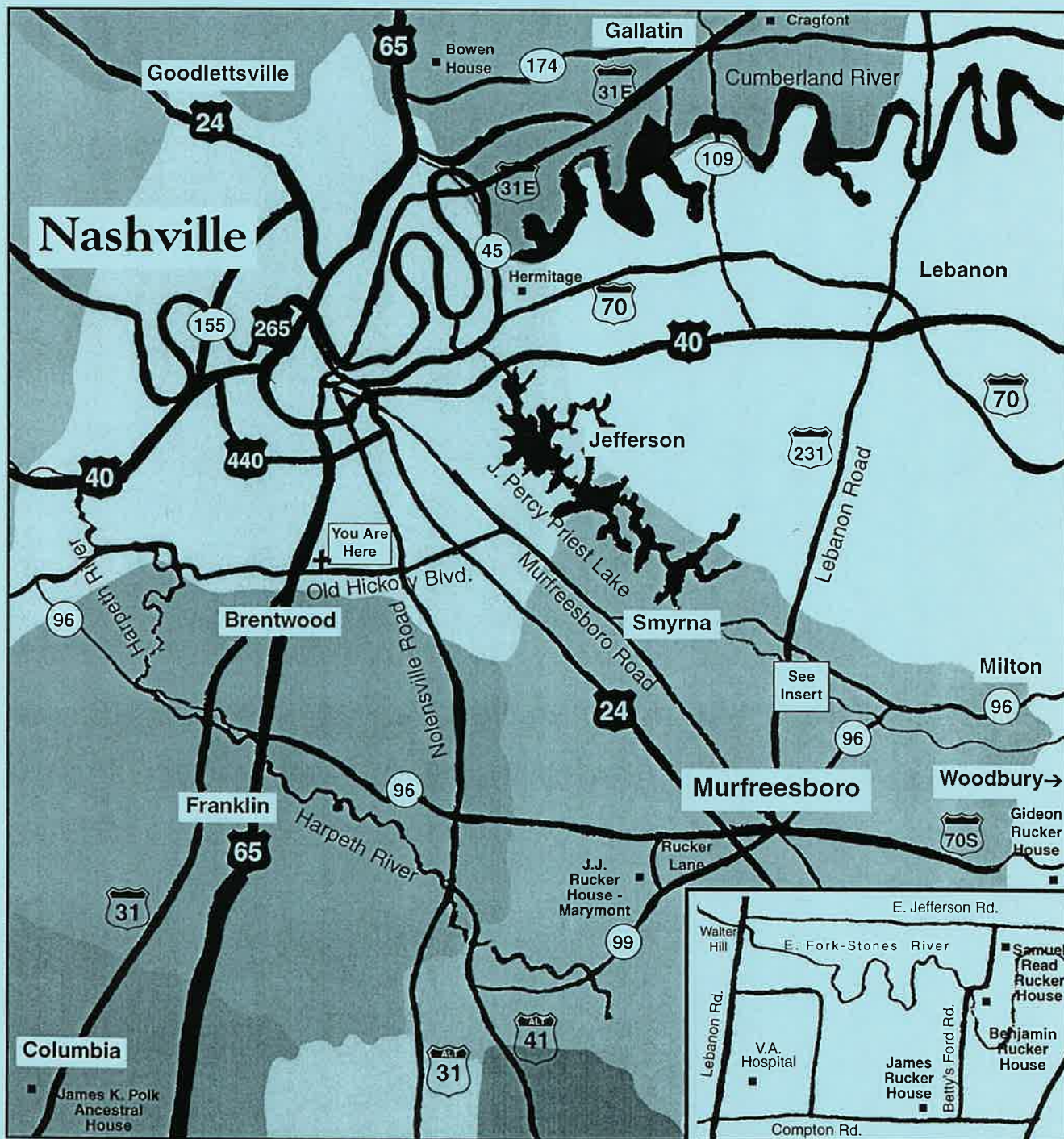


200 YEARS OF RUCKERS IN MIDDLE TENNESSEE

BY MARY RUCKER ESTES



NATIONAL RUCKER REUNION

JUNE 12-14, 1998

NASHVILLE, FRANKLIN, BRENTWOOD, MURFREESBORO, AND HERMITAGE, TENNESSEE

HOW RUCKERS CAME-SAW-CONQUERED

It was Peter Rucker's great-grandchildren who crossed the Appalachians and ventured into the choice lands of Middle Tennessee. They were not the earliest settlers who came to the Cumberland region. In 1779 the first pioneers who were led by James Robertson, and John Donelson hardly knew the hardships ahead of them — the treacherous Tennessee River if they came by boat, the barely passable trails if by horseback, or the fifteen years of Indian attacks and raids.

Peter Rucker's great-grandchildren, who came nearly twenty years later, traveled over crude roads built to accommodate wagons into a country that finally was free of Indian hostility, and with their pockets full of money. They, too, were pioneers but they saw to it that the odds of finding success were slanted in their favor.

