

Days Of Old Sumner County

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Sumner County Historical Society

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Bessie, Where Did You Go?

By Ken Thomson, SCHS
President

Born in 1877 into a prominent Sumner County family, Bessie Dismukes entered this world uneventfully.

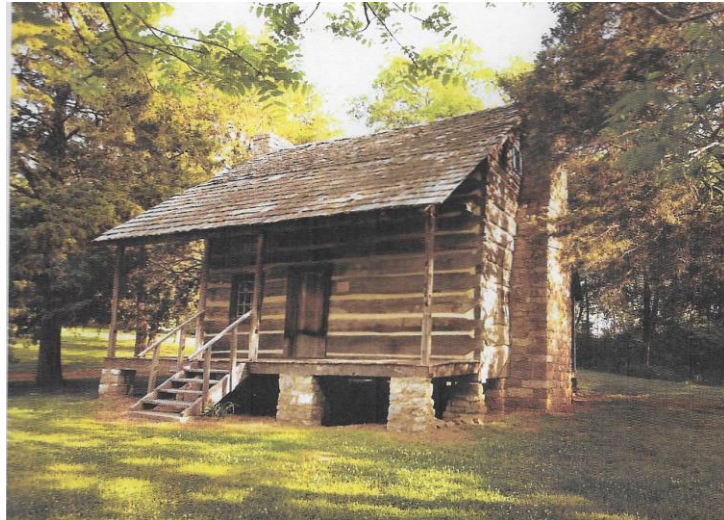
Her father, William Cantrell Dismukes, was a successful attorney and served as Speaker of the Tennessee State Senate. He was a descendent of several Sumner Co. pioneers, including Stephen Cantrell and William Gillespie, soldiers of the Revolutionary War.

Bessie's mother, Sally (Martin) Cantrell, also had deep roots in the community. Among her Revolutionary War ancestors were William Lucas Martin of Dixon Springs in Smith County and Gen. James White, the founder of Knoxville.

Bessie had a brother, Martin, two years her senior, and a younger brother, William, four years her junior. Martin died at age 26 after serving in the Spanish American War. Her brother, William, moved to California where he died in 1951, leaving a family.

Tragedy struck Bessie's life in 1884 when her mother died at age 33. Two years later her father remarried to Mariah Louisa Cage. This union produced a daughter, Frances, in 1887. Frances married Samuel Price Erwin. Frances' daughter, Louise Dismukes (Erwin) McKee, had two sons, Tom and Erwin

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Nathaniel Parker built this small cabin upon first settling in Tennessee about 1790. It was moved to Bledsoe Park.

Parkers: Quick Marriage, Slow Divorce

By Jan Shuxteau, Editor

The 18th century marriage between two of Sumner County's most prominent, land-rich pioneers, widow Mary Ramsey Bledsoe and widower Nathaniel Parker, was short-lived and angry with both sides abandoning their usual decorum to fight it out. The fracas between them ended in Tennessee's first divorce, which was—interestingly—presided over in Nashville by Andrew Jackson, then Tennessee Superior Court Judge.

Before her wedding with Nathaniel, Mary, born in 1744 (or '34), had been married to Anthony Bledsoe from 1767 (or '60) for more than 20 years until his murder in July 1788. They had 11 children, including Polly who was born a few months after his death. Anthony Bledsoe was a Sumner landowner, surveyor and Revolutionary War colonel and at various times a state senator, a justice of the peace and, at his death, chairman of the Sumner County Court. These occupations kept him away from his family for months at a time.

Mary and Anthony, originally from Virginia, settled in Castalian Springs about 1784 after living in the East Tennessee pioneer settlement of Fort Chiswell for about 15 years. Of necessity, Mary had to be strong and capable, maybe even formidable, for her family to survive and thrive on the frontier, especially with Anthony often gone. (For more about her, see "Mary Bledsoe: A Pioneer of Sumner County" in the May 2020 edition of this newsletter.)

Nathaniel Parker, born about 1730 in Hampshire County, Virginia, was a long-hunter, who furnished supplies to the Continental Army in the Revolutionary War, according to DAR research. Like Anthony, he

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Portland's Kerley Tradition Traced Back

By John and Jane Stegmeier Kerley

The Kerley tradition in business dates back to the Civil War, according to the family. When the war started and most of the Kerley men went to fight, Sarah Kerley became head of the family. Her neighbors called her a doctor even though she had no formal medical training. She was foresighted enough to predict the fall of the Confederacy and of the Confederate money, so she took all the family funds and bought land in Southern Kentucky, including a farm in the community of Hickory Flat. James Eldon Kerley, called El, took his bride, Mary Harris, to this farm. She gave birth to three sons--Clarence, Vernon and Charles. The road from Franklin to Scottsville ran through the farm and another rural road intersected it, forming the corner that was the heart of Hickory Flat. El put a little store on that corner, dealing in general merchandise and trading.

