

## Origins of Tennessee County Names

As Indian treaties opened up the land that is now Tennessee for settlement, settlers rushed in to clear farms and establish communities. The new inhabitants sought protection for life and property and other benefits of government—courts of law, militia organizations, and legal title to newly acquired land. Counties were quickly organized once migration into the frontier region had begun. Access to the seat of government was a main difficulty for the pioneers, since it was necessary to travel to the county seat to conduct legal business or to present oneself to the court. Over time, residents in areas remote from the county seat would petition the General Assembly for a new county centered closer to their homes. Twenty-two new counties were formed between 1806 and 1819, and twenty-five between 1820 and 1840. This process of carving counties out of the land began in the 1780s and ended a century later. Counties were named for military heroes, American statesmen, physical features, European noblemen, and Indian tribes and settlements, and one was named for a woman. Some counties were authorized but never organized, some organized and then abolished. At present, Tennessee has ninety-five counties, each with its own unique story to tell.

### **Anderson County**

Created 1801 from Knox and Grainger counties; named in honor of Joseph Anderson (1757–1847), U.S. senator, judge of the Superior Court of the Territory South of the River Ohio (later Tennessee), and U.S. comptroller of the treasury.

### **Bedford County**

Created 1807 from Rutherford County and Indian lands; named in honor of Thomas Bedford, Jr. (d. 1804), Revolutionary War officer, Middle Tennessee land owner of Jefferson Springs in Rutherford County who contributed to the development of that area.

### **Benton County**

Created 1835 from Humphreys County; named in honor of David Benton (1779–1860), member of the Third Regiment, Tennessee Militia in the Creek wars, early settler, and farmer who was instrumental in establishing the county.

### **Bledsoe County**

Created 1807 from Roane County and Indian lands; named in honor of Anthony Bledsoe (1733–1788), colonial and Revolutionary War soldier, surveyor, Tennessee militia colonel, and early settler of Sumner County who was killed by Indians.

### **Blount County**

Created 1795 from Knox County; named in honor of William Blount (1749–1800), member of the Continental Congress, governor of the Territory South of the River Ohio (later Tennessee), founder of Knoxville, U.S. senator, and speaker of the state senate.

**Bradley County**

Created 1836 from Indian lands; named in honor of Edward Bradley (d. 1829), Tennessee militia officer, colonel of First Regiment, Tennessee Infantry in the War of 1812, and member of the Tennessee state house and the Shelby County Court.

**Campbell County**

Created 1806 from Anderson and Claiborne counties; named (reportedly) in honor of Arthur Campbell (1743–1811), member of Virginia House of Burgesses, Revolutionary and Indian wars officer, and commissioner for negotiation of Indian treaties.

**Cannon County**

Created 1836 from Rutherford, Smith, and Warren counties; named in honor of Newton Cannon (1781–1841), Creek War and War of 1812 soldier, Tennessee state senator, U.S. congressman, and first Whig governor of Tennessee.

**Carroll County**

Created 1821 from Indian lands; named in honor of William Carroll (1788–1844), colonel and major-general in the War of 1812, governor of Tennessee for six terms, known as Tennessee's "reform governor."

**Carter County**

Created 1796 from Washington County; named in honor of Landon Carter (1760–1800), treasurer of Washington and Hamilton districts of North Carolina, speaker of the State of Franklin senate and its secretary of state, and militia officer.

**Cheatham County**

Created 1856 from Davidson, Dickson, Montgomery, and Robertson counties; named in honor of Edward Cheatham (1818–1878), member of Tennessee state house, member and speaker of the state senate, businessman, and railroad president.

**Chester County**

Created 1879 from Hardeman, Henderson, McNairy, and Madison counties; named in honor of Robert I. Chester (1793–1892), quartermaster in the War of 1812, colonel in Texas war for independence, U.S. marshal, and state legislator.

