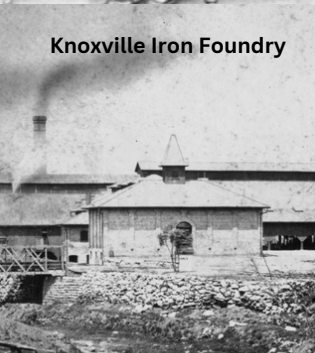




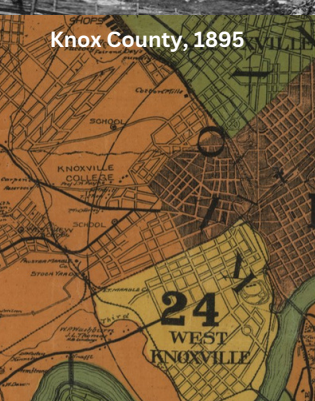
Victorian House on Carrick



E. Frederick Esperandieu.



Knoxville Iron Foundry



Knox County, 1895

INTRODUCTION

Mechanicsville is the cluster of Victorian-era historic homes on the northwest side of downtown, west of Second Creek and north of the old Southern train tracks. Developed soon after the Civil War, it's arguably the oldest suburban neighborhood in Knoxville, substantially occupied with houses on city blocks even before Fort Sanders had filled out. Much of Mechanicsville is well preserved.

Originally property owned by a New Hampshire native—attorney, journalist, and civic and Baptist church leader **Col. John L. Moses (1822-1887)** – Mechanicsville still presents traces of Moses' influence; some of the older streets are named for members of his family, and the large former Moses School is named for him.

The neighborhood saw some hubbub during the Civil War, especially in November, 1863, when Confederate troops massed near here before their ill-fated charge on Fort Sanders. Ever since then, Mechanicsville gardeners have been accustomed to finding Minie balls in their tilled soil. Camp Van Dorn, along Western Avenue, was the site of much misery, and not just from bullets and shelling. An estimated 150 Confederates died here of typhoid.

On an 1867 map, the larger part of the Moses development was identified as "Esperandieu," with a smaller section just west of Wallace appearing by that name in an 1874 map; the name was also applied to a principal street (part of what was later University Avenue). The appearance of that French name here has puzzled historians in the past, but it was certainly a reference to Swiss-born cleric, winemaker and language professor **E. Frederick Esperandieu**. The area may have been the site of the "fruitful fields and a fine vineyard" described by exiled Irish revolutionary John Mitchel, who visited Esperandieu in 1855. Much of the property was trampled by troops during the Civil War, and during the period of Union occupation, Esperandieu returned to Europe. He remained in France through the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71 to serve the French side as a chaplain. He returned to Knoxville afterward, building a new house overlooking the river downtown, no longer a vintner but now known as a cigar manufacturer, watchmaker, language professor, and beekeeper.

Also known as the **Ninth Ward** in its early days, Mechanicsville is named for the "mechanics"—the ironworkers—who worked at the Knoxville Iron Foundry, which was located on Second Creek from the Civil War, when it was run by enterprising Union officer Hiram Chamberlain and others, including a few Welsh immigrants, especially David and Joseph Richards, until the big factory moved to Lonsdale in 1903. Those workers, a combination of Welsh immigrants with experience with the iron and coal industries, and African Americans, many of them formerly enslaved, were Mechanicsville's first residents. World's Fair Park's "Foundry," believed to date from the early 1870s, is the only surviving remnant of what was once a larger iron plant.

Although it may seem more distant today because of the intervening highway and railroad tracks, Mechanicsville was then a short distance from that iron foundry, an easy 10-minute walk for most of the residents. The Knoxville Iron Co. was one of Knoxville's first important industries, and closely associated with the rapidly growing railroad network. Although East Tennessee iron ore was not of especially fine quality, it was useful for many of the basic products of the era. Some of its early products were nails and railroad spikes.