The Ruckers had been tobacco farmers in Virginia. Tobacco farmers typically moved to new lands after their crops began to deplete the soil. In Virginia each Rucker generation had some of their number who left their father's home, and settled further into the west or south, closer to the mountains. With the end of the Revolutionary War the rich lands in Kentucky and Tennessee sang a siren song to those who felt their opportunities were greater in the country west. By 1795, especially for those who lived on the borders of the Appalachians, almost everyone caught "moving fever."

The sons and daughters of Benjamin Rucker (John, Peter), who lived in Amherst County, Virginia, were typical of those who were drawn by new dreams in what was to them a place of fabled opportunities. It was the Nashville area that seemed to offer the greatest rewards. Although the town itself had only about 500 inhabitants, there were fertile bottom lands along several rivers flowing toward the Cumberland. The lands assured productivity and rivers provided a way to get products to market. What made these Rucker immigrants unique was being the children of their father, Benjamin.

Benjamin Rucker was a wealthy man. Along with his brother Anthony, he had invented the James River Batteau. The batteau made it possible to float his tobacco to ports where it could be sold for good profits. Benjamin Rucker also was an attorney, Justice of Peace, vestryman of St. Matthew's Church, and held other offices in Amherst County. He had owned thousands of acres in Amherst

County, but he began disposing of some of his land after 1790. By 1809 in a very complex will, Benjamin Rucker left both cash and land to his four sons and three daughters. In addition, different gifts already made to his children were cited. Perhaps the greatest legacy Benjamin Rucker left his children was an understanding of how to make friends with those of influence and advantage. Long after Benjamin Rucker was dead, his neighbor Thomas Jefferson, testified on his behalf that Benjamin and his brother Anthony actually had invented that James River Batteau.

By the last years of the 1790's the best land in the immediate vicinity of Nashville was already taken by earlier settlers. Yet the Rucker brothers, James and Thomas, came to the Clover Bottom area where lay the choicest land and where the most prominent people lived. John Donelson's son's property was there and their sister, Rachel, who had married Andrew Jackson, lived just across Stones River at Hunter's Hill. Andrew Jackson ran a store in the area as well as having recently served as the new State of Tennessee's first Congressman. Jackson was appointed Senator in 1797, but he returned to Tennessee to work out some serious personal financial problems by 1798. Davidson County deed records show that James and Thomas Rucker and their brother-in-law, Zachariah Dawson, first bought 1806 acres of land in 1797 on the Stones River from John Caffrey another son-in-law of John Donelson. Andrew Jackson was probably glad to meet the Rucker men.

The Rucker brothers continued to buy land. In 1799, for the sum of \$2,130.33, six hundred and forty acres were purchased from John Caffrey. This is the land to which they probably moved. It was on the Stones River, but further downstream than the first purchase. This place was called Stoners Lick, and was very close to where Andrew Jackson would acquire, in 1804, the land of the Hermitage.

George Deaderick, a overachieving real estate agent, was the richest man in Nashville. Deaderick, who would form in 1807 Tennessee's first bank, the Bank of Nashville, in 1799 sold 640 acres to James and Thomas' brother, Gideon, land far up on the East Fork of Stones River.

Deaderick also sold to a William Rucker 640 acres located on the Big Harpeth River. This William is probably the son of John, a brother to Benjamin Rucker making him a cousin to Benjamin's sons. Other cousins, also sons of John, went to Kentucky but within a generation their children came to this area too. The Harpeth River flows north through the south-western portion of Davidson

County before emptying into the Cumberland River. Williamson County, which was formed in 1799 from Davidson, has miles of the many twists and turns of the Big Harpeth River, the Little Harpeth River, the South Fork of the Harpeth, and the East Fork and West Forks of the Harpeth River. William Ruckers of several generations, and their brothers and sisters, made their homes here. As if not to miss out on a good thing, in 1797 James and Thomas Rucker, and their brother-in-law Zach Dawson, also bought 640 acres on the Harpeth River near William Rucker's purchase.

In May of 1802 General Isaac Shelby, who had completed his term as the first governor of Kentucky, sold his huge 5,000 acre tract that was given to him by the State of North Carolina for his Revolutionary War services, to James and Thomas Rucker, and one Simon Miller. Simon Miller was probably the nephew of the wives of James and Thomas. He had married James Rucker's daughter, Lucinda, in April, 1802, making the relationship even closer. This land lies on the East Fork of the Stones River. The 5,000 acres which cost \$7,000.00 was divided within months by the purchasers who sold to each other specific amounts and locations. It adjoined the land that was bought from John Caffrey in 1797 by James and Thomas Rucker and Zachariah Dawson. It appears that Issac Shelby gave them a good deal, for they had paid Caffrey \$3, 612 for 1,806 acres.



Nancy Ann Read Rucker

*Wife of James Rucker
(Benjamin, John, Peter)*

MAKING THE MOST OF IT

The Middle Tennessee frontier filled very quickly. Its new inhabitants saw themselves as civilized people and began to work toward realizing their vision of prosperity as soon as they could manage. James, Thomas, and Gideon Rucker built impressive brick houses in the first decade of the Nineteenth Century. James and Thomas, who had bought their land together, were close neighbors.