In 1898, El sold the store and the farm to move to South Union on the railroad just outside the Shaker Community in Auburn, Ky. At South Union, the Kerleys lived in a 40-room brick home facing the railroad. Mary Kerley rented rooms to drummers, traveling preachers and chance visitors and, of course, also fed them. Across the road in the store, El and the boys sold train tickets and operated the area postal service.

However, the family was not especially happy since their Shaker neighbors had a faith and customs differing greatly from their own. So when El heard about a store for sale in Portland, just across the state line, he wasted no time buying what had formerly been the Moore store. They sent stock for the store and household possessions to Portland by a railroad flatcar, while mother, father and the three boys traveled by wagon to their new home. It was April, 1902, when a newly painted sign reading "J. E. Kerley & Sons" went up on the two-story frame building facing the railroad depot.

Thus, Kerley's became part of Portland. The store's opening date was a family controversy for years, with some saying it opened in 1904, and others 1902. Finally, J.V. Kerley's daughters discovered old records that showed that the store opened in 1902 and the store purchase included a safe that came from the Victor Safe and Lock Co, Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1888, the same year that the town's name was changed from Richland to Portland.

In those days, Portland's Main Street was a swirl of dust in dry weather and a sea of mud in rain.

The town was small, but business was good at Kerleys, which handled just what folks needed for their farms and homes.



In 1904 with the store going well, J.E. Kerley built a large Victorian house, the first on High Street.

About 1916, a fire damaged Kerley's store. The building was repaired and resituated to face Main St. The Victor safe was placed in the balcony-office where it stayed until the fire of 1959.

Charlie Kerley went into the army when World War I began. He had just married Louise Bunch, a graduate in the first class to finish at the new Sumner County High School and a teacher at the Cold Springs School.

Vernon Kerley, too old for the army, signed up for six years with the Navy as the only way he could find to get into action. After the Armistice, Congressman (later Secretary of State) Cordell Hull obtained Vernon's discharge.

After the war, Portland enjoyed a little spurt of growth. Two sisters from the Tibbs family moved to town to start a millinery shop. Vernon Kerley married the younger sister, Minnie Jane Tibbs, in 1919. From 1921 to 1925, they had four daughters, Dorothy, Nancy, Carolyn and Jane, who became known as "The Kerley Girls." Kerley's store was again damaged by fire in 1923, which led to more remodeling.

By 1924 a motley assortment of buildings lined Main St.: Kerleys and Goosetrees on its eastern end, and a hotel/boarding house stood on one of the west corners. During those days, Vernon drove through the countryside selling Studebaker wagons and buggies to farm families. Later, Kerleys store also sold Maxwell cars.

After El Kerley's death in January, 1935, the three Kerley brothers prayerfully decided that the business could not support three growing families. So, Vernon became head of the store in Portland. Clarence opened a store in Columbia, and Charlie started another in Lewisburg. It was agreed that the Portland store would support the other locations. By that time the Portland store was well established in selling furniture, appliances, farm supplies, china, crystal, wallpaper and floor coverings. After the advent of car dealers, the store quit selling Maxwell cars as well as saddles, harnesses and other tack—the demand for which had dropped to nothing. Field, garden and tobacco seeds sold well, and everybody brought in their Octagon Soap coupons to trade for pots and pans and other premiums. A small corner was devoted to jewelry, and Kerley's sold a goodly number of the engagement rings for Portland brides of the '40s and '50s.



Clarence (left) and John Vernon Kerley

During the '40s, Kerleys entered the construction business, and by 1950 Kerleys was one of the major plumbing contractors in the region, Vernon bought pipe and equipment by the box car load.

During WWII, Vernon served as Mayor of Portland, working for \$35 per month. Whenever his girls were home from college, they sat around the dining room table and wrote out the city water bills by hand. During those years, Portland built City Lake and installed an expanded water system, laying the groundwork for a sewer system later on. Portland was the scene of army maneuvers during 1942 and 1943. Thousands of

troops were stationed in Portland or passed through it in long convoys. The sight of tanks being unloaded on a sidetrack of the railroad was a common sight, and civilian cars were outnumbered by jeeps and command cars. There was little crime and a lot of fun as the town mothers supervised nightly dances at a city hall that served as a USO. A band played hits such as, *In the Mood* and *Chattanooga Choo-Choo*.

After the war, Vernon's second daughter, Nancy, married William (Bill) Miller of New Jersey. With tax laws becoming more complicated, the store badly needed a professional accountant. Vernon urged his son-in-law, a C.P.A., to move to Portland and join the firm. Bill Miller agreed and stayed with the store, becoming president after Vernon's death and holding that position until he died in 1985. A grandson, John V. Kerley II then became president of the family owned-and-operated corporation.

In the pre-dawn hours of Oct. 16, 1959, a fire destroyed everything in the store. The floors fell through. The west wall crashed into a drug store and damaged the Western Auto store beyond. Fire fighters came from Gallatin, Franklin, Donelson and Nashville. Water supplies failed, and a pond was pumped dry. L&N railroad traffic stopped, and the flames could be seen in Robertson County. Kerley and his daughters set up business in a warehouse on Highway 109N and began making plans to rebuild. It took about three years to complete the new building, stocked and ready for business at the corner of Market Street and Broadway.

