Junior Detectives

Fayetteville Edition

from The Fayetteville TN Almanac

Issue #2 · The Christmas-Past Case · November 2026

Hello, Detectives!

Grab your magnifying glass! We promised you a **holiday I-spy**, a **Christmas-past word search**, a **winter cipher** and a **brand-new History Mystery**. They're all here. And there's a surprise: a **secret code** that takes five issues to crack!

This issue is for everybody in your house. Find your color:

Little Detectives

Ages 4–6 · look, count, draw, listen and spy on the real square

Clue Crew

Ages 7–9 · word hunts, codes, map shapes and landmarks

Master Detectives

Ages 10–13 · a History Mystery, a logic puzzle, a timeline and a road map

Family Case: The Secret Decoder Ring

Everyone has a job!

Detective rules

- [ ] Outing missions are always done **with a grown-up**, on public sidewalks, while shops are open.
- [ ] Look with your eyes. Don't go into private areas.
- [ ] You never need to tell anyone your name, address or school.
- [ ] Answers are at the very end. Try your best first!

Inside this case

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The Secret Decoder Ring

Piece 1 of 5

A secret message about **our corner of Tennessee** is hiding in this vault. It's locked with **five locks**. Each issue gives you **one key**. Collect all five and you'll know the secret! **Keep this page safe.**

LOCK 1	OLQFROQ	Opens this issue!
LOCK 2	CPF IKNGU	Opens in Issue #3
LOCK 3	YNGXK G	Opens in Issue #4
LOCK 4	KRACQMJH	Opens in Issue #5
LOCK 5	SR RSZIQFIV JSYVXIIR	Opens in Issue #6

Everybody gets a job

Key Finder

Little Detectives

Find the key number! Look at the **Holiday I-Spy** picture (page 4) and count the **candles in the windows**. *Double-check:* count the letters in D-O-T. Same number?

Wheel Turner

Clue Crew

Build the decoder ring (page 16). Use the key to open **Lock 1**.

Case Keeper

Master Detectives

Check the key, fill in the Decoder Log and keep it safe. **Bonus:** the Lafayette Shift from Issue #1 moved letters how far? Does it match?

How to use your ring

1. Cut out the **big ring** and the **small ring** (page 16).
2. Put the small ring on top. Push a paper fastener through both middles (ask a grown-up).
3. **Set the key:** start at **A** on the big ring and count forward the key number. Key 3: A → B → C → **D**. Turn the small ring until its **A** sits under that **D**.
4. **Decode:** find each locked letter on the **big ring**. The letter under it on the **small ring** is the real one.

Decoder Log

Lock	Key	Opened word(s)
1		
2	?	
3	?	
4	?	
5	?	

No scissors? Use this strip for key 3:

Big ring (locked)	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	A	B	C
Small ring (real)	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z

Don't spoil it! Cracked a lock early? Have a grown-up email your guess to **hello@ourtownalmanac.com**. We'll keep it secret until the big reveal.

Finish the Sentence

A secret-number check

Fill in the missing word in each true town fact. Then write the **first letter** of each word in its pink box. Read the boxes from top to bottom. They spell a **number**!

1. Fayetteville is a town in the state of _____
2. Every year, downtown Fayetteville puts on a holiday festival called _____ of Christmas Past.
3. Lafayette and Pulaski helped the American side in the _____ War.
4. Both of those heroes came from _____ (a part of the world across the ocean).
5. The Old Stone Bridge crossed the _____ River.

Word bank (every word is used once):

