

Talk Given Lealand Garden Club by Ridley Wills II
October 7, 2013

In 1912, the Lealand estate, owned by Overton and Ella Cocke Lea, contained about 1,200 acres. Located on the east side of Granny White Pike and bordered on the south by the Harpeth hills, three of which were on the farm, the home was on today's Tyne Blvd. The larger part of the tract, including that upon which the house stood, was a portion of the original estate of Lea's maternal grandfather, Judge John Overton, of Travellers Rest. The second day of the Battle of Nashville was fought in part on the Lealand Plantation. The Confederate line extended from west of Granny White Pike along the entire front of Lealand and then through the property later owned by Van Leer Kirkman. From there the line ran across the Franklin Turnpike to Peach Orchard Hill, then part of Colonel John Overton's Travellers Rest Plantation. On December 2nd, General John Bell Hood, commander of the Army of Tennessee, had his headquarters on the lawn of Lealand. Judge John M. Lee, one of the state's eminent jurists, and Overton Lee's father, loved to tell an amusing story about the battle. General Hood requested that a pitcher of water be sent him. Thereupon, Judge Lea called loudly for his coachman to fetch it. The coachman finally emerged from hiding behind a stone wall and approached Lee and Hood, dodging from tree to tree as the fighting was both intense and close. On learning what he was asked to do, the black man said, "Now Mars John, if you wants de water, I'll go get it from the spring, doe the bullets is flying mighty thick, but if Mr. Hood wants it, he'll have to send a sojer or go get it hisself." Judge Lea ended up carrying the water to General Hood.¹

¹ Mrs. James E. Caldwell, *Beautiful and Historic Homes In and Near Nashville, Tenn.* (Nashville: Brandon Printing Co., 1911).

The most prominent member of the Lea family was Overton's son, Luke Lea, born April 12, 1879. Luke attended the University of the South at Sewanee, where he was the manager of the fabled Sewanee football team that had a perfect 12-0 record, winning the Southern Collegiate Athletic Conference championship. One of Lea's duties that year was to schedule games. He presumptuously arranged for Sewanee to play five major universities during a six-day 2,600-mile road trip. Amazingly, Sewanee won all five games, outscoring their opponents 91-0. It still is considered the most successful roadtrip in collegiate football history.²

After Luke Lea got his BA and MA degrees at Sewanee in 1899 and 1900, he went to Columbia University where he was president of his second year law class and where he got his L.L.B. in 1903.³ ⁴⁵In 1906, Lea, only twenty-seven years old, masterminded the nomination of Malcolm Patterson in the Democratic gubernatorial convention. Breaking with Patterson, who was elected governor in 1907, Lea backed former U.S. Senator Edmund Ward Carmack in the 1908 Tennessee gubernatorial race against Patterson, the incumbent. Carmack lost in a bitter fight and Lea, who owned the *Nashville Tennessean* gave Carmack the job as editor. In January 1911, two years after Carmack was killed by Robin Cooper, Lea was elected to the U.S. Senate, where he was the youngest member. When the United States entered the World War in 1918, he was commissioned to raise a regiment-the first Tennessee Field Artillery which later became the 114th Field Artillery. Its record on the front in France was outstanding. At the end of the war, Lea came close to capturing the Kaiser who had fled Bentinek Castle in Holland.⁶

² Mary Louise Lea Tidwell, *Luke Lea of Tennessee* (Bowling Green Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1993), 12-13.

³ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 20, 22, 23.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 112.113.

Bentinek Castle in Later, in 1931, Luke Lea, his son, Luke Lea Jr. and two others were indicted in North Carolina for bank fraud, following the collapse of the Central Bank and Trust Company of Asheville, N.C. which had been connected with Caldwell and Company through Lea. Found guilty, Lea was sentenced to prison for six to ten years, and his son, Luke Jr. for two to six years. After fruitless appeals to the North Carolina Supreme Court, the Tennessee Supreme Court and the U.S. Supreme Court, the Leas were incarcerated in the North Carolina State Prison in May 1934. A few weeks later, Luke Lea Jr. was paroled and in May 1936, after two years, Luke Lea received a similar parole.⁷