Only a few months later, a double-tail tornado dropped out of a March sky over Portland. One tail demolished the warehouse building that had just been vacated. The other tail hit the new store with sufficient force to break nine show windows and, working like a giant egg-beater, to smash through the china and crystal department.

Changing times made it difficult for the store to compete with metropolitan-area shopping malls with easy Interstate highway access, and other businesses eventually bought up spaces in what became known as Kerley Corners.

Sumner's Buntin Found a Place in Texas History

By Jan Shuxteau, Editor

Editor's Note: The fascination that 19th century Sumner Countians had with the early settlement of Texas seems today like an odd footnote to local history, but it was very real. Mexico, which included Texas, gained independence from Spain in 1824 after years of fighting. Bankrupt, the new Mexican government began encouraging immigration into then sparsely populated Texas, hoping settlers would control Indian raids and military encroachment in the region. Americans, especially Southerners, poured into Texas and soon outnumbered the natives. State Historian Walter Durham noted in his book, *Old Sumner*, that Sumner Countians saw opportunity for land speculation and placed ads in local newspapers to sell property in Texas. With true pioneer spirit, some Sumner Countians packed up and moved there.

Durham wrote, "For one young Gallatin lawyer the call of adventure in Texas was overpowering. In 1833, John Wheeler Buntin, nephew of Gov. Joseph Desha of Kentucky, closed his law office, resigned from the state militia, and made his way to Texas on horseback."

Buntin, born Feb. 22, 1807, was the son of Joseph Robert and Phoebe Desha Buntin of Sumner County.

Durham continued, "When he reached Texas, Buntin found the politics of rebellion is a state of advanced ferment. Soon after his arrival, he became secretary of one of the first 'committees of safety,' local activist groups who led the Texas revolution. In 1836, the principality of Bastrop sent Buntin to the Constitutional Convention of the Republic of Texas, where he served on the committee that drafted the constitution and one of its signers. Later he was assigned to Gen. [Sam] Houston's staff. During the Battle of San Jacinto, Buntin and six other Texans captured the Mexican General Santa Anna and brought him before Houston, who accepted the surrender of his forces. A certain 'Capt. Billingsley,' who fought at Buntin's side during the Battle of San Jacinto, described him: 'He could be seen amidst the thickest of the fight. He penetrated so far into the ranks of the defenders of the breastworks that it is miraculous that he was not killed but he came out of the deadly conflict unscathed.'

"Buntin's Princeton education and his reading of the law at Gallatin equipped him better, perhaps, than most to serve in the first Congress of the Republic of Texas. While serving as a member of the Congress, he wrote the bill that established the famous Texas Ranger service. Buntin was

also the author of several other bills, including one that provided the Texas postal service and another that set up the organization of the judiciary of the new republic.

"In early 1837, Col. Buntin returned to Sumner County, where he was married to Mary Howell of Gallatin."

[According to records, Mary Howell was born Feb. 22, 1816. She is described as "statuesque, with brown eyes, wavy hair, soft complexion."

Durham continued, "During the following 12 months [after his return to Gallatin], Buntin raised a company of approximately 40 whites and some 100 slaves that they owned to go to Texas as colonists. Typical of the early Tennessee settlers' caravans, this group included several members from the same family. Col. Buntin's brother Desha Buntin and his wife were in the party, as were his sister and her husband, John Kindall.



John Wheeler Buntin

"Buntin soon discovered that moving his part of 140 persons from Gallatin to Texas was no small chore. The trip from Nashville to New Orleans was made by riverboat without incident. At New Orleans, the party boarded a small steamship to cross the Gulf to their destination in Texas. When the vessel was near the Galveston Island, a Mexican man-of-war, the Julius Caesar, bore down on her and captured all on board. Buntin's entire entourage was taken to Mexico City, where the whites were held in prison for several months. The slaves were set free.

"According to family tradition, when the [white] settlers were freed to return to Sumner County,

they found that their children had been cared for during imprisonment by one of their slaves, a man known only as 'old Uncle Ranch.' With the whites free, Uncle Ranch rounded up the slave members of the party, and all were reunited at Vera Cruz. It is said that in the rush to get all on board a steamer there for New Orleans, Uncle Ranch was inadvertently left ashore. However, his separation from the group was of short duration, as he somehow made his way back to Sumner County and rejoined Col. Buntin.

"Col. Buntin and his wife, undaunted by their Mexican imprisonment, again left Sumner County to go to Texas. This time they were accompanied by Col. and Mrs. William McCleary, Mrs. Buntin's brother-in-law and sister. They again made the trip from Nashville by boat. Their passage was unhindered and, reaching their destination, they entered Texas at Indianola on Matogorta Bay."