ELK **HOST** **EUROPE** **TENNESSEE** **REVOLUTIONARY**

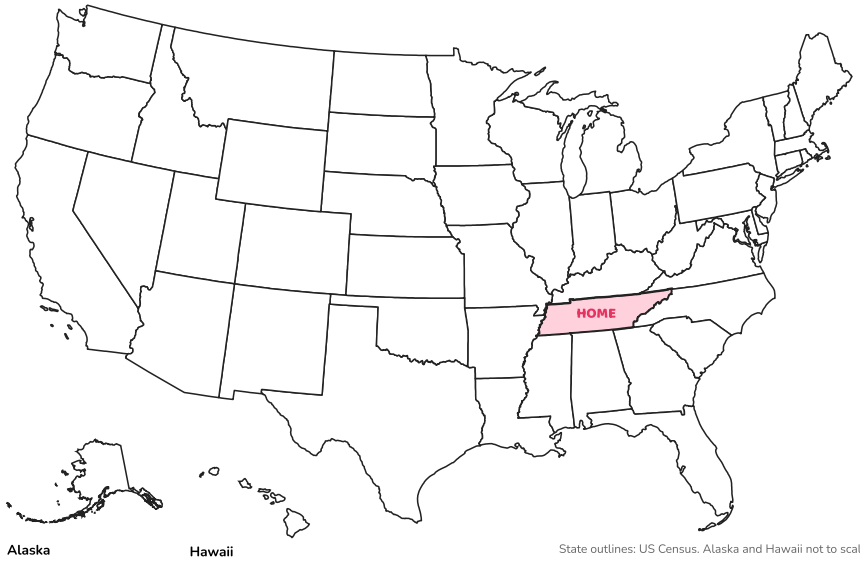
Stuck? Every answer is somewhere in this issue. Try the Three-Town Trail and the History Mystery.

Case Keeper check: does your secret number match the key your Little Detective found?

License Plate Travel Log

Keep this page!

Cars come to Fayetteville from all over. Each time you spot a license plate from **another state**, color that state on the map. Keep this page and keep coloring with every new issue. How much of the map can your family fill?



State outlines: US Census. Alaska and Hawaii not to scale.

Bonus: 8 states touch Tennessee. Can you find a plate from all 8 neighbors?

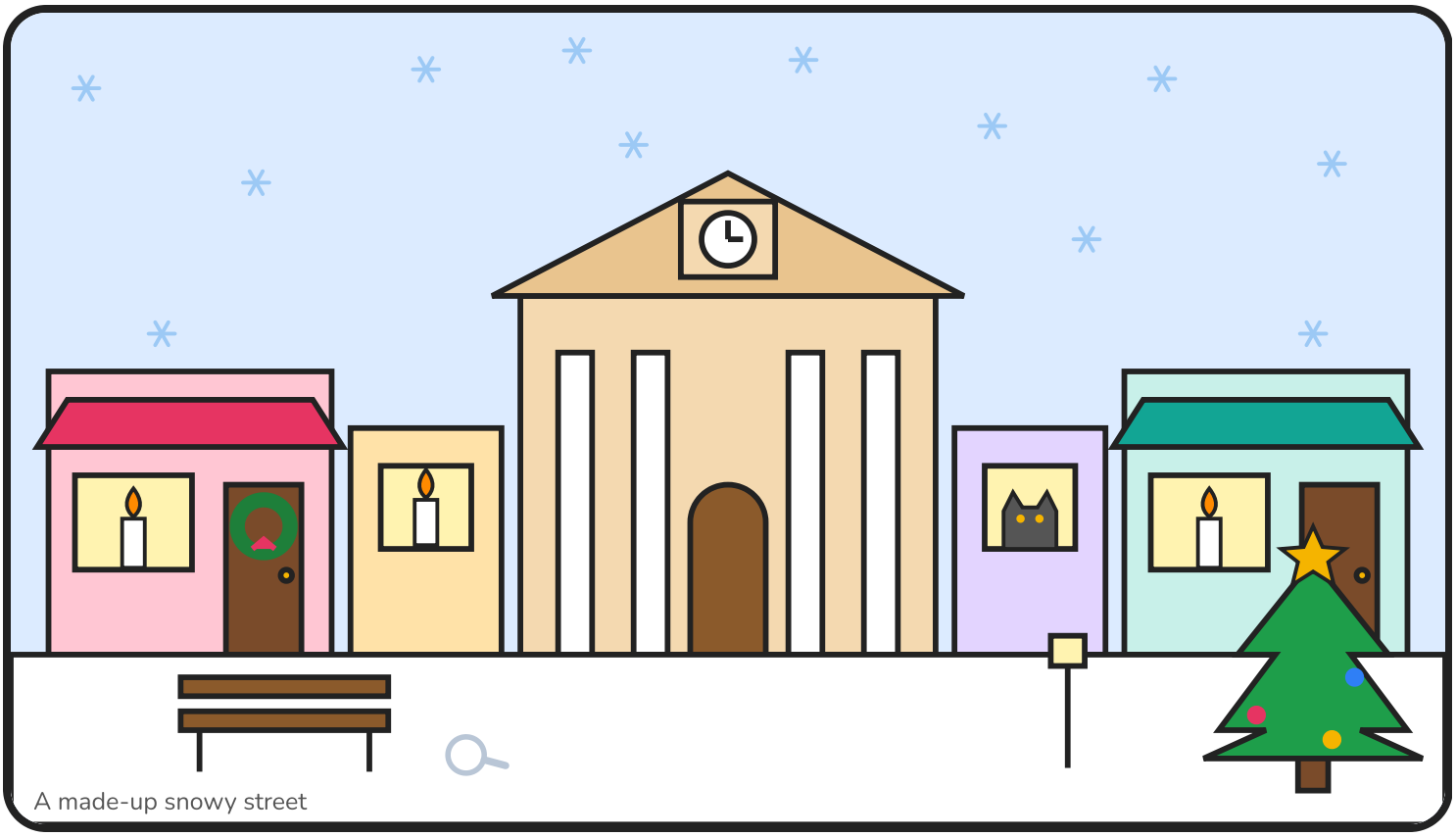
Issue	New states	Total
#2		
#3		
#4		
#5		
#6		

