

A SHORT HISTORY OF HISTORIC GREEN HILLS EAST

This district is the namesake for the larger Green Hills area and is significant for its representation of the national initiative to promote home ownership and educate about modern materials and construction practices, beginning in the late 1920s.

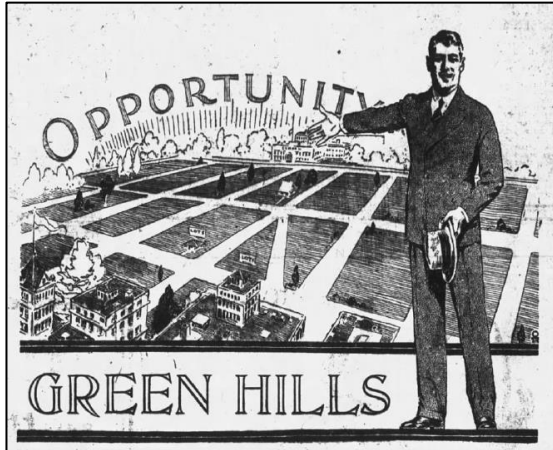


Figure 1. Partial advertisement from the *Tennessean*, 10 Apr 1927.



Figure 2. Green Hills Dr prior to home constructions. *Nashville Banner*, 5 May 1927.

The name of the new development, Green Hills, may come from the area's view of a collection of three hills about 1 mile south that includes Shy's Hill. Advertisements note that the development is on a "plateau that overlooks the knobs." The most likely origin of the name was a marketing tool to promote the clean air and beautiful land as an alternative to city living. The sentimental and arcadian use of the term in the 19th and early 20th century signified the nostalgia of 'home' and fertile land. Three examples are the poem "The Green Hills of My Fatherland" written by Laura M. Thurston in the 1800s and reprinted by the *Republican Banner* March 11, 1842, the 1829 song

"Green Hills of Tyrol," and the opera "The Far Green Hills of Home" by Father Joseph Patrick Connor in the 1920s. The developer, John Calhoun, (who later developed Courts of Belle Meade and Manors of Belle Meade) would have wanted to promote the new development in a manner that differentiated this suburban paradise from city life. Archivist, Debbie Cox, in her Nashville Blog Post, noted that the *Tennessean* wrote that the development was promoted as being on the highest elevation in an area with a "wealth of big shade trees and plenty of luxurious grass."¹ An advertisement for a house in the new neighborhood, led with "Where There is No Smoke or Dirt."² The name likely was a part of what enticed potential buyers from urban neighborhoods to the beauty of the countryside and a neighborhood that met the idea of 'home.'

¹ "Model Home of the Tennessean To Be Open April 24," *Tennessean* 3 April 3, 1927.

² *Nashville Banner*, 6 May 1928.

