, much of which was never collected.

Copper was first discovered at Ducktown in 1843, and within four years mule teams were carrying casks of ore south to a forge at Dalton, Georgia. Sustained development of the Copper Basin began in the late 1850s after transportation improvements and company consolidation. Julius E. Raht combined many individual mining claims into the Union Consolidated Mining Company and became superintendent of both the Polk County Copper Company and the Burra Burra Copper Company. From 1865 to 1878, 24 million pounds of copper were taken from the underground mines, and 50 square miles of the Copper Basin area were stripped of its timber to fuel smelters and build mines. After 1891 production by the open-roasting process of removing copper from the ore, an environmentally disastrous method, killed vegetation for miles and left the landscape open to erosion. By the early twentieth century, a barren moonscape of red hills surrounded Ducktown and Copperhill.

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During the Civil War, Polk County provided five companies for the Confederacy and two for the Union army, as well as 90 percent of the copper for the Southern cause. No battles were fought within the county; however, a November 29, 1864 raid by the notorious bushwhacker and guerrilla John P. Gatewood resulted in at least sixteen deaths.

Polk County's remote Sylco Mountains became the site of Vineland, a unique experiment in social living by Rosine Parmentier. In the 1840s, with the aid of a New York associate, Parmentier purchased 50,000 acres of land and encouraged French, German, Italian, and Austrian colonization of the area. Their grandiose plans for a profitable winemaking industry apparently failed to materialize, and most of the colonists migrated elsewhere. Those who remained were quickly integrated into the local community, but the family names of Becklers, Miolin, Nocarina, Genollic, Sholtz, Pace, and Chable are indicators of this vanished settlement.

In 1858 W. P. Collins edited the county's first newspaper, the Ducktown Eagle. The Polk County News, edited and owned by Ingrid and Randolph Buehler, has served the county for over one hundred years. A recently reorganized Historical and Genealogical Society publishes a quarterly and oversees the preservation of the county's historic sites and heritage.

According to the 2000 federal census, Polk County had a population of 16,050. There are approximately fifty churches of Protestant denominations in the county. The largest denomination is Baptist, followed by Methodist, Presbyterian, Church of God, and Episcopal.

The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) operates three hydroelectric plants on the Ocoee River and one on the Hiwassee River; the TVA owns more than 3,000 acres of land in Polk County. The U.S. Forest Service controls in excess of 150,000 acres and operates several recreational sites which provide picnicking, camping, and swimming facilities for local citizens and thousands of visitors each year. ([Tennessee Encyclopedia](#))

[Polk County Chamber of Commerce](#)

Record Loss – Polk County (Family Search)

1895 and 1935 Fires damaged courthouse records.

- Lost deeds: 1839 to 1893
- Lost marriage records: 1839 to 1893
- Lost probate records: 1839 to 1872

Polk County was established 28 November 1839 from [McMinn](#) and [Bradley](#) Counties. Early records may be found at McMinn and Bradley County Courthouses.

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FamilySearch Polk County [Catalog](#)

TnGenWeb Project - [Polk County](#)

Contact - [Sharon R. McCormack](#)

[Polk County History & Genealogical Society](#)

Record Location Table

Record Type	Location	Record Notes
Birth	County Clerk Office	County Registrations began 1908
	Tennessee Vital Records Office	Keeps for 100 years then they are sent to TSLA
Marriages	County Clerk Office	County Registrations began 1894
	Tennessee Vital Records Office	Keeps for 50 years then they are sent to TSLA
Divorce	Chancery Court Clerk	
	Tennessee Vital Records Office	TSLA
Deaths	County Clerk Office	County Registrations began 1908
	Tennessee Vital Records Office	Keeps for 50 years then they are sent to TSLA
	TSLA	1908-1912
		1914-1933
Land Deeds		County Registrations began 1894
	County Register	County Register of Deeds
List of Microfilmed Polk County Records	TSLA-PDF	Download PDF
Pension Applications	Tennessee State Archives & Library	County Index to Tennessee Confederate Pension Applications
Probate Records	Chancery Court	County Registrations began 1873

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Tennessee Enumeration of Male Voters	Ancestry.com (\$)	Tennessee Enumeration of Male Voters
World War I Veterans	Tennessee State Archives & Library	Research Collection

County Repositories

[Benton Public Library](#)
[Polk County History & Genealogical Society](#)

Current Area Information

[Polk County Chamber of Commerce](#)
[Polk County Government](#)

Resources

General

[Tennessee County Database \(TNGS\) – Polk County](#)
[Polk County Wiki \(Family Search\)](#)
[Genealogy Trails – Polk County Genealogy and History](#)
[Linkpendium – Polk County](#)
[Tennessee State Library & Archives – Polk County Facts Sheet](#)
[TNGenWeb – Polk County](#)
[USGenWeb Archives – Polk County Tennessee](#)
[Tennessee Law, The Early Days](#)

Newspapers

Tennessee State Archives & Library

[Check Online Catalog for Benton & Polk County Newspaper Details & Dates Held.](#) We do not necessarily hold all published issues of the newspapers.