Safe spotting: only look at **parked cars**, or look out the window **from your seat**. Never walk into the street or a parking lot to get a closer look. Write down the **state only**, never the plate numbers or letters.

Little Detectives · ages 4–6

Grown-ups: read these out loud. Let your detective point, count and draw.

Holiday I-Spy



A made-up snowy street

I spy...

- ☐ **candles** in the windows. Count them! ____
- ☐ a round **wreath** on a door
- ☐ a **tree** with a star on top
- ☐ a **cat** peeking out
- ☐ **snowflakes** falling
- ☐ a hidden **magnifying glass**

Key Finder!

How many **candles** did you count? That number is the **key** for the Secret Decoder Ring!

Double-check: count the letters in

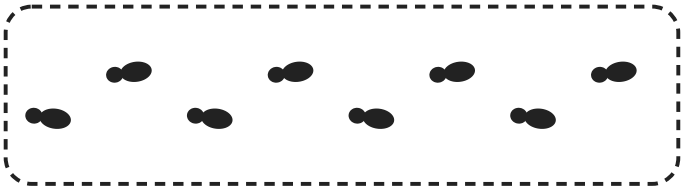
D O T

Do the numbers match?

Footprints in the Snow

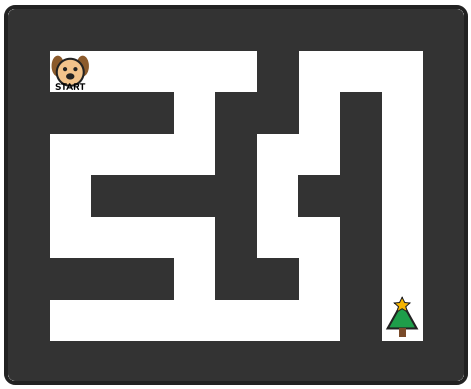
Someone walked through the snow! How many footprints?

_____



Big boots or little paws? Point to your guess!

Help Dot reach the tree!



Trace a path from Detective Dot to the tree. Stay in the white spaces!

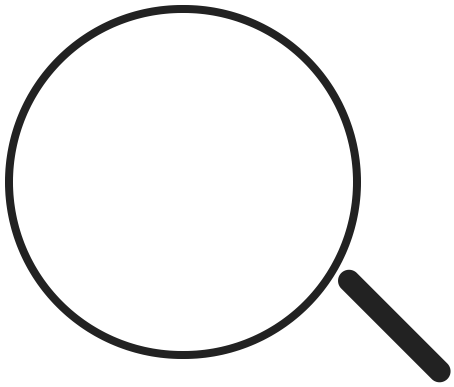
Long Ago or Today?