The neighborhood included a Welsh Church, established by 1869 on old Atkin Street (an area on the downtown side of Mechanicsville, now chopped up by Interstate construction). Soon, a Welsh Choral Society formed and became well known for its performances in downtown auditoriums. By 1878, there was a Mechanicsville Literary Society, dominated by Welsh. The community's annual Eisteddfods, the traditional Welsh festival of music and poetry, peaked here in the early 1890s. One charming and plausible story from the early era of Mechanicsville was that the Welsh industrial workers, who came from a singing culture, would, after supper, go out in the yard and begin singing familiar Welsh hymns, which would be picked up by unseen neighbors, until there was a full chorus.

However, from its early days, it was a mixed-race neighborhood, with some of the first homes occupied by African Americans after the end of slavery.



Today, the neighborhood is dominated by old frame houses of the Victorian era. They've been called "Queen Anne" in style, but several are discernibly different from the styles of homes in other Victorian neighborhoods like Fort Sanders and Fourth & Gill, partly because they're a decade or two older, exhibiting 1870s characteristics of the Westlake and Stick styles. Mechanicsville houses appear a little more compact and restrained, lacking towers and turrets, and only a very few have balconies or second-floor porches—though many still show an attention to elaborate ornamentation, including sometimes extravagant spindlework, that was unlike anything a century before or after. Many or most of the homes appear to be well-kept and distinctive to their era. Deaderick Avenue is particularly picturesque.



Side streets like Callaway and Hannah feature what may now be an even rarer style, in Knoxville at least: "shotgun style" houses, long, narrow one-story houses intended for workers, but with a strong sense of dignity and even flair that speaks of the late Victorian era in another way. Mechanicsville may have Knoxville's highest concentration of shotgun houses, a style more common in New Orleans and other older cities with a larger working-class population. Several have been renovated to be cozy-looking homes.



In 1876, Mechanicsville became the home of East Tennessee's major college for Black students, **Knoxville College**. Established by the Presbyterian Church, it was originally a college for teachers, at a time when many or most of its students had been recently emancipated. For more than a century, KC remained a popular and accredited college, drawing students from all over the nation.

Much of the eastern part of the neighborhood was shaved away by degrees by highway-construction projects in the 1950s and later. McGhee Street, described as Mechanicsville's "principal thoroughfare" in 1874, when it got a fancy plank sidewalk, is now only a couple of blocks long, on the periphery of the neighborhood. Second Creek was the site of Knoxville's first three beer breweries, established as early as 1865, and the lost eastern corner of the neighborhood includes the site of the largest brewery in Knoxville-area history, known between 1885 and 1909 as the **New Knoxville Brewing Co.** and the **East Tennessee Brewing Co.** The turreted 200,000-square-foot factory produced as much as 40,000 barrels a year, at the corner of McGhee and Chamberlain. An attempt to revive the factory just after Prohibition in 1935 was a controversial failure. The building was torn down in the early '50s, and now its intersection no longer exists. That site and the sites of several other factories where local people manufactured pottery, soap, brooms, and even railroad cars, is now a no-man's land underneath interstate overpasses.



Most of Mechanicsville was annexed into Knoxville's city limits in 1882—15 years before Fort Sanders and Old North were—though the blocks northwest of Moses Avenue, including modern-day Beaumont and Lonsdale, were not incorporated until 1917. Mechanicsville had its own "electric railway"—a neighborhood streetcar connecting it to downtown—in 1891, suggesting the importance of this suburb to Knoxville.

After the departure of the Knoxville Iron Co. in 1903, Mechanicsville became better known for its association with Knoxville College than with the iron industry. A predominantly Black neighborhood after about 1920, it was a culturally lively place, with barbecue restaurants and live-music nightclubs, especially along University Avenue, and even a newspaper, the *Flashlight Herald*, located on College Street, which carried on a lively and sometimes contentious rivalry with its crosstown counterpart, the older East Tennessee News. Most of the neighborhood's activity was in the vicinity of University and College, where there were grocery stores, barber shops, pool halls, and restaurants, with a variety of churches down the street.