**Claiborne County**

Created 1801 from Grainger and Hawkins counties; named in honor of William C. C. Claiborne (1775–1817), judge of the superior court of Tennessee, U.S. congressman and senator, governor of the Mississippi Territory and of Louisiana.

**Clay County**

Created 1870 from Jackson and Overton counties; named in honor of Henry Clay (1777–1852), member of the Kentucky state house and senate, U.S. congressman and senator, secretary of state, and commissioner for treaty with Great Britain in 1815.

**Cocke County**

Created 1797 from Jefferson County; named in honor of William Cocke (1748–1828), Revolutionary War and War of 1812 soldier; member of Legislatures of Virginia, North Carolina, State of Franklin, Territory South of the River Ohio, Tennessee, and Mississippi; and Chickasaw Indian agent.

**Coffee County**

Created 1836 from Bedford, Warren, and Franklin counties; named in honor of John Coffee (1772–1833), Creek War and War of 1812 cavalry commander, frontiersman, congressionally appointed surveyor-general, land dealer, and prosperous planter.

**Crockett County**

Created 1871 from Haywood, Madison, Dyer, and Gibson counties; named in honor of David Crockett (1786–1836), frontier humorist, author, soldier, state legislator, U.S. congressman, and a defender and casualty of the Alamo in the Texas war for independence.

**Cumberland County**

Created 1855 from White, Bledsoe, Rhea, Morgan, Fentress, and Putnam counties; named in honor of the Cumberland Mountains, which Thomas Walker may have named for the Duke of Cumberland, then prime minister of England, circa 1748.

**Davidson County**

Created 1783 by Act of North Carolina; named in honor of William Lee Davidson (circa 1746–1781), colonial soldier and Revolutionary War officer in the North Carolina Third, Fourth, and Fifth Regiments, who was killed in action at Valley Forge.

**Decatur County**

Created 1845 from Perry County; named in honor of Stephen Decatur (1779–1820), American naval officer who won fame in the War with Tripoli in 1804, the War of 1812, and the Algerine War in 1815 for his daring exploits.

**DeKalb County**

Created 1837 from Franklin, Cannon, Jackson, and White counties; named in honor of Johann DeKalb (1721–1780), German baron who came with Lafayette to America in 1777, became a Revolutionary army officer, and was killed in action at Camden.

**Dickson County**

Created 1803 from Montgomery and Robertson counties; named in honor of William Dickson (1770–1816), Nashville physician, member and speaker of the state house, U.S. congressman, and trustee of the University of Nashville.

**Dyer County**

Created 1823 from Indian lands; named in honor of Robert Henry Dyer (circa 1774–1826), Creek War and War of 1812 officer, cavalry colonel in the 1818 Seminole War, state senator, and instrumental figure in formation of Dyer and Madison counties.

**Fayette County**

Created 1824 from Indian lands; named in honor of the Marquis de Lafayette (1757–1834), French nobleman, statesman, and soldier who entered American service in the Revolutionary War and was commissioned major-general.

**Fentress County**

Created 1823 from Morgan, Overton, and White counties; named in honor of James Fentress (1763–1843), speaker of the state house, chairman of Montgomery County Court, and commissioner to select seats for Haywood, Carroll, Gibson, and Weakley counties.

**Franklin County**

Created 1807 from Rutherford County and Indian lands; named in honor of Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790), American printer, diplomat, author, philosopher, scientist, statesman, and member of the committee to draft the Declaration of Independence.

**Gibson County**

Created 1823 from Indian lands; named in honor of John H. Gibson (d. 1823), who served with distinction under Andrew Jackson in the Natchez Expedition (1812–1813) and in the Creek War.

**Giles County**

Created 1809 from Indian lands; named in honor of William B. Giles (1762–1830), Virginia state legislator, U.S. congressman and senator from Virginia who advocated admission of Tennessee into the Union in 1796, and governor of Virginia.

**Grainger County**

Created 1796 from Hawkins and Knox counties; named in honor of Mary Grainger (d. 1802), daughter of Kaleb Grainger of North Carolina, who married William Blount and became first lady of the Territory South of the River Ohio (later Tennessee).

