

Joseph
Buckner
Killebrew

1831-1906

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A Boy is Born

The date, May 29, 1831, was an exciting and memorable one in the Montgomery County, Tennessee, home of Bryan and Elizabeth Killebrew. On that day their first child -- a baby boy - was born, and he was destined in his manhood to do great -things for Tennessee, especially in education and agriculture. They named their child Joseph Buckner Killebrew.

The name of young Joseph's father suggests an English background, and that is correct. Bryan Whitfield Killebrew was born in Montgomery County on April 1, 1805, and his parents, the grandparents of Joseph, knew the value of education, especially in farm life. So Bryan was sent to a Montgomery school. His record there is a part of the Killebrew history, showing the kind of student Bryan was and giving us a picture of the school's course of study --quite different from the elaborate and advanced studies required of boys and girls in these Twentieth Century days. Of Bryan, his report tells us that he was "a good reader and an outstanding natural mathematician." Of his manhood days, there is also a record: "a farmer in good circumstances, owner of many slaves; free from vices; of amiable temperament and genuinely hospitable."

When Bryan was 24 years old, the idea of marriage became a dominant thought. He became acquainted with Elizabeth Ligon, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Matthew Ligon, a family name still well known throughout Tennessee. Matthew was the son of a Ligon with a Revolutionary War record.

Bryan and Elizabeth were married in 1829. Two years later Joseph was born. A second son, Matthew Ligon Killebrew, constituted the Bryan Killebrew family. Death took the mother in 1836, when Joseph was five years old. Sometime before Mrs. Killebrew's death the family had moved from Montgomery to adjoining Stewart County where the father operated a farm. Joseph, however, was sent back to Montgomery where his maternal uncle, Joseph P. Ligon, had his own school. Here Joseph studied for six years. He made excellent progress, which may be taken for granted, as his uncle and teacher was known as an excellent classical scholar. In those days that probably included Greek as it certainly did Latin.

With six years of learning stored away, Joseph returned to Stewart County to help his father run the farm. Although only 12 years old, he realized that he wanted to "drink deep the Pierian Spring." So he enrolled in a neighboring school for the school terms and had a splendid attendance record, although it meant a six-mile walk, there and back, five days a week. This way of life lasted until 1846 when at 15 years of age the urge was to learn still more.

Years were passing swiftly, and Joseph went to live with his Aunt Lettice. It is recalled that his mother's dying thoughts were devoted to her two boys, and especially to her first born Joseph. It was to this Aunt Lettice (Mrs. Fortson) that she had commended Joseph. Like other aunts in-fiction as well as in real life, Aunt Lettice proved worthy of the responsibility entrusted to her. Although not attending school, Joseph, through his Aunt's interest and persuasion, read biography, history and other literature. For two years, beginning in 1848, he was enrolled in a mathematics class at Bethany College, a highly regarded college in LaFayette, Ky. This was brought to an end in 1850 with the death of his father, and the management of the family farm was again his daily task and responsibility.

But youth, like love, will find a way, and in his 20th year (1851) Joseph Buckner Killebrew did find a way to further progress.

The Boy Grows to Young Manhood

During his time of managing the family farm, Joseph had managed to save the then tidy sum of \$125.00. It was not a fortune, yet it was burning in his pockets. He wanted to spend every cent of it for more education. There was a college near Nashville that he had heard of – Franklin College. It was not a Yale or a University of Tennessee, but he was sure that it could teach him something he did not know. Mathematics, for instance. Franklin College was under the management of Talbert Fanning, whose reputation as a teacher still lingers in the recollection of those conversant with early history of schools and teachers.

Joseph entered Franklin and his biography tells us that he made his \$125.00 last through his entire first year. That was long enough to give him a college-wide reputation in Mathematics. He knew not merely the math of his own grade but that of the upper classes also. And he knew it so well that he was often called upon to take charge of those classes in the absence, for any reason, of the regular professor. Evidently, though this was a signal and special honor, it was an honor without pay and now with a nearly empty pocket book he turned homeward to Montgomery County.

One morning (it must have been Saturday as Joseph was in a Clarksville barber shop getting a shave) a barber addressed him as “Mr. Killebrew.” A waiting customer, hearing the name, said to him, “You are the man I'm looking for. I have a school near Clarksville. If you will teach mathematics under me I will teach you the Languages.”

Obviously, young Killebrew had never met this gentleman nor did he know him by sight. What he did know was that here was an open door to fields of literature that had lived and still lived -- the very chance that in his young dreams he had longed for. But Fate and Opportunity were more than kind, for the one who made the language offer was none other than John D. Tyler, head of Clarksville College and known throughout the state and well into the education world as one of the most celebrated classical scholars and teachers in Tennessee.

With an education in math already his, Joseph realized he was now to be introduced to the great writers of the ancient days of the glory that was Greece, and, one might add, of Rome. Joseph could consider this the luckiest chance he ever had. He accepted the offer and began his tutorial work in arithmetic and algebra. So satisfactory were his duties as teacher that he remained with the Clarksville school for two full years, teaching mathematics and tucking under his mental vest as much Greek and Latin as possible.

Many a lad might have been content with this fair start in adult education, but what he had acquired made Joseph hungry for more. The fact he was now 23 years old was no deterrent. If anything, it made him even more zealous. To that kind of determination and a mind that craved wider knowledge, it is not surprising that the educational gates opened full wide.