Near Mechanicsville was a 12-acre public park, Leslie Street Park, just west of the historic section, which hosted African American baseball games. It disappeared in the early 1990s when it was purchased from the city for industrial purposes, but the current Ed Cothran pool, which was moved from the old park, is a legacy.



Mechanicsville was occasionally targeted by local slum-clearance projects like one in the late 1930s that resulted in the subsidized-housing apartments known as College Homes, reserved for poor people of color and completed in 1940. However, unlike the city's other Black cultural district, East Vine, Mechanicsville was not subject to the sweeping demolitions associated with the federal Urban Renewal initiative of the late '50s and '60s. Much of the old architecture still survives, including at least a few of the brick buildings of the old 20th-century Black business district, including the ca. 1929 two-story brick Cansler Building.

Mechanicsville was nominated for the National Register of Historic Places in 1975, finally earned in 1980. Knoxville's first residential neighborhood to earn that designation, the neighborhood, physically neglected and considered a slum by some at the time, gained some respect and historic protection, in the form of a historic overlay that requires significant changes to historic houses be discussed and approved in a public forum. The look of the neighborhood has much improved since then.

<< The tour starts heading west out of downtown on Western Avenue from the L&N Station at the intersection with Henley Street/Broadway/Summit Hill Drive. Observe that just below the viaduct on the right is the red-roofed Foundry, the one remaining building of the Knoxville Iron Co., which played a major role in the development of Mechanicsville.

Drive west for approximately half a mile. >>



Western Avenue was originally known as Asylum Avenue, because it led to the “Deaf & Dumb Asylum,” an obviously outdated term for what we now know as the Tennessee School for the Deaf. It was a statewide institution in 1844, located in what’s now in Lincoln Memorial University’s school of law, long before the University of Tennessee was, and also one of America’s first eight schools for the deaf. Knoxville was especially proud of it; “Asylum” originally meant “safe place,” but by the early 20th century, it was becoming more associated with mental institutions. Just before TSD moved to South Knoxville, the city chose to rename the street Western in 1923.

Obvious on the left side of Western, on the southern fringe of Mechanicsville, is Second Methodist Church, colloquially known for more than a century as the “Red Cross Church.” Although conventional in construction, it’s notable for its brightly lit red cross, most noticeable at night, a symbol that dates to its earliest days. The Asylum Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church, as it was first known, was originally established here in 1868, in a wooden building that lasted only until a tornado destroyed it five years later. Replacing it was a much-sturdier brick structure known for a red cross of colored slate on the roof. Among its early supporters was sometime mayor, sometime sheriff Marcus De Lafayette Bearden, for whom the community of Bearden is named. Another church built in 1907 became better known by a new name, Second Methodist, but kept the red-cross symbol. Much of the current building was constructed in 1952, though expansions and improvements have changed the church’s shape several times in the years since.

<< Turn right where Western Avenue meets College Street >>



The distinctively triangular Prince Building (1549 Western Avenue) is eye-catching even today. Built by grocer-developer David R. Prince (1854-1928) in 1901-1902, it has hosted dozens of businesses, including barbers, beauty parlors, butchers, confectioneries, lunch counters and grills, and, in its earliest days, an Irish-family-run saloon, Pat Dewine’s. Located at the sharp end, Dewine’s lasted only until the city banned saloons in 1907. The retail was mainly on the sidewalk level; upstairs were five residences, and sometimes as many as a dozen residents.

Three two-story brick “Flatiron” buildings from the turn of the century remain in Knoxville, and two of them are in Mechanicsville.



Less well known but from the same era are the ca. 1900 two-story brick Rogers and Weber buildings. Weber is named for Alvin Weber, who ran a furniture store here. In the earliest years of the 20th century, this cluster of urban businesses included a blacksmith, a livery stable, a meatmarket, and a barber. One Italian immigrant, Tony Piscitello, ran a grocery near here in 1910. The downtown-style hilltop assemblage was once known as Western Heights—a phrase that later became more associated with a housing development on another hill just northwest of Mechanicsville.