**Greene County**

Created 1783 from Washington County; named in honor of Nathanael Greene (1742–1786), Revolutionary War commander at Trenton who succeeded Horatio Gates in command of the Army of the South and forced the British out of Georgia and the Carolinas.

**Grundy County**

Created 1844 from Coffee, Warren, and Franklin counties; named in honor of Felix Grundy (1777–1840), chief justice of the Kentucky Supreme Court, U.S. congressman and senator from Tennessee, and U.S. attorney general under President Van Buren.

**Hamblen County**

Created 1870 from Jefferson, Grainger, and Greene counties; named in honor of Hezekiah Hamblen (1775–1854), early settler, landowner, attorney, and member of the Hawkins Circuit and County Courts for many years.

**Hamilton County**

Created 1819 from Rhea County and Indian lands; named in honor of Alexander Hamilton (1757–1804), American statesman, Revolutionary War soldier, member of the Continental Congress, and secretary of the U.S. treasury under President Washington.

**Hancock County**

Created 1844 from Hawkins and Claiborne counties; named in honor of John Hancock (1737–1793), president of the Continental Congress, first signer of the Declaration of Independence, Revolutionary War militia officer, and governor of Massachusetts.

**Hardeman County**

Created 1823 from Hardin County and Indian lands; named in honor of Thomas Jones Hardeman (1788–1854), Creek War and War of 1812 soldier, prominent figure in the fight for Texas independence, and Republic of Texas congressman.

**Hardin County**

Created 1819 from Indian lands; named in honor of Joseph Hardin (1734–1801), Revolutionary War soldier, speaker of the State of Franklin Legislature, and member and speaker of the territorial Legislature whose sons settled Hardin County.

**Hawkins County**

Created 1786 from Sullivan County; named in honor of Benjamin Hawkins (1754–1818), member of the North Carolina Legislature and the Continental Congress, U.S. senator, and agent for the Creek, Cherokee, Chickasaw, and Choctaw.

**Haywood County**

Created 1823 from Indian lands; named in honor of John Haywood (1762–1826), North Carolina Superior Court and Tennessee Supreme Court judge, author of *Civil & Political History of Tennessee*, and “Father of Tennessee History.”

**Henderson County**

Created 1821 from Indian lands; named in honor of James Henderson (fl. 1815), commander of Tennessee troops preceding the Battle of New Orleans, and staff officer to Andrew Jackson in the Creek and Natchez campaigns.

**Henry County**

Created 1821 from Indian lands; named in honor of Patrick Henry (1736–1799), Virginia statesman, patriot and Revolutionary leader, member of the Virginia colonial and state Legislatures and the Continental Congress, and governor of Virginia.

**Hickman County**

Created 1807 from Dickson County; named in honor of Edwin Hickman (d. 1791), longhunter who, while on a mission to survey land on the Piney River, was killed by Indians near the present site of Centerville.

**Houston County**

Created 1871 from Dickson, Humphreys, Montgomery, and Stewart counties; named in honor of Sam Houston (1793–1863), U.S. congressman from and governor of Tennessee, Texas war for independence commander, president of the Texas Republic, and U.S. senator from Texas.

**Humphreys County**

Created 1809 from Stewart County; named in honor of Parry Wayne Humphreys (1778–1839), judge of the Superior Court of Tennessee, U.S. representative from Tennessee, and longtime judge of the state judicial district.

**Jackson County**

Created 1801 from Smith County and Indian lands; named in honor of Andrew Jackson (1767–1845), U.S. congressman and senator, Tennessee Supreme Court judge, troop commander at the Battle of New Orleans, and seventh U.S. president.

**Jefferson County**

Created 1792 from Greene and Hawkins counties; named in honor of Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826), member of the Virginia House of Burgesses and the Continental Congress, governor of Virginia, U.S. secretary of state, and third U.S. president.