Clarksville in those days was a town of considerable wealth, principally because it was in a prominent cotton-growing area and the center of a rich tobacco market -- a dark leaf that fitted exactly the foreign demand. There was no sufficient means of transportation back over the mountains that the earliest first settlers had traveled. But there was the Cumberland River. Raft transportation was slow, but it was available. So every fall saw Clarksville tobacco-laden rafts following the currents of three rivers -- the Cumberland, Ohio and Mississippi -- until they reached New Orleans. Then the choice leaf was transferred to ocean going vessels destined for the rich profitable markets of Spain and other nations whose citizens found the Clarksville-raised weed exactly suited to their taste.

Principal Tyler was evidently proud of his young teacher and student, and quite likely made him the subject of conversation among his friends and associates. This much is certain: he praised young Killebrew to George S. Wimberly, a Clarksville man of means, as the well-to-do were often referred to in those early days. It is known that Tyler and Wimberly were close friends and therefore knew of Joseph Killebrew's laudable ambition and his well-formed, studious habits. It is not strange that Wimberly and Joseph chanced to meet one day. Wimberly had married Joseph's aunt. The reported conversation was brief. Wimberly broke the ice by saying, "I hear that you have completed in two years a course which ordinarily required four years. I know that you want to go to college. Here is my proposition: you may select any college in the United States and I will advance the money to pay your expenses during a full four-year course, simply taking your note to be paid when you get into business."

The offer was accepted. Killebrew knew of Yale, Harvard, Princeton and Columbia as well as some of the smaller splendid colleges of the North. To quote a popular old English ballad: "His 'ert was true to Poll" and "Poll" in this case was a southern college. Killebrew chose the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, famous then and now for its varied course of study and its outstanding faculty. Another reason for his choice was that it was one of the favorite schools for southerners who had risen to distinction after graduation.

Recalled at North Carolina University is Killebrew's editorship of the North Carolina University Magazine, which won high rank as a college publication. And he again made rapid progress as student. Records show that he graduated in 1856.

Killebrew returned to Clarksville, where law engaged his attention. He read and studied law with the firm of Robb and Bailey, names which still carry Tennessee honors. Admitted to practice, he earned some fees, and saved part to apply on his notes to Mr. Wimberly, which Joseph realized would be coming due now that he was in practice.

Aunt Lettice, loving aunt as she was, continued to be interested in Joseph's welfare after he hung out his shingle as a lawyer. Joseph, with some money of his own and the balance from his aunt, paid the notes he had signed to finance his education at North Carolina University. Just how much was Joseph's part is seemingly not of record. What is of record, however, is that Joseph in the first two months of his law practice made \$500.00, a tidy sum to have in the days when a dollar had real purchase power.

A Bride is Taken; A Family is Started

In 1857, at the age of 26, the idea of establishing a home occurred to Killebrew. And since the time when he first met Mr. Wimberly, he was not unmindful of the fact that his benefactor had an attractive young daughter. When he began courtship is not an established date, but Mary Catherine Wimberly and Joseph Buckner Killebrew were married on December 3, 1857. She had that past June completed her course of study at the Old Nashville Academy. It was a happy marriage, and Dr. Killebrew, (he had a degree title then) said later, "Whatever success I have attained, I attribute much to my marriage." Others have described Mrs. Killebrew as "a companion of extraordinary kindness, good sense, firmness of character and one who inspired affection in the highest degree. She was a wife who managed her home with discretion, vigor and ability."

Joseph and Mary Catherine Killebrew enjoyed a long, happy and productive married life. Seven children were born to them, and six of the children lived to adulthood. These were Mattie, born in November 1858; Lulu, born September 1860; George, born May 1862; Joseph Pleasants, born September 1863; Alfred, born March 1869, and Buckner, born January 1872. All the children are now deceased.

The year of the marriage of Joseph and Mary was also the year of Mr. Wimberly's death. Attorney Killebrew settled the estate and took up residence on the plantation in order to effectively manage it. His teen-age training on his father's farm was put to good advantage in his new responsibilities. He more than doubled the acreage of the plantation and improved it handsomely. The Killebrews continued to live there until 1871.

Bureau of Agriculture is Reborn

The Tennessee General Assembly on December 13, 1871, passed an act establishing the Bureau of Agriculture. The Bureau was originally organized in 1854 during the term of Andrew Johnson. Governor Johnson was the Bureau president, and Elbridge G. Eastman was secretary. With the outbreak of the Civil War, the Bureau became inactive.

A hard fought campaign, in which Killebrew played no small part, was waged before the Bureau was re-established and reorganized in 1871. Under provisions of the law passed by the Legislature, the governor was to appoint six members of the Bureau. Two were to come from each of the state's grand divisions ----East, Middle and West. One of the members was to become Secretary of the Bureau.

J. B. Killebrew was appointed as one of the members, representing Middle Tennessee. At its first meeting on March 13, 1872, Killebrew was chosen secretary of the Bureau. Under the legislative act, the secretary was to "publish annually such statistics and other information as the Bureau may deem necessary to advance the general interests of agriculture and the material development of the state." Annual reports were also to be prepared and distributed, and the secretary was to visit all sections of the state and report on Tennessee's resources.

The Bureau of Agriculture's constitution was printed in 1872, and according to that document the Bureau's objective was "to promote the interests of agriculture by procuring and disseminating the practical experience of farmers of the country and to collect facts in regard to its material wealth and so advertise its resources as to attract to it capital and labor."