<< Proceed a few yards west on College Street >>



Visible ahead are two churches, modern in style but with historic congregations.

Rogers Memorial Baptist Church (520 College Street) dates back to the early 1900s, and has always been on this street. The current building was built in 1953, and stands across the street from its predecessor.



Clinton Chapel AME Zion Church (546 College Street) dates back to the 1880s, as its name attests: when it was established, this street was called Clinton Pike. It’s been in this particular location since about 1900. The original building burned in 1976, and this one, completed in a strikingly angular modernist style in 1980, replaced it.

<< Turn right onto Deadrick Avenue >>



Several of these homes belonged to people prominent in Knoxville business, and they built elaborate if not pretentiously large homes here; modern owners have painted several of the houses in contrasting colors to highlight their unusual detail. Specific architects are known for only a few of them, but the Queen Anne house at **243 Deaderick**, notable for its second-story porch and spindle bannisters, was designed in 1888 by the then-new firm of Baumann Brothers. Joseph and Albert Baumann, sons of a German immigrant, were two of Knoxville's first full-time architects. The original owner of the house was Market Square merchant A.L. Young, whose dry goods and notions store specialized in women's clothing. He was described as "affable, polite, and anxious to please."



Flatiron Building at Deaderick Avenue and Carrick Street: This eye-catching triangular (or, technically, trapezoidal) building, sometimes known as the J.T. Moore Building, was built in 1902 by that downtown hardware merchant and in its early years served as a neighborhood grocery store. Nicknamed "the Wedge," it was one of several "flatiron" buildings built in Knoxville about the same time, perhaps inspired by the large, famous one in New York, which was also completed in 1902. Two of the three 1902 flatiron buildings that survive from the turn-of-the-century era are within a few blocks of each other in Mechanicsville, a neighborhood that presents many odd and acute angles.

On the right, at 220 Carrick Street alongside Deaderick Avenue, is the impressively large, brick **Moses School**, a 1916 enlargement of a previous school. First known as the Mechanicsville School, it was a school for white children in an era when race-mixing in the classroom was illegal in Tennessee.

It's been closed as a public school for many years, but has been used for a variety of purposes since then: Police training center, performance space, and most recently Emerald Academy, a public free charter school run in conjunction with the faith-based Emerald Foundation. It's one of the older school buildings in Knoxville



Oak Avenue, on the right, is now only a short street in Mechanicsville, with its other end a fragment intersecting with Broadway downtown. Oak was one of the higher-end streets where the iron-factory owners lived, like members of the Welsh David and Joseph Richards family. Several had ornamental iron fences outlining their yards, fences manufactured at the nearby foundry. Unfortunately, as you can tell by looking at it from here, a quarter mile of Oak Avenue was demolished for highway construction beginning in the late 1950s, taking with it many of Mechanicsville's oldest and largest houses.

The existing house just past Oak Avenue, on the right, has an iron fence around its triangular yard. This particular one has been identified as a product of the Knoxville Iron Company.

<< Continue north on Deaderick Avenue to Arthur Street and turn left >>



Arthur Street Firehall (419 Arthur Street): The oldest active firehall in Knoxville, it was built in 1909 on an "Italian villa" design by Baumann Brothers; it was reputedly the city's last firehall built for horse-drawn fire engines. Plaques that list City Council members rarely make interesting reading, but this 1909 plaque includes the name of Dr. H.M. Green, the nationally known physician who, until forced out by a radical streamlining of city government in 1912, was the last African American member of Knoxville's Board of Aldermen for many years. Also listed here is John Paul Murphy, an Irish Catholic who had served as interim mayor of Knoxville, but was more proudly known as the (honorary) Mayor of Irish Town, the immigrant community that was almost adjacent to Mechanicsville to the northeast.