According to a Buntin family genealogy, Mary Buntin may have played a big role in gaining the freedom of the Buntin party on their earlier trip to Texas. Mary somehow gained an audience with Santa Anna during the family's imprisonment. She thought diplomacy might gain their release and, in fact, argued successfully that their party were merely U.S. citizens seeking a new home in Texas under the Colonization Law granted by Mexico to Stephen Austin. She mentioned famous friends back home, such as Zachary Taylor. Three days later, the party was released.

More About Buntin in Texas

A story online by Ann Miller Strom for the Texas Historical Association reported that in 1840 Col. Buntin settled on a farm on Cedar Creek in Bastrop County, Texas, where he lived for 17 years. In 1857, he moved to Mountain City, Texas. At some point, he withdrew as a political leader, and he took up the cattle business, which became a large scale operation with the "Turkey Foot" brand.

Strom noted that Buntin joined the First Christian Church at Lockhart and was baptized in Walnut Creek in Caldwell County, Texas. "He was a very tall man" [6'4, according to a family genealogy] "and family members said it was necessary to dam the creek to get sufficient water to immerse him."

Records show that the Buntins had five sons (Joseph, Thomas, Desha, William and James) and a daughter (Elizabeth B. Oatman). Joseph, Thomas, William and James were all given the middle name Howell.

After Mary Buntin's death in September 1862, Col. Buntin married again on July 26, 1865, in Bastrop County to Hermine C. Duval of New Orleans.

Col. Buntin died at his home on August 24, 1879, and was buried in the Robinson Cemetery beside his first wife. In recognition of his patriotic services in behalf of Texas, on Texas Independence Day, March 2, 1932, the remains of John Wheeler and Mary Howell Buntin were moved and reinterred in the State Cemetery in Austin under the auspices of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas.

Historical Society Now Has Facebook Page

Check out the new Sumner County Historical Society's facebook page. We plan to post information on historical events of the past and present. If you have information to share or requests for information regarding Sumner County history, please post on the page or contact Jane Wright at jswright107@gmail.com or 615-452-7704.

Pleasant Grove Began as 'Free for all Denominations'

John F. Creasy

A slight turn to the northeast heading out of Westmoreland will take a traveler through the rural community of Pleasant Grove. Never a place of more than a general store or two, the hamlet in earlier times was centered round its churches, cemetery, school, and the families who enjoyed its relative tranquility.

It started in 1844 with an agreement, a deed, whereby W. M. Blakemore allowed for the setting aside of the Bethpier Meeting House and its adjoining four acres of land "for the use of the neighborhood for a school and a meeting house." The initial trustees appointed to oversee the venture were Stephen R. Gilliam, Squire Brown and Mastin Keen.

Blakemore's deed stipulated that Bethpier was to be "free for all denominations of Christians to preach in without restraint forever." Both Baptists and Methodists used the spot, and revivals frequently turned into protracted meetings lasting two or three weeks at a time. The two denominations often combined their revivals, and the ministers of both would stand on either side of the altar, welcoming those who wished to join the church of their choice. During this time, locals began referring to the area as "Old Brushy", and, still later, the Baptists began to meet alone in the building, the Methodists having constructed a building in a nearby valley.

It wasn't until July of 1873 that the name "Pleasant Grove" was first used to describe the area.

William Caldwell and his wife, Sarah, sold the community 1.6 acres of land adjoining the original Bethpier tract. The land was placed in the hands of Trustees S. A. Epperson, A. Epperson, S. S. Davis, Elvis Rippy, Howard Perry, David Gaines, G. C. Hawkins, Noah Jenkins and G. M. Everett and would be the location for the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. The deed further stipulated the church building be constructed with a second floor to serve as the meeting place for the Trammel Masonic Lodge. The prior Methodist congregation in the nearby valley moved and changed its name from "Pleasant Valley" to "Pleasant Grove", a tribute to a beautiful grove of trees that existed on the new tract.

The Methodist congregation completed their move when their two-story structure was finished later that year. The building was located only a few yards away from the Baptist Church on the original Bethpier tract. Holding with the terms of the original deed, the community's school was also located on the tract. A portion of the land

was set aside to serve as the hamlet's cemetery, and the first individual was soon laid to rest there; Johnny R. Everett, barely a year old and a son of teacher and trustee George M. Everett, died on Sept. 22, 1873. The child was buried on the same day of his death.

The two churches continued to flourish in their adjoining abodes. Residents frequented the general stores of Cyrus Simmons, Stephen Rice Gilliam, Henry Rhodes and Frank Link. Saw mills, corn mills and so forth dotted the landscape and, from 1856 to 1889, a post office served the community. Called Trammel, the mail was delivered three times a week to the facility from the ABC post office at nearby Turners Station on the C & N Railway, the rail line having been constructed in 1886. Ben Cliburn made the delivery via a two-wheeled buggy drawn by a rabbit-jawed mule, according to the late A.L.



Seated: Phillip Rice Creasy and his wife, Nancy Durham Creasy Standing (left to right): Myrtle Creasy Brown, Johnny Creasy, Edward Creasy P. R. Creasy was a Justice of the Peace and member of the Sumner County Quarterly Court from Pleasant Grove. His wife, Nancy, was the daughter of Dr. Durham of the community. Myrtle Creasy Brown was the mother of daredevil J. T. "Crash" Brown.