Agriculture Gets a Boost

A full score of years had passed since 1851 when Tennessee first attempted, through law, to give aid to its greatest industry -- farming.

In those 20 years, farming had become agriculture -- a change in words but an enlargement in methods of farming and of farm living itself. The out-door pump and water bucket had been replaced by an equipped bathroom which, if it was not up to the elegance of bathroom conveniences of the Twentieth Century, was an appreciated gain over the Saturday night bath tub behind the sitting room stove, in preparation for the Sunday go-to-meeting clean-up.

In towns, wall telephones were making appearance in well-to-do homes, but were largely a "hope" deferred dream for farm life though farm co-ops were springing up here and there.

It was an era of great but peaceful domestic revolution. Wealth counted in millions was becoming a newly heard note. Yes, 1851 was widely different from 1871 and laws that seemed the adequate help to farm betterment then were out-moded in the new era regarded as modern.

It was at such time of need -- almost an emergency -- that Joseph Buckner Killebrew began his increasing and ultimately successful advocacy for a finer agriculture.

"The proper cultivation of the earth marks the beginning of civilization of every country; and in proportion as civilization advances, just in that proportion are the higher principles of agriculture brought into use."

So said Killebrew in 1871 in his famous and often-used address on farming interests. He saw that Tennessee was growing, and he realized the necessity for higher principles of agriculture in the state. This prompted Killebrew to work with his hands, heart and mind for agricultural advancements. He had begun in 1870 to advance his theories on agriculture, and these theories proved to be very real remedies --- just what the doctor ordered to make agriculture Tennessee's healthiest industry.

Beginning in his native Montgomery County, Killebrew urged local farmers to organize so as to form a body which would be heard, especially in the halls of the State General Assembly. A lack of organization was causing agriculture to suffer in the county, he said, as he urged farmers to organize so they could "put more solid men in our legislative bodies --- men endowed with the spirits of agriculture --- honest, able, shrewd, vigilant and firm."

With such speeches as this, Killebrew quickly convinced his fellow county agriculturists. The influence didn't end at the Montgomery County lines, however. Indeed, people in other parts of

the state began listening seriously to the noted orator who certainly seemed to know what he was talking about.

Boscobel, Killebrew's 900-acre farm in Montgomery County, actually became a model operation which drew praise, especially from the press. The farm was positive proof that scientific farming could be successful.

When Killebrew took over the duties of agricultural editor of the Nashville Union and American (his appointment was announced in an editorial on January 7, 1871) he had the instrument with which to guide even more farmers toward his cherished agricultural goals. He pressed, through a regular column, for cooperation and organization among agriculturists, especially through active farmers' clubs.

As follow-ups to his editorial endeavors, Killebrew made speaking tours of county seats in Middle Tennessee, never missing a chance to campaign for general agricultural improvements. The most popular speech which he made on these tours was entitled "Address on the Farming Interests" and included such challenging comments as this: "...Let us not fold our arms upon our bosom and sigh for the good old days that have passed away forever. Let us be alive to the great and growing influence of our state and take those steps for its advancement that experience has shown to be necessary....Let us pull together, shoulder to shoulder"

He also urged farmers to be industrious, to experiment with commercial fertilizers, to practice soil economy and crop diversification, to enrich the soil and to improve the appearance of their farms.

Killebrew was elected secretary of the National Agricultural Congress when the organization was born at a meeting in Nashville in the fall of 1871. Eleven states and 40 agricultural and mechanical associations were represented by delegates at the meeting. The national organization lasted until 1875, and Killebrew was its secretary for two years.

Agriculture, Education Kinship Emerges

In Mr. Killebrew, education and agriculture seemed to have found a definite kinship, and he was never able to separate himself from one to devote full time to the other. His dual duty in these areas also began in 1872.

The Peabody Education Fund had become interested in Tennessee, and this interest produced Peabody College for Teachers in Nashville, graduates of which are to be found today in all parts of the world. There was one man needed to develop the Peabody interest in Tennessee, and that man was Joseph Buckner Killebrew.

Along with the Peabody duty came his appointment as assistant state superintendent of public instruction. The state treasurer was dubbed superintendent ex officio. Soon after assuming the duties of assistant state superintendent, Killebrew realized the tremendous task ahead of him. It was hard to believe, but facts were stubborn things, and they showed that Tennessee ranked

second nationally --- not second in education but second in illiteracy. That meant a long, long educational ladder to be climbed, and Killebrew was determined to do something about it. He started by visiting every one of the 92 counties, ascertaining for himself the local education situations and the reasons why little or nothing was being done to improve them.

Killebrew always felt that if he accepted a task he was bound by duty to accomplish it, and the load proved too heavy. His health gave way, and Killebrew wisely resigned from all his positions except that of Commissioner of Agriculture.

Although he had headed the Bureau of Agriculture since 1871, it wasn't until 1875 that he was given the title of commissioner. Governor Brown, in 1875, praised the Bureau of Agriculture to the General Assembly and called Killebrew a "very able and efficient secretary." The legislature, during that session, passed an act creating the Bureau of Agriculture, Statistics and Mines. A single commissioner was to be named, and he was to be in charge of the department's administration. J. B. Killebrew was appointed to the post --- thus becoming Tennessee's first Commissioner of Agriculture -- in March of 1875.

A Career in Public Affairs Begins

Secretary of the Tennessee Bureau of Agriculture. Editor of the South's best agriculture paper. Assistant state superintendent of public instruction. General agent for the Peabody Education Fund in Tennessee. Secretary of the National Agricultural Association.