Many streets in Nashville carry names associated with the Lea family. Clendenin Road, between Stonewall Drive and Gateway Lane was named for William Clendenin Robertson, a Texan who was the valedictorian at the University of the South in 1893. That fall he tutored Luke and his brother, Overton Lea. Robertson later married their sister, Laura. Gateway Lane is named because of its proximity to the gateway to Lealand, the Lea's home. Gerald Place in Belle Meade was named for Gerald Howard, a friend of Luke Lea's. Lea Avenue in South Nashville was named for Judge John M. Lea. Of course, Lealand Lane was named for the Leas' home. Sewanee Road was named for Sewanee, where Overton and Luke Lea went to college. Sheppard Place in Belle Meade was named for David Alexander Shepard, of Sewanee, a life-long friend of Luke Lea and a long-time president of the Sewanee Alumni Association.⁸

Glen Leven on Franklin Pike was the home of the Thompson family from about 1789 when Tommy Thompson received a 640-acre land grant along Brown's Creek until 2006, when Susan Thompson West, Tommy Thompson's great, great, great grandfather died, having left the remaining 65 acres to the Land

⁷ Ibid., 228-230, 249-250, 275-76.

⁸ Ridley Wills II, *Nashville Streets and Their Stories* (Franklin, Tn.: Plumblin Press, 2012), 32, 63, 65, 92-93, 135, 138.

Trust For Tennessee in 2005. I recently finished chairing a campaign that raised \$1.2 million for the restabilization of Glen Leven. When the Civil War erupted in 1861, John Thompson, Tommy's son, who had had increased the size of the plantation to 947 acres and who had 60 slaves in 1850, was too old to join the Confederate Army and his two sons, John and Joe, born in 1852 and 1854 respectively to his fourth wife, Mary Hamilton House, whom he married in 1851, were too young. In appreciation for Mary giving him two sons, he built the handsome Greek Revival house that is now being restored by the Land Trust For Tennessee.⁹

Early in December 1864, Confederate General Stephen D. Lee established his headquarters at Glen Leven. After the Battle of Nashville, Glen Leven was converted into a Federal hospital and a washhouse was used as a small hospital for black soldiers.¹⁰ A piano in a front parlor was used as an operating table. Four hundred fifty soldiers, mostly Union were treated at Glen Leven. Included were at least 50 black Union soldiers from the 12th and 13th U. S. Colored Troops Regiments. At least 90 Union soldiers, killed in the Federal assault on Peach Orchard Ridge, were buried at Glen Leven before being disinterred in 1866 and reburied in the new U.S. Military Cemetery on Gallatin Pike. Fifty of those, whose bodies were move to the Military Cemetery, were black. Colored soldiers did the work.¹¹

In 1876, when his father died, John Thompson II inherited Glen Leven. He lived there until his own death in 1919. John's wife was McConnell Overtn, the second daughter of Col and Mrs. John Overton of Travellers Rest. In the 1880s, John Thompson sold vegetables to the Maxwell House Hotel, owned by his father-in-law, John Overton.¹² For the past several years, Tyler Brown,

⁹ Caldwell, *Beautiful and Historic Homes In and Near Nashville, Tenn.*;

¹⁰ Polly Orr Jordan, "Glen Leven," a short, unpublished history, copy in the collection of Ridley Wills II.

¹¹ Katie Randall, "19th Century African-American Community at Glen Leven Farm," a paper written by Ms. Randall, Glen Leven Program director, 2013, copy at GlenLeven.

¹² Paul Clements, *A Past Remembered* (Nashville: Clearview Press, 1987, 84.

the celebrated chef at the Hermitage Hotel, has managed a two-acre garden at Glen Leven that supplies vegetables for the Hermitage's Capital Grill. John Thompson was active in politics and served as speaker of the state senate.

In the fall of 1886, Thompson, three brothers-in-law, Jesse, May and Overton Thompson, and Van Leer Kirkman established an elaborate trotting horse stud farm on the west side of Franklin Pike. Its track ran from just south of Curtiswood Lane all the way to where Robertson Academy is today. The club house still stands in the side yard of Julie and Bill Pursell's house at 895 Curtiswood Lane. Restored by their son, it is adorable. Thompson was secretary-treasurer of the stud; Van Leer Kirkman, who lived at Oak Hill, was president; May Overton was manager; and Jesse and Robert Overton were board members. Van Leer Kirkman's wife, Katherine was a Thompson from Memphis, kin to the Glen Leven Thompsons. She paid for the construction of Oak Hill, which was in her name.¹³