Draw a line from each **long-ago** thing to the **today** thing that does the same job.

LONG AGO	TODAY
candle	phone call
horse and sleigh	electric lights
letter in the mail	car

Draw It!

Inside this magnifying glass, draw the **most sparkly thing** you can find at home. Make it HUGE!



Read-Aloud: Dot and the Jingle-Bell Clue

It was the coldest night of the year, and the town square was full of lights. "Jingle... jingle..." Detective Dot's ears went up. "Do you hear that?" she asked her friend Pip the squirrel.

"A bell!" said Pip. "But where is it?" Dot held up her magnifying glass. First she spotted tiny tracks in the snow. *Little hops.* Next she found a red ribbon. Then... *jingle!* The sound came from under a bench.

There sat a very small bunny with a bell on her ribbon. "I wanted to see the Christmas tree," she whispered, "but I got lost." "Follow me," said Dot. "Detectives always find the way!" Soon the bunny was hopping home, jingling all the way. "Case closed!" said Dot. "Best case ever."

Talk about it: What three clues did Dot find?

I Spy on the Real Square

Outing mission

Take a walk around the **Fayetteville square** with your grown-up. Check off each thing you spy!

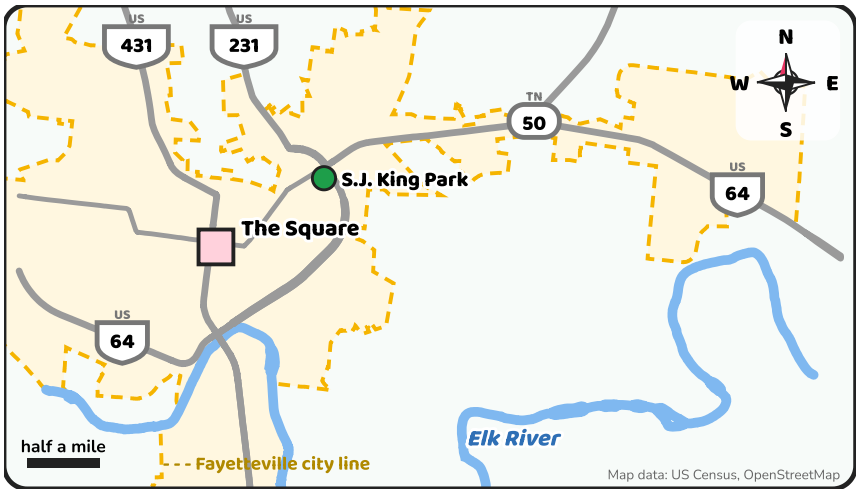
- ☐ a big **red brick** courthouse with **white columns** (the middle of the square)
- ☐ a little **white tower** on top of the courthouse roof. It's called a **cupola** (say KYOO-puh-luh). (look up!)
- ☐ a tall, pointy **stone post** on the courthouse lawn (west side of the lawn)
- ☐ the word **Lincoln** in curly white letters on a tall **blue** sign (the movie theater)
- ☐ **three** round-topped windows in a row, up high (count them: 1, 2, 3!)
- ☐ an **awning** (a cloth roof over a shop window) with **green stripes**
- ☐ a **red** awning
- ☐ Your own find! Draw or tell it: _____

Detective rule: do this **with a grown-up**, from the **sidewalk**. Hold hands near the street and cross only at crosswalks. Shops change, so if something has moved, that counts as a clue too!

Where Does Your Grown-Up Work?

Everybody

Mom, Dad, Grandma, Grandpa, an aunt, a big cousin, whoever takes care of you: every grown-up has a job! Ask yours, "Where do you work?" If it's in or near Fayetteville, draw a **star** ★ on the map. If it's far away, draw your star at the edge of the map with an arrow pointing the right way.



My grown-up's job:

_____

_____

Or draw them at work:

Some jobs happen at home, or in lots of places. Those count too!

Just for your fridge: this page is for home only. Please **don't** send it in to the Mailbag, because it's about your family's own places.

Christmas-Past Word Search

Find all 12 words. They go **across** →, **down** ↓ or **diagonally** ↘.

