

Johnson City in 1911

Author: City Historian Ray Stahl, 1989

Edited by Alan Bridwell, 2007

The year 1911 marks the beginning of the first public or community hospital in Johnson City. What was Johnson City like in 1911? The following facts have been gleaned from an examination of the Johnson City and Jonesborough newspapers of 1911.

In 1911, **Johnson City was a city of 8,501 people** and Washington County had a population of 28,968. **Guy Smith** was Mayor of Johnson City, which was governed by a Mayor and Alderman form of government. The city did not own its office buildings but leased space for a city hall and courthouse for an annual rental of \$600.00.

In 1911, every male in the city was taxed \$30.00 a year for street maintenance. If he refused or couldn't pay the tax, he was required to give four days of manual labor in lieu of taxes.

In 1911, Johnson City had 20 physicians and surgeons and six dentists. The Johnson City and Washington County Medical Society, with offices in the Miller Building, met on the first Thursday of each month at the office of one of its members. To supply its citizens with drugs and medicines, the city had four drugstores.

The city had eight hotels, 12 boarding houses, 13 restaurants, five wholesale grocers and 49 locally-owned retail grocery stores. Ice cream was made at five locations in the city. Three banks – the Bank of Commerce, the City National Bank and the Unaka National – provided the city with financial services.

The city library in 1911 was located at 121½ Spring Street. The city newspaper, **THE COMET**, published both daily and weekly editions but during 1911 discontinued the daily. The Dixie and the Edisona were the city's theatres and the Hippodrome at the corner of Whitney and Main Streets served as the city auditorium.

The City Directory listed a dozen businesses in 1911, the most striking being the Cranberry (blast) Furnace at 2000 Second Avenue, which lit the sky a fiery red at night when it poured its molten mass of iron into molds called "pigs" to produce pig iron.

In 1911, the city had two telephone systems (Cumberland and Bristol) and many businesses and residences had phones on both systems or exchanges.

The Commercial Club, forerunner of the Johnson City Chamber of Commerce, championed a number of causes in 1911: a juvenile court, a reform school, compulsory education, a city court to replace the recorder's court and support of the Bristol to Memphis Highway (US 11-E) to run through Johnson City (which it did in later years).

In 1911, the Southern Railroad in cooperation with the Commercial Club distributed a 3-page brochure advertising business and industrial opportunities in Johnson City. One enticement, which this brochure held for out-of-town industrialists to locate in Johnson City, read: "Johnson City is blessed with an abundance of labor at a reasonable cost. This is made possible by the exodus from the mountain regions surrounding this city. Industrialists who employ female labor can be supplied at reasonable wages. Strikes are practically unknown here as our laboring population is capable and contented and the foreign and agitating element is not here."

In 1911, neighboring Milligan College, four miles from the city limits, had an enrollment of 280 students. Dr. Fred D. Kershner resigned the presidency during the summer of 1911 to become president of Texas Christian University. In October, he was replaced by Dr. T. E. Utterback, superintendent of Johnson City schools.

The first state convention ever held in Johnson City took place September 19-20, 1911. The state convention of the Christian Churches of Tennessee was held in the First Christian Church building on East Main Street.

The major event of 1911 was the construction and opening of the **State Normal School** at Johnson City, known today as East Tennessee State University. Under the direction of S. M. Beaumont Contracting Company of Knoxville, more than 100 workmen including carpenters, masons, electricians, molders, plumbers and others raced to get the main structures, Gilbreath Hall, Carter Hall and the president's residence, ready for occupancy by the opening of the fall term in early October.

Prior to 1911, **Sidney G. Gilbreath** had been chosen as the president of the new normal school and, while the buildings were being constructed

on the campus, he maintained offices in the King Building in downtown Johnson City. Among his early responsibilities were preparation of a curriculum for the school and selecting a faculty. He was proud to announce that all teachers in the normal school were graduates of colleges and universities, including Milligan and Tusculum Colleges.