All of these are important and demanding jobs. But Joseph Buckner Killebrew, shortly after launching his career in public affairs, held them all. And he held them all at one time --- during parts of 1872 and 1873.

Killebrew -- strong, healthy and in the prime of life -- had seen the years pass swiftly. He had demonstrated his skilled ability as a farmer and farm manager. His teaching experience had given him an insight into the needs of an educational system for the welfare of the public and the state. In 1860, Killebrew assumed the position as professor of mathematics at Clarksville Female Academy. He taught there --- two hours a day, three days a week --- until the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861. He did not go to war but remained on the farm.

It is reasonable supposition that Mr. and Mrs. Killebrew drew as social companions others who had been privileged to have similar educational advantages as well as those who were of sterling stock. What is quite certain is that the Killebrews were well and favorably known as persons with "book larnin'."

After the war, Killebrew turned his attention to the issues of immigration, agriculture and education. He delivered speeches on these subjects at every opportunity, and these addresses were usually well received and duly noted in leading newspapers in the area.

Killebrew was appointed in 1870 to a three-man committee which was given the important task of organizing a system of public schools for Montgomery County. It was fitting that he was

named to the committee, because it was largely through his urging that the Montgomery County Court in that year took steps to establish a local school system. And Killebrew put into his duties the same energy that made his own farm and that of Wimberly outstanding successes.

In January 1871, he took on an additional duty when he became agricultural editor of the Union and American, a Nashville newspaper. Editors all over the south found in Killebrew's articles a solid agricultural diet that brought comfortable wealth to farmers in their own territories. While he wrote down-to-earth doctrines that could be followed and were, some regarded them as ahead of the times. Sound agriculture, however, is never outdated, and Killebrew's articles of 1871 are worth following in these days of advanced agriculture. These articles covered a period of 20 months.

Killebrew -- A Commendable Commissioner

Successful and rewarding administration of a State Department of Agriculture by Commissioner Killebrew operating with limited appropriations marked the Killebrew decade. This may have been the record of other Tennessee Departments, but it was certainly true of the State Bureau (Department) of Agriculture. It was a subject worthy of comment by three governors who served during the same years that Killebrew was commissioner.

The appropriations for agriculture were pennies compared to the dollars appropriated elsewhere. So noticeably one-sided were these that the governors mentioned them in their reports to the Legislature. They paid tribute to Killebrew's ability to get a full dollar's worth of service out of every 100 cents appropriated for agriculture.

As his first Legislature was adjourning for the 1871 holidays, Governor John C. Brown sent a special message. Of the importance and value of the Department of Agriculture, he said: "You need no argument to convince you that the importance of this Department has been sadly under estimated in the previous legislation of Tennessee," while other branches of industry have been fostered and subsidized. The farmer has been left to grope his way through doubtful and costly experiments to success or to toil on in the same channels, and with the same implements of former generations, until his soil is worn to exhaustion, and he reduced to poverty."

The national political scene was quiet in 1874, that being the middle year of the U. S. presidential term. In Tennessee, however, with Governor Brown's second term coming to an end, political kettles, and there were several, began to boil. Emerging from the intense heat, James Davis Porter survived and became the Democratic candidate for Governor, and at the November election, his vigorous campaign brought about his election. He took the oath of office on January 18, 1875, at a joint session of the Legislature. Killebrew continued in the office of Commissioner of Agriculture.

The Honorable Mr. Porter also directed attention to the Department of Agriculture in his first address as Governor. An interesting paragraph states, "A million dollars of British capital has already been invested in Tennessee within the past two years, and this is but a foretaste of other millions. For this result the state is indebted to J. B. Killebrew."

All accounts of the political situation of the early 1870's were concerned with "the state debt and what to do with it" or perhaps, "what could be done with it." So, it is not surprising that Governor Porter's Inaugural Address of 1877 devoted much space to that problem. A quotation from Iron Age, which was part of Governor Porter's inaugural address, gave this praise: "Of late years the attention of ironmongers, both at home and abroad, has been considerably directed to the South and especially to Tennessee. For this result the state is indebted to its wonderful resources, but also in a large degree to J. B. Killebrew. We acknowledge our great indebtedness to him personally and to his various publications for information which we have uniformly found trustworthy -- 4,000 copies of his Resources of Tennessee, a book of 1,200 pages, have been distributed."

Then, referring to the Department of Agriculture, his message continued: "We have heard it whispered that some persons in Tennessee have suggested its (the Department's) abolition. Such a course would be most shortsighted and occasion the highest injury to the state. Tennessee needs capital from abroad, and the Bureau has brought it. Mr. Killebrew is wise enough to see that it is not alone in the development of its mineral resources that wealth is to be found, but in the agricultural as well, and his effort has been to bring capital to this end. No state can at the present day afford to dispense with such agencies, because capitalists look for information from official sources and we speak from a personal knowledge and examination when we say that the publications of Mr. Killebrew are among the fairest statements of the resources of a state we have ever seen. If every southern state had placed the work of acquainting the public with its resources in equally competent hands, immigration would have been less difficult to obtain, and capital more disposed than now to seek investment there."

The Governor added, "It would be a source of the greatest regret if the Bureau were to be discontinued."