S	Y	B	V	W	B	S	N	O	W	X	M
K	L	F	R	G	A	R	L	A	N	D	B
B	A	E	B	B	V	J	W	B	Z	K	X
Y	N	Q	I	C	A	N	D	L	E	K	T
K	T	U	K	G	X	H	O	L	L	Y	P
B	E	I	W	F	H	H	P	F	R	Z	W
Z	R	L	J	S	T	O	C	K	I	N	G
P	N	T	P	Y	Z	V	C	Y	K	V	W
H	T	B	E	L	L	S	C	A	R	O	L
M	I	T	T	E	N	S	T	D	X	Z	F
H	Z	V	W	R	E	A	T	H	T	Y	B
Y	C	P	V	H	H	Z	K	B	J	K	V

Word list

- ☐ BELLS
- ☐ CANDLE
- ☐ CAROL
- ☐ GARLAND
- ☐ HOLLY
- ☐ LANTERN
- ☐ MITTENS
- ☐ QUILT
- ☐ SLEIGH
- ☐ SNOW
- ☐ STOCKING
- ☐ WREATH

The Winter Cipher

The upside-down alphabet

In this code, the alphabet is flipped like a snowflake in a mirror: A = Z, B = Y, C = X… Find each code letter in the chart, then write the letter it swaps with.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
Z	Y	X	W	V	U	T	S	R	Q	P	O	N

R G H G Z I G V W D R G S L M V

__ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __

H S L K

__ __ __ __

Clue: it's about how Host of Christmas Past got started, a long time ago.

Hidden Holiday Words

A winter word hides in each sentence. The letters are side by side, but might stretch across two words.

1. Wake up, Abel! Lots to do!_____
2. We must arrive by noon._____
3. Pass now, please!_____
4. Meet me at the street corner._____
5. Dennis led the parade._____

Hint: number 1 jingles.

Riddle Me This

I'm round and green, with a bow on my chin.
I hang on a door to welcome you in.
What am I? _____

Your job: Wheel Turner

Ask your Little Detective for the key number. Set your ring (page 16) and open **Lock 1** on page 2!

Clue Walk on the Square

Outing mission

With a grown-up, on the public sidewalks around the Fayetteville square, during **Host of Christmas Past (Nov. 13–14, 2026)** or any day in December. Check the official schedule at hostofchristmaspast.com before you go.

- ☐ A wreath. How many on one side of the square? _____
- ☐ A window with candles or lights
- ☐ A Christmas tree on the square
- ☐ A bow. What color? _____
- ☐ Someone singing or playing music
- ☐ A number on a building: _____
- ☐ An **arch** over a window or door (a curved top)
- ☐ Something old-fashioned
- ☐ Something that made you smile

Shape Detective

Real map shapes!

These shapes are real outlines from the U.S. Census map, seen from above. Each one is a **town** or a **county** near us. Use the clues to name each shape. (Each row is drawn at the same size, so you can compare.)

Towns: Fayetteville or Pulaski?

A



_____

B



_____

- The **Elk River** flows through this town.
- This town is the county seat of **Giles County**.

Counties: Lincoln, Giles or Moore?

C



_____

D



_____

E



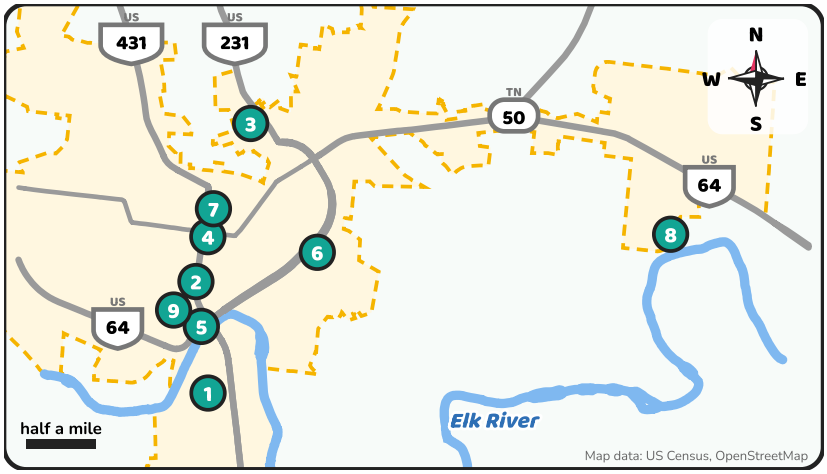
_____

- It's the **biggest** of the three. (It has the most land.)
- In 1871, part of its land was used to make **Moore County**.
- It's the **smallest**, only about **129 square miles**.