The public park on the southwest corner is the "Olde Mechanicsville Park." Despite its period-appropriate gazebo, the park is a relatively recent embellishment. It was dedicated in 2004 to the memory of Betty Quirk (ca. 1927-2003), a longtime schoolteacher who moved to Mechanicsville in the 1980s.

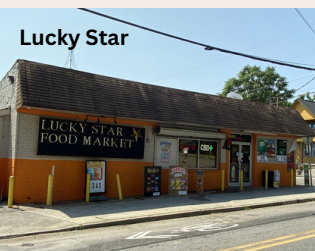
Across the street to the east, at 501 Arthur, is a ca. 1910 grocery store building, with an inviting two-tiered porch. Once known as Bradley's, it has sometimes been used as a restaurant, but in recent years it's served as a Buddhist-based "contemplative community center." A residential apartment is upstairs.



<< Turn left on to McGhee Avenue, via a small dog-leg onto Boyd Street, leading to University Avenue >>

Note: Cansler Avenue is reportedly named for Laura Scott Cansler (1846-1926), the teacher who arrived in town with her family as a free person of color during the slavery era and ran a school for formerly enslaved Black children even before the Civil War ended. The street has borne her name since the early 1920s, when she was still alive.

<< Turn left on University Avenue >>



Lucky Star

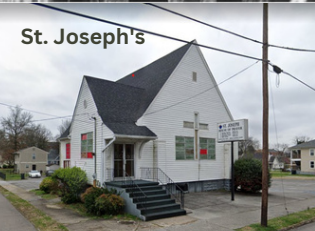
One block to the right is the **Lucky Star Food Market** (1006 University Avenue), which has been a neighborhood corner store since the 1940s, when it was Ownby's Grocery.

University Avenue first appeared by that name in 1871, described as "the handsomest ever laid out in East Tennessee." Its name is puzzling, because the street lies about a mile away from the historic campus of the University of Tennessee; the choice may have reflected the city's general pride about Congress's recent decision to endow what was then known as East Tennessee University with federal funding through the Morrill Act, making it the first college in the former Confederacy to achieve that status, and a major factor in making it a major university, as opposed to a small regional college.



Camp Poland

The steep hill to the north played a surprising role in the Spanish American War. For the first and only time in history, in June, 1898, Knoxville became a major training ground for a foreign war, with recruits from around the nation congregating here by the thousands to learn to fight. Much of that training took place just north of Mechanicsville, at a place called **Camp Poland**, named for an officer who had died in overcrowded Camp Thomas in Chattanooga. Although the troops remained for only seven months, the experience left its mark: the steep hilltop where Boyd intersects with West Fourth, in the lofty northeastern part of the neighborhood, became known as Flagpole Hill.



St. Joseph's

At 1300 University Avenue, on the southwest corner of Wallace, is the **St. Joseph House of Prayer**, a large frame building that was by 1926 an African American Seventh-Day Adventist church. It became the interdenominational St. Joseph's in 1980.

The cross streets tell little stories of their own. Dora Street, an old street which is believed to be named for a daughter of Col. John L. Moses' family. After 1883 it was the location of the Fairview School, the community's first school for Black children, and the forerunner to Maynard Elementary.



Canler Building, 1520 University

Dunbar Street's name has its own story. Educator Dr. **Robert S. Beard**, observing that all of Mechanicsville's streets were named for white people, appealed to City Council to rename Mary Street for poet **Paul Lawrence Dunbar (1872-1906)**. Dunbar was an Ohioan who never lived in Knoxville, but during his short life spoke at Knoxville College in 1899, and had many admirers here, notably educator Charles Canler. Dunbar died of tuberculosis at age 33, and Dunbar Street took his name under the administration of Mayor McMillan in March, 1919.

