

# Banks Turner - a forgotten Tennessee hero

BY DON ENSS

What do we know about Banks Turner? He must be considered a man in the context of his time, shaped by his upbringing, education, and family as well as the particular era of Southern history in which he lived, including its policies.

Turner was a staunch Democrat who was strongly influenced by his father, Dr. Alexander E. Turner, who had been born in Graham, Alamance County, N.C., to James J. Turner, a house carpenter, and Mary Ellen McMurray-Turner. The 1870 North Carolina census lists Alexander Turner as living at home but working as a clerk in a dry goods store. He enrolled in the University of Pennsylvania Medical School around 1872 and graduated in 1874. He then relocated to Neboville in Gibson County and began practicing as a physician. In 1875, Dr. Turner married Mary Melvina Banks, the daughter of Ransom R. Banks and Sallie Cope. Mr. Banks was an elder in the Yorkville Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

Banks Turner was the youngest of four children. He had two sisters, Ora Blanche and Erma, both college graduates and a brother, Clarence,

who graduated from Vanderbilt and became a physician like his father. Blanche would marry Dr. Wyatt and would later give birth to a daughter who would marry future Congressman Ed Jones who played an important role in my personal story.

When Banks Turner was old enough to go to school, he attended the local public schools and received his basic education while gaining additional education at home. Education was very important to Dr. Turner as he was one of three men who served on the Neboville School Board.

His school prepared him for his later education -- a year at Castle Heights Academy in Lebanon, Tenn., and then Vanderbilt University. Turner attended Castle Heights from 1905-1906 before it became an all-boys military academy.

For his political involvement, he had to look no further than his father who served two terms as a Tennessee State Senator from 1899 to 1903. It is reasonable to believe that Banks Turner learned some aspects of governing and legislation from his father. When he decided to run for State Representative in 1919, the Herald-Democrat ran an article on him in which it said, "When in

school, he specialized in history, was interested in social and economic problems."

Turner was an "inveterate reader and enjoyed debating societies." He read the Trenton Herald-Democrat and The Rutherford Register. Part of an editorial in The Trenton Herald-Democrat in 1898 reflects the sentiment in other editions. "The Republicans have never done anything for Tennessee. When they have been in power in the state their rule was noted for extravagance and wild abuses... people well know what a Republican administration means in a southern state."

Banks Turner was nine when this was written, old enough to know that his father and his relatives were and would always be Democrats, and he would be dedicated to the Democratic Party as he communicated when he initially ran for public office in 1918. Part of the article reported by The Rutherford Register commented on his announcement by reporting that "Banks Turner is a Democrat."

The Register also carried his full announcement, in which he described how he planned to serve his constituents by not making "any radical changes or to advocate untried policies," by endeavoring "to meet the demands made by that greatest of living men, Woodrow Wilson," and by protecting money allocated to the public schools since he knew about "the country school's



Banks Turner

importance."

Although Gibson County's population grew significantly during Turner's boyhood and early adulthood, it was still primarily a rural county heavily influenced by agriculture. One of its agricultural leaders and innovative farmers was Banks Turner. He earned the respect in his community as a man of knowledge and principle.

Turner's decision to return to his parents' farm was unplanned. In his senior year, as he returned to

see page 4



## Milan Tire & Brake

1012 Ellington Drive, Milan • 686-8341  
See us for all your automotive needs!

### ON THE COVER

Gibson County women currently representing their county or communities as elected or appointed officials are (front row, from left) Miss Rossy, Milan Special School District; Cindy Flowers, Gibson County Circuit/General Sessions Court Clerk; Vanessa Presson, City of Medina; Sarah Skinner, City of Kenton; (second row) Stacey Hensley, Milan Special School District; Katelyn Orgain, Clerk & Master, Trenton; Mayor Sandy Simpson, Town of Rutherford; CeCe Jones, City of Trenton; (third row) Treva Maitland, Gibson County Special School District; Joyce Brown, Gibson County Clerk; Melissa Workman, Gibson County Trustee; Annie Edwards, Town of Rutherford; (fourth row) Amanda Brown, Clerk & Master, Humboldt; Tammy Wade, City of Milan; Barbara Davidson, Gibson County Register of Deeds; (back row) Rachele Gibson, Public Defender; and Broeck Horner, Town of Rutherford. Women unable to attend the photo shoot are Andrea Knight, Gibson County Commission; Dee Ann McEwen, Trenton Special School District; Alecia Craig, Gibson County Commission; Becky Fisher, Milan Special School District; Yahweh Yahweh, Gibson County Commission; Rachel Arrington, City of Bradford; Carol Thomas, City of Bradford; Dana Welch, Gibson County Special School District; Shonna Smith, outgoing Clerk & Master, Trenton; and Jennifer Hurst, Town of Yorkville.

Humboldt  
2405 East End Dr.  
784-1111

Trenton  
502 N. College  
855-1895

Milan  
2026 E. Van Hook  
686-9355

[www.shopbr.com](http://www.shopbr.com)

**Celebrating the 100th Anniversary of Women's Suffrage, the Right to Vote!**