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rabbit-jawed mule, according to the late A. L. Nimmo. Many of the smaller post offices, including Trammel, shuttered with the opening of the post office at Westmoreland and its network of rural free delivery carriers.

A new school was built in 1923 on land owned by Phillip Rice Creasy, a member of the Sumner County Quarterly Court and son-in-law of Robert Durham, the community's doctor. The Pleasant Grove schoolhouse would remain in operation until the late 1950s. Its last teachers were Mrs. Lillian Morris, who had spent much of her career there, and Jimmy Lee Brown, later the long-time principal of Westmoreland Elementary School. After closing as a school, the building continued to serve the community as its beloved community center, hosting reunions, dinners and auctions until it was destroyed by fire on Christmas Eve of 1989. A new community center was built on the site of the old school house.

With the construction of a new building in 1953, the Pleasant Grove Methodist Church demolished the old 1873 structure, and the community's Trammel Masonic Lodge closed its doors and merged with the lodge in Westmoreland where it continues to thrive as Trammel Lodge #439.

The Pleasant Grove Cemetery is now one of the largest cemeteries in the northern part of Sumner County. It is managed by a board of directors and is actively supported by the local community. Those at rest there include Knox Doss, former Superintendent of Sumner Schools, former Sheriff and County Judge W. R. Brown, former State Senator Arthur V. Louthan, renowned mid-century daredevil and auto-enthusiast J. T. "Crash" Brown, and a host of doctors, lawyers, teachers, merchants, soldiers and community leaders.

Though the Methodist congregation at Pleasant Grove closed its doors in May, 2017 and was absorbed by the Westmoreland Methodist Church, the building remains standing and has been recently restored as the sanctuary of the historic neighboring Pleasant Grove Missionary Baptist Church. Many descendants of the hamlet's earliest families—Brown, Gilliam, Keen, Doss, Gregory, Creasy, Burnley, Simmons, Morris, and Dorris, to name a few—still reside among the lush green fields of Sumner County's "Pleasant Grove".

Dominant Trees No More

By Jan Shuxteau, Editor

If they came back home to Middle Tennessee today, our early settlers would not recognize the forests or even the wilderness areas with which they were most familiar. Tennessee's most majestic trees, the American chestnuts, which dominated the old woods for centuries, are long gone. All that remains are the occasional place names, such as Chestnut Ridge near Lynchburg, where my father, Ben Waggoner, grew up and recalled the way things were around 1930.

That's when the blight that killed Middle Tennessee's chestnuts was most deadly. Michael V. Stump, owner of a surveying company in Crossville, Tenn., a graduate of Perdue University in Forestry Management and brother to Sumner County Archives director, Bonnie Martin, noted that he used to find big chestnut stumps—very decay resistant—while surveying in the 1960s and '70s. Now, he no longer finds even stumps. The last one he saw was in Pickett Co. It took three people to get their arms around the stump, which was over nine feet in diameter.

Most American chestnuts grew on dry ground at the tops of ridges and rich slopes facing east. The tree was late-flowering and withstood frost.

An estimated 4 billion chestnuts grew in the eastern U.S. a little more than a century ago. "The American chestnut tree once dominated the eastern half of the U.S. Because it could grow rapidly and attain huge sizes, the tree was often the outstanding visual feature in both urban and rural landscapes," according to The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF).

The goal of TACF and The University of Tennessee's Tree Improvement Program is to bring back American chestnuts that are blight-resistant. UT's program has researched the trees for decades. It reports that there were still a few surviving trees in the early 1960s, when their program started. These were grafted; breeding and testing began and continues.

The chestnut lumber industry flourished until the trees died out. Early settlers used the trees for log cabins, especially foundations. The wood was rot resistant. Posts, poles, flooring, and railroad ties were made from chestnut lumber, as were furniture and musical instruments.

The tree's edible nuts were harvested as a cash crop to feed livestock. Also, the nuts were the single most important food source for a variety of wildlife, especially bears and birds. In addition, American chestnuts, sweeter than other varieties, were sold by the train-load to be roasted and eaten by people, especially at Christmas.

Shivel Drive Is the Heart of Old Hendersonville

By Jan Shuxteau, Editor

(Editor's Note: This is part of a story I wrote as a staff writer for the Hendersonville *Star News*. It originally ran sometime in the late 1970s and again as it appears here in a *Star News* special section entitled *The Progress Edition* on Feb. 20, 1980, as "Shivel Was First City Subdivision")

Walter Shivel [b. 1886, d.1964], for whom Shivel Dr. was named, began the monumental task in 1937 of gathering land to build a subdivision in Hendersonville in the early '40s. This was no easy undertaking because most of the land was in the hands of a few old families who had no intention of selling.

Originally part of the estate built by the Crittenden family in the mid-1800s, the site was a 16-acre parcel of land located from Gallatin Road down Shivel Dr., then unpaved.