An early nightclub in this section was called **Neal's Savoy Ballroom**, established on University Avenue by **Maggie Canler (1897-1985)** in 1933, at the end of prohibition. Her middle name was Neal; she may have preferred that it not be known that the west side's hottest nightclub was run by a woman. On occasion Neal's Savoy hosted major stars of jazz, notably bandleaders Fletcher Henderson, Andy Kirk, Benny Carter, and Jimmy Lunceford; singer Maxine Sullivan; and piano masters Fats Waller and Earl "Fatha" Hines, who performed there several times. It was on University between College and Dunbar. Most shows were strictly for Black patrons, but some admitted others on a limited basis. It was forcibly closed in 1943 due to alleged fire-code violations. On its site is the current Beulah Church of God Holiness.



Paul Lawrence Dunbar

University developed a walkable downtown section near College Street where, by the early 20th century, businesses clustered, including grocery stores, barber shops, restaurants, and pool halls. Since East Vine Avenue was destroyed by Urban Renewal in the 1960s, this is the best-preserved Black business district in the Knoxville area—even if only a little of it remains.

At 1518 University Avenue is often the site of a restaurant today. Its best-known tenant was the College Café, a fixture in the 1950s and '60s. It was recommended by the nationally published *Green Book* for African American travelers.

The two-story brick building at 1520 University is the **Canler Building**, its name still visible in a marble block at the top. Built in 1929, it has been attributed to the best-known member of a large and accomplished mixed-race family: scholar **Charles Canler (1871-1953)**, longtime principal of Austin High. His achievements were mostly intellectual and cultural—he was one of the earliest supporters of artist Beauford Delaney, whose reputation would be international—and little is known of his foray into business and development. The building originally housed a grocery store.



Charles Canler

University Avenue has often been famous for food: Brother Jack's, on University Avenue for about half a century, was among Knoxville's best-known barbecue restaurants in history. The original Brother Jack was Charles Andrew Jackson, who founded the meat market at University Avenue and Dunbar in 1923; it moved in 1946 to a spot where many remember it as an exciting late-night attraction, known for distinctively spicy barbecue and specialties like "pigburgers." Brother Jack's settled at 1710 University Ave., not far from the intersection with Western, before it finally closed in the 1990s. Its modest building was torn down.

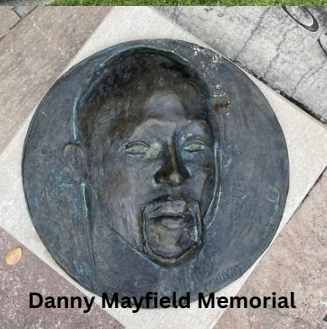
Tamale man Charlie Green was a University Avenue pushcart vendor whose wares got the attention of some national gourmards like John Egerton, who cited Green in Egerton's definitive 1987 tome, *Southern Food*; Green's Mechanicsville tamales, in fact, were Knoxville's only distinction in that very thick book.

Coincidentally, despite its distance from the traditional campus, in recent years the University of Tennessee has built two large buildings on University Avenue: the Institute for Public Service, at 1610 University Avenue, and the UT Foundation, Inc., at 1525, both with offices involving fundraising for the university. Both two-story brick buildings are in Mechanicsville's old "downtown" section.

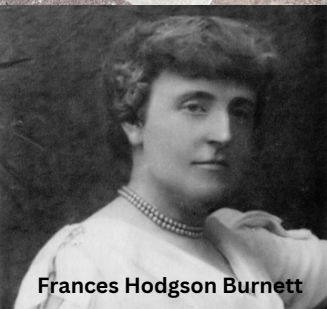
<< Proceed west on University Avenue and turn right on to College Street >>



Danny Mayfield Park



Danny Mayfield Memorial



Frances Hodgson Burnett

College Street, named much later than University, is an obvious homage to Knoxville College; this street runs along the campus's northeastern border. Previously, College Street was considered the southernmost part of Clinton Pike, its historic route leading northwest toward modern-day Clinton Highway.

The 250 frame houses west of College Street, though historical in design, were all built as part of the federally subsidized Hope VI project between 1998 and 2004.