Landmark Match

Fayetteville

Every numbered dot on this map is a real place in Fayetteville. Read the clues, then write the dot number next to each place (or draw a line to it).



The dashed line is the edge of the city.

Copperweld plant · North of the square, on Cotton Mill Road ____

Frito-Lay plant · Way out east. The farthest dot from the square! ____

The hospital (Lincoln Medical Center) · East of the square ____

The courthouse on the square · Right in the middle of downtown ____

The library · A short walk north of the square ____

The Fayetteville-Lincoln County Museum · South of the square, in an old milk plant ____

The Old Stone Bridge marker · Right beside the Elk River ____

Lincoln County High School · The farthest south, across the Elk River ____

The fairgrounds · A few blocks southwest of the square ____

History Mystery: The Bridge With No Keystone

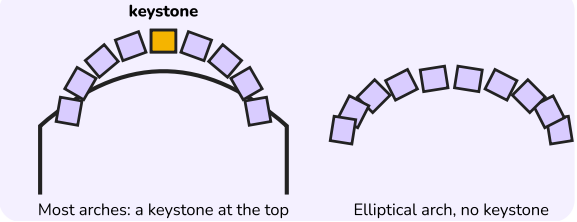
Everything here really happened.

Most stone arches have a special stone at the very top, called a **keystone**, that locks the arch in place. But in **1861**, a bridge was finished over the **Elk River** in Fayetteville that was different.

The **Old Stone Bridge** was made of limestone dug from a spot nearby along the Elk River. It was **450 feet** long. It had **six** curved arches shaped like stretched-out circles (called **elliptical** arches). And it had **no keystone at all**. The state's history marker says it was one of only two bridges built like it in the United States.

Two years later, in the fall of **1863**, during the Civil War, a Union army led by **General William T. Sherman** marched east across southern Tennessee and crossed the Elk River on this bridge. The marker says Sherman ordered the bridge destroyed so the other army couldn't use it. But an officer named **Major Byrd** didn't carry out the order. He told Sherman the bridge would give no help to the Confederate army. The bridge stayed.

It carried people across the river for more than 70 years. Then, on **February 2, 1969**, after days of heavy rain, the 108-year-old bridge fell into the river.



A diagram of how arches work. It is not a picture of the real bridge.

Go see it

With a grown-up: the state's history marker for the Old Stone Bridge stands in Fayetteville, near the river.

Your mission

1. What made this bridge's arches unusual? _____
2. How many arches did it have? _____ (Jot it in your Decoder Log margin. A future Case Keeper may need it...)
3. Do the math: 1969 − 1861 = _____ Does it match the marker?
4. **Detective thinking:** The Major Byrd story comes from just one sign. Good detectives like two clues that agree. Where could you look for a second clue? _____

Logic Puzzle: Three Towns, Three Clues

Mia, Leo and Rosa each visited a different town: **Fayetteville, Lynchburg or Pulaski**. Each found a different clue: **a bell, an arch or a date stone**. Each went on a different day: **Friday, Saturday or Sunday**. (The detectives are made up. The towns are real!)

1. Mia did not go to Pulaski.
2. The detective who visited Lynchburg went on Saturday.
3. Leo found the arch.
4. Rosa did not go on Sunday.
5. The bell was found in Fayetteville.
6. Leo went on Friday.
7. Mia did not find the date stone.

	Fayetteville	Lynchburg	Pulaski	bell	arch	date stone	Fri	Sat	Sun
Mia									
Leo									
Rosa									

Mark ✗ for "no" and ● for "yes."

Which Came First?

A three-town timeline

Number these real events from **1 (oldest)** to **8 (newest)**.