According to a news item which appeared March 2, 1911 in the **Johnson City Comet**, the law which created the three normal schools in the state (Western, Middle, and Eastern) clearly defined the purpose of the schools, “the education and professional training of teachers from the elementary schools of the state.” These normal schools were to “confer that education, training, discipline and skills which will best prepare them for teaching in the public schools of Tennessee.”

On admission to the school, every applicant was required to sign a pledge “to teach in the public or private schools of the State of Tennessee within the next six years after leaving school, at least as long as he or she attends the said school.”

There was no tuition charge to Tennessee students. They were required to pay a \$2.00 registration fee for each twelve-week term and \$1.00 for the six-week summer term. Out-of-state students were charged \$12.00 tuition for each twelve weeks and \$6.00 for the summer school. The Normal School advertised that a student could attend “for a full year for \$150 with all expenses including books, tuition, room and board and other expenses with the exception of clothing being covered.”

The law which established the normal school permitted the school to contract with local school districts to have students taught in the normal schools to serve as an observation or practice field for the student teachers. In order to meet this requirement, the State of Tennessee and the normal school entered into a contract with Johnson City to take the city’s high school students for the years 1911 through 1913. The contract price to the city was \$4,000 a year. The Johnson City School Board considered this “a good deal” since the cost of maintaining these students at Science Hill was \$4,500. Not only was this a saving of \$500 to the city but the high school students had the extra advantage of taking courses in agriculture, manual training, domestic science and commerce, courses not offered in the Science Hill High School curriculum. In 1913, the contract was renewed for another year. Beginning in 1914, the Normal School recruited its own students in grades one through twelve to provide an observation school or practice field for its student teachers.¹

¹ This was the beginning of what is known today as “University High School,” located on campus.

One of the conditions of the contract between the state and the city for having high school students enrolled in the normal school was that trolley transportation would be provided to the normal school by the Johnson City Traction Company. Apparently, by July 1911 this trolley line to the normal school had not been laid and the school was to open in October. City officials were disturbed. This was the occasion for a lengthy article in the July 13, 1911 issue of the *Johnson City Comet*.

Said the Comet,

“There is considerable discussion going the rounds in a sub-rosa sort of way as to the reason why the street car extension out to the Normal School is not underway as of yet. It will be remembered that a new franchise was granted to the Johnson City Traction Company by the Board of Aldermen some weeks ago provided work on the extension was begun within four months and the line to the Normal School completed in nine months. The four months have expired and no visible start appears except some crossings (cross-ties) piled at the CC&O (Clinchfield Railroad) crossing of Buffalo Street.”

“The situation seems to be this: Before the Normal School was thought of Mr. George L. Carter secured a contract from the street car people that they would operate a car line through the Carter addition (present Tree Streets Historic District) if and when he would build and turn over the same at his own expense for such operation. Later, the Normal question came up and this street car company bound itself to build, at its own expense, a car line to the Normal at any point within two miles of Johnson City.

Now it so happens that the Normal was located at a point where the car line to the Normal will go through the Carter addition. This serves the purposes of Mr. Carter, it seems, and instead of building the line at its own expense, but the street car out of great politeness is willing to yield the honor to say nothing of the expense to Mr. Carter. It’s a game of Alfonso and Gaston.

It is believed that the street car now proposes, if it is forced to build the line, to build up Buffalo Street and straight out Walnut under the old franchise which puts no tax on its gross earnings and which only skirts the Carter property and not under the new franchise that goes up Southwest Avenue and then out to Pine Street to the very heart of the Carter addition. This squabble should be satisfied and settled at once. The school, the city and the people of Johnson City ought not to be buffaloes and swayed with a jugglers act.”

The Johnson City Traction Company was forced to build a trolley line out to the Normal School and the *Johnson City Comet* later commented,

“One of the quickest jobs of engineering in the South was carried out during July, August and September in getting the trolley line to the Normal School in time for the opening of school on the first Monday in October. (1911). Mr. Amzi Smith, Manager of the Traction Company, said he would have the cars running when the school opened. Gangs of track-layers and stringers put in 13 hours a day to get the job done.”