Obviously, the Bureau was not discontinued. As a matter of fact, Killebrew was to see his Department inherit more responsibilities in 1877. It was during that year that the General Assembly consolidated the Bureau of Immigration and the Bureau of Agriculture, Statistics and Mines without additional compensation to Killebrew's Bureau.

As one reads the record of the four-year term, 1875-1879, he is impressed with the fact that it was a period of difficult legislative problems. A mounting state debt, railroad legislation and other public problems needing money were frequent opportunities to cause tempers to rise, with the frequent results that schools and agriculture did not receive the legislative attention they merited. However, it is to the credit of Governor Porter that he did not overlook these vital needs to a state's progress. For example, he said: "In transmitting the biennial report of the Superintendent of the Bureau (of Agriculture), I invite a critical inspection of the character and extent of the work performed by this officer (Killebrew). To enable himself to speak with certainty of the greatest productiveness of the state, he has traversed all parts of it The crop reports, the treatises upon wheat culture, sheep husbandry, and the grasses and forage plants are able, accurate and exhaustive, and are alone a full compensation to the state, for the appropriation made to the Bureau."

It is noted that this report on agriculture was given precedence in the Governor's Report to Federal regulations on finance and other problems, bank statements, river improvement and other important state problems. This final message bore the date January 6, 1879.

On the same date, Albert Smith Marks became Governor. And it was on January 5, 1881, at the very close of his term of office that he directed special attention to the state's agriculture. A 10-line paragraph gave this praise: "The interesting facts disclosed by the Commissioner in his report commend themselves to the attention of the General Assembly. The amount appropriated for this Bureau has been inconsiderable, but the impression made by its labors has been surpassed by no similar Bureau in the Union. Its publications have become standard authority, and through them the advantages of Tennessee are thoroughly advertised. The Bureau by its enterprise has conferred lasting benefits upon the state."

Governor Marks concluded his farewell message with the wish that the session of Legislature "may prove faithful in blessings to the state" and return to private life.

With the Democratic Party weakened by a strife which at that time would not heal, the Republicans elected their candidate for Governor, Alvin Hawkins, for a single term (1881-1883). He appointed his brother, A. W. Hawkins, to be Commissioner of Agriculture, thus ending Mr. Killebrew's long term as Commissioner. The date was January 17, 1881.

Journalism, Another Career

The year 1872, although an extremely busy one for Killebrew, was also one which offered him unlimited opportunities to develop the kind of career he had always wanted and to be of service to mankind, a single goal which he had always held. That year was to hold an important opportunity for the energetic Tennessean --- the chance to head a real agriculture paper.

Governor John C. Brown, who had the reputation for holding a sincere interest in agriculture, felt that a strictly agricultural paper would at least pay its own way. So, in October of that year, the governor called in General William G. Harding, A. Cox, John McGavock, William H. Jackson, John Overton, James Merrill Safford, Hunter Nicholson, and others, including some of Middle Tennessee's most prominent and dedicated farmers, and the group subscribed \$20,000 to float the paper. All were agreed that Editor Killebrew of the Nashville Union and American should be the editor of the new paper. Killebrew accepted this new assignment (at a salary of \$2,500 a year) and put heart and soul into his new work. The paper was called the Rural Sun and is credited with containing more original editorials on agriculture -- editorials of superior quality -- than any of its competitors of that day.

The objective of the new paper was to advertise "the great agricultural advantages, mineral resources, unsurpassed water power, magnificent forests and genial climate of the state and its surroundings." The Rural Sun has been called the best agriculture paper ever printed in the South. Killebrew published information on a variety of subjects, and every issue contained data concerning better breeds of cattle, hogs and sheep and better varieties of grasses, grains, fruits

and vegetables. Believing Tennessee to be ideally suited for raising sheep, the campaigning editor launched a drive to improve and increase sheep herds.

The farmers who read the Rural Sun were rewarded with dozens of helpful articles in each issue -- crop reports, editorials, and articles on care and improvement of livestock, dairying and bee-keeping. Then, there was the regular questions-and-answers column for the farmers and "The Household Department" feature for their wives.

The paper listed Killebrew as its editor through November 27, 1873, but he had done little work since the middle of that summer. He was suffering from the pressure of his many positions and from severe attacks of rheumatism, which forced him to go to Hot Springs, Ark., for several weeks of treatment.

Commissioner Killebrew becomes an Author

Joseph Buckner Killebrew had, over the years, through hard work, practical experience and laborious' research and study, built quite a storehouse of knowledge concerning agriculture. He was now ready to share this knowledge with others, and he chose the printed word as his method of dissemination.

His first, and most noteworthy venture as an author began in 1872 when he started compiling data for his The Resources of Tennessee. Although 95 years have passed since Resources was issued in July 1874, the volume is still referred to as an authoritative source of information. Although population has increased as a first century nears its close, population of the 1870's is still valuable in showing the growth in times, changes in industry and similar information which has retained much of its original value.

The history of counties, reaching back to the first settlers and telling how they lived, could hardly be reconstructed in these days without the value of Killebrew's research. County histories are grouped alphabetically according to the state's Grand Divisions East, Middle and West Tennessee.

Resources, with its 1,193 pages, proves that Killebrew had a facile pen. Whether he is discussing crops in farm land values, there is an aura of reliability in what he writes.

Soon after Resources was printed, noted men from all across the country began to laud the work. For example, the volume was called the finest work of its kind in describing geographical, agricultural and industrial resources of a state.