Thomas Rucker has left a record of being the more involved in the government and politics of his new homeland. He was one of the signers of a 1803 petition to create a new county south of Davidson and east of Williamson counties. To organize the new county, named Rutherford, the court met in Thomas Rucker's house in January of 1804. At this first county court meeting, taxes and

tavern rates were set, money appropriated for the poor, and seven court members were sworn in, including Thomas Rucker. A committee was also appointed to select a county seat.

Already plans for a town had been laid out on a piece of land rising between the east and west forks of Stones River. It was a likely location. The town was named "Jefferson" for the President of the United States. A brick courthouse was built and stores and taverns appeared. The river bank became crowded with wharves and warehouses. A considerable amount of boat building developed at Jefferson. In addition to rafts and barges built and in use there a keelboat is described in the history book, *Rutherford County*, by Mabel Pittard as "from 40 to 80 feet long and from seven to ten feet wide. The vessel was pointed at both ends and the midsection was usually covered. The crew stood on a cleated walkway that ran around the gunwales while poling the boat upstream. Steering was done by a long oar that pivoted at the stern. The average capacity of a keelboat was from 15 to 30 tons." This sounds very much like the Ruckers' James River Batteau.

In a country without highways and railroads it was the river that opened the way for trade. Goods such as gunpowder, glass, nails, coffee, and whiskey, came into Jefferson primarily down the Ohio River from Pittsburgh. Business thrived with the products of Rutherford County—corn, tobacco, whiskey, and hides—leaving for a river journey into Nashville or all the way to New Orleans. On the Thomas Rucker property Rutherford County's first mill was built, and it is believed, also a still.

Three months after the first meeting of the Rutherford County Court the second term opened on April 1804, at the home of Simon Miller, the son-in-law of James Rucker. James, himself, was appointed Cotton Inspector. The cotton gin had been invented only about ten years earlier but most likely the farmers of Rutherford County, as had Andrew Jackson recently, saw the future of the productivity that could be theirs with a "machine that did the work of forty hands."

Not surprisingly, rough roads were soon hacked out of the developing county and in only a few years the majority of residents lived to the south of Jefferson, which is close to the northern boundary of Rutherford County. By 1811 these citizens demanded a more central location for their county seat. Thomas Rucker was one who offered his property. Fierce competition ensued between Rucker, Charles Ready, and Capt. William Lytle. It was Lytle's donation of sixty acres which lay five miles south of the Ruckers that won out by a vote of four to three. The new town was laid out, lots sold, and the Tennessee General Assembly designated the new county seat as "Cannonsburgh," after the

member of the Assembly who represented Rutherford County. However the name was changed a month later to "Murfreesborough," honoring Col. Hardy Murfree who had recently died in nearby Williamson County. The episode seemed to cool Thomas Rucker's interest in politics.

Gideon Rucker may have seen advantages in locating the new county seat at either Ready's site or at the chosen one of Lytle's rather than at his brother Thomas's. He had land in two places, one parcel to the east, fifteen miles up the Stone's River, and another at the mouth of Locke's Creek nearer Ready's holdings. He was in the process of developing both. Gideon also owned land near James and Thomas so he was in a position of being ready for several possibilities. In 1833 an area in eastern Rutherford County was taken into the formation of the new county of Cannon. Gideon's property there now lies in Cannon County.

MARRIAGES

At least six of Benjamin Rucker's seven children came to Tennessee. There were four brothers, James, Thomas, Gideon, and Bennett. Their three sisters were Sophia, Lucy, and Mildred. The brothers all married daughters of William Read of Bedford County, Virginia.

James, the oldest, had married first in 1781, Euphan Tate, who was the daughter of Henry Tate. Henry Tate's land adjoined that of James in Campbell County, Virginia. James and Euphan had four children, Elizabeth (Betsy), Lucinda, Henry Tate, and Jonathan.

Betsy was nineteen years old when she married Severn Donelson in 1801. Severn was the brother of Rachel Jackson. One of the most unusual stories in Rucker history, is that of the adoption of the newborn twin son of Betsy and Severn Donelson by childless Rachel and Andrew Jackson. Some Jackson biographers say that Betsy was weak and ill at the time. The Donelsons already had three other young children, and Rachel was desperate to have a child.

Betsy and Severn had three other children after the twins were born in 1808, but Betsy was left a widow with a two-year old in 1818. Betsy died at 46 in 1828. In James Rucker's will dated 1819, Betsy is the only one of his children that he designates as his "beloved." Her baby became Andrew Jackson Jr. and lived most of his life at the Hermitage, the home of Andrew Jackson. Andrew Jackson Jr. and many of his family are buried there in the garden cemetery. His portrait can be seen at the Hermitage. The twin's brother was Thomas Jefferson Donelson. Severn and Betsy Rucker Donelson are buried in the graveyard of the Hermitage Church.

James Rucker's second wife was Nancy Ann Read who he married January 31, 1788. Thomas Rucker married her sister, Sallie, in January of 1793. Gideon married their sister Joycey, December 1793. Bennett, the youngest of the brothers, married Johanna Read, September 1802.