Trolley Line Extension to Normal School - 1911

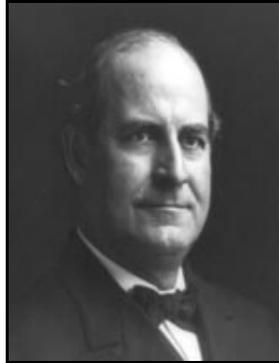
The State Normal School of Johnson City opened Monday, October 3, 1911, with about 150 students. More than 100 of these students were high school students from Johnson City’s Science Hill High School.

The normal school was dedicated Tuesday October 10, 1911, in a ceremony that began at 10:00 a.m. and continued into the late afternoon of that day. Many celebrities made speeches, including Dr. P .P. Claxton, United States Commissioner of Education; State Superintendent of Education, Dr. George Brister; Ex-Governor, John I. Cox; Dean Charles E. Little of Peabody Normal; Professor Hoskins of the University of Tennessee; and presidents of Milligan, Maryville, Washington and Tusculum Colleges.

The first annual appropriation from the State of Tennessee for the normal school was \$30,000. Additional income came only from the student fees and out-of-state tuition.

William Jennings Bryan, three-time (1896, 1900, and 1908), unsuccessful, Democratic candidate for the presidency of the United States, spoke in Johnson City in 1911. He spoke at the Hippodrome (local assembly hall) on February 21, 1911. He arrived in Johnson City at 6:20 a.m. (that day) on the Southern train from Washington, D. C. and was immediately taken to the **Pardue (later Windsor Hotel)** for breakfast. A public reception was held for him at 8:00 a.m. in the parlors of the Pardue Hotel. At 9:00 a.m. he spoke to the school children and the public from the balcony of the hotel.

Mr. Bryan delivered the lecture at the Hippodrome at 9:45 a.m. Tickets for the lecture at the Hippodrome were fifty cents each. All tickets were for general admission seats only. The balcony was reserved entirely for the negroes, whose seats were free. The title of Mr. Bryan's lecture was "The Price of a Soul." He came to Johnson City to raise money for a monument fund for **Congressman Walter P. Brownlow**. The obelisk was to be placed in the Circle of the National Cemetery at Mountain Home.



William Jennings Bryan

Colonel Walter P. Brownlow (1851 – 1910) was the United States Congressman from Tennessee's First Congressional District from 1896 until his death in 1910 and the nephew of former Governor, W. P. "Parson" Brownlow. Prior to his becoming a Congressman, he had careers as a tinner, railroad locomotive engineer and newspaper editor. **During his 14 years in Congress, the appropriations he secured for his district (\$2,797,000) amounted to nearly twice as much as all the appropriations for the State of Tennessee in the previous 100 years (\$1,642,229).** Washington County, in his district, was the first county in the United States to receive rural free delivery of mail. He

secured the National Soldiers' Home at Johnson City (\$2,100,000); post office buildings at Johnson City and Bristol; a federal court building and the Andrew Johnson National Cemetery at Greeneville and the fish hatcheries at Erwin. He founded the Appalachian Park movement² and inaugurated the national "good roads" movement that later became enacted as the Bureau of Public Roads, forerunner of the Federal Highway Administration.

The **Southeastern Baseball League**, organized in the spring of 1910, became the **Appalachian League** in 1911. Johnson Citian, W. W. Miller, was the president of the Southeastern Baseball League when the season opened in Johnson City on May 22, 1911. The season closed September 8 that year with 102 games being played during the season. The salary of players was limited to \$600 - \$800 per man. There were six teams in the league, including Johnson City, Bristol, Asheville, Knoxville, Cleveland and Morristown. The Johnson City home games were played on the Mountain Home (Soldiers Home - present VA facility) diamond and the team was often called "The Soldiers." Prior to each game, the Mountain Home Soldier's Band and Drum Corps gave an hour concert. **The Johnson City team won the league championship in 1911.**

Some members of Johnson City's 1911 team were: Billy Dubbs, George Townsend, A. L. Martin, E. N. Shaw, Mark Lusk, Sam Alexander, Bert Lacy, Alex Patterson, Dave Taylor, Sam Hall, Rube Merchant, B. W. Cleveland and H. B. Kelley.