Development

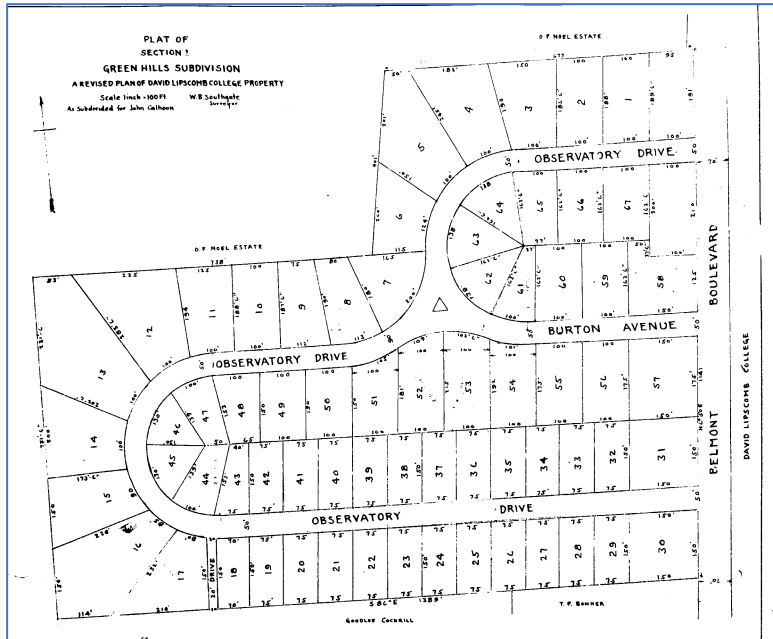


Figure 3. Green Hills Subdivision, No 1, Book 547, Page 128

Calhoun filed two plats in 1926 and 1927 on land that on the 1907 Nashville map by W.Z. Hitt is noted as being owned by the Nashville Bible School (plat 1) and G. Lipscomb (plat 2). The first plat included N and S Observatory Drives where work first began on streets and infrastructure. While constructing the first home on what is now S Observatory Drive, Calhoun began working on the streets and infrastructure of the 1927 (plat 2) which included Bonner Avenue, Green Hills Avenue, Shackelford Road, and Eden Avenue. The second plat was created from the estate of T.F. Bonner, on land formerly owned by G. Lipscomb. The area of the first plat opened for sale in April 1927.

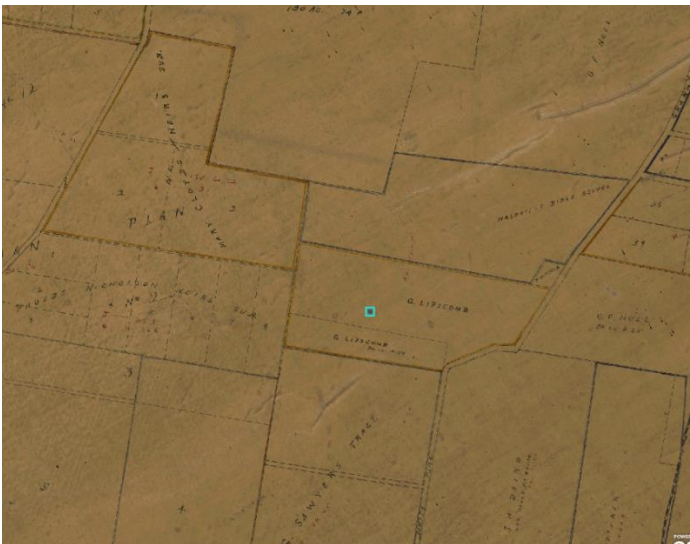


Figure 4. 1907 Hitt map. The small square denotes the location of 1710 Bonner Ave today, for reference. The Nashville Bible School, seen on the map was established in 1891. The name of the school changed in 1918 to David Lipscomb College.

