TENNESSEE

THE VOLUNTEER STATE *Became a state June 1, 1796 (16th)*

Tennessee is a long, narrow state that stretches from the misty Appalachian Mountains to the Mississippi River. Pioneers, scientists and musicians have all left their mark on it.



Mountains of Blue Smoke

The Cherokee called these mountains Shaconage, the place of blue smoke. The haze is not smoke at all. Trees and plants give off vapor, which hangs over the ridges as a bluish mist. The national park here is the most visited in the country, with more than 11 million visits a year. About 1,900 black bears live there.



The Lake an Earthquake Made

In the winter of 1811 and 1812, powerful earthquakes shook the land along the Mississippi River. People reported that the river ran backward for a short time. In northwest Tennessee the ground sank as much as 20 feet, and water filled the low place. That is Reelfoot Lake. Today bald cypress trees stand in its shallow water.



A Name from a Cherokee Town

Tennessee is named for Tanasi, a Cherokee town on the Little Tennessee River. In 1756 the British began building Fort Loudoun nearby, at the invitation of the Cherokee. Sequoyah was born close by around 1770. He never learned English, yet by 1821 he had invented a way to write the Cherokee language with 86 symbols. His young daughter Ayokeh learned it first.



A Chandelier in a Cave

Cumberland Caverns has more than 27 miles of passages. The story goes that the man who found it in 1810 was stuck inside for three days after his torch went out. In 1981 a huge chandelier from an old New York theater was hung in one big room. Bands now play concerts there.



The Secret City

In 1942, during World War II, the government bought about 59,000 acres of farm valleys in East Tennessee. A hidden city called Oak Ridge rose there, and by 1945 about 75,000 people lived in it. They were working on the first atomic bomb, though most did not know it. A dam built nearby a few years earlier helped supply the electricity.



A Radio Show That Never Quit

On November 28, 1925, a Nashville radio station put a 77-year-old fiddler named Uncle Jimmy Thompson on the air. Listeners loved the show, called the Barn Dance. In 1927 it followed a program of grand opera, and the host joked that his show was the “Grand Ole Opry.” The name stuck. It has been on the radio ever since.

BY THE NUMBERS

Population	About 7.3 million (15th most)
Size	About 42,100 square miles (36th largest)
Highest point	Kuwohi (Clingmans Dome), 6,643 feet
Counties	95
Neighbors	Kentucky, Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Missouri

DID YOU KNOW?

- Why the Volunteer State? The name goes back to the War of 1812. In 1846 the country asked Tennessee for 2,800 soldiers and about 30,000 stepped forward.
- Tennessee touches eight other states. Only Missouri touches as many.
- The three stars on the state flag stand for East, Middle and West Tennessee.
- Elvis Presley bought Graceland in 1957. About 600,000 people now visit the house each year.

FIND IT ON THE MAP

1. Which city is the capital?
2. Which city is closest to Graceland?
3. Which river forms the western border?

Answers: 1. Nashville 2. Memphis 3. The Mississippi River