- ☐ The oldest Lincoln County farm on the state's Century Farms list gets its start.
- ☐ The Old Stone Bridge is finished over the Elk River in Fayetteville.
- ☐ Pulaski's courthouse, the one standing today, is built.
- ☐ Surveyors drive the first pin to lay out Fayetteville's streets.
- ☐ The slawburger is born at a Fayetteville restaurant.
- ☐ Lynchburg's courthouse, the one standing today, is finished after a big fire.
- ☐ The *Fayetteville Observer* newspaper begins.
- ☐ A drugstore opens on the Fayetteville square and is still open today.

Bonus: one happened **before** Fayetteville was laid out. Which one? What does that tell you about farms around here?

Arch Detective

With a grown-up, from the public sidewalk. Count the **arched** windows or doors on the Fayetteville square: _____

Is your favorite round, pointed or flat-ish? Does it have a **keystone**?

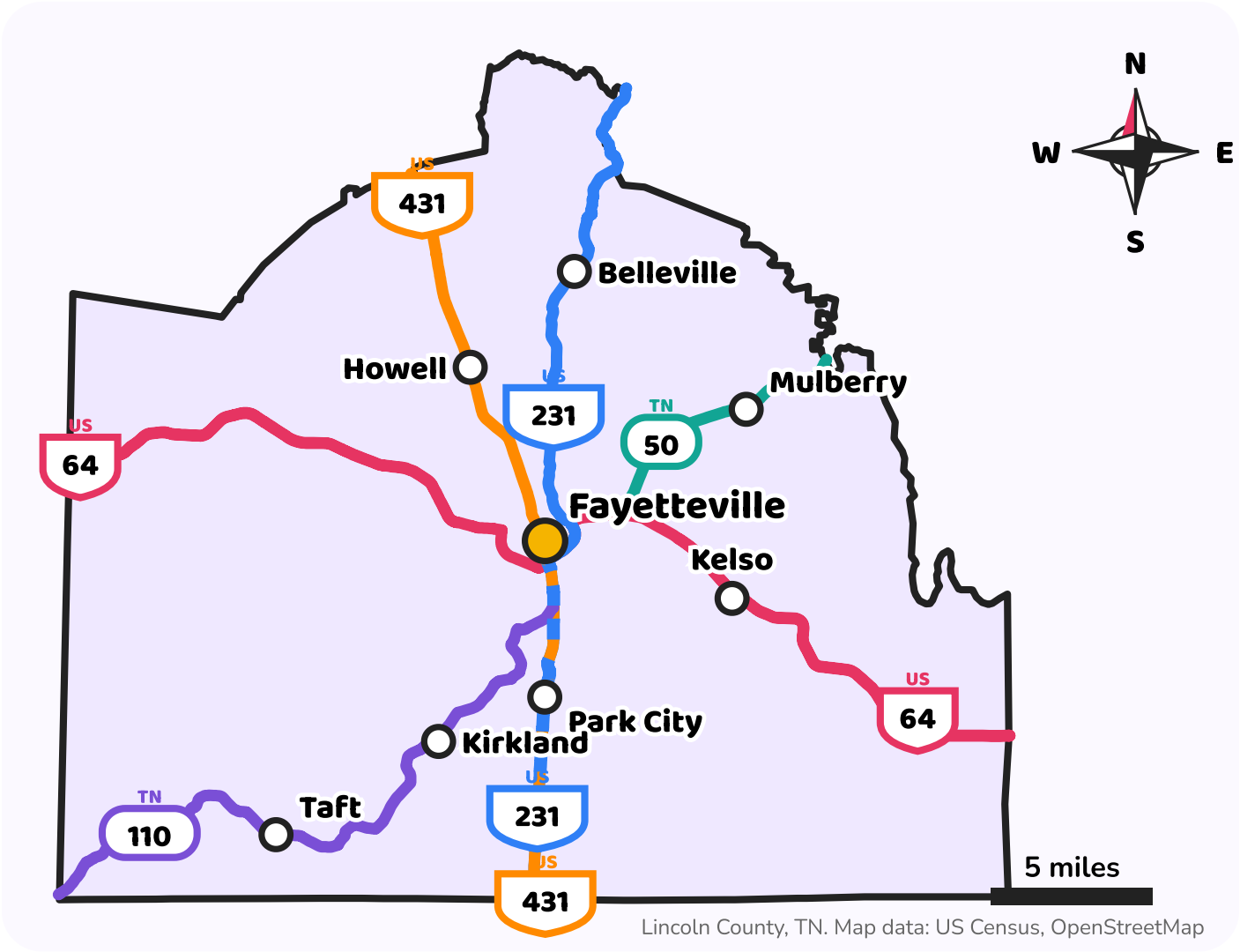
Your job: Case Keeper

Check your Little Detective's key, fill in the Decoder Log on page 2 and try the bonus. Lock 2 opens next issue!

Road Detective: Lincoln County

Read the map!

This is a real map of **Lincoln County**. Each colored line is a real highway, and each dot is a real community on one of those roads. A **US** shield (pointed bottom) means a U.S. highway. A **TN** shield (rounded) means a Tennessee state highway.



Lincoln County, TN. Map data: US Census, OpenStreetMap

1. Which road connects **Fayetteville** and **Taft**? _____
2. Which road connects **Fayetteville** and **Mulberry**? _____
3. Which road connects **Fayetteville** and **Kelso**? _____
4. Look at the dot for **Park City**, south of Fayetteville. Its road has **two** highway numbers at once! What are they? _____ and _____

Compass check: Is Belleville **north** or **south** of Fayetteville? _____
Which direction would you drive from Fayetteville to get to Kelso? _____

Scale bar challenge: use the 5-mile bar and a strip of paper. About how far is it from Fayetteville to Taft, as the crow flies? _____ miles

Everybody · for the whole family

The Three-Town Trail

Fayetteville → Lynchburg → Pulaski

Fayetteville + Pulaski: named for heroes from far away