About 100 yards from the northern end of the Hermitage Stud

track there was a twenty-four-stall training table. In the SW corner there was a circular colt stable, which burned in the winter of 1916-17. Many of the brood mares, usually sixty or more, were pastured in a field on the James E. Caldwell place across Franklin Pike from Glen Leven and about a mile from the stud. Another stable was in the Elysian fields tract owned by May Overton on the east side of Franklin Pike. The most famous horse at the Hermitage Stud was Wedgewood, a champion trotter that earned the nickname "The Iron Horse" for running as many as six heats in a single event. His short racing career lasted from 1879 through 1881.¹⁴

¹³ Ridley Wills II, *Lest We Forget: Lost Nashville Companies and Their Stories* (Franklin, Tn.: Plumblin Press, 2013), 264-65.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

When the Cumberland Fair and Racing Association Park opened in 1891, the road connecting the new race course with the Franklin Pike was named Wedgewood for the great horse, that the Hermitage Stud syndicate purchased for \$25,000 in 1887 to stand at stud there. Undoubtedly, Van Leer Kirkman, president of the Hermitage Stud and vice-president of the Cumberland Park Fair and Racing Association, helped make that decision.¹⁵

The Hermitage Stud weathered the 1893 depression only to close in 1898 with a dispersal sale which advertised the stud as the "Grandest Stud of Trotting Horses Ever in Tennessee." One of the causes was a lack of money. The other was a serious disagreement between Van Leer Kirkman and the other partners. For about five years, William Gerst leased the Hermitage Stud before moving his horses to his own stable or selling them. In 1908, the Pawnee Bill Circus spent the winter on the abandoned Hermitage Stud site. Neighbors were apprehensive, particularly when long-legged camels stepped over fences and got on their land. By 1910, Battery lane had been cut through the old Hermitage Stud property. In 1911, John and Conn Overton Thompson gave four acres of their land to the school, which was built in 1912-13. That building burned in 1932 and a new structure, designed by my father-in-law, Granbery Jackson Jr., was erected. It is still there today.¹⁶

When Overton Thompson was growing up at Glen Leven in the late 1920s he went to Robertson Academy. When the weather was good, Overton rode his pony. When the weather was bad, he rode the Franklin Interurban. In a 1990 conversation with his daughter, Ophelia Thompson Paine, Overton said "Mr. Cotton would stop right in front of Glen Leven and pick me up. From time to time, he would let me sit in his lap and operate the Interurban."¹⁷

The Interurban made its first run between Nashville and Franklin on Christmas Eve 1908. Its first president was Henry

¹⁵ Ibid., 265.

¹⁶ Ibid., 265.

¹⁷ Interview, Overton Thompson with his daughter, Ophelia Thompson Paine, 1990, copy in collection of Mrs. Paine.

Hunter Mayberry, a 47-year-old Franklin resident, who had made a fortune selling steel nails made in Birmingham. He determined that the best route would be along the Franklin Pike corridor and had the route surveyed. He also talked to all the families who lived on land where he needed easements. Going from Nashville to Brentwood, the impacted lands were owned by the C. D. Berry, Joseph Vault, Oscar F. Noel, James E. Caldwell, John Thompson, Norman Kirkman, Jacob McGavock Dickinson, A. J. Phillips, and Ed Baxter families. Most of these farmers and those south of Brentwood were receptive to the railroad as it would enable them to get to Nashville more quickly and, equally important, to get their farm produce to market faster. Automobiles were still a rarity in 1908, and the road from Nashville to Franklin was terrible.¹⁸

Of the total of 88,840 feet acquired for the Interurban, more than 60,000 feet were donated. About 25,000 feet were purchased and the rest taken by condemnation. The 1,874 feet that passed through the front field of Longview, the Franklin Road estate of Nashville financier James E. Caldwell was the most difficult to get. Caldwell tried to get the Interurban to build on the other side of Franklin Pike. The Interurban owners refused to do so, arguing that such a move would two grade-level crossings and create a bad curve. A bitter lawsuit ensued with the case going to the Tennessee Supreme Court, which ruled in favor of the Interurban. The court dictated that the Caldwells' carriageway would be an official stop, which meant that every train would have to stop there and the conductor was obligated to get off the train and flag the carriageway. For a number of years, the conductors blew their high-pitched whistles every time they approached Longview. This infuriated Mr. and Mrs. Caldwell, who complained about the noise and the invasion of their privacy.¹⁹

¹⁸ James A. Crutchfield and Robert Holladay, *Franklin, Tennessee's Handsomest Town* (Franklin: Hillsboro Press 1999), 246-51,

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 251-52.