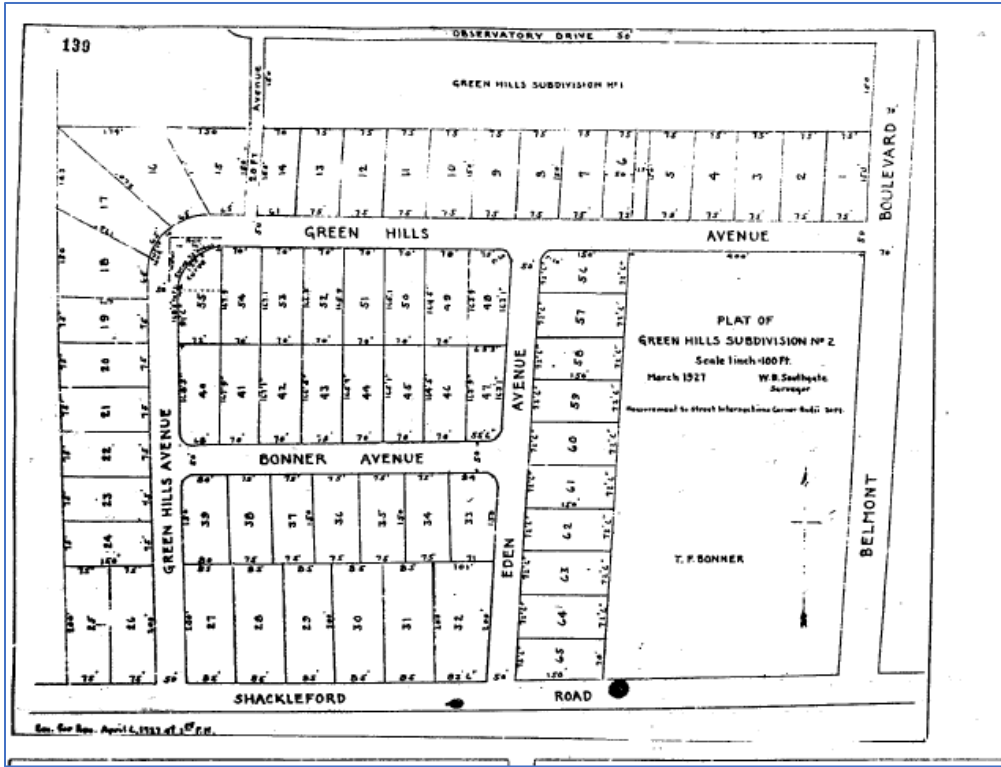


Figure 5. Green Hills Subdivision, No 2, Book 547, Page 130

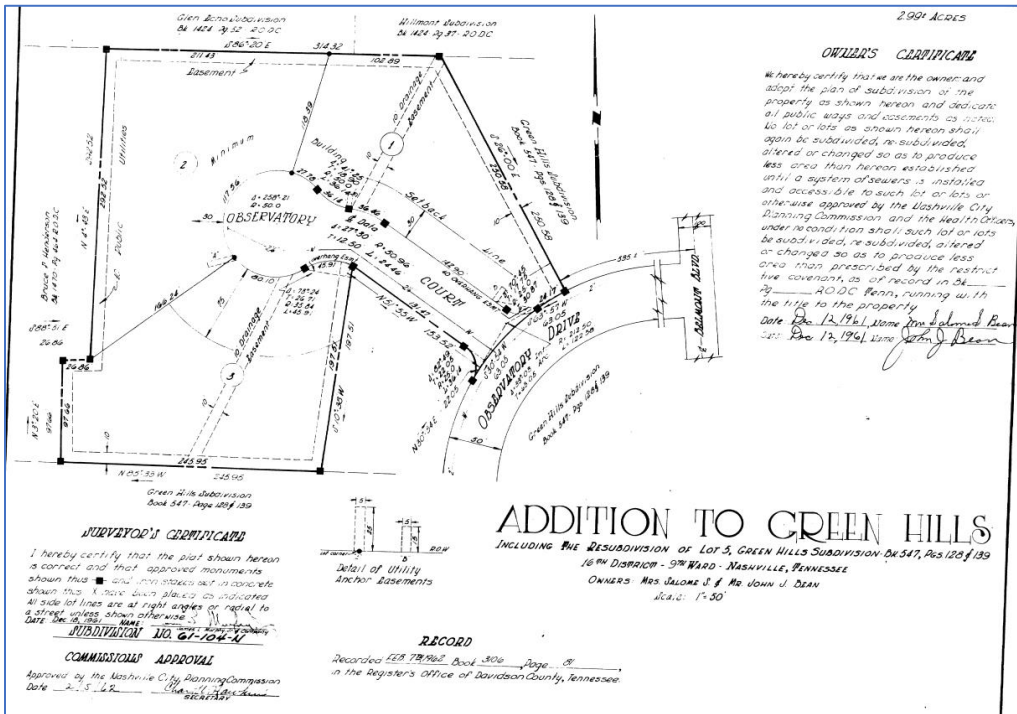
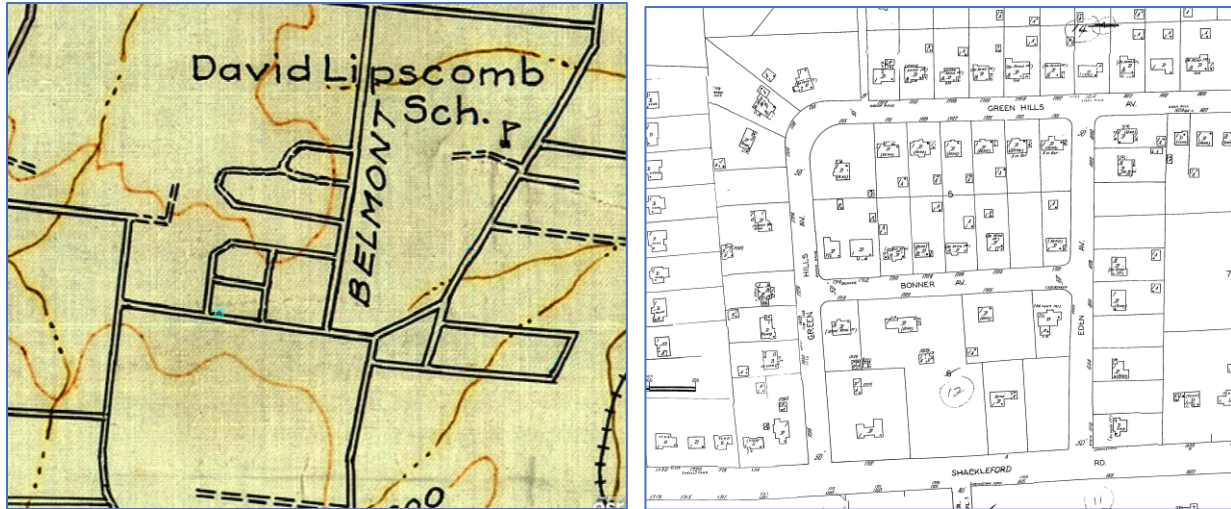