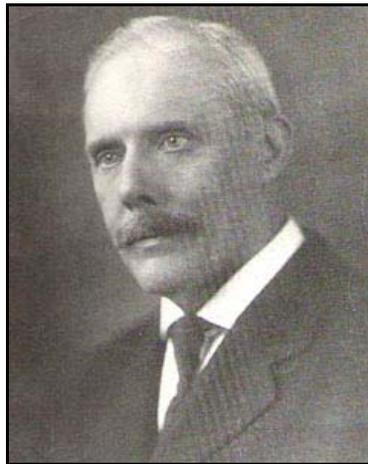
In 1911, Appalachian League Bill Dubbs, shortstop for the Johnson City Soldiers, received a contract for \$22,500 from Connie Mack's Philadelphia Athletics.

The back-home movement was organized in Johnson City in 1911 by W. D. Roberts of Johnson City, who became its chief promoter. Roberts inaugurated the program in behalf of the CC&O (Clinchfield) Railroad and the idea quickly spread through Tennessee and eventually throughout the South. Its aim was to get former residents of Tennessee and the South who had migrated west of the Mississippi and north of the Ohio and Potomac Rivers to return home. A four-page folder with a full-color reproduction of the painting, **Back Home** on the cover was mailed to thousands living in the North and West who had formerly resided in the South. In June 1911, the Jonesborough Herald and Tribune

² The Appalachian Park proposed by Congressman Brownlow extended along the Blue Ridge Mountains from Front Royal, Virginia to Gatlinburg, Tennessee. Years later, two national parks were formed. The Shenandoah National Park in Virginia was established in 1935 and the Great Smoky Mountain National Park in Tennessee and North Carolina was created in 1926 and established in 1930.

reported that the mail to the Back-Home Association was the heaviest of any in Jonesborough. Hundreds of Association letters were also handled in the Johnson City post office each week.

By 1911, the city of Johnson City had amended its charter. The amendment called for popular election of the city attorney, the city recorder and the police judge to be held at the same time as the election for mayor and aldermen. The city commissioner, the executive who administered the affairs of the city, was paid an annual salary of \$1,500. The salary for the city judge was fixed at \$300 a year. The amendment also called for an audit of the city's books at least once a year.



George L. Carter

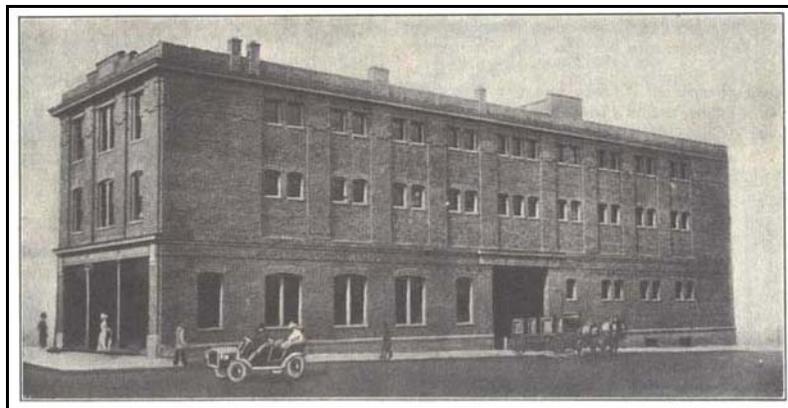
George L. Carter, a resident of Johnson City and President of the Carolina, Clinchfield and Ohio Railroad, resigned his position with the railroad on February 14, 1911. Mr. Carter was forced to resign by the Interstate Commerce Commission, who ruled that his other business interests conflicted with his duties as president of the railroad. The Interstate Commerce Commission did however permit him to retain his financial interests in the railroad and his position as a director of the corporation. Although the railroad presidency paid Mr. Carter a handsome salary, he was reluctant to give up his many other business interests which had their own financial rewards.