Danny Mayfield Park (700 College Street): Established in 2004, as much of this part of the neighborhood was being renovated through the Hope VI project, this 15-acre park honors Knoxville College graduate, inner-city mentor, energetic community activist, and City Council member Danny Mayfield (1969-2001), who died of cancer at age 32. The park includes an unusual horizontal bas-relief sculpture of Mayfield, as well as a memorial to teacher Alfreda Delaney (See Alfreda Delaney Lane, below).

A house no longer standing at 834 College Street was the childhood home of **James "Sparky" Rucker**, born 1946, a folk and blues musician, touring and recording artist. He lived with both parents, including his father, who was a Knoxville policeman, but they still qualified for subsidized housing.

This hilltop was a remote, wooded place before KC established itself here in 1875. It may seem astonishing that **Frances Hodgson Burnett** (1849-1924), the English-born author of books with English and Northeastern settings, lived on this hill with her siblings and widowed mother, all immigrants with few resources. College Street, then part of "Clinton Pike," was the site of an awkward little hillside house she called "Noah's Ark." The Hodgsons lived here from 1866 to 1869. Here in 1868 Frances began her career as a short-story writer. She recalled selling wild local grapes harvested with the help of neighboring African American children, in order to buy stationery and postage stamps. She was already selling stories to women's magazines at age 18, and helping support her widowed mother and her brothers and sisters. It's been proposed that her most famous novel, *The Secret Garden*, was partly based on memories of a beloved open spot in the woods here that she called "the Bower." As described it in her memoir, *The One I Knew the Best of All*, the Bower was a place she came to be alone, read, write, and contemplate the view of the mountains. Her place is believed to have been near the eastern edge of Knoxville College's campus. About six years before the hilltop was purchased to be a campus, the Hodgsons moved to another, larger house downtown near the river.

<< Turn left onto Knoxville College Drive. Knoxville College is on the right >>



Knoxville College,
early 1900s



Knoxville College: Originally known as Knoxville Freedmen's College, KC was founded by the Presbyterian Church with major assistance from the Reconstruction-era U.S. Freedman's Bureau, and opened in 1876.

KC was already thriving in 1891, when federal law obliged the University of Tennessee to provide higher education for Black students. Because the all-white university was not ready to desegregate, UT paid Knoxville College to provide that education, through its vocational Industrial Department. By 1892, local journalists were claiming that KC was "one of the largest and best-conducted schools for colored people in the country." That uneasy partnership with UT lasted several years, until 1913 when Nashville's new Tennessee State assumed UT's obligation. In 1914, KC commenced its College of Arts & Sciences, and the college grew in size, accommodating 275-400 students for most of the first half of the 20th century. It grew to accommodate over 1,200 by the early 1970s. KC's alumni include journalist **George E. Curry** (1947-1916); New York politician C. Virginia Fields (b. 1945); longtime Tuskegee, Ala., mayor **Johnny Ford**; **Jake Gaither** (1903-1994), the legendary Florida A&M football coach; Knoxville doctor and City Councilman Dr. H.M. Green, who became president of the (African American) National Medical Association; and Knoxville author and pioneering politician **Robert Booker**.

After desegregation, as many Black students began to favor mainstream, multiracial universities, KC's enrollment declined—most sharply after the historic college lost accreditation in 1997. Enrollment dwindled to double digits by 2015. Although Knoxville College never formally closed, only a few students are enrolled today, using only a couple of buildings on the old campus.