Figure 6. Addition to Green Hills, Book 3106, Page 81



Figures 7 and 8: 1934 City Planning & Zoning Commission map and 1951 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, V4, Page 828 (The area was not included in the 1931 and earlier Sanborn maps.)

Home Construction

The district is significant for its connection with the home demonstration movement, which began with the Secretary of the National Advisory Council's Better Homes in America campaign and took root with the "Home Sweet Home" project, a model home dedicated in 1923 in Washington, DC for the General Federation of Women's Clubs. Donn Barber's design for the model home was realized in 5 weeks by the Home Owners Service Institute.³

The home demonstration initiative was part of the Progressive movement from the late 19th to the early 20th centuries that aimed to reform female suffrage, education, working conditions, urbanization, industrialization, and child labor. The movement was also influenced by the nation's involvement in World War I and its aftermath, aiming "to create the desire for and to educate prospective home owners to build better homes, where happiness and contentment will reign."⁴ At the dedication of the first model home, President Harding explained its purpose and suggests the influence of the war on the initiative:

The home is at last not merely the center, but truly the aim, the object and the purpose of all human organization. We do not seek to improve society in order that from better homes we may bring forth better servants of the state, more efficient cannon fodder for its armed

³ Henry Atterbury Smith ed., "The Books of a Thousand Homes," Preservation Technology International [The books of a thousand homes, vol. 1 : Home Owners' Service Institute : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#).

⁴ Henry Atterbury Smith ed., "The Books of a Thousand Homes," Preservation Technology International [The books of a thousand homes, vol. 1 : Home Owners' Service Institute : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

forces; rather we seek to make better homes in order that we may avoid the necessity for conflict and turmoil in the world.

The Home Owners Institute took the lead on this movement, by publishing home plans and information first in the *New York Tribune* and then through syndication, publishing a plan book, creating a home ownership course, and selling sets of house plans, as well organizing model homes.⁵ Theodore Roosevelt, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, supported the fact that demonstrations would have a far greater impact on the nation's goals than articles and books alone. In 1926, construction began on 16 model demonstration houses in cities across the country under the guidance of the Homeowners Service Institute, Inc. The purpose of the program was to encourage home ownership, educate about the advantages of using standard nationally known materials and equipment and good construction practices. Nashville took part in the demonstration home movement with the first home constructed in the Green Hills subdivision, known as The Tennessean Model Home, located at 1637 S Observatory Drive.⁶