The Interurban was a big success. Initially, the first car left Franklin at 6 a.m. and the last car from Nashville reached the Franklin Public Square at 11:30 p.m. A one-way trip cost a dime and a two-way trip cost twenty cents.²⁰

After World War I, the increase in automobile traffic put pressure on the Interurban and its profits diminished. In 1925, the company cut back on night trips. Three years later, the Interurban got a reprieve when the Franklin mayor and aldermen gave it the franchise for selling electricity to the city. However, by the late 1930s, the Interurban seemed doomed to failure as the Franklin Pike was improved and automobiles became faster and far more numerous. In Nashville, the city was tearing up old electric streetcar lines as the move toward motorized busses progressed. Soon, the Interurban had to stop at the edge of Nashville and transfer its passengers to busses. In November 1941, the Franklin Interurban made its last run, replaced by busses. The old electric streetcars were sold to an automobile plant in Marietta, Ga. The bus service lasted until 1969.²¹ Last week, the last remaining Franklin Interurban shelter fell down. It was on the east side of Franklin Pike at Franklin Road Academy.

Nearly a century before the first appearance of the Franklin Interurban, Andrew Jackson proposed, following the War of 1812, that the Federal Government fund a new road from Nashville to New Orleans that Jackson's soldiers would build. If the government did so, Jackson, who was familiar with Tennessee and Mississippi, predicted that the new road would be 200 miles shorter than the Natchez Trace. The government responded in 1816 with an initial appropriation of \$5,000. Jackson got started using from fifty to three hundred soldiers as his construction crew. They were, in 1818, under the immediate supervision of Col. Perrin Willis. In March of that year, the Federal government appropriated another \$5,000. Construction of the road required 75,801 man-days

²⁰Ibid., 252.

²¹ Ibid., 300, 371, 373, 405, 454.

of labor and cost \$300,000, much of which must have been paid by the Federal government. The road began in Nashville and went south through Glen Leven. For the next century, a field at Glen Leven was known as Camp Field because Jackson's troops camped there. The tree line that Jackson Military Highway followed is almost immediately behind the Glen Leven smokehouse. From there the road went through Travellers Rest to Franklin and on to Columbia. There it veered to the SW through Lawrenceburg, where the two major north-south roads today are named North Military and South Military Roads. After crossing the Tennessee River between Kileen and Florence, Alabama, the road cut cross country through mostly unoccupied lands in Alabama and Mississippi, some of which was still occupied by the Choctaw Indians. The road is still a prominent one in Columbus, Mississippi, where the Jackson Military Road crossed the Tombigbee River. The road then angled down through multiple Mississippi Counties before crossing into Louisiana twenty miles west of Poplarville, Miss. It then passed the site of the future town of Bogalusa, Louisiana to Madisonville on the north shore of Lake Pontchartrain before making its final descent into New Orleans. When completed, it was 200 miles shorter than the old road. The Jackson Military Road declined in importance in the 1840s due to disrepair and its difficult route through Louisiana swamps. The Jackson Military Road route later became part of Jackson Highway, established early in the twentieth century.²² Probably in the 1830s, the road through Glen Leven, called the Franklin Turnpike, moved several hundred yards west to its present location. When Overton Thompson, born in 1915, was a little boy the Franklin Turnpike was still a narrow two-lane gravel road with little traffic.

In the early 1880s, James E. Caldwell visited New York and became enchanted with the elevated railroads and dummy trains that went from Brooklyn to Fort Hamilton along New York Bay.

²² Wills, *Nashville Streets and Their Stories*, 83-84.