Sophia, daughter of Benjamin Rucker, married Joseph Burrus. They settled in the vicinity of the homes of her brothers, James and Thomas. Sarah the daughter of Sophia married Aaron V. Brown. Brown found political success being elected to Tennessee House of Representatives and Senate, the U.S. Congress, Governor of Tennessee, and was appointed Postmaster General of the United States. But Aaron Brown had the misfortune of losing his wife, Sarah, when she was only 35 years old. They had five children, and one of their great-grandsons was also elected governor of Tennessee.

Mildred, the second sister, married a Mr. Brown according to family histories, but Browns are abundant everywhere. Some have thought she also came to Tennessee.

The oldest sister was Lucy. She married Zacariah Dawson a minister, and had five children. They moved with her brothers to Tennessee, buying land with James and Thomas in 1797. But even the most considered plans sometimes are shattered. Zacariah died in 1799. Lucy's life took another turn. A sweetheart from her girlhood, Colonel John McDaniel, hearing of her situation, came to Tennessee and persuaded her to return with him to Virginia. They married in the fall of 1799, and had six children.

It is family tradition that the four Rucker brothers who came into Rutherford County were ministers of four different denominations. That James Rucker was a Methodist minister is documented in many places. Gideon was a minister in the Baptist Church. Thomas and Bennett do not seem to have left a record of any ministerial service but Thomas gave a plot of his land for the building of a Baptist Church. The old Baptist Church on Lebanon Road today is situated on the property that once belonged to Thomas Rucker. Like so many Baptists in Middle Tennessee, Thomas and his son Thomas Jr. became part of the Christian/Church of Christ movement. They both were founding members of Murfreesboro's East Main Christian/Church of Christ in 1833. Further south, Gideon too, became active in establishing a Church of Christ in his neighborhood.

CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN

James Rucker got a head start on having children over his brothers, and he had more of them. In all, James had fourteen, thirteen of whom grew to maturity, married and had children of their own. His family's generations overlapped.

His older children began their families at the time that his youngest children were being born. Most of the sons who grew up in Rutherford County stayed there.

Western Tennessee, who was born about the time that his father first purchased land in Tennessee, was one exception. He moved to Lauderdale County, Alabama where he began a medical practice. The young doctor's life was cut short. When on a journey with his wife and three children back to visit his family in Rutherford County he fell sick and died just south of Columbia, Tennessee in Maury County. Western's wife, Frances, died four years later and his children were reared by his brother Benjamin.

James Rucker left approximately 300 acres to each of his sons in his will, but he evidently gave them the property as they came to maturity for by the time his will was written some had already either taken possession of their share or even sold it. The son, William Read made several interesting choices. Twenty-two-year-old William was commissioned as a Surgeon's Mate in the War of 1812. In his will James states that William had already sold his land to Dr. Yandall. In other sources it is learned that William Read studied medicine with Dr. Wilson Yandall becoming a physician of good reputation in Murfreesboro.

Dr. William Read Rucker married Susan Childress, the daughter of a successful merchant in Murfreesboro, whose other daughter, Sarah, married an up-and-coming lawyer and politician—James K. Polk. During the years from 1819 to 1825 Murfreesboro played an important role in the development of Tennessee government, and in the careers of those who would enter the arena of national service. A permanent state capitol had not yet been chosen, and Murfreesboro was designated as the site for the meetings of the State General Assemblies. It was Dr. Rucker who served as host mayor during the years 1822 and 1823 to the likes of future President Andrew Jackson, James K. Polk as clerk of the Senate, David Crockett as a member of the Legislature, and Sam Houston as adjutant-general. Dr. Rucker's job could not have been easy when the courthouse where the Assembly had been meeting burned, and other accommodations had to be found. The Presbyterian Church offered the best solution to the situation.

It was in the midst of these heady times that Sarah and James K. Polk married, and as part of the wedding festivities were entertained in the home of Dr. and Mrs. William Read Rucker. The favor was returned when their daughters, Sarah and Johanna, were each invited for lengthy visits to their aunt's home in the White House when James K. Polk was president. Susan Childress Rucker and William Read Rucker's portrait are displayed in the Ancestral Home of James K. Polk in Columbia, Tennessee. It is open to the public.

It was not lack of sentiment that caused William Read Rucker to sell his inheritance, or a dislike of country living. After his mother's death in 1845, William bought the interests of the other heirs of his father's property and old homeplace. It appears he, his wife, and their children lived there for many years.

Ruckers have a history of making fortunate marriages. Thomas Rucker's son Edmund married Louise Winchester the daughter of General James Winchester, who was prominent in both the Revolution and the War of 1812. Winchester along with Andrew Jackson and John Overton were founders of the city of Memphis and Louise grew up in one of the most remarkable early homes in Middle Tennessee, Cragfont. Edmund, like many of the second generation in Tennessee bought and sold land, moved several times, and sired notable children of his own.

But fortunate marriages are not always made with a partner who had a wealthy or important family. Susan Edmundson, a local girl who came to Tennessee with her widowed mother, married Joseph Burrus, James Rucker's youngest son. Susan was able to rear her family to be regarded as respectable although her husband was ill most of their married life, and they lived among her more affluent in-laws. Her children married well, too.