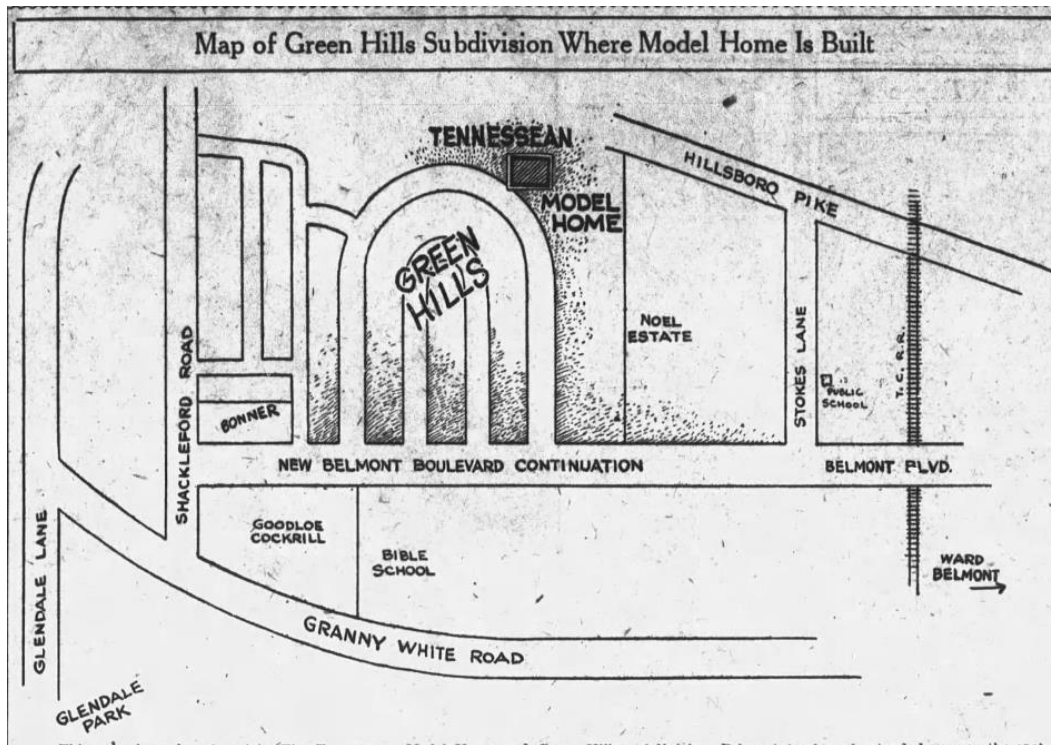


Figure 9. "Map of Green Hills Subdivision Where Model Home is Built," *The Tennessean*, 3 April 1927.

The home is located on the center plot or the "bend in the largest horseshoe of the Plateau that overlooks the knobs" in the new subdivision. Both the construction process at 1637 S

⁵ Henry Atterbury Smith ed., "The Books of a Thousand Homes," Preservation Technology International [The books of a thousand homes, vol. 1 : Home Owners' Service Institute : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

⁶ "Model Home Can Be Inspected While Under Construction," *Tennessean*, 9 Dec 1926.

Observatory (lots 12 and 13) and the finished product were open to the public. Promotion of the construction of the home in the *Tennessean* was used not only to sell ideas but also materials and home goods. The home, designed by the Nashville firm of Tisdale, Stone and Pinson was completed in April 1927. (Significant additions have been constructed over the years but the house plan is also evident in the house constructed at 1612 N Observatory.) The firm designed other residential buildings in Nashville, the Eakins & Cavert School buildings, and the courthouses for Hickman County in Centerville, TN and Jackson County in Gainesboro, TN. The *Tennessean* described the new home as, “perfection in every detail, a combination of art and beauty and utility, a thing to be admired from the exterior, and a place of admiration and dreams on the interior....”⁷ The floor plan was approved by the national organization of model home builders and considered “near perfect as possible for small homes.”⁸ A later advertisement touted the neighborhood as place for “those who want an exclusive neighborhood in which to erect substantial homes.”⁹

This first home followed the English style of architecture and included three bedrooms, a living room with fireplace, dining room, breakfast room, lavender tile bathroom, pantry, kitchen, steel windows, and steam heat. The basement included stationary tubs, a servant’s room and shower, and room for two cars. Phillips & Quarles provided the Richardson Multichrome shingled roof.¹⁰ The brick was painted to give it an antique finish.¹¹ Regular full-page articles in the *Tennessean* provided updates on construction, designs and floorplans for homes, and helpful information on materials and construction. Fifteen thousand visitors toured the home on opening day on May 1, 1927.¹²



Figure 10. Holt Bean in The *Nashville Banner*, 5 April 1925.