**Johnson County**

Created 1836 from Carter County; named in honor of Thomas Johnson (circa 1836), early settler of Carter County on the Doe River, prominent citizen, and one of the first magistrates of Johnson County.

**Knox County**

Created 1792 from Greene and Hawkins counties; named in honor of Henry Knox (1750–1806), American Revolutionary War artillery commander, one of the founders of the Society of the Cincinnati, and first U.S. secretary of war.

**Lake County**

Created 1870 from Obion County; named for Reelfoot Lake, formed by a series of earthquakes in 1811 that dammed the Reelfoot River and altered the course of the Mississippi River, an area now part of the state park system.

**Lauderdale County**

Created in 1835 from Haywood, Dyer, and Tipton counties; named in honor of James Lauderdale (d. 1814), Indian War and War of 1812 officer who fell leading troops against the British in 1814, a few days before the Battle of New Orleans.

**Lawrence County**

Created 1817 from Hickman County and Indian lands; named in honor of James Lawrence (1781–1813), American naval officer who died commanding the *Chesapeake* against the British frigate *Shannon*, known for his dying words, “Don’t give up the ship!”

**Lewis County**

Created 1843 from Hickman, Lawrence, Maury, and Wayne counties; named in honor of Meriwether Lewis (1774–1809), appointee of President Jefferson to explore the Louisiana Purchase in 1804 who died violently on the Natchez Trace.

**Lincoln County**

Created 1809 from Bedford County; named in honor of Benjamin Lincoln (1733–1810), American Revolutionary officer, U.S. secretary of war, commander of forces that suppressed Shay's Rebellion in 1787, and lieutenant governor of Massachusetts.

**Loudon County**

Created 1870 from Roane, Monroe, Blount, and McMinn counties; named for Fort Loudoun, erected 1756 by the British and named in honor of the Earl of Loudoun, commander-in-chief of British and American forces in the French and Indian War.

**Macon County**

Created 1842 from Smith and Sumner counties; named in honor of Nathaniel Macon (1757–1837), Revolutionary War soldier, North Carolina legislator, congressman and senator, and president of the 1835 North Carolina Constitutional Convention.

**Madison County**

Created 1821 from Indian lands; named in honor of James Madison (1751–1836), member of the Continental Congress, the 1787 Constitutional Convention and the U.S. Congress, U.S. secretary of state, and fourth U.S. president.

**Marion County**

Created 1817 from Indian lands; named in honor of Francis Marion (1732–1795), continental and Revolutionary War officer whose guerilla tactics in the Revolutionary War won him the title "Swamp Fox."

**Marshall County**

Created 1836 from Giles, Bedford, Lincoln, and Maury counties; named in honor of John Marshall (1755–1835), Revolutionary War soldier and Federalist leader, U.S. congressman, secretary of state, and chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.

**Maury County**

Created 1807 from Williamson County and Indian lands; named in honor of Abram Poindexter Maury, Sr. (1766–1825), pioneer, farmer, lawyer, civil engineer who laid out the town of Franklin in the late 1790s, commissioner of the town, and state senator.

**McMinn County**

Created 1819 from Indian lands; named in honor of Joseph McMinn (1758–1824), militia commander, member of territorial Legislature, speaker of the state senate, governor of Tennessee, and superintendent of the Cherokee Agency.

**McNairy County**

Created 1823 from Hardin County; named in honor of John McNairy (1762–1837), North Carolina Superior Court judge for Mero District, 1796 Constitutional Convention delegate, U.S. district judge for Tennessee, and Davidson Academy trustee.

**Meigs County**

Created 1836 from Rhea County; named in honor of Return Jonathan Meigs (1740–1823), Tennessee country pioneer, American Revolutionary officer who distinguished himself at Sag Harbor and Stony Point, and longtime Indian agent.

**Monroe County**

Created 1819 from Indian lands; named in honor of James Monroe (1758–1831), American Revolutionary War soldier, member of the Continental Congress and the U.S. Senate, governor of Virginia, U.S. secretary of state and of war, and fifth U.S. president.