Both towns are named for heroes from Europe who helped the American side in the Revolutionary War. Pulaski is named for **Casimir Pulaski**, a general born in Poland. Fayetteville is named for Fayetteville, North Carolina, which was named for the **Marquis de Lafayette**, a general from France.

Fayetteville + Lynchburg: the county that grew out of corners

In 1871, Tennessee made **Moore County** from the far corners of the counties around it, including Lincoln County. Lynchburg became its county seat. Lincoln County didn't want to give up that much land, so it went to court. In the end, Moore County shrank from about **300** to about **129** square miles. It's named for a man who was an early settler of Lincoln County.

Lynchburg + Pulaski: courthouses that rose after fires

On December 4, 1883, a fire burned nearly half of Lynchburg, including its courthouse. The one there today was finished in **1885**. Pulaski's courthouse burned in **1907**, and the one standing today was built in **1909**.

Trail map coming once the first cache is placed

We're working on a real-life treasure trail. When the first stop is ready, its map goes right here!

Your Detective Passport (coming soon!)

The **Almanac Detective Passport** is a fold-up keepsake logbook. Get a stamp (or a sticker, or draw your own!) each time you:

- **geocache find**
- **shop clue stop**
- **factory visit**
- **farm visit**

Watch for a print-your-own copy in a future issue!

Someday Missions

Ideas, not dates yet! We're dreaming up visits to places where things get **made** and **grown**: factory open houses and farm tours. None are planned yet. If they happen, you'll read about it here first.

Detective Calendar

Lincoln County 4-H Home School Club (grades 4–12): **Fri., Nov. 6** and **Fri., Dec. 4, 2026**. Ralph Hastings Building, 208 Davidson St. E, Fayetteville. Grades 4–6 at 9:30 a.m.; grades 7–12 at 10:30 a.m. lincoln.tennessee.edu/4-h-home-school-club/

Host of Christmas Past, downtown Fayetteville, **Nov. 13–14, 2026**. Opening, tree lighting and carols on the south side courthouse lawn, Fri., Nov. 13, 5 p.m. hostofchristmaspast.com

Schedules can change. Always check before you go!

Build Your Secret Decoder Ring

Cut along the dashed circles (ask a grown-up for help). Put the small ring on top of the big ring and push a paper fastener through both centers.