Newspaper.com

Polk County News Gazette (1910, 1913 & 1914)
Polk County New – 1917-1921

Genealogybank.com

Benton, Tennessee, Newspaper Archives (1910 – 1921)

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Chronicling America

1. [Copper City advance. \(Copperhill, Tenn.\) 1931-1973](#)
2. [The Copperhill news. \(Copperhill, Tenn.\) 19??-1931](#)
3. [Ducktown eagle. \(Hiwassee Mines \[Ducktown\], Tenn.\) 1858-18??](#)
4. [The Polk County citizen. \(Benton, Tenn.\) 1928-19??](#)
5. [The Polk County news and the Charleston-Calhoun record. \(Benton, Tenn.\) 1983-1984](#)
6. [Polk County news, citizen-advance. \(Benton, Tenn.\) 1985-current](#)
7. [Polk County news-gazette. \[online resource\] \(Benton, Polk County, East Tennessee\) 190?-191?](#)
8. [Polk County news-gazette. \(Benton, Tenn.\) 190?-191?](#)
9. [Polk County news. \[online resource\] \(Benton, Tenn.\) 191?-1983](#)
10. [Polk County news. \[volume\] \(Benton, Tenn.\) 191?-1983](#)
11. [Polk County news. \(Benton, Tenn.\) 1984-1985](#)
12. [The Polk County Republican. \[online resource\] \(Ducktown, Tennessee\) 1914-191?](#)
13. [The Polk County Republican. \(Ducktown, Tenn.\) 1914-191?](#)
14. [Citizen-advance. \(Copperhill, Tenn.\) 1973-1985](#)

Tennessee State Archives & Library - Newspapers on Microfilm

Newspapers were published in Benton, Copperhill and Ducktown. Scattered early issues are available from 1858, and a complete run begins in 1890. Microfilms are loaned to Tennessee libraries. Individual reels may also be purchased. An [Inventory of Newspapers on Microfilm at the Library and Archives](#) is available on our website.

Selected Published County Histories

Tennessee State Archives & Library

- Brief History of Polk County. [Written by Members of the 6th Grade of Benton Elementary School, Year 1934-1935] (Benton [Tenn.] Elementary School, 1958)
- Confederate History of Polk County, Tenn., 1860-1866 (Williams, 1923)
- Fun, Fact, and Philosophy: The Diary of John Coffee Williamson, 1858-1861 (Polk County Historical & Genealogical Society, 1996) *[name index]*
- Heritage of Polk County, Tennessee, 1839-1997 (Polk County Historical & Genealogical Society, 1997) *[surname index]**
- History of Polk County, Tennessee (Lillard, 1999) *[name index]*
- The Journal of Rosine Parmentier 1852 (Cleveland Public Library, 2001)
- Kopper Memories (Sullivan, 1988?)
- Life and Time of Captain David McNair (Donnelly, 1997) *[name index]*
- Old Home Place: Faces and Places in the Mountains of Polk County, Tennessee, Before there was a Cherokee National Forest (Parish, 1994) *[surname index]*
- Polk County Scrapbook: 150 Years of Memories [2 vols.] (19??)*

Polk County Locality Guide (23 June 2023)

- Studies in Polk County History (Polk County History Society, 1965)*
- The Tennessee Copper Company, 1899-1970 (Frye, 2022)
- Tennessee's Great Copper Basin (Frye, 2017)

Published Local Records

Tennessee State Archives & Library

- 1840 Federal Census, Polk County, Tennessee (Snell, 1982) *[name index]*
- 1880 Census, Polk County, Tennessee (Sistler, 1990) *[alphabetical by surname]**
- Abstracts of Ocoee District Early Land Records-entries (McClure, 1990) *[alphabetical]*
- Bradley County, Tennessee, Confederate Pension Applications [includes pension applications for Polk County] (Wiefering & Sherrill, 1990) *[name index]*
- Cemetery Inscriptions of Polk County, Tennessee (Casada, 1988) *[name index]*
- Check List of Cemeteries and Graveyard (WPA, 19??)
- County Court minutes, 1840-1843 (WPA, 1936) *[name index]*
- Court Minutes, 1844-1848 [vol.1 1844-1847; vol. 2 1844-1848] (WPA, 1936-1937) *[name index]*
- Higgins Funeral Home Records, 1928-1987, Benton, Tennessee Blankenship, 1993) *[alphabetical]**
- Historical Listing of Cemeteries of Polk County, Tennessee (Blankenship, 1994)
- Index to the Ocoee District Early Land Records - entries (McClure, 1990) *[alphabetical]*
- Ocoee Land District Maps (Douthat, 2013) *[name index]*
- Polk County 1850 United States Census (Adams & Ledford, 1996) *[surname index]*
- Polk County 1870 United States Census (Polk County Historical & Genealogical Society, 1998) *[name index]**
- Polk County 1920 United States Census (Polk County Historical & Genealogical Society, 1998) *[name index]**
- Polk County 1930 U.S. Census (Polk County Historical & Genealogical Society, 2003) *[name index]**
- Polk County Tennessee 1860 U.S. Census (Polk County Historical & Genealogical Society, 1998) *[name index]**
- Polk County, Tennessee, 1900 U. S. Census (Polk County Historical & Genealogical Society, 2000) *[name index]**
- Polk County Tennessee 1910 U.S. Census (Polk County Historical & Genealogical Society, 2000) *[name index]**
- Polk County Tennessee Marriage Records, 1894 through 1970 (Poteet-Pitts, 1995) *[alphabetical]**
- Polk County Tennessee Marriages: Recorded in Vol. I, II, III, and IV, 1894 Through 1907 (Jones, 1986) *[alphabetical index for each volume]**