The home was purchased later in May 1927 by Holt and Salome Stephenson Bean for \$12,000. Holt began his career as a tax inspector. He and his wife moved to Nashville from Lynchburg when he was promoted in 1918 to internal revenue agent. They moved to Lewisburg in 1920 when Holt was chosen to head the Marshall County Auto Co. In April 1925 he is listed in an advertisement as working as a Farm Loan Correspondent with the New York Life Insurance Co. (see fig. 6).¹³ At the time of his purchase of the Green Hills home, he is noted as correspondent for Union Central Life Insurance and later listed in the City Directory as owner of Bean Bros and Bean & Co. Holt died in 1960. The Beans also purchased the land that is now Observatory Court, platted in 1962 by Salome and John J Bean.

⁷ “The Tennessean’s Model Home Can Be Inspected While Under Construction,” *Tennessean*, 9 Dec 1926.

⁸ “Work will be Rushed to Prevent Delay in Schedule for Tennessean’s Opening,” *Tennessean*, 8 Jan 1927.

⁹ “Green Hills Subdivision a Proven Success!,” *Tennessean*, 9 March 1927.

¹⁰ “The Model Roof for The Model Home,” *Tennessean*, 13 Feb 1927.

¹¹ “Men to Be on Ground Every Day for 5 Weeks to Receive Visitors,” *Tennessean*, 3 April 1927.

¹² “Tennessean’s Model Home Thrown Open to Throng of 15,000,” *Tennessean*, 2 May 1927.

¹³ “Tennessean Model Home Purchased: Many Visit House,” *Tennessean*, 16 May 1927.

Salome Bean moved to 1602-A Observatory Court sometime prior to her death in 1975.



Figures 11 and 12: The house at 1637 S Observatory Dr as originally conceived (*Tennessean*, 12 December 1926) and as completed (*Tennessean*, 24 Apr 1927).



Figure 13: The house at 1637 S Observatory Dr as seen in 2024 (Metro Historical Commission) and 1969 (Property Assessor).



Figure 14: The house at 1612 N Observatory Dr as seen in 2024. Property of the Metro Historical Commission.

The model home spurred sales of the newly platted lots in the subdivision. Five thousand dollars was the minimum building restriction; however, many are noted as being approximately ten thousand.¹⁴

¹⁴ "New Subdivision Sells Rapidly," *Tennessean*, 6 Feb 1927.

Sometime between 1927 and 1969, the first house was enlarged but the original design can be seen in the house at 1612 N Observatory. The *Tennessean* published multiple model plans that were available at a “low cost” but it appears that only one other of those designs was



Figure 15: Plan No. 115-S published in the *Tennessean* on 23 Jan 1927.

constructed in the district. Different styles of the Plan No. 115-S can be seen throughout the neighborhood and primarily differ in terms of the design of the front entrance and the fact that they do not have the clipped gable seen in the plan. Some examples of similar designs may be seen at: 1700 Bonner Avenue and 1623 and 1629 S Observatory Drive. The revisions of both house plans showed how owners and developers customized stock plans to make the house their own. All of the historic buildings are similar to designs included in plans books of the era.

The neighborhood was developed and sold as being a respite from urban living and remains such today, with quiet streets, old growth trees and many of the original buildings. Alterations have taken place, as they do in any neighborhood, to address changing needs but the original architectural forms, designs and settings are still evident. Even new construction, for the most part, has been respectful of the character of the street. As the city evolved and a market developed that encouraged demolition of small and medium sized homes for ‘mcmansions’, both new residents and long-time residents were interested in preserving their hidden jewel of a neighborhood. Protection began with a neighborhood-led effort to down-zone the area to single-family in 2006 and discussions regarding a neighborhood conservation zoning overlay in 2024.

SHORT HISTORIES BY STREET

Bonner Avenue

Bonner Avenue is named for T.F. Bonner (1861-1939) whose farm constitutes a portion of this development. Bonner's death certificate notes him as a "retired salesman" however, newspaper clippings paint him as more of an entrepreneur. In 1907, *The Tennessean* called him "one of Nashville's most progressive citizens".¹⁵



Figure 16: "Judge Shriver rites scheduled tomorrow," *The Tennessean*, 15 Feb 1986.