The editor of Iron Age, an authoritative magazine of the iron industry then as it is today, said of Resources: "To Mr. Killebrew, the world is indebted for a fuller and more explicit exposition of the natural resources of Tennessee than has been presented for any other state."

Actually, Resources was intended by its author as annual agricultural reports for 1873 and 1874. The energetic Bureau of Agriculture Secretary prepared it to fulfill a requirement which called for the Bureau to submit annual reports to the legislature.

Of course, other members of the Bureau contributed to the work, but the finished book was clearly the product of one man --- Killebrew.

General W. H. Jackson, Bureau president, in introducing Resources said: to J. B. Killebrew, the efficient secretary, is eminently due the credit for his good judgement, correctness, zeal, enthusiasm, and untiring energy, coupled with a remarkable versatility in the preparation of the matter of the report, and unremitting labor in getting it through the press. He has been a faithful and assiduous public servant, and has not only earned the salary given him but hasmerited the thanks of the people of the State for this work of such magnitude requiringso much constant and persistent labor, and one which will certainly add millions in property to our State.”

The Nashville Republican Banner, in an editorial, praised Resources and its author, calling the volume the best statistical record of the state in existence. “A triumph of mind” was the term which the Nashville Union and American chose to praise the work.

Later in 1874, portions of Resources were being translated and published in Berne, Switzerland, for European distribution. An abridgement to the work was ordered by the Bureau of Agriculture, and in 1876 another abridgement and revision was made so the volume could be distributed at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition.

In his next Biennial Report, covering the years of 1875 and 1876, Killebrew hit upon the idea of another work which was to become widely distributed, read and praised. “Tobacco: Its Culture in Tennessee”, came out in pamphlet form and represented the only section dealing strictly with an agricultural subject in Killebrew's four-part report. Tennessee could, through proper management, assume national leadership in the production of tobacco, Killebrew said in the pamphlet.

Another giant achievement for Killebrew, the author, was to come in 1878, when still another Biennial was published. This time, he hit it big with his report entitled “The Grasses of Tennessee”, a 500-page section in the four-part report. Two other sections, dealing with wheat and sheep husbandry, also won him acclaim, but neither was as influential and prestigious as the report on grasses.

Throughout his years with the Agriculture Bureau and Department, Killebrew, kept a steady flow of information going to the farmers. If funds were not available to have his information printed in booklet form, he would have it printed in newspapers.

Other noteworthy works accomplished by Killebrew and which won wide acclaim were Sheep Husbandry, completed in 1880; an abridgement to his successful Grasses volume, also in 1880; and a 264-page report on the “Culture and Curing of Tobacco in the United States”, in 1885.

He also wrote articles on tobacco culture for Home and Farm and was, for a time, agricultural editor of The American.

In 1897, Killebrew collaborated with Herbert Myrick to publish Tobacco Leaf: Its Culture and Cure, Marketing and Manufacture.

It was also in 1897 that the noted author began contributing regularly to the Manufacturer's Record, the voice of Southern industrial interests. He was also an editor and contributor for Southern Farm Editor, and his articles appeared until his death.

Other works accomplished by Joseph Buckner Killebrew during his lifetime included:

Tennessee: Its Agricultural Resources and Mineral Wealth, 1874

“Mineral and Agricultural Resources of the Portion of Tennessee Along the Cincinnati Southern and Knoxville and Ohio Railroads,” 1876

“Special Report on the Coal Field of Little Sequatchee,” 1876

Tennessee: Its Agricultural and Mineral Wealth, 1877

West Tennessee, 1879

Iron and Coal of Tennessee, 1881

“Grasses, Meadows and Pastures,” 1883

“The Properties of the Tennessee Valley Company,” 1890

The Western Iron Belt, 1890

“Facts and Statistics Concerning Northeastern Alabama Adjacent to the Line of the Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis Railway Between Elora, Tennessee and Gadsden, Alabama,” during 1890's

“Facts about the Cumberland Table-Land of Tennessee and Sand Mountain of Alabama,” 1897

The Forests of Tennessee (in collaboration with G. B. Sudworth) 1897

Life and Character of James Cartwright Warner, 1897

The Phosphate Deposits of Tennessee, 1898

“Information for Immigrants Concerning Middle Tennessee and the Counties in that Division,” 1898

“Grasses and Forage Plants,” 1899

The South, 1899

The Battle of Guilford Courthouse, 1902

The Elements of Geology of Tennessee (prepared in collaboration with J. M. Stafford), 1904

Killebrew Rouses Tennessee from. Rip Van Winkle Sleep to Progress in Education

The importance of a good education seems to have been instilled in Joseph Buckner Killebrew at a very early age. He was afforded, largely through his own efforts, some of the best educational advantages of his day. And he was determined to see that every other Tennessean, regardless of class or social standing, had the opportunity to receive the best possible education in a public school system.

Starting his program of education betterment on the local level, Killebrew appeared before the Montgomery County Court early in 1870 to push for a county public school system. A local tax levy was proposed as the means of financing the venture. In July of the same year, the system was established, with portions of poll and property tax revenues earmarked to finance it. Killebrew was also named a member -- along with two others -- of the first local school board, which had the duty of certifying teachers and organizing and operating the school system.