Polk County Locality Guide (23 June 2023)

- Polk County, Tennessee, Minutes, Ocoee Baptist Church, 1836-74 (WPA, 1938) [\[name index\]](#)*
- Polk County, Tennessee, Vital Statistics, 1914 Through 1925 (Wiefering, 1993) [\[name index\]](#)*
- Polk County, Tennessee, Vital Statistics, 1926 Through 1930 (Wiefering, 1997) [\[name index\]](#)*
- Polk County, Tennessee, Vital Statistics 1931 Through 1935 (Wiefering, 1997) [\[name index\]](#)*
- Polk County, Tennessee, Vital Statistics 1936 Through 1941 (Wiefering, 1999) [\[name index\]](#)*
- Polk County, Tennessee, Vital Statistics 1942 Through 1946 (Wiefering, 1999) [\[name index\]](#)*
- Resting Places: Cemeteries of Polk County, Tennessee (Finnell, 2003) [\[name index\]](#)*

Selected Manuscripts Material

Tennessee State Archives & Library

- Allen Family Papers-Addition, 1834-1942
- James Donaldson Clemmer Scrapbooks on Polk County, 1884-1934 (Microfilm Manuscript #1525, 12 reels)
- Mayfield Papers, 1889-1929 (Microfilm Manuscript #1529, 4 reels)
- Old Friendship Baptist Church Records. Polk County, 1879-1943 (Microfilm Manuscript #348, 1 reel)
- Robert Edward Barclay Papers, 1854-1977 (Microfilm Manuscript #825, 25 reels)
- Springtown Baptist Church of Christ Records. Polk County, 1855-1903 (Microfilm Manuscript #1281, 1 reel)
- Sudie Clemmer Collection, Polk County (Microfilm Manuscript #722, 4 reels)
- William Erskine Sloan Diary, 1861-1865 (Microfilm Manuscript #154, 1 reel)

Maps

[TDOT Map of Polk County](#)

[Polk County - 1888](#)

[TnGenWeb Project = Maps Our Ancestors Followed](#)

[The Ocoee District Land Grants](#)

Cemeteries

[Polk County Cemeteries - Find-a Grave](#)

[Polk County Cemeteries - USGenWeb](#)

[Polk County Cemeteries - Genealogy Trails](#)

[Polk County Cemeteries - TNGenWeb \(Cemetery\)](#)

Polk County Locality Guide (23 June 2023)