**Montgomery County**

Created 1796 from Tennessee County; named in honor of John Montgomery (d. 1794), explorer, Revolutionary War officer, signer of the Cumberland Compact, founder of Clarksville, and Nickajack Expedition commander who was killed by Indians in Kentucky.

**Moore County**

Created 1871 from Bedford, Lincoln, and Franklin counties; named in honor of William Moore (1786–1871), early settler, Lincoln County justice of the peace, War of 1812 officer, turnpike company president, and state legislator.

**Morgan County**

Created 1817 from Anderson and Roane counties; named in honor of Daniel Morgan (1736–1802), American Revolutionary War officer who commanded the troops that defeated the British at Cowpens, and U.S. congressman from Virginia.

**Obion County**

Created 1823 from Indian lands; named for the Obion River, chief watercourse of the area, the origin of the name of which is obscure: possibly an Indian word meaning “many prongs” or the name of a French-Irish explorer.

**Overton County**

Created 1806 from Jackson County and Indian lands; named in honor of John Overton (1766–1833), pioneer attorney, supporter of Andrew Jackson, Tennessee Supreme Court judge, and co-founder (with Jackson and James Winchester) of Memphis.

**Perry County**

Created 1819 from Humphreys and Hickman counties; named in honor of Oliver Hazard Perry (1785–1819), American War of 1812 naval officer who, after his flagship *Lawrence* was damaged, continued the fight from the *Niagara*, forcing the surrender of the British fleet.

**Pickett County**

Created 1879 from Fentress and Overton counties; named in honor of Howell L. Pickett (1847–circa 1909), attorney and member of the Tennessee state house from Wilson County who moved to Arizona and continued his career in law and politics.

**Polk County**

Created 1839 from McMinn and Bradley counties; named in honor of James Knox Polk (1795–1849), clerk of the state senate, member of the state house, member and speaker of the U.S. House, governor of Tennessee, and eleventh U.S. President.

**Putnam County**

Created 1854 from Fentress, Jackson, Smith, White, and Overton counties; named in honor of Israel Putnam (1718–1790), French and Indian War soldier, and commander at the Revolutionary War battles of Bunker Hill and Long Island.

**Rhea County**

Created 1807 from Roane County; named in honor of John Rhea (1753–1832), Revolutionary War soldier, member of North Carolina and Tennessee state houses, member of U.S. Congress, and U.S. commissioner to treat with the Choctaws.

**Roane County**

Created 1801 from Knox County and Indian lands; named in honor of Archibald Roane (1760–1819), 1796 Constitutional Convention delegate, Superior Court of Law and Equity judge, Supreme Court judge, and governor of Tennessee.

**Robertson County**

Created 1796 from Tennessee and Sumner counties; named in honor of James Robertson (1742–1814), pioneer, surveyor, soldier, founder of the Watauga Settlements and of Nashville, and state senator, known as “Father of Tennessee.”

**Rutherford County**

Created 1803 from Davidson, Williamson, and Wilson counties; named in honor of Griffith Rutherford (1721–1805), North Carolina legislator, Indian War soldier, and chairman of the Legislature of the Territory South of the River Ohio (later Tennessee).

**Scott County**

Created 1849 from Anderson, Campbell, Fentress, and Morgan counties; named in honor of Winfield Scott (1786–1866), War of 1812 soldier and commander of U.S. troops at Vera Cruz, Cerro Gordo, and Molino del Rey in the Mexican War.

**Sequatchie County**

Created 1857 from Hamilton, Marion, and Warren counties; the name linked with a Cherokee word “sequachee,” probably meaning “opossum, he grins or runs,” also the name of a Cherokee chief for whom the Sequatchie Valley is named.

**Sevier County**

Created 1794 from Jefferson County; named in honor of John Sevier (1745–1815), governor of the State of Franklin, territorial militia officer, U.S. congressman from North Carolina and Tennessee, state senator, and first governor of Tennessee.

