

Johnson County Locality Guide (17 July 2023)

Geographic Area and County History



Johnson County was named for Thomas Johnson, an early settler. The county is located in the northeastern area of the state. ([FamilySearch Wiki](#))

Located in the extreme northeastern corner of the state, Johnson County lies on the western slope of the Appalachian Mountains. It is bounded by Virginia on the north and North Carolina on the south and east. Hilly and mountainous, the county covers approximately 290 square miles, and the highest elevation is Snake Mountain at 5,574 feet. The most fertile and flat land can be found along the Little Doe River and Roan and Beaverdam Creeks.

Before the arrival of white settlers, the Cherokees, Creeks, and Yuchis used the area as a hunting and burial ground. Evidence of prehistoric mound builders has been found. The first white settlers were mostly English, but also included some Scots-Irish and Germans. The first settlement occurred at the confluence of a buffalo trail and three wilderness trails. The settlement name, Trade, attests to its importance as a meeting place where settlers, frontiersmen, and Native Americans swapped goods and stories.

Daniel Boone hunted and explored the area between 1761 and 1769. Numerous settlers followed Boone's trail through the wilderness, including John Honeycutt, who built a cabin on Roan Creek. Honeycutt entertained several well-known frontiersmen, including Boone and James Robertson, who achieved fame in the Watauga and Cumberland settlements. Before the end of the century, additional settlements had been established at Little Doe, Shady Valley, and Laurel Bloomery.

Settlers on Roan Creek included Joseph and John Haskins; George and Samuel Neatherly; Thomas, John, and Charles Asher; Richard and Benjamin Wilson; John and Henry Grimes; Joseph Gentry; John Jesse; and John Higgins. Nathaniel Taylor erected an iron works on Roan Creek. The first Little Doe settlers were Jacob Perkins, George Brown, George Crosswhite, Ed Polly, Joseph Timpkins, and David Stout. John Vaught operated a mill and a "still house," which he left to his son Joseph Vaught. Shouns Crossroads bore Leonard Shoun's name, and David Wagner lived east of Shouns. Laurel settlers included James Keys, Charles Anderson, Peter and John Wills, Daniel Cuthbert, Peter Snyder, Abraham Dorson, Joseph Sewell, John and Garland Wilson, Robert and John Walters, William Wandley (now Widby), William Neatherly, and Anthony and William Fisher.

Johnson County shared its early history with Carter and Washington Counties. Johnson County was created by the general assembly in 1836 and named for Thomas Johnson, one of the early settlers, who came to Doe Valley from Virginia. Johnson died in 1835, but the first session of the county court was held in the home of his son, William Johnson, who served as a member of the court. Other members included Andrew Wilson, James Wright,

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John Ward, James B. Morley, Joseph Robinson, Jered Arrendell, Jessie Cole, M. M. Wagner, James Brown, Andrew L. Wilson, Phillip Shull, and John Dugger.

The commissioners appointed to locate the seat of justice purchased twenty-five and one-half acres from William P. Vaught and laid off a town, which they named Taylorsville, in honor of Colonel James P. Taylor. The first courthouse was completed in 1837, and two years later the county built a jail. A second courthouse was erected in 1894. The third and present courthouse was built in 1958.

In 1866 Taylorsville was incorporated, and J. M. Wagner served as the first mayor. In 1885 the town changed its name to Mountain City. In 1844 W. R. Keys founded the Taylorsville Reporter; in 1885 the newspaper's name changed to the Tennessee Tomahawk, and in 1915 it was called the Johnson County News. Mac Wright owned and published another small paper called the Johnson County News Bulletin. In 1950 he purchased the Johnson County News and continued with the News Bulletin until 1956, when he sold it to new owners, who renamed the paper the Tomahawk.

In 1900 Johnson County acquired railroad service, and the line reached Mountain City in 1910. Built to haul timber and manganese into Virginia and North Carolina, the railroad attracted miners and timber cutters, who established camps along the line. In 1922 the Merchant and Traders Bank was founded to handle the company payrolls for the mining and timber operations. The bank, now the Farmer's State Bank, competes with two others, the Johnson County Bank and Elizabethton Federal.

The county's economy remains somewhat dependent on agriculture. Today, tobacco is still the largest cash crop, with a few land owners leasing tobacco allotments from smaller farms. Corn, apples, strawberries, and other fruits and vegetables are raised on small farms and sold locally. In the first half of the century, Johnson County was known as the "Green Bean Capital of the World."

The largest industrial employers in the county are textile mills, including Sara Lee Knit Products, Bike Athletic Company, Mountain City Glove Manufacturing Company, and C&A Lingerie. Johnson County has experienced some industrial downsizing due to recent changes in the textile industry. In response to these changes, the county economy has shifted toward tourism and the creation of specialty shops. The Appalachian Trail crosses U.S. 412 at the Johnson-Sullivan county line, and most of the county's natural resources are within the Cherokee National Forest. TVA-created Watauga Lake (1949) provides recreational opportunities at Butler.