Pieces seemed to have fallen almost automatically in place in Killebrew's life and his next logical step was to press for a better educational system on a statewide basis. That opportunity came in January 1872 when he assumed the positions of general agent for the Peabody Fund in Tennessee and assistant supervisor of public instruction for the state. Killebrew then began his push. Within only seven weeks, he appeared before a called session of the Legislature to deliver a report in which he outlined the conditions of existing public school systems in each of Tennessee's 92 counties. It was a comprehensive and detailed report, disclosing such facts as tax levies, commissioners elected, student enrollment, number of schools in operation and the duration of school terms in each school district of each county.

Shrugging off the contention that property taxes should not be levied to support schools, Killebrew immediately began a speaking tour, covering all sections of the state, and in his prepared address entitled "Importance of Levying a Tax for the Support of Common Schools," he said: "Education is necessary to produce the vigor of body, strength of intellect, warmth of soul; to awaken our emotional nature to acts of benevolence and charity, to subdue the passions, to restrain the impulses, to give power of action and directness of thought to all our faculties. The obligation of the citizen to society cannot be known unless the state, or society, provides for the instruction of the citizens; and this is clearly shown in the statistics of crime in the United States, those states paying the largest amount for crime that pay the smallest amount for schools.

"You grumble and complain, if you have a few thousand dollars to pay to educate the children of your county, yet we never hear any complaints for the far larger sum paid for the support of your state prosecutions for crime, for the support of your penitentiary and the apprehension of fugitives from justice. Ignorance, since the world began, is the parent crime. Darkness of intellect and blackness of crime go together.

"Levy a tax for your schools. Do not be parsimonious. Let these schools begin in September, and all the poor children and rich children attend them, and, in order that they may do so, make the schools of a high order. The reason public schools have been unpopular with men of property is that they have been for the most part, taught by men totally unfit to discharge the duty of teachers. Their grade has been low, and the men of property have scorned to patronize teachers and schools wholly unworthy of the support of any one. Levy a good tax, employ good teachers, erect good school houses, and establish schools that will appeal to the pride of your men of property; schools that will pour a broad stream of living knowledge over the State, fertilizing it with thought, and vitalizing it with energy, infusing new hopes, new desires and new aspirations among all classes of people and your men of property cannot grumble.

"An insufficient tax ought to be unpopular; it does no good; it educates no one; it merely pretends; it does not perform. It does not meet the high ends that ought to be attained.

Disappointment is the result and unpopularity the effect. If the counties fail or refuse to levy a tax for the support of schools, the State must, for its own preservation, eventually do it. If the Stateshould fail to do it, the central government will undertake the task of educating our children. Even now, a scheme is on foot to establish a so-called National School System; in other words to force upon us a system of education wholly repugnant to our instincts.

“The most substantial glory of a state is her virtuous great men and her literatureAn intelligent people is most sure to be a thrifty, energetic and moral people. They bring to their aid new agencies; they set the wheels of enterprise and thrift in motion; they stir up new activities, inventions and projects; they devise new methods of economy in time, in labor and in power.

“You must remember also that ignorance, in our country, votes..... The untutored mind and unrestrained passions of the uneducated are beyond the power of reason, and they have an imperfect conception of right.... The same power that makes a good constitution, or a good government, must preserve it; men of wisdom, virtue, intelligence, education and morality.

We cannot afford to stand still while the rivers of thought and intelligence are whirling all around us. To do so will be to attract to us all the drift and slime and corruption that fester and float upon the surface of society. Our working men; our mechanics, seeing nothing for them in the future, will fly to other places that offer educational advantages to their children. Then will go up a wail of anguish and despair, as you see your lands uncultivated and decreasing in value, your homes becoming dilapidated, your energies impaired, your hopes clouded, and your sons, the pride and glory and ornament of the State, deserting you for a home of fresher activities and brighter prospects. Then howl on in your old age and misery. Let this current of living wealth once begin to flow beyond your borders, and each succeeding year will see your county growing poorer.

“...Let our people be educated. Give education to the moral, mental and physical man, and you give everything -- civil and religious liberty, heroism and honor, virtue, integrity and power. Deny it, and you deny everything.....”

Killebrew became famous in all sections of Tennessee for his impressive and sensible oratory on schools.

While the crusader was on his speaking tour, Governor John C. Brown was hard at work, pushing for the coveted public educational system. The governor urged legislators to adopt a system which would include a full-time state superintendent as well as a State Board of Education.

Killebrew himself appeared before the 38th General Assembly when it convened in 1873, and made quite a report to the lawmakers. The report included several definite and important recommendations:

1. That teachers be required to pass comprehensive and rigid examinations for certification.
2. That three normal schools (one in each division of the state) be established.

3. That counties match state funds for financing education.
4. That a central control be established for the system.
5. That curriculums be revised so that studies of state resources, especially geology, could be included.

More support of the Killebrew campaign came when the State Teachers' Association quickly rallied to his support. His labors bore fruit in 1873 when an act to establish and maintain a uniform system of public schools in Tennessee was passed. And the act included all of Killebrew's recommendations with the exception of the one which called for central control of the system.

Passage of the act made Killebrew even more famous, and he earned the reputation then as one of the foremost educational leaders of the South, if not of the country.

He received praise, too. For example, the State Education Association, in a letter to the Peabody Trustees in July of 1873, credited Killebrew with being largely responsible for the new state system of education.