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"Folk medicine in McMinn, Polk, Bradley & Meigs counties, TN, 1910-1927." TN Folklore Soc. Bull. 28 (1962), pp. 1-8.	Lillard, Roy G.	Y		
"Murder of a landscape: Ducktown desert." Nat. Hist. (Oct. 1951), pp. 352-356.	Teale, E.W.	Y		
"Retracing the old Federal road." Emory U. Q. 6 (1950), pp. 159-171.	Goff, John H.	Y		
"Switching for water." TN Folklore Soc. Bull. 21 (1955), pp. 108- 111.	Rogers, E.G.	Y		
"The GA-TN boundary line." GA Hist. Q. 35 (1951), pp. 269-306.	Coulter, E. Merton.	Y		
"The old barns of Appalachia." Mtn. Life & Work 41 (1965), pp. 21-30.	Glassie, Henry.	Y		
A brief history of the First Baptist Church (Ocoee Baptist Church), Benton, TN. 1836-1959. Benton, 1964. 50 pp. (unp. typescript)	Lillard, Roy G.	Y		
A Confederate history of Polk County, TN, 1860-1866. Nashville, McQuiddy, 1923. 31 pp.	Williams, A.J.	Y		
A history of Polk County. (unp. typescript)	Williamson, W.H.	Y		
Abstracts of Ocoee District early land records-entries. Signal Mountain, Tennessee:	McClure, Lucille.		Y	
Cemetery south east and north east.	Brown, Albert.		Y	
Confederate history of Polk County, Tenn., 1860-1866. Signal Mountain, Tennessee: Mountain Press,	Williams, A. J.		Y	
Ducktown back in Raht's time. Chapel Hill, NC, UNC Press, 1946. 284 pp. (reprinted 1974 by White Wing).	Barclay, Robert E.	Y		Y
Fun, fact and philosophy: the diary of John Coffee Williamson, 1858-1861. Knoxville, Tennessee Valley, Pub., 1996. 178 pp.	Williamson, John Coffee.	Y		
Goodspeed Publishing Company. Polk County history of Tennessee. Signal Mountain, Tennessee: Mountain Press, 1988.	Goodspeed Publishing Company.		Y	
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Heritage of Polk County, Tennessee, 1839-1997. Benton, TN, Polk County Historical & Genealogical Society, 1997. 400 pp.		Y		
History of Polk County, Tennessee. Benton, Polk County Historical & Genealogical Society, 1999. 463 pp.	Lillard, Roy G.	Y		
History of Tennessee: containing historical and biographical sketches of thirty east Tennessee counties. Greenville, SC: Southern Historical Press, Inc., 2006, ©1980.	Goodspeed Publishing Company.		Y	
History of the Ocoee Ranger District, 1838-1988. (republished as The old home place. Benton, TN, Polk County Pub. Co., 1994. 104 pp.)	Parish, Thurman.	Y		
In touch with the past: a guide to historic places & homes in Fannin County, GA & Polk County, TN. Blue Ridge, GA, K. Thompson, 1982. 248 pp.		Y		
J.D. Clemmer's scrapbooks relating to Polk County, TN: newspaper clippings, programs, photographs, letters, ledgers, & account books, etc. Benton, n.p., 1884-1934.	Clemmer, James D.	Y		
Ocoee land district maps. Signal Mountain, TN: Mountain Press, 2013.	Douthat, James L.		Y	
Polk County Hist. Soc. Studies in Polk County history. Benton, the society, 1965. 24 pp.		Y		
Polk County News: reprints of articles relating to the history of Polk County. Benton, Polk County News, 1990. 97 pp.		Y		
Polk County scrapbook: 150 years of memories. Benton, Polk County News, 1989. 59 pp.		Y		
Polk County Tennessee marriage records, 1894 through 1907 : recorded in vol. I, II, III, and IV	Viola H. Jones.			Y
Polk County, Tennessee, court records [microform] Contents Minutes 1848-1849, 1840-1851, 1852, 1853-1854, 185-1856.	WPA			Y
Polk County, Tennessee, court records [microform] Contents Minutes 1856, 1857; Tombstone inscriptions.	WPA			Y
Polk County, Tennessee, vital statistics, 1914 through 1925	Edna Wiefering			Y
Polk County, TN, 1980-1987: an economic analysis. Nashville, TN Dept. Emp. Sec., 1988. 12 pp.		Y		
Record of decision: 1996 Olympic whitewater slalom venue, Ocoee River, Polk County, TN. Cleveland, US Forest Service, 1994. 21 pp.		Y		
Scrapbook history of Polk County, TN. N.p., n.d., 1927-1939. 326 pp.	Wooten, John M.	Y		

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Some aspects of Polk County politics. Benton, 1962. 50 pp. (unpublished typescript)	Lillard, Roy G.	Y		
Tennessee records of Polk County county court minutes, 1840-1843. Signal Mountain, Tennessee: Mountain Press, [Date of publication not identified].	WPA		Y	
The Copper Basin, 1840-1963. N.p., the author, 1995.	Barclay, Robert E.	Y		
The Copper Basin, 1890 to 1963. Knoxville, the author, 1975. 187 pp.	Barclay, Robert E.	Y		
The Ocoee Lodge #212, F&AM, Benton, TN. Benton, 1963. 10 pp. (unp. typescript)	Lillard, Roy G.	Y		
The old home place: faces & places in the mountains of Polk County, TN, before there was a Cherokee National Forest. Benton, Polk County Pub., 1994. 104 pp. (originally published in History of Ocoee Ranger District)	Parish, Thurman.	Y		
The Polk County Copper Company of TN: its mineral resources & mining prospects. New Orleans, LA, Bulletin Book & Job Office, 1859. 19 pp.	Maury, Matthew F.	Y		
The railroad comes to Ducktown. Knoxville, Cole Print. & Thesis Svc., Inc., 1973. 193 pp.	Barclay, Robert E.	Y		
Touching home: a collection of history & folklore from the Copper Basin, Fannin County area. Produced by the students of the West Fannin High School photo journalism class.	K. Thompson, 1976.	Y		