

Historical Resources on Microfilm:
Benton County, Tennessee

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West Tennessee Heritage Study Center
Univ. of Tennessee at Martin

Benton County

In mid October 1818, Andrew Jackson and Isaac Shelby successfully strong-armed Chickasaw Indians into ceding lands in the tribe's cultural region lying east of the Mississippi River. Land south of the Ohio River and north of the Kentucky-Tennessee border became the Jackson Purchase; land within Tennessee became the Western District. Registration and entry of North Carolina land grants within the Western District complicated property ownership for decades. The legislature passed an act to organize the region into new counties on November 7, 1821 (*Acts of Tennessee* 1821, p.39). Settlement in the area that is presently Benton County, Tennessee can be traced to 1819, when brothers Willis and Dennis Rushing settled on Rushing Creek, about six miles north of present-day Camden. A school was organized at this small settlement in 1822 or 1823, but the area remained sparsely populated.

Benton County was organized 1835 Nov 24 from territory previously belonging to Humphreys and Henry counties, and is named in honor of Missouri senator Thomas Hart Benton. It bounds approximately 412 square miles. The first county organization was established early in February 1836 with the election of a five-member county commission. Camden was surveyed as the county seat in December, 1836 on land claimed by John Jackson. A two-story brick courthouse was erected the following year.

Between the 1890 and 1900 censuses the Henry-Benton county line as redrawn to follow the bed of the Big Sandy River, which enlarged Benton county to its present boundaries. A small piece of Decatur County along the river was also acquired at nearly the same time. The 1920 federal census fixed the county's population at 12,045. The 2000 census enumerated 16,537.

For a general history of Benton County see Jonathan K. T. Smith, *Benton County*, Tennessee County History Series (Memphis: Memphis State Univ. Press, 1979).

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Book and film holdings of the West Tennessee Heritage Study Center may be searched via the Internet by pointing a browser to <<http://wthsc.utm.edu>> and following the link to the Paul Meek Library catalogue.

MICROFILM

WTHSC
Film Reel Contents

Federal census¹

	1830 census—see Humphreys and Henry county population schedules
473	1840 census
491	1850 census, free schedule
523	1850 census, slave schedule
530	1860 census, free schedule
571	1860 census, slave schedule
578	1870 census
637	1880 census
684	1890 census, Union veterans and widows schedules
685	1900 census
735	1910 census
772	1920 census
816	1930 census

Maps

403	Sanborn Fire Insurance Co. maps (Camden)
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Newspapers

Those seeking to find things in early local newspapers face several challenges. First, almost all newspapers were issued weekly, not daily, so the likelihood is not good that a report of an event was printed near the time it happened. Second, until the twentieth century there were no reporters, so an event appeared only if the editor was notified, and then only if there was space to print a notice *and* if the editor chose to do so. Finally, though newspapers began being published in Camden as early as 1852 with the *Central Democrat*, only a few scattered issues have survived; with one exception there are no complete files extant.

Newspaper titles are listed below in chronological order. If a sequential run is available, then the range of dates is given by noting the first and last issues using a hyphen rather than listing each individually. In the accompanying lists, the newspaper masthead (title) is given first, followed by the volume and issue number separated by a colon, as “1:24,” and then the date.

119–120	<i>Camden Herald</i> , 1883 – 1887 Dec
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¹ County boundaries changed dramatically between nineteenth century census enumerations. Researchers can follow changes graphically in William Thorndale and William Dollarhide’s *Map Guide to the U. S. Federal Censuses, 1790–1920* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, 1987).