

“Courted by the Great Iron King”

Reprinted from the *Johnson City Comet*, February 21, 1889

Johnson City, the beautiful and blushing little maiden, is being courted by the great Iron King, Andrew Carnegie. Mr. Carnegie has proposed to her and if she agrees to take his name has offered to make her a bridal present of the finest public library in the south and also will build a large steel plant here. The Comet will take pleasure in announcing the decision of the maiden when reached and also the wedding day.

“Wrong Again”

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This is certainly a mercenary age says the *Nashville Herald*. Everything has a commercial value on it.

For instance the **great iron monger, Carnegie**, is said to be negotiating with Johnson City for a deal like this: **Assume my name and I will endow you with a \$10,000 library.** So far as we know Johnson City has never told Mr. Carnegie indignantly to go to that clime where never a collar will stand.

Andrew Johnson, for whom the “City” is named, is not universally admired. He had some grievous faults. But he was so immeasurably more worthy of having his name perpetuated in their state nomenclature than Andrew Carnegie that a \$10,000 library should cut little the matter. He was a better example of true American characteristics to place on a pedestal for the emulation of the rising generation than Carnegie with all his wealth. He scorned the wealth he could earn on earth on equal terms with his fellow men. He opposed taxing the masses to enrich the few. And in East Tennessee where he is most idolized, to dethrone his name and debauch his fame for that of a man who was his antipode in their characteristics that won for Andrew Johnson the name of the Great Commoner for the paltry sum of \$10,000 would surely disturb the repose of his restless spirit. Forbid it Heaven!

The *Herald* is not as well posted in regard to Johnson City as it might be. Johnson City, formerly “**Johnson’s Tank**” because the railroad built a tank here (and we are sorry to say the tank still stands in the center of the city and adds little to its beauty), and **Henry Johnson**, a farmer who owned the land on which the city now stands, built a store house

close to it. When the town began to grow it was called “**Johnson’s Depot.**” but soon outgrew this name and when it was incorporated in 1884, it was under the name of Johnson City. It is easy to see why a stranger would fall into the error of supposing that our town was named for the ex-President, for he was a man whom Tennesseans loved to honor and Johnson City is the most thriving town in the state and would be a fitting monument to his memory but unfortunately Johnson City has no connection with the Great Commoner.

Johnson City may or may not change her name to Carnegie. Should she decide to do so, she will exercise her own judgment in the matter, and we assume the Herald will be benefited if the change occurs. **There are bigger things than a \$100,000 library too.**

Notes: These articles are frequently cited as evidence that Andrew Carnegie was seriously negotiating with Johnson City to locate a steel mill and an offer for one of the first Carnegie Libraries in 1889. The sum of money is listed as both \$10,000 and \$100,000 in the second *Johnson City Comet* news article. The article mentions Johnson City being incorporated in 1884 which actually was the City’s second incorporation, the first being in 1869.

Was General John Wilder actually in business discussions with Andrew Carnegie or was this just part of a local promotional/marketing scheme during the railway/mining boom of the late 1880s? Could Carnegie have been a “silent partner” to these enterprises?