Several of the older buildings of the hilltop campus are still standing. Unused for many years, most are in very poor repair. However, at this writing, those remaining do present an interesting display:

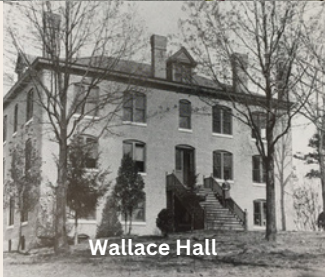
McMillan Chapel



The first building on the right is **McMillan Chapel**, built in 1913, on a design by KC alumnus **William Thomas Jones**, and is Knoxville's oldest building known to have been designed by a Black architect. McMillan Chapel is notable for its Doric-column architecture, but also for the fact it served as the college's public auditorium, hosting speeches by W.E.B. DuBois, Countee Cullen, George Washington Carver, Jesse Owens, Jackie Robinson, and many others. In terms of hosting important events, it's one of the most historic buildings in Mechanicsville.

Intersecting to the left is **Alfredda Delaney Street**, which was named in 1992 for a public-school English teacher whose organizational skills and enthusiasm for the neighborhood where she was born is credited with much of its astonishing revival in the 1970s and '80s. Sometimes known as "the Mayor of Mechanicsville," she died in 1988.

The prominent building on the hilltop with the tower in the middle, long considered a symbol of Knoxville College, is **McKee Hall**, originally built as one of the first buildings on campus in 1876, but devastated by a fire in 1894. What we see today is what was rebuilt after that. It's named for **Rev. Joseph Gillespie McKee (1832-1868)**, an Irish missionary. He had established the first school for African American children in Nashville around 1863. The McKee School in Nashville was controversial, and McKee is said to have been obliged to defend himself physically. Knoxville College was described as a combination of the McKee School and Robert Creswell's teachers' college in Knoxville, known in its brief life as the Creswell School.



Wallace Hall

It's not certain whether McKee spent time in Knoxville, where **Laura Cansler** had begun a school for African Americans about the same time McKee did, but some of KC's earliest teachers, like Aggie H. Wait, had previously worked under McKee. The Irishman died of tuberculosis, at age 36, in 1868. The building, intended as a memorial by those who remembered him, may be his most tangible legacy; as is often the case, the memorial has become better known than the man.

Elnathan Hall, built in 1898 after a fire destroyed the original, was originally as a dormitory for girls. Its unusual name originated with a Hebrew phrase meaning "God has given." Its builder/designer was Paris-trained French-Swiss architect David Getaz. Extensively renovated and augmented in the 20th century, Elnathan has served various purposes, albeit none recently.

Originally a boys' orphanage built in 1891, **Wallace Hall** would bear the name of **Eliza B. Wallace**, one of KC's earliest and most beloved teachers, sometimes considered a co-founder of KC, where she worked for 20 years. Her will enabled the 1907 construction of an on-campus hospital. Wallace Hall, which had received that name by 1908, may be Knoxville's first large building named for a woman.

The lawn was the setting for a well-attended commencement speech by Rev. Martin Luther King in May, 1960. That year, K.C. students led sit-ins at whites-only lunch counters all over downtown.

The campus also includes the Victorian "president's house" (1889, rebuilt with brick, 1905) and the Giffen Alumni Memorial Building of 1929, named for J. Kelly Giffen, president of KC from 1918 to 1936. A bungalow at 1005 College Street was a faculty residence.

Note: Adjacent to Knoxville College, a little further along College Street near Iredell Avenue, is **Freedmen's Mission Historic Cemetery**. Known over the years as First United Presbyterian Church Cemetery and Knoxville College Cemetery, it was renamed Freedmen's Mission Cemetery in 2012 to reflect the church's original initiative in founding the college.

Among those buried here are formerly enslaved members of Andrew Johnson's household, some of whom accompanied the president to the White House. Also buried here is **Laura Ann Cansler (1846-1926)**, the mixed-race woman who became the first public-school teacher in Knoxville history when she convinced occupying Union Gen. Burnside to let her open a school for Black children. She was the mother of several educators, including well-known author Charles Cansler.

Others interred here are community leaders **James and Ethel Beck**, for whom the **Beck Cultural Exchange Center** is named. In recent years, the cemetery has been the location of ceremonies celebrating the Eighth of August, East Tennessee's traditional emancipation day.



Laura Ann Cansler Grave