There was a good bit of intermarriage in the family. With the early death of a wife, sometimes her sister or cousin became the second wife. It was not uncommon for cousins to marry, in one case, even a double first cousin. There did not seem to be a taboo or concern about it. Nor does there seem to be any evidence that their offspring had any problems.

THE HOUSES

When travelers along the roads and highways of Middle Tennessee see the many houses that sit so proudly amidst old sheltering trees their hearts can catch with an indefinable emotion. It is part nostalgia, part longing, part romance, but mostly appreciation. They are beautiful. They stood for something by those who built them as well. The houses were a statement of who they believed they were, and the kind of life to which their families were entitled. Those of us who trace our ancestors to this part of the country may wonder about the homes of our own grandfathers and great-grandfathers. There are several Rucker homes that are still with us.

James Rucker's son Samuel Read Rucker was a lawyer; and like his brother William, also served as mayor of Murfreesboro. However, town life was never his

choice. In 1829 he built his house on the land his father left him. The house sits back through fields lying to the southeast of the intersection of the Jefferson and Betty Ford Roads. It is a two story frame L-shaped structure. There are two front entrances to face the two roads. A hewn stone chimney adorns the exterior of the house, and to the side, a porch for sitting and working invites visitors to a center room. The rooms to the rear of the house were built later than the two story front facing the driveway from Betty Ford Road. Underneath the clap-board siding of this earlier section are walls of huge logs. Until recent times Samuel's log law office stood in the yard of the house.

The house would be known today by neighbors as the Pickard Place. It is the home of Mrs. Ann Pickard, the widow of John Marion Pickard Jr., who is the direct descendant of Samuel Read Rucker. Pickard's mother Rosaline married John Pickard. Rosaline was the daughter of Robert Martin Rucker, the only son of Samuel. Rosaline Rucker Pickard welcomed her son's bride, Ann Pickard, into her home in 1936. Both women loved the house. After Rosaline was gone Ann continued to love the house. However, her husband's, John Pickard Jr., dreams carried him to Hollywood. Through the years Ann stayed in Murfreesboro, reared their son, John, and looked after her husband's inheritance. Tragically, the actor John Pickard Jr. on a visit home in 1993 was killed by a bull while he was doing some maintenance on a spring in the fields of his own property. The house, though, is filled with proud memories for Ann. It alone of all the Rucker properties remains in the ownership of their descendants.



Samuel Read Rucker's House
Picture taken 1883

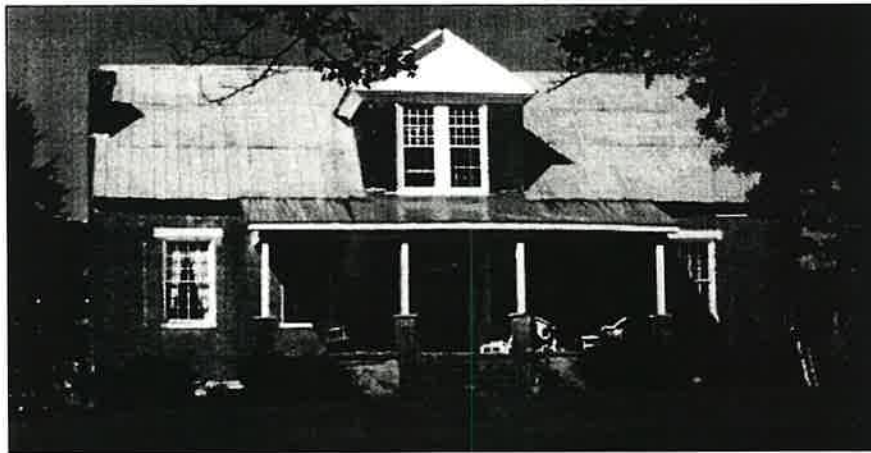
Not far down Betty Ford Road is the home that was built by Samuel Read Rucker's brother Benjamin. It is close by the ford crossing the Stone's River, that gives the road its name. Nowadays the road crosses the river by bridge. Benjamin Rucker did not have any sons, and his daughter Sophia married Colonel William Betty; therefore the house is usually called the Betty House. This lovely home of mellow old bricks fits everyone's image of a old time plantation home. Benjamin, indeed, was a very successful planter. There is, however, some evidence that Benjamin Rucker had freed some of his slaves, and supported the Union during the Civil War. It is now the much loved and cared for home of Mr. and Mrs. Richard F. LaRoche.



Benjamin Rucker's House

James Jr.'s home, too, still stands where the young James took the land his father intended for him, adjoining his own. By the time James Sr. wrote his will in 1819 he describes James Jr.'s portion as "the land where he now lives," indicating James' independent life was already in progress. This house, which faces Compton Road, might appear to the hurried passer-by as an ordinary farm house, old-but not as old as it really is. It gives the appearance of being a story and half house with a large dormer window cut into the tin roof that slopes down to the one story porch which shelters the front entrance and two of the four front windows. But when one turns toward the house and sees how perfectly it is placed on the gentle rise, and the double chimneys that are extended on each end of the old brick side walls, it is apparent this is a house whose builder had a taste for elegance. The front entrance is especially fine, with beautiful diamond shaped lights above and beside the double door. The door treatment is duplicated in what must have been a back entrance opposite the front across the entry hall. The diamond windows are similar to those of Benjamin's house, as are the fifteen inch brick walls. Like most of the surviving early houses, floor levels were not important considerations when a room was added or enclosed. A step up or down is part of the charm.