Burley Tobacco is Adapted to Tennessee Soils

It was during the quadrennium (1875-1879) that Killebrew began to see that if a diversified agriculture was to succeed, crops must be suited to the soil. The tobacco interests were showing much enthusiasm for a new tobacco "sport" which was especially suited to Tennessee as it was to that of Kentucky. Killebrew left the cotton to West Tennessee where it showed ability to grow a both splendid poundage to the acre and a fiber of unusual fineness, which it has continuously retained. Except in a few southern border counties, it did not do so well, but tobacco did. A variety discovered in an Ohio field and named Burley was proving highly acceptable to the tobacco manufacturing industry, and Killebrew, first in Eastern Tennessee and then in Middle Tennessee counties, succeeded in making Burley the chief cash crop of those sections, a supremacy which it has retained.

Although his career in public service had ended, Killebrew was not content to sit idle. His interest in agriculture was still keen, and he turned to the development of the tobacco interest in Tennessee. Earlier, he had toured the eastern and north-central portions of the country in interest of tobacco. He published in 1880 his famous "Report on the Culture and Curing of Tobacco in the United States." Much of the material for this report, which was called "the most comprehensive and valuable treatise on the subject of tobacco in the United States ever published, or ever likely to be published," was gathered on his trips to tobacco-growing areas.

In his noteworthy treatise on tobacco, Killebrew was not content to limit it to the four varieties that were bringing profit to Tennessee growers. Instead, he studied the varieties in the other tobacco-growing states, noting their growth, their peculiarities, and other qualities that made Burley a selected weed for cigarettes -- Connecticut for cigar wrappers, Tennessee dark fired the choice for the export market. Studying each variety thoroughly, he was able to speak and write with respected authority on the tobacco plant and its many varieties.

Tobacco articles authored by Killebrew later appeared in the Louisville-based Home and Farm Journal. These were reprinted in succeeding years-- in 1903 and 1904, according to Dr. Sam B. Smith in an article written about Killebrew.

The production of American tobacco was related to that of other countries in a book written in 1897 by Killebrew in collaboration with Herbert Myrick. This well-known volume was entitled "Tobacco Leaf: Its Culture and Cure, Marketing and Manufacture."

Out of Public Office, Killebrew Remains Active

With the cares of public office laid aside, Mr. Killebrew devoted his energy hopefully toward the development of his iron interests, including heavy investments in Tennessee ore lands. Some of these deposits had a record of furnishing the Confederate States iron for the casting of cannons.

Killebrew felt that at 50 years he was still in the prime of life. In his case, history reveals that he still had 25 productive years ahead of him.

Leaving state employment, he turned to his own business affairs. He had extensive ore mine investments in Tennessee and Alabama. More than that, he had confidence in their continued productiveness. Perhaps he overlooked the sad fact that ore deposits, unlike agricultural crops, do not grow repeated harvests. But at 50 years of age, he was filled with confidence in the future of his investments. Moreover, he had as associates a group of experienced, widely recognized, and trusted ore exports. These men had joined with Killebrew in organizing corporations for the development of their wide-spread iron properties. He made trips to New York, Chicago and St. Louis, hoping to interest Northern capital as he had successfully done in interesting Southern capital.

A Mexican venture in a silver mine proved to be a failure. Killebrew later admitted that this venture was "the greatest mistake of my life." On the other hand, his companies in Tennessee and other states were successful. For example, Killebrew estimated his profits at no less than \$100,000 ---not a bad showing for 1886, which marked the beginning of the "leveling off" in coal and iron stock.

By 1893, the decline of most of Killebrew's stock had reached the point of almost total dissolution. Once asked the reason for not ridding himself of holdings that had become worthless, Killebrew replied, "It is a difficult matter for one with proper sensibilities to pull out from a cause in which he had strong faith in its final success, and had helped to create faith in it among his associates."

Killebrew was saved from complete personal ruin because he paid in full for his stock purchases and did not go in debt for them.

Seemingly, for Killebrew there was always a job ahead waiting for his talents, his abilities, and his integrity. Thus, in 1894, when he was 63 years old, the Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis

Railroad, during its entire existence a favored shipping route to Nashville manufacturing industries, offered him the job of settling immigrants along the company's lines.

As 1897 was nearing, Tennessee was stirred to action to celebrate the State's Centennial, and Killebrew was made the first General Secretary. He also prepared the N.C. & St. L. exhibit, one of the notable displays of the Centennial Fair, which featured minerals, agricultural products, state flora, war relics, Indian relics, oil paintings, and maps. Quite likely his splendid work for the Centennial Fair led to his being appointed chief. of the Railroad's Department of Immigration, a position he held until 1902.

Home for Good at Beloved Boscobel

Conscious of advancing years, at 72, he retired to his beloved Montgomery County farm -- Boscobel -- in 1903. The farm home was to bring happiness and comfort to old age. The spacious white frame home overlooked Red River and gave a splendid view of the attractive landscape that marks Montgomery County. Here Killebrew found a freedom that had long been denied him in his years of active work. Here was happiness but sorrow. A line from Hamlet falls into it appropriate space: "One woe doth tread upon another's heels, so fast they follow."

In January 1906 Killebrew's wife died. Two months later, on March 17, crepe upon the door announced that Joseph Buckner Killebrew was dead at the age of 74.

It has been commented by several biographers that Killebrew's burial stone, unlike most of his period, contains no eulogy. It might truthfully be said of him as it is of Sir Christopher Wren, architect of St. Paul's Cathedral in London, "If you would see his monument, look around."

Many a pupil in Tennessee schools and many a farmer on Tennessee's fertile fields can say a prayer of gratitude for what Joseph Buckner Killebrew's labors have done for on-coming generations.