*“Mr. Carter,” said **the Comet**, “was willing to give up his presidency and the handsome salary in order to be free to give his attention to this vast and varied interests in important developments along the line of the new railroad, including extensive coal interests.”*

The Johnson City Comet, for May 17, 1911, reported that Mr. Carter took over the Standard Oak and Veneer Company and the Allen Panel Company which had gone into bankruptcy during the 1907 Financial

Panic. Mr. Carter paid \$250,000 for these two firms and reportedly had “put them on their feet” and, at the time of the news article, was employing more than several hundred men.

In 1911, Mr. Carter transformed a three-story building, formerly occupied by the Love-Thomas Company, into an office complex to accommodate the offices of the Unaka Corporation, the Tennessee Veneer Company and the Model Mill (later General Mills), all corporations owned by him. The building also housed the offices of the Carolina, Clinchfield, and Ohio Railroad. A fire-proof vault was built in the building. It was said that the “extensive remodeling made the building one of the most modern office buildings in the city” at that time.



Love-Thomas Bldg. Clinchfield RR Offices

At a meeting in Atlanta in 1911, Mr. Carter was made Governor of the Southern Commercial Congress.

In 1911, two inter-urban electric railways were planned to connect Johnson City with nearby municipalities. The April 28, 1911 issue of the ***Jonesborough Herald and Tribune*** stated, “There is much talk in Johnson City and Washington, Greene, and Cocke Counties of building an electric railway to connect Newport and Johnson City. The distance is 55 miles. The plan is to organize a stock company with capital of \$100,000. The route is by way of Conklin, fourteen miles southwest of Johnson City, where it would cross the Chuckey River and then to Newport. Power would be furnished from a plant to Embreeville.”

On May 25, 1911, the ***Jonesborough Herald and Tribune*** reported a proposed electric railroad from Johnson City to Elizabethton by way of Milligan College. The Jonesborough paper listed the stockholders of the proposed corporation as John G. Burchfield, president; H. B. Brown, treasurer; J. N. Edens, secretary; and J. H. Smith and W. C. Burchfield. Said the Herald and Tribune, “The stockholders ordered a sale of

\$10,000. The preliminary surveys have been made and the final survey is to be made within the next thirty days and a map of the route to be drawn. The length of the line proposed is twelve miles and covers one of the best sections of Carter County along its route.”

The major social event of 1911 was the wedding on February 8 of Marion Louise Friberg and the groom was the son of Dr. W. J. Miller. The *Johnson City Comet*, in a one-and-a-half newspaper column, described the wedding in great detail and called it a violet wedding since the color violet was carried through in all of its decorations.

The tragedy of the year was the shooting that occurred when John Smith, 15, shot J. P. Gray, principal of the West Side School, with a 32-caliber revolver. Smith, son of Dr. and Mrs. C. E. Smith, was retaliating for a paddling he had received from the principal. The principal was wounded in the neck but not mortally so and did recover. However, the Smith boy, fearing that he would be sent to reform school for his offense, a month after the shooting incident, committed suicide by hanging himself in a barn.

In 1911, Dr. C. J. Broyles, a Johnson City Eye, Ear, Nose and Throat specialist, was elected president of the Tennessee Medical Association. He served the State Society during the 1912 calendar year.

A large male glee club of 50-100 voices was organized in Johnson City in the spring of 1911.

H. A. Calvin, owner of the Edisona, one of Johnson City’s earliest theaters, was fined in 1911 for showing a picture of a Reno prize fight between **Jim Jeffries and Jack Johnson**. Calvin, who sold tickets to men of the city, showed the picture after the close of the regular show. The local court declared the fight picture immoral.

After having operated a weekly and daily newspaper for several years, Cy H. Lyle, editor of the *Johnson City Comet*, announced on May 24, 1911 that he would abandon the daily newspaper and publish the weekly only. Lyle said that he had reached the conclusion that, **“Johnson City had as much need for a daily newspaper as hell has for a steam heating plant.”**