**Shelby County**

Created 1819 from Indian lands; named in honor of Isaac Shelby (1750–1826), Revolutionary War troop commander at Kings Mountain, first governor of Kentucky, and negotiator for the purchase of the western district from the Chickasaws.

**Smith County**

Created 1799 from Sumner County and Indian lands; named in honor of Daniel Smith (1748–1818), surveyor, Revolutionary War officer, secretary of the Territory South of the River Ohio (later Tennessee), maker of the first map of the state, and U.S. senator.

**Stewart County**

Created 1803 from Montgomery County; named in honor of Duncan Stewart (1752–1815), member of the North Carolina Legislature, early settler, Tennessee state senator, surveyor-general, and lieutenant governor of the Mississippi Territory.

**Sullivan County**

Created 1779 from Washington County; named in honor of John Sullivan (1740–1795), Revolutionary War officer, member of the Continental Congress, attorney general, legislator, U.S. district judge, and governor of New Hampshire.

**Sumner County**

Created 1786 from Davidson County; named in honor of Jethro Sumner (1733–1785), French and Indian War soldier, and Revolutionary War commander at Charleston, Brandywine, and Germantown who defended North Carolina against Cornwallis in 1780.

**Tipton County**

Created 1823 from Indian lands; named in honor of Jacob Tipton (d. 1791), organizer for the defense of the Northwest Territory against hostile Indians, who was killed leading an attack in 1791.

**Trousdale County**

Created 1870 from Wilson, Macon, Smith, and Sumner counties; named in honor of William Trousdale (1790–1872), “War Horse of Sumner County,” Creek and Mexican War soldier and officer, state senator and governor of Tennessee, and U.S. minister to Brazil.

**Unicoi County**

Created 1875 from Washington and Carter counties; the name, shared with the Southern Appalachian mountains in the area, probably derives from an Indian word “u’nika” meaning white, foglike, or fog-draped.

**Union County**

Created 1850 from Grainger, Claiborne, Campbell, Anderson, and Knox counties; named possibly for the “union” of fragments of five counties, or for the strong feelings in eastern Tennessee for the preservation of the Federal Union.

**Van Buren County**

Created 1840 from Warren and White counties; named in honor of Martin Van Buren (1782–1862), attorney general and governor of New York, U.S. senator from New York, U.S. secretary of state, and eighth U.S. president.

**Warren County**

Created 1807 from White, Jackson, and Smith counties, as well as Indian lands; named in honor of Joseph Warren (1741–1775), Revolutionary War officer who sent Paul Revere on his famous midnight ride to Lexington in 1775, and who was killed at Bunker Hill.

**Washington County**

Created 1777 by Act of North Carolina; named in honor of George Washington (1732–1799), member of the Virginia House of Burgesses and the Continental Congress, and Revolutionary War commander unanimously elected first U.S. president.

**Wayne County**

Created 1817 from Hickman County; named in honor of daring “Mad Anthony” Wayne (1745–1796), American statesman and officer in the Revolutionary War, who later led troops against hostile Indians.

**Weakley County**

Created 1823 from Indian lands; named in honor of Robert Weakley (1764–1845), Revolutionary War soldier, state legislator, U.S. congressman, U.S. commissioner to treat with Chickasaws, and 1834 Tennessee Constitutional Convention delegate.

**White County**

Created 1806 from Jackson and Smith counties; named in honor of John White (1751–1846), Revolutionary War soldier who saw action at Brandywine, Germantown, and Stony Point, and who was the first white settler of White County.

**Williamson County**

Created 1799 from Davidson County; named in honor of Hugh Williamson (1735–1819), surgeon-general of North Carolina troops in the American Revolution, North Carolina legislator, and member of the Continental and U.S. Congresses.

**Wilson County**

Created 1799 from Sumner County; named in honor of David Wilson (1752–circa 1804), Revolutionary War soldier and member of the North Carolina Legislature and the Legislature of the Territory South of the River Ohio (later Tennessee).