



Paris Fish Fry, 1956.

Henry County

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The Tennessee General Assembly created Henry County on November 7, 1821, and named it in honor of Revolutionary War patriot and statesman, Patrick Henry. Henry County became the gateway for the settlement of West Tennessee and beyond. The Henry County Court House was erected in 1823 in Paris, West Tennessee's oldest incorporated municipality. The county counted 31,115 residents in the 2000 census.

During the Civil War, military units, including the Fifth Tennessee Infantry Regiment, organized on the courthouse lawn. Henry County sent more than 2,500 volunteers to the Confederacy and earned the title "Volunteer County of the Volunteer State." In March 1862 General Ulysses S. Grant ordered four companies and a battery of artillery into Paris. The Union forces attacked an encampment of 400 Confederate soldiers but retreated toward Paris Landing after a short engagement. In October 1864 General Nathan Bedford Forrest began his Johnsonville campaign at Paris Landing, where he captured four Union gunboats, fourteen transports, twenty barges, twenty-six pieces of artillery, \$6,700,000 worth of property, and 150 prisoners.

Beginning with Isham Green Harris, Henry County provided Tennessee with three governors. Born in Franklin County in 1818, Harris moved to Paris as a young boy. He served in both state houses before his election as governor in 1859. As Tennessee's only Confederate governor, Harris served as brigadier general aide-de-camp to Generals Albert S. Johnston, Braxton Bragg, and Joseph E. Johnston. In March 1864 Harris was involved in a brief skirmish with Union troops near Mansfield in Henry County which left two Confederate soldiers wounded. After the war, he served twenty years in the U.S. Senate and was president pro tempore of the Senate at his death in 1897.

James Davis Porter, born in Paris in 1828, was elected to the state legislature in 1859. He helped organize the Army of Tennessee and was General Benjamin F. Cheatham's chief of staff. Porter was elected governor for two terms beginning in 1874. He later served as assistant secretary of state, minister to Chile, president of the Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis Railway, president of the University of Nashville, and chancellor of Peabody College. Porter died at his home in Paris in 1912.

Thomas Clarke Rye, born in Camden in 1863, moved to Paris in 1902. He was governor during World War I, serving from 1915 to 1919. Rye became a chancery court judge in 1919 and served twenty years. He died at his home in Paris in 1953.

Other political figures from Henry County include General J. D. C. Atkins, a Confederate congressman and five-time member of the U.S. Congress, chair of the House Committee on Appropriations, and later commissioner of Indian Affairs. John Wesley Crockett, the eldest son of the legendary Davy Crockett, took his father's old congressional seat in 1837. Justice Howell E. Jackson was a U.S. senator before he became a justice on the U.S. Supreme Court in 1893.

Henry Countians who have had an impact on education include Dudley M. Clements, who began the nation's first vocational agricultural program following the passage of the Smith-Hughes Act. E. W. Grove-Henry County High School, Tennessee's first privately endowed public high school, honored Edwin Wiley Grove, who headed the Paris Medicine Company and Grove Laboratories, which produced "Grove's Tasteless Chill Tonic." Henry County has produced a number of university presidents, including Dr. C. C. "Sonny" Humphreys, Memphis State University; Dr. Thomas D. Jarrett, Atlanta University; Dr. Mordecai Johnson, Howard University; and Dr. Joe Morgan, Austin Peay State University.

Entertainers from Henry County include Rattlesnake Annie, country music singer; Bobby Jones, award-winning gospel performer; Buster Jones, host of Soul Unlimited; Cherry Jones, Tony Award-winning actress; Merle Kilgore, country music writer and manager; Keith Lancaster, founder of the Acapella Music Group; Ula Love, Hollywood starlet and member of the Ziegfeld Follies; Harry Neal, member of the duo-piano team of Nelson and Neal; Ricky Revel, country music singer; Jackie de Shannon, pop music singer; and Hank Williams Jr., Country Music Association Entertainer of the Year.

Other prominent Henry Countians include Vernon Jarrett, newspaper columnist and social commentator; Virginia Weldon Kelly, syndicated columnist; Ethel McFadden, the first Miss Tennessee; Christine Reynolds, the state's first female cabinet member; "Miss Pearl" Routon, artist and one of those responsible for naming the iris as Tennessee's official cultivated flower; and Dr. Henrietta Veltman, who delivered over four thousand babies during her fifty years of practice.

Vernon McGarity received the Congressional Medal of Honor for his actions in the Battle of the Bulge during World War II. Camp Tyson, built near Routon in 1941 and named for Brigadier General Lawrence D. Tyson, was the U.S. Army's only barrage balloon training center during World War II.

Henry County's first tourist attraction, Sulphur Well, was created by accident in 1821, when an artesian well of sulphur water was struck in an attempt to locate a large salt bed on a former Chickasaw reservation. Eventually a summer resort was erected at the site to accommodate the large numbers of people who came to drink the water, which was believed to have health benefits. Many sought refuge at Sulphur Well during the 1837 yellow fever epidemic.

In 1944 Sulphur Well was covered by the Tennessee Valley Authority's Kentucky Lake, the largest man-made lake in the United States and the second largest in the world. After the creation of Paris Landing State Park in 1945, the lake soon became a popular recreation destination. Paris acquired the name "Capital City of Kentucky Lake," and tourism took an important role in the area's economy. The World's Biggest Fish Fry at Paris emerged as one of Tennessee's premier festivals and draws tens of thousands of visitors, and politicians, into Paris and Henry County during the last full week of April.