The first resident on Bonner Avenue was Thomas A and Attie (Addie) Gene Humphreys Shriver at 1709 Bonner Avenue, appearing in the City Directories in 1930, having purchased their lot from Henry Goodpasture in 1929. Thomas and Attie married in 1926. Shriver, at the time he purchased the property, was an attorney with Shriver & Shriver, located in the Stahlman Building, along with his older brother Berry D. Shriver. In later years, he served as a chancellor judge (appointed in 1940 by Gov. Prentice Cooper) and 25 years as appellate judge (appointed by Gov. Frank G. Clement in 1955). Judge Shriver was a prime mover in the establishment of the Tennessee Natural Gas Co, as it was known at the time, and instrumental in the firm's acquisition of the Nashville Gas Co.

Shriver may have known Bonner, as Mrs. Bonner is listed in 1897 as receiving a free gas cook stove from the Nashville Gas Co.

Burton Ave

Burton Avenue was named after Andrew Mizell Burton (1879-1966), a supporter of Lipscomb University (as well as other colleges and universities), an owner of property in the subdivision, and the founder of Life and Casualty Insurance Company. Longtime resident Lee Maddux, says that 3810 Belmont, at the corner of Burton Ave and Belmont, was owned by Burton, and that the home also served as the home economics classroom for Lipscomb University in the 1950s-60s.

An early resident of Burton Avenue was Jas H and Minnie Sutton in 1931. Sutton was a salesman for Nashville Coal Co. The Suttons may have had the street to themselves for several years as the next resident to appear City Directories is Jas H and Elise M Allen in 1937. Both Sutton and Allen were salesman and both families appeared to be renting rooms to at least one other person by 1938.

¹⁵ "Nashville's Greatest Need," *Tennessean*, 16 May 1907.

Eden Avenue

Using the verdant and rural location as a selling point, may have also been the reason behind the naming of Eden Avenue, possibly after the Garden of Eden.

The first occupants in 1930 were: Leonard J. and Gladys Davis (Deaderick & Davis Electric Co), Andrew P. and Josephine Martin (A.P. Martin & Son, real estate, loans, chain store specialist and one of the realtors of Part 2 of Green Hills), Buford G. and Grace Wilson (stocks and bonds).

Green Hills Drive

Green Hills Drive is listed in City Directories shortly after the subdivision but names of residents do not appear until 1930. Some early residents were: Cliff W and Alma Beasley (wire chief with L&NRR), Elmer C. and Wilma Hicks (Mrg Chamberlin Metal Weatherstrip Co), Samuel A and Lucy High, (Union Grocery Co), Issac B. and Ruth Hime. 1606 (operator at Paramount Theater), Vaden M and Mildred Lackey (Lackey Coal Co), Erwin J. and Fannie Sain, 1600, (jeweler), William D Shouse, Frank and Lillie Thomas, and Walter W. and Lula Wilson, 1610.

Observatory Drive

Because the neighborhood was advertised as being a high point with views, naming a street "Observatory" might have been a way to instill the value of the views from these lots. This was the first street to be developed so it is not surprising that by 1946, it had the most residents of all the surrounding streets. In early City Directories, there is no distinguishment between North and South Observatory until 1949.

Where the earliest residents lived is difficult to determine as house numbers were not included in City Directories until 1942 and the numbering was irregular without the current distinction between North and South. Early residents included: Rev Hall L. and Mary Etta Calhoun (Pastor Belmont Ave Church of Christ), Robert H. and Jane Chilton (RH Chilton Auto Machine Co.), Ward and Elizabeth S DeWitt (Spt Rock City Construction Co.), Miller and Virginia Dismukes (Dismukes-Niles & Co, wholesale hats and caps), Otis P Grant, Dr. Frederick H Hall, Edwin L and Brinda R Kuykendall (slsmn), John Milas, Jas Ogler, Horace and Mary Powell (circulation mgr Nashville Banner, John R Stephenson, Sam H. and Frances E Vaughan (collr Hilary E House Furn Co.), Frank C. and Cloie Womack (Dist Mgr L&C Insurance Co.).