He also was impressed with the beautiful public parks he saw there and in other Eastern cities he visited and decided that he needed to do something in Nashville to relieve congestion. He concluded that to provide quick and inexpensive transportation to the suburbs, he needed to establish a popular attraction at the end of the line. In 1887, Caldwell bought a 60-acre Winburn tract for the park he envisioned. In 1887, he also began building a \$15,000 pavilion that was 136' by 198 feet with 6,000 feet of porches. It was completed in May 1888. A cold water spring provided water for the pavilion and three drinking fountains. He additionally built an Edison electric light plant and a music hall. His Overland company also built a dummy railroad that ran from the city to Overland Park, whose name would change to Glendale Park in 1890. The original board of directors included president Oscar F. Noel, who lived at Noelton on Granny White Pike, west of Longview; vice-president Joseph H. Thompson, who lived at Brightwood on Thompson Lane; and himself as secretary-treasurer, and general manager. The dummy railroad ran from the transfer station downtown, out Eighth Avenue, Douglas Avenue, Tenth Avenue and on by the side of the new reservoir hill before heading south between the Franklin and Granny White Pikes along Lealand Lane. The cost to make the roundtrip of 13 miles was 10 cents. Originally chartered as a regular steam railroad, the car line used little steam locomotives hooded over to resemble street cars. They could go twenty miles an hour. Initially, there were three coaches, each with a capacity of one hundred passengers. When the park opened in 1888, people packed the cars like sardines, and teenaged boys rode on top. In 1889, the park expanded to 200 acres.²³

By 1893 or 1894, the little steam-driven "dummy" trains were replaced by electric street cars that were powered by overhead trolley lines. Ten years later, in 1903, all the street railway lines in Nashville were consolidated into The Nashville

²³ "The Dummy Railroad," (Nashville) *The Daily American*, Sunday, April 22, 1888; James E. Caldwell, *Recollections of a Lifetime*, 109 (Baird Ward Press, 1923).

Railroad and Light Company, whose president was Percy Warner, Luke Lea's father-in-law. Warner's company used Glendale Park and the electric rail line to advertise his street railroad. The Nashville Railroad and Light Company also enlarged the zoo at Glendale Park. Warner's hobby was raising rare birds at his home, Renraw on Gallatin Pike. Clare Lovett, a young Englishman trained the cranes. When Warner moved to his new home, Royal Oaks, in 1910, he gave his collection of rare birds, including Rufus, a crane, to the zoo. Lovett went to the zoo also as its manager. Except for four years during the Great World War when he served in the British Army, Lovett managed the zoo until it closed in 1932. Before the war he had two bears there, Zana and Zerle, whom he trained to take sticks of chewing gum from his lips without touching his face. When he returned from England in 1918, he was uncertain that the two bears would remember him so the third day he was back he walked slowly around their cage for a few minutes for the bears to see him. He then stepped inside. Lovett later said, "The bears walked over to me stood on their hind legs and dropped their paws to their sides, just the way I trained them. Then they took the chewing gum out of my mouth without ever touching me. The zoo also had monkeys; two fierce buffaloes, named Adam and Eve; rabbits that children could pet; and haughty peacocks that strutted around the grounds."²⁴

One of the largest crowds ever at Glendale Park came in the 1920s when Clyde Lovett arranged for two airplanes from Blackwood Field on Shute's Lane to fly over Glendale Park and drop free tickets to park concessions. On the day of the "airplane shower" 15,000 people pushed and shoved into the park to catch the free tickets raining down from the sky. Each spring, the zoo hosted an Easter egg hunt that, in 1926, was expected to attract 10,000 people. In July 1932, just before the park closed, there were

²⁴ Louise Davis, "Nashville Had A Zoo," *The Tennessean Magazine*, June 18, 1972.

51 church picnics held there. The park also had a merry-go-round with prancing hand-carved horses that the children loved.²⁵

Glendale Park closed in 1932 because of the depression and the fact that the proliferation of automobiles were causing fewer people to ride streetcars, and the park was hemorrhaging money. In 1942, when Fred Harvey opened his department store on Church Street, there was a shortage of store window display materials. He got the idea of putting carousel horses in his display window at Easter. Antique dealer, Baxter Pamplin helped him find three or four that had been at Glendale Park. Harvey widened his search and eventually found 15 carousel horses that had been at Glendale. One of those horses was actually a goat with a big horn named "Big Red." People who had ridden "Big Red" at Glendale would rush up to the goat at Harvey's to admire it and reminiscence about the good times they had as children at Glendale.²⁶

²⁵ Ibid; "Glendale Park To Open Sunday," undate Nashville newspaper, 1926.

²⁶ Davis, "Nashville Had A Zoo," *The Tennessean Magazine*, June 18, 1972.