James Jr.'s house is now the home of the Burgess family. It came into the possession of James Burgess's through his mother, a Luftin, whose family bought the property early in the Twentieth Century. Beyond the Burgess property is a graveyard where James Jr. is buried. The area is in the process of being developed for new homes, and there is an effort by those families who have ancestors buried there, to preserve the site.

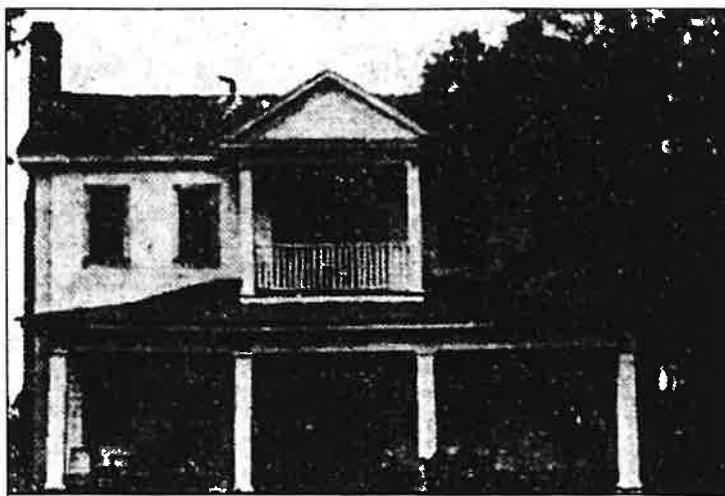


James Rucker Jr.'s House

Of course, the whole area encompassing the three homes is part of James Rucker's portion of the 5,000 acres that James and Thomas Rucker, and Simon Miller bought from Isaac Shelby in 1802. When they divided the land, James's portion was generally to the south and east. Of the 5,000 acres, 600 acres have been united. Sixty years ago at the northeast intersection of Compton Road and Lebanon Road the government built a Veterans Hospital. Several parcels of land were purchased, and the houses that had been built on them were torn down. By studying a map from a rather detailed newspaper story that was published when the work for the new hospital began to get underway, along with the descriptions found in the original deeds, and a 1878 Rutherford County map, it can be deducted that James's house stood where the actual hospital administration building is now. Thomas's house was not far from it but nearer to the road, in fact, the road has been relocated so that the cave that was close by the house is now on the opposite side of the road. The newspaper map shows the cave, the springs, and creeks that made the land so desirable two hundred years ago. Those rich fields made a lovely golf course. The Veterans Hospital property itself seems like a tranquil vestige from the past. Few in the area can remember when it wasn't there. There is a marker in the lawn placed by the DAR which commemorates the service of James Rucker, a soldier in the War of 1812.

Another 1938 newspaper article gives a description of Thomas Rucker's house that had just been torn down. The article tells of the size of the timbers and the pegged construction. It also mentions a house that was being built across the road that would incorporate some of the old house's materials. There is a house, built in the thirties, across the road from the Veterans Hospital, that has a finely carved staircase, a elegant fireplace mantel, and short square columns that look very much like the columns in the newspaper picture of Thomas Rucker's house. Down the road a bit is the Baptist Church whose land was originally a gift from Thomas Rucker.

James Rucker's house was incorporated in the building of a new house in the early part of the 20th century for the Frank Batey family. Mrs. Cordelia Batey Henderson, who grew up in this house, described what she remembered many years later as, "we knew the back two rooms were old part, they had solid brick walls probably fifteen inches thick, and they were the biggest rooms I ever saw." Like the other Rucker houses those rooms were probably 20 feet by 20 feet and had 11 foot ceilings.



Near the site of this Thomas Rucker homestead, built in 1809 and torn down recently, the first unit of the World War Veterans Hospital will rise this year.

From Newspaper Article 1938
Thomas Rucker's House



Stairway in 1930's House
across from Veteran's Hospital



Front Porch Columns of House
across from Veteran's Hospital

Two hundred years is hard to comprehend. There were not many houses built in the very early days with the refinements that we know James and Thomas Rucker's had. Andrew Jackson and his inlaws, the Donelsons, were still living in log houses more than a decade after the Ruckers built their brick homes. The three surviving houses, north of Murfreesboro, built by the sons of James, are at least a generation earlier than the grand mansions that are quite notable and numerous in Middle Tennessee. Most of these houses were built, or at least remodeled, in the prosperous decade just prior to the Civil War. Styles changed, Greek Revival replaced the more elegantly simple Federal. The Rucker family changed too. Many of the grandsons moved to other areas.

