

Morgan County

Established 1817 County Seat: Wartburg

Early History

The first settlers in what is now Morgan County arrived in 1805 when the Third Tellico Treaty opened the land to settlement. Morgan County took its name from Revolutionary War hero Daniel Morgan. Its original county seat, Montgomery, was named for Major Lemuel P. Montgomery, a Knoxvillean who was killed in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend. Because little fertile soil was available, early settlers tended to live in isolated mountain valleys. The Obed and Emory rivers flowing through the county were not suitable for transportation purposes. As a result, Morgan County grew very slowly in its early years. In 1844, George Gerding of New York and Theodore de Cock of Antwerp purchased over 100,000 acres of land in Morgan, Cumberland, Scott, Fentress and White counties as part of a plan to bring Swiss and German settlers to the area. The town of Wartburg was created as part of the settlement, and in 1870 the citizens of Morgan County voted to make Wartburg the county seat. The colony was generally unsuccessful due in part to its remote location. By 1870, most of the Swiss and German immigrants had moved away.

Civil War and Reconstruction

While Morgan County voted against secession, the county was divided with some residents supporting the Union and others supporting the Confederacy. Local government broke down, and isolated families were attacked by guerillas operating in the area. Many Union supporters left the area and did not return at the end of the war. In 1880, the Cincinnati Southern railroad came to Morgan County and spurred dramatic economic growth. Logging and mining benefited from access to the railroad. Tourism also flourished as resorts such as Deer Lodge and Franklin brought visitors to the area. In 1893, the Tennessee legislature ordered a new prison built at Brushy Mountain. While the state had previously leased convicts to private companies, the practice had received harsh criticism. At Brushy Mountain, prisoners mined coal for use by the state directly under the supervision of guards.

Twentieth Century

Tourism has continued to be an important part of Morgan County's economy in the in twentieth century. Frozen Head State Park, Catoosa Wildlife Management Area, Obed National Scenic River, and Big South Fork National Recreational Area bring thousands of visitors to the area each year. Brushy Mountain Prison closed in 2009, but plans are underway to turn the former prison into a revitalized area, which will include walking tours, a brewery, and a distillery. Many community leaders support the plan which would bring jobs to the area.

Rugby

In 1880, a British social reformer and philosopher by the name of Thomas Hughes bought 75,000 acres in Morgan County with the express interest in creating a utopian community. Hughes wanted to solve issues created by Victorian politics and the English tradition of primogeniture, which gave the majority of an inheritance to the eldest son. Hughes's goal was to provide younger sons of the English aristocracy a place where they could work alongside Americans to create a model community. Rugby was named for the English school for boys that Hughes attended in his youth.

While Rugby appeared to flourish for a while, problems emerged as the difficulty of farming on the rough terrain of the Cumberland Plateau became apparent. Additionally, the English and American investors insisted on managing every aspect of the community instead of giving autonomy to local leaders. These economic problems combined with an outbreak of typhoid in 1881 and a fire that destroyed the Tabard Inn led to Rugby's slow decline. By 1892, the community had virtually been abandoned. In 1966, Rugby's revival began with the efforts of Brian Stagg to preserve the community's unique history. Today, Historic Rugby offers visitors tours of the historic village as well as dining and lodging.

For more information see,

[Historic Rugby](#)

***Visions Utopia: Nashoba, Rugby, Ruskin, New Communities* by John Egerton**

***Rugby, Tennessee: Being Some Account of the Settlement Founded on the Cumberland Plateau* by Thomas Hughes**