Peter H. Harlin, a coal yard owner, held the property for some years and attempted to subdivide it, but poor health prevented him from carrying out his plans.

After Harlin's death, the land passed quickly through different hands to O.K. Richman, a traveling salesman who inherited it. Richman was a wanderer and did not want to be tied down with the property, so he sold it to the tall, dark-eyed Shivel.

Four additional acres came from Mrs. Bill Gore, a widow whose in-laws lived nearby.

People coming into the area to work at the big Dupont plant across the river made Shivel's timing perfect for the subdivision. Those newcomers were looking for garden spots to build their homes and settle in, and the subdivision was just what they had in mind.

Shivel divided the land into 42 lots, each about 50-feet wide. Some of the people bought two lots to get more frontage. He surveyed for the road, and the county sent out a tractor to cut it.

The subdivision caught on well, one of Shivel's friends recalls. Before Shivel had the land two years, he'd made about \$10,000 on it.

But money was not the sole goal of Shivel in building the homes. It was the idea of providing homes for people who needed them. This was evident in the way he handled the financing. Some residents remember paying only \$15 down and \$15 a month for their houses.

One resident, Wister Morrison, who has [had] lived on Shivel Drive since its inception, remembered discussing building to Walter Shivel [while] in the old Bloodworth's General Store.

Shivel encouraged Morrison to choose a lot and go ahead and build while property on the street was for sale. Because Morrison had helped him set up the subdivision, Shivel offered him a special deal on his home—five percent interest and payments made any way he could.

Some old-timers on Shivel Drive recall mules being hitched up to skids and guidelines to move one house two blocks to a new location."

More About Shivel

In his book, *The City by the Lake, A History of Hendersonville, Tennessee 1780-1969*, attorney-author Tim Takacs provided further information about Hendersonville subdivisions. He wrote, "Walter Shivel was not the first to think of locating a subdivision in Hendersonville, although from the available evidence we can perhaps credit him as being the first to see his idea through to completion."

Takacs noted that P.W. Wheeler on June 23, 1914, recorded a survey for a four-acre subdivision behind the old Hendersonville Church of Christ, which was located on the corner of Gallatin Road and Shivel Drive, what is now Harlan Avenue. In addition, in 1916 A.W. Hobby tried to develop a subdivision on the corner of Gallatin Road and Center Point, and the Bransford Realty Co. divided the 20-acre Murphree Farm near Sandersville into 10 tracts.

Takacs wrote, "The Cages, Clarks, Roneys, Reeces, McMurtrys, Hurts, Morrisons, Searcys, Etheridges, Dixons and Comers all built houses, most of them in the Shivel Addition that formed the nucleus of Hendersonville's first urban, residential area. One man remembered that when he was a boy, his grandmother saved her egg money, approximately \$2,000 and bought a house on Shivel Drive from one of the developers. In the early '40s, after Mr. and Mrs. L.W. Oliver, Sr., bought their house on Shivel Drive, the homeowners chipped in to have the street paved, the first residential street in Hendersonville to be paved. With new people moving in, in 1939 and 1940, the Methodist Church and the Church of Christ added Sunday School classrooms and made other improvements to their structures."

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McKee, and they too have never heard of their half great aunt Bessie!

However, local newspapers reveal that Bessie was a member of Gallatin social whirl. She attended numerous social functions during the 1890's. The Fleur De Lis Club of young ladies frequently entertained the young men of Gallatin in royal style. Parlors were used for the quick step and waltz while settees and hammocks were set on beautifully lit lawns for quiet tete-a-tetes.

Social life of the young crowd revolved around The University Street home of Emily Turner Peyton, then in her 60's. Emily, daughter of the famous Bailie Peyton, was well educated and a world traveler. Her influence on Sumner's youth was unsurpassed. She was the first female paid by the United States in foreign service, when in 1849 her father was minister to Chile. She later owned a boarding school for young ladies and was in the 1870's elected engrossing clerk for the Tennessee State Senate.

Bessie had a firm foundation upon which she could build a successful life, but it was not to last.



Bessie Dismukes

In December 1902, she traveled to Oklahoma City to visit relatives. The first leg of her journey was from Nashville to Memphis on the L&N railway. The night after she got to Memphis, she was found drugged, lying in mud near the corner of South and Shelby streets at about 8:15 p.m. Her skirts were bedraggled, and her hair covered her face. She was attired in a traveling suit with hat to match. Arriving at the police station, she was insensible, and her breathing was indistinct. She was taken by ambulance to the hospital.

When later interviewed, she related that a young man boarded the train at McKenzie. "He was a man of pleasing manner and did not appear to be rude," she said. "Upon arriving in Memphis, he asked me to take a stroll. We went to get a glass

of wine, and soon afterward I became dazed. I remember nothing after that."

The young man was Tom Biles, a traveling representative for the Nashville American and owner/editor of the McKenzie Herald newspaper. She described him in detail. At this point, she refused to believe he had done anything wrong. After all, he was the editor of the McKenzie Herald, a married man, a Mason and a member of other leading fraternities. She refused to prosecute him, and the matter was dropped.

Back in Gallatin, Bessie's social life resumed. In the early summer of 1903, she spent a month at Epperson Springs with her father and stepmother. Upon returning to Gallatin, she contacted her new gentleman friend, Robert. He was Robert Andrew Hill of Oxford, Miss., who had moved with his parents, Judge George Robert Hill and Marietta Hill, to Gallatin in January 1903. He was educated at Vanderbilt and Cumberland universities.

Bessie's father died on July 20. On Aug. 1, she eloped with Robert. Strangely, he was engaged to a young lady from Mississippi, who was visiting his parents when he eloped. Robert and Bessie went to Nashville on their honeymoon, where they stayed at the Maxwell House Hotel. Five days later, he committed suicide by drinking morphine in a fit of despondency. Bessie grew alarmed when he did not come back until 4 a.m. He had been drinking at the nearby Climax Saloon. Upon returning to his room, he asked Bessie not to lecture him. She went to bed, but at 6:30 she was awakened by Robert's difficult breathing and rang the bell for assistance. Dr. J.W. Maddin, Jr., was summoned and found that Robert had taken a lethal dose of morphine.

When interviewed later, William H. Embusch, the bartender at the Climax, said Hill told him he would never see him again, and he gave a porter a letter addressed to M.P. Estes, who was one of Hill's college classmates. The bartender said he asked Hill if he intended to shuffle off and that Hill had replied, "Wait until you see the newspapers tomorrow and you will know."

Also interviewed, Bessie said, "After our marriage my husband gave me no evidence of depression or low spirits until the evening before he died when he began drinking. He was cheerful, and I had no reason to believe that he was not happy."

Bessie shipped Robert's remains to Oxford. She, herself, disappeared. I have not been able to trace her. Two days after Robert's death, she told people that she was going to Virginia. I can find no word to show if she arrived at her destination, no word of whether she lived on or died. Indeed, her indirect descendants have no recollection of ever hearing her name.

(PARKER, Continued from Page 1)

had an inclination for exploration, and he surveyed land in Tennessee. He made several trips from Virginia to Sumner County in the 1780s and was actively searching for buyable property to build a home for his family by September 1790. That's when he gave Sumner attorney Elmore Douglass power of attorney to purchase land in his name while he returned to Hampshire County to get his children. By that time, Parker was a widower with nine children, eight of whom chose to move to Sumner with their 60-something dad. (Once here, a lot of the family stayed on through generations. Bob Parker of Hendersonville and his family are among Nathaniel's descendants through his son Robert.)

Parker and his children first went to Morgan's Fort, about 2.5 miles north of Anthony Bledsoe's Station, where they and other settlers congregated for protection from Indian raids. "Here, at the fort, Nathaniel...met Mary Ramsey Bledsoe. The two were drawn to one another and eventually married on Dec. 4, 1791," reported Sherry Falcon, a Parker descendent, in a 2001 report about Parker available at Sumner County Archives. Some historians say that Nathaniel and Anthony were likely acquainted and had even traveled in the Cumberland Gap together.

"The marriage of Mrs. Bledsoe and Nathaniel Parker must have caused some heads to turn, the couple now owned combined real estate assets of more than 16,000 acres and an even larger personal estate," said Falcon.

Once they were married, Parker, by law, had control over the estate of Mary's deceased husband Anthony and became an executor of his will, which provided for his children. She was executrix.

There is a big question about how romantically "drawn to each other" the couple actually were when they married. Family tradition holds that Mary was engaged to Thomas Sharpe (Bigfoot) Spencer, a well-known family friend, and took up with Parker only after Spencer's murder by Indians in April of 1791.

She gave birth to her last child, Nancy, in 1792 though possibly 1793—the date is unclear. Parker's treatment of Nancy has caused some descendants and historians to think he questioned Nancy's legitimacy. He seemed to harbor a grudge. In his will, registered in Sumner County on Feb. 25, 1811, he left property to all of his other living children. To Nancy, he left "one dollar and no more" and referred to her as his "second wife's daughter." Of course, his animosity could have arisen out of his acrimonious separation from her mother, who reared her.

The Parker separation began less than a year after the marriage. Mary took baby Nancy and moved out of Nathaniel's house while he was gone. She said he abused her, and she wouldn't go back to him—a big scandal. Time passed; it was evident there would be no reconciliation. She sued for divorce—an even bigger scandal and a legal maneuver that was not easy to do.

Breaking Up Was Hard to Do

Like most of America, Tennessee followed the English common-law rule that a woman "became one" with her husband when she married him. Therefore, she could not bring a lawsuit on her own but only under the "protection" of her husband. This was a particular problem if the woman wanted to sue her husband, such as Mary did for divorce and income. The legal solution was to allow a wife to bring suit under the name of a "next friend," a man, often a relative, who would act as her guardian and represent her before the court.

The Parker divorce trial is recorded in the *Andrew Jackson Papers*. An Editorial Note describes it:

"On April 29, 1800, Mary Parker by her 'next friend,' her brother, Josiah Ramsey, delivered to Jackson a petition for divorce from bed and board against her husband, Nathaniel Parker. Mrs. Parker alleged that her husband's ill treatment had forced her to leave the farm on which they resided and that the couple had lived apart from each other for three years and six months. Mrs. Parker sought issuance of a divorce decree and an award of separate maintenance.

"Nathaniel Parker subsequently filed an answer with the court in which he alleged that his wife had left his house without cause about one year after their marriage. Parker denied ever having mistreated his wife or ever having threatened to do so. In addition to seeking a dismissal of his wife's petition, Parker requested that his wife's prayer for an award of separate maintenance also be denied on the grounds that she had squandered some \$300 of the defendant's money, which he asserted was more than the value of her share of his property.

"At its May Term 1802, the court entered an order that the depositions of Anne Ramsey and Susanah Penny be taken and that the cause be set for trial at the court's ensuing November Term. At the trial of the matter on Nov. 12, 1802, the court, with Judges Jackson, White and Campbell presiding, sent the jury out to render a special verdict upon two questions of fact: (a) whether the defendant had mistreated the plaintiff as alleged and (b) whether the defendant's

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(PARKER, Continued from Page 10)

conduct had forced the plaintiff to leave his house as alleged. The jury found that, although the defendant had not treated his wife any worse than she had treated him, the defendant's conduct in fact had forced the plaintiff from his house.

"Twelve days later, on November 24, the court entered its final decree signed by Judges Jackson and White. The court granted the plaintiff a divorce from bed and board and awarded her separate maintenance in the amount of \$200 per annum to be paid quarterly.

What Mary Said

Mary's petition to the court accused Nathaniel of repeated ill treatment and unhusbandlike conduct, which she said compelled her three years and six months separation from him and her desire for divorce. She said he had enjoyed all the "privileges and emoluments arising from the property" they jointly possessed and had refused to "furnish her with such other assistance and property..."

Among the Jackson papers is speculation that Mary's separation from Parker "might have been prompted by the litigation over the substantial Bledsoe estate in which she was engaged with Parker as executors of the estate..."

What Nathaniel Said

Nathaniel told the court that his "wife Mary after having lived about one year with him as his wife left the house...when he was absent, without any good cause." He denied that he "did beat, abuse or evilly treat his said wife, as she has untruly charged or threatened so to do, or render his life and condition intolerable, or force her to leave him or use her in any manner different from what a husband ought to use his wife."

Nathaniel further claimed that Mary "wasted and destroyed property and money" that belonged to him "to the amount of \$300 or thereabouts," which he said was more than her share of all the property that he owned. He said that she should not be entitled to any more money from him then or in the future. He went on to say that he was "always willing and desirous," for her to return to his house and conduct herself as a wife ought to do and that he would "treat her well and tenderly as a husband ought to treat his wife and to provide for her every thing that was necessary and proper for her support." He said it was "obstinacy," not his treatment of her that kept her from returning to him. He asked the court to dismiss Mary's petition for divorce, which they did not do.

In Tribute to the Life of Nathan Harsh

On April 10, 2020, Bledsoe's Lick Historical Association lost a member and a true friend who championed the rich heritage of our world in Castalian Springs, Sumner County, and the State of Tennessee. Nathan Harsh's influence and personal involvement have been key in the preservation of Wynnewood and Bledsoe's Fort Historical Park. For this, BLHA owes him a debt beyond words. At my request, we extend the following tribute in Nathan's honor, eloquently penned by Kenneth Thomson.

—*Kathleen Haynes*---

"Sumner County's historical community has lost a true patron. From his youth, Nathan Harsh displayed a great appreciation for his historic surroundings that he quickly embraced and nurtured throughout his long life. In the tinted portraiture of his journey, he encompassed every historical venue of our world. He was a liberal benefactor both privately and publicly in the preservation of everything historical from structures and furnishings to the recording of oral history. He compiled a wonderful book documenting the beauty of Tennessee furniture created in the ante-bellum South by true craftsmen. His intellect was of a judicial order which led him through a busy and successful life. We should attempt to follow his example in creating our own historical legacy. Since Nathan's death, I am now the last of the original 15 members appointed to the Bledsoe's Lick Historical Association Board of Directors by Mr. George Winchester Wynne 50 years ago.

--*Kenneth Calvin Thomson, Jr.*---

On Feb. 18, 1970, the original incorporators of BLHA were appointed. Listed in the order they signed the BLHA Charter, they are: Nathan Jams Harsh, J. Harold Whitaker, William Brimage Bate, Jr., Leon Henry Shoulders, Walter T. Durham, Oscar E. Martin, John B. Garrott, Dr. Thomas Parrish, George Winchester Wynne, Cullen Edward Douglass, Robert B. Alexander, Hugh Oliver Love, Jr., Dr. James W. Thomas, Harris E. Ferguson and Kenneth Calvin Thomson, Jr.

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