One of the most outstanding of the imposing classically inspired homes is Marymont built just prior to the Civil War by Hiram Jenkins. The Rucker connection to this house came through James Rucker Jr.'s grandson, Dr. J. J. (James Joshua) Rucker who married Hiram Jenkins' niece, Minnie Jenkins, and came into the possession of Marymont. Actually the house did not become "Marymont" until the Rucker's daughter, Mary, was born and the house was named in her honor. Extensive exterior remodeling was carried out by Dr. Rucker with the addition of the four Ionic columns and the bracketed cornice which was unusual even in that age of ornamentation. Many maple trees were set out, and Dr. and Mrs. Rucker planted a hedge of boxwood bushes along the walk. It was at this time that the stone posts flanking the wrought iron gate were constructed, as well as a small office on the front lawn for Dr. Rucker. This house is owned by the grandchildren of Dr. and Mrs. Rucker, Dorothy Ennis, and J. R. Donnell. The house is on Rucker Lane, west of Murfreesboro, off Highway 96.



The very earliest of Rucker houses that is still standing was built by the third Rucker brother, Gideon. Gideon bought two parcels of land in 1798 that, although they were not too distant from each other, are now in very different situations. Both are now within the western borders of Cannon County, east of Murfreesboro.

However, one of the houses now is very remotely located, somewhat southeast of the tiny community of Milton, but actually not even visible from any road. The house, which Gideon must have begun within a very few years after the land's purchase, is a gem of early frontier architecture, and is beautifully restored. It is the home of Mrs. Robert Mason. Robert Mason retired as a Professor of Literature from the Naval Academy at Annapolis in the early 1970's to come home to Cannon County. Mr. Mason's wife's family, the Hares, had owned this old home for many generations since they obtained ownership from Bennett Rucker, who bought it from Gideon in 1817.

Robert Mason busied himself with the writing of two Cannon County histories in his retirement as well as bringing his and his wife's home back to its former dignity and livability. His books show his research into the identification of the roots of his home's construction and architecture. The two story brick main house is a type that can be found, first in England and Wales, and then coming into Tennessee by the way of Virginia. A house almost identical to the Rucker house, is The Captain William Bowen house built on Mansker's Creek, near Goodlettsville, a few miles northeast of Nashville. This house, which is near the reconstructed Manskers Station Fort in Moss-Wright Park, is open to the public. After the death of Mr. Mason, Mrs. Mason continued to live in her secluded home.



Built by Gideon Rucker - Owned by Bennett Rucker

(Note two front doors.)

The other Gideon Rucker property now is fully visible from US Highway 70S. From the beginning this property may have had more promise than the site near Milton. Besides having the near-by Stones River available for water power, since 1806 it has been on the road between Murfreesboro to Woodbury. Gideon Rucker seems to have begun developing both of these properties about the same time, building a two-story cedar log house above the bank of the river. This house has a central hallway which was probably open originally. Another large room built to the back gave the house an ell shape. Today the logs have been covered with white clapboards and a long porch with a gallery above, graces the front.

Gideon contributed services to his community besides that of his religious leadership as a Baptist minister. He built a gristmill as early as 1814. By 1827, he owned a gristmill, a sawmill, and a 50- saw cotton gin and gin house. Gideon Rucker, planter, buyer and seller of properties of all kinds, was for many years, a leader among those who fostered the economic growth of his day. Gideon's home and much of his land is owned today by Mr. and Mrs. Donald Paschal. Mr. Paschal, in many ways has carried on in the tradition of Gideon Rucker. He, for a number of years, was outstanding in Tennessee Walking Horse organizations. Today his pastures, which are part of the 2,000 acres Gideon came to own, are devoted to the business of raising cattle.



Gideon Rucker's House

RUCKER NAMES

In 1988, at the First National Rucker Reunion at Ruckersville, Virginia, two distinguished looking gentlemen introduced themselves. "Hello, I'm John Rucker," said the first with "Murfreesboro," written on his name tag. "Well, I'm glad to meet you. I'm John Rucker," said the second with "Nashville" on his name tag. They knew they had to be kin. They were right, sixth cousins, for although both Johns' families had deep roots in Rutherford County, they had to go all the way back to Number One Peter to find the common ancestor.

John Rucker of Murfreesboro's great-grandfather, Edmund (Robert, John, Thomas, Peter) Rucker, came to Rutherford County with his brother Joseph Burton as a young men from Virginia. They lived near the Milton community and both married ladies with the given name of Susan (Seward and Overall) in 1835. Edmund and Susan Overall Rucker's son was Isaac and his grandson was Ellis. Ellis Rucker's name can be seen in the 1890's Rutherford County records for he served as Circuit Court Clerk. He is the father of the former State Senator John Richardson Rucker, a Murfreesboro lawyer and leader in the county for many years, and one of our hosts for the Rucker Reunion-1998.

John Rucker of Nashville's great-grandfather was Joseph Burrus Rucker, son of James. John's father John left Murfreesboro as a young man to work in the mercantile business in Nashville. To a researcher of Rutherford County records, Joseph Burrus Rucker and Joseph Burton Rucker, can be a challenge to distinguish, they were about the same age, both had wives named Susan, and both went by "Joseph B."

For both John Ruckers who met that day in Ruckersville, it was not too much of a novelty to meet a stranger who had their name.

There have been many sons, of those first Middle Tennessee settlers, to enrich the population. John Rucker of Nashville has four himself, and six grandsons with the Rucker name. These John Ruckers have not eliminated confusion in naming their own sons. As might be expected, they both have a John Jr.. Senator Rucker's sons are Richard Warren Rucker and John Richardson Rucker Jr.. Our Nashville John Rucker's sons, are John Willson Rucker Jr., Edmond, Thomas, and Robert Daniel, all names that could fit with those who have held them for the past three hundred years. And yes, they both have grandsons named John, though Nashville's John is a Jonathan.

However, in Rutherford County John Rucker has a brother, Ellis Suttle Rucker Jr. (who was named for their father). Ellis, who feared his brother, glid-

er pilot John, would not return from World War II named his own son John Richardson Rucker II. Therefore, Rutherford County sports three John Richardson Ruckers. John Richardson Rucker II helpfully named his son not John, but Jonathan. Jonathan's brothers are Joey and James Ellis.

More challenging is to identify the many daughters of the Rucker families. They lost their father's name when they married, but often the most interested in family history are those women who know the importance of their own contribution to their families, and suspect their mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers, have given them a heritage to treasure. They have not all forgotten. In addition, remember this, Ruckers tend to marry well. Many a spouse has delighted in the discovery of the family she or he has acquired with their union. Researching inlaws can be fascinating.

John Rucker of Murfreesboro does not know of any other white Ruckers in Rutherford County currently, besides his own family and his brother's. Nor does John Rucker of Nashville know of any other descendants of the four Rucker brothers, sons of Benjamin, who first came into Middle Tennessee who still have the surname of Rucker living in the Middle Tennessee area. Perhaps this reunion can reunite some lost Ruckers.

Rutherford County is enjoying a prosperity that is reminiscent of its early days. John R. Rucker's distinguished career in public service undoubtedly has contributed to its position. He was General Sessions Judge for fourteen years, a long time member of the Murfreesboro City Council, Tennessee State Senator—representing several Middle Tennessee Counties from 1976-1988 and a practicing attorney in Murfreesboro since he was nineteen years old. His sons, Richard Warren Rucker and John Richardson Rucker Jr. of Rucker and Rucker law firm, continue the tradition. It may be that some Rucker descendants will find Rutherford County, the "Heart of Tennessee," would make a good place for them to prosper today.

Edythe Johns Rucker Whitney in the foreword of her "Ruckers and Connections" gives a quote,

"He who careth not whence he came,
Careth not whither he goeth."

All of us have ancestors, we Ruckers have some that cared about where they were going.

— *Mary Carol Rucker Estes*

SOURCES

- Allen, Alice Rucker. *Rucker Heritage*. Austin, Texas: printed Morgan Printing, 1993.
- Arnow, Harriette Simpson. *Seedtime on the Cumberland*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960.
- Burnes, Frank; Jones. *Tennessee County History Series; Davidson County*. Memphis; Memphis State University Press, 1989.
- Caldwell, Mary French. *Tennessee: The Dangerous Example*. Nashville, Tennessee: Aurora Publishers, Inc., 1974.
- Hughes, Mary B.. *Hearthstones, Historic Rutherford County Homes*. Murfreesboro, Tennessee: Mid-South Publishing Co. Inc., 1942.
- James, Marquis. *Andrew Jackson, The Border Captain*. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1993.
- Mason, Robert L.. *Cannon County-Tennessee County History Series*. Memphis Tennessee: Memphis State University Press, 1982.
- Mason, Robert L.. *History of Cannon County, Tennessee*. Mufreesboro: Lancer Printing Co., Cannon County Historical Society, 1984.
- Morison, Samuel Eliot. *The Oxford History of The American People*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1965.
- Nelson, Anson and Fanny. *Memorials of Sarah Childress Polk*. New York; Anson D.F. Randolph & Company, 1892.
- Pittard, Mabel. *Rutherford County. Tennessee County History Series*. Memphis Tennessee: Memphis State University Press, 1984.
- Ray, Worth S.. *Tennessee Cousins A History of Tennessee People*. Austin, Texas: 1994 Genealogical Publishing Co. Inc., 1950.
- Weeks, Terry. *Heart of Tennessee*. Rutherford County, Tenn.: Chamber of Commerce, Rutherford County, Tennessee, 1992.
- Whitley, Edythe Johns Rucker. *Ruckers and Connections*. Nashville, Tennessee: Hermitage Printing Co., 1927.
- Wood, Sudie Rucker. *The Rucker Family Genealogy*. Richmond, Virginia: Old Dominion Press, Inc., 1932.
- The Hermitage a History and Guide*. Hermitage, Tennessee: The Ladies Hermitage Association, 1967.
- Davidson County, Tennessee Deed Records.
- Marriage Bonds of Bedford County, Virginia.
- Rutherford County, Tennessee US Census, 1870.
- Rutherford County, Tennessee Deed Records.
- Rutherford County, Tennessee Wills.