Johnson County and Mountain City have undertaken a number of improvements. Mountain City has initiated a downtown revitalization project. The Johnson County Welcome Center is one of the largest in the state. The county increased in population between 1990 and 2000 by 27 percent, to 17,499 residents. ([Tennessee Encyclopedia](#))

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[Johnson County Chamber of Commerce](#)

Record Loss – Johnson County (Family Search)

Lack of marriage records: 1836 to 1837

FamilySearch Johnson County [Catalog](#)

TnGenWeb Project – [Johnson County](#)

Contact – [Cyndy Cox](#)

County Historian – Jenny Johnson Manuel

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[Email](#)

[Johnson County Tennessee History & Genealogy](#)

Record Location Table

| Record Type | Location | Record Notes |
|-------------|--|--|
| Birth | County Clerk Office | County Registrations began 1908 |
| | Tennessee Vital Records Office | Keeps for 100 years then they are sent to TSLA |
| | | |
| Marriages | County Clerk Office | County Registrations began 1836 |
| | Tennessee Vital Records Office | Keeps for 50 years then they are sent to TSLA |
| | TNGenWeb | 1838-1850 |
| | | |
| Divorce | Chancery Court Clerk | |
| | Tennessee Vital Records Office | TSLA |
| | | |
| Deaths | County Clerk Office | County Registrations began 1908 |
| | Tennessee Vital Records Office | Keeps for 50 years then they are sent to TSLA |
| | TSLA | 1908-1912 |
| | | 1914-1933 |
| | | |

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| | | |
|--|------------------------------------|--|
| Land Deeds | | County Registrations began 1836 |
| | County Register | County Register of Deeds |
| | | |
| List of Microfilmed Johnson County Records | TSLA-PDF | Download PDF |
| | | |
| Pension Applications | Tennessee State Archives & Library | County Index to Tennessee Confederate Pension Applications |
| | | |
| Probate Records | Chancery Court | County Registrations began 1836 |
| | TnGenWeb | Will Index 1837-1884 |
| | | |
| Tennessee Enumeration of Male Voters | Ancestry.com (\$) | Tennessee Enumeration of Male Voters |
| | | |
| World War I Veterans | Tennessee State Archives & Library | Research Collection |
| | | |

County Repositories

[Johnson County Public Library](#)
[Johnson County Tennessee History & Genealogy](#)
[The Watauga Association of Genealogists Northeast Tennessee](#)
[East TN Historical Society](#)
[Archives of Appalachia](#)

Current Area Information

[Johnson County Chamber of Commerce](#)
[Johnson County Government](#)

Resources

General

[Tennessee County Database \(TNGS\) – Johnson County](#)
[Johnson County Wiki \(Family Search\)](#)
[Linkpendium – Johnson County](#)
[Tennessee State Library & Archives – Johnson County Facts Sheet](#)
[TNGenWeb – Johnson County](#)

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[USGenWeb Archives - Johnson County Tennessee](#)
[Tennessee Law, The Early Days](#)

Newspapers

Tennessee State Archives & Library

[Check Online Catalog for Mountain City & Johnson County Newspaper Details & Dates Held](#). We do not necessarily hold all published issues of the newspapers.

Newspaper.com

The Tomahawk (Mountain City) – 946 issues

Johnson County News – 373 issues

Taylorsville Reporter – 2 issues

Tennessee Tomahawk – 1 issue (1897)

Genealogybank.com

No Johnson County Issues available

Chronicling America

[Johnson City Tennessee](#)

[The Tomahawk](#) (Electronic Newspaper – Mountain City, TN)

Selected Published County Histories

Tennessee State Archives & Library

- From This Valley (Cook, 2003)
- History of Johnson County, 1986 (Johnson County Historical Society, 1986) [*name index*]

Published Local Records

Tennessee State Archives & Library

- 1880 Census, Johnson County, Tennessee (Sistler, 1994) [*alphabetical by surname*]
- Abstracts of Death Records for Johnson County, Tennes[s]ee, 1908 to 1941 (Nikazy, 1992) [*name index*]
- Enumeration of Male Inhabitants of Twenty-one Years of Age and Upward, Citizens of Tennessee, January 1, 1891 [Johnson County] (Reed, 1992)
- Johnson County, Tennessee 1836 Tennessee Civil Districts and Tax Lists (Douthat, 1993) [*name index*]*
- Johnson County, Tennessee, 1860 Census (Wilson, 1979) [*name index*]
- Johnson County, Tennessee, 1870 Census (Gentry, 1982) [*name index*]
- Johnson County, Tennessee, 1880 Census (Gentry, 1982) [*name index*]*

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- Johnson County, Tennessee, 1900 Census (Gentry, 1995) [*name index*]*
- Johnson County, Tennessee, 1910 Census (Gentry, 1995) [*name index*]
- Johnson County, Tennessee, 1920 Census (Gentry, 199?) [*name index*]*
- Johnson County, Tennessee Bible & Tombstone Records (WPA, 1936) [*name index*]
- Johnson County, Tennessee Census Records, 1840-50 (Wilson, 1974) [*name index*]
- Johnson County, Tennessee, Court Minutes vol.1, 1836-54 (WPA, 1936)
- Johnson County, Tennessee Marriage Book 1, 1838-1857 (Douthat, 1982) [*name index*]
- Johnson County, Tennessee, Marriage Records vol.1 & 2, 1838-57, 1857-60 (WPA, 1936) [*name index*]
- Johnson County, Tennessee, Tax List, 1836-1839 (Douthat, 1998) [*name index*]*
- Johnson County, Tennessee Tax List vol.1, 1836-39 (WPA, 1937) [*name index*]
- Johnson County Tennessee Will Book #1, 1827-1860 (Douthat, 1982)
- Marriage Records of Johnson County, Tennessee, 1796-1880 [2 vols.] (Johnson & Hawkins, 1979) [*alphabetical listings*]
- Upon a Lonely Hill: The Cemeteries of Johnson County, Tennessee (Carrier, 1985) [*name index*]
- Watauga Reservoir Cemeteries: TVA Grave Removal Records (Douthat, 1992)
- Wills and Letters of Administration, vol.1, book 1, 1827-1867 (WPA, 1936)

Selected Manuscripts Material

Tennessee State Archives & Library

- Paul M. Fink Collection, 1862-1869 (Microfilm Manuscript #146, 1 reel)*
- Shoun Family Papers, 1795-1926 (Microfilm Manuscript #460, 1 reel)*

Maps

[TDOT Map of Johnson County](#)

[Johnson County - 1888](#)

[TnGenWeb Project - Maps Our Ancestors Followed](#)

Cemeteries

[Johnson County Cemeteries - Find-a-Grave](#)

[Johnson County Cemeteries - USGenWeb](#)

[Johnson County Cemeteries - Genealogy Trails](#)

[Johnson County Cemeteries - TNGenWeb \(Cemetery\)](#)

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Bibliography

[The Land Laws of Tennessee \(Whitney, 1891\) Google Books](#)
[Guide to Public Vital Statistics in Tennessee \(WPA 1941\)](#)

| Library Titles | Author / Date | TSLA | GRH&GC | MPL |
|--|--|------|--------|-----|
| 13 Tennessee ghosts and Jeffrey | Windham, Kathryn Tucker | | Y | |
| Abstracts of death records for Johnson County, Tennessee, 1908 to 1941 | Nikazy, Eddie M., 1992 | | Y | Y |
| Acquisition of farm land by credit corporations in TN. Knoxville, TN Ag. Exp. Sta. | Allred, Charles E. 1938 | Y | | |
| Churches & institutions of Hamblen, Johnson, Cocke & Greene counties, TN | Milligan College, 1994 | Y | | |
| Corrections or alterations to land grants in North Carolina (1714-1873) & Tennessee (1778-1796). | Pruitt, A.B., 2002 | | Y | |
| First families of the lost state of Franklin | Rigdon, John C., 2014 | | Y | |
| Goodspeed's history of east TN (Johnson County, pp. 922-925, 1312-1317). | Goodspeed, 1887. | Y | | |
| History of Johnson County, 1986. Sesquicentennial Edition | Johnson County Hist. Soc., 1986 | Y | | |
| History of the 13th regiment, TN volunteer cavalry, USA. | Scott, Samuel W. & Samuel P. Angel, 1903 | Y | | Y |
| Johnson County, Tennessee 1836 Tennessee civil districts and tax lists. | Douthat, James L, 1993 | | Y | |
| Johnson County, Tennessee Bible & tombstone records | U.S. WPA | | Y | |
| Johnson County, Tennessee census records, 1840-1850 | Wilson, Walter W | | Y | |
| Johnson County, Tennessee marriage book 1, 1838-1857 | Douthat, James L, 1982 | | Y | |
| Johnson County, Tennessee will book #1, 1827-1860 | Douthat, James L, 1982 | | Y | Y |

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| | | | | |
|---|-------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Johnson County, Tennessee, 1910 census | Gentry, Thomas W., 1986 | | | Y |
| Johnson County, Tennessee, deeds [microform] Contents Deed index 1836 - 1910, Deed books 1836 - 1845. | | | | Y |
| Johnson County, Tennessee, marriage records [microform] Contents Marriages 1836-1902 | | | | Y |
| Johnson County, Tennessee, wills [microform] Contents Wills 1836-1932. | | | | Y |
| Johnson County, TN tax list, 1836-1839 | Douthat, James L. 1988 | | Y | Y |
| Old Butler | Depew, Michael, 2005 | | Y | |
| Tennessee records of Johnson County :Wills and letters of administration. Vol. I Book I, 1827-1867 | U.S. WPA, 2017 | | Y | |
| The history of Watauga Academy of Butler, TN Appalachian State U. Thesis | Jennings, George, 1950 | Y | | |
| Upon a lonely hill: the cemeteries of Johnson County, Tennessee | Carrier, Jeffery L, 1984 | | Y | |
| Watauga Reservoir cemeteries : TVA grave removal records | Douthat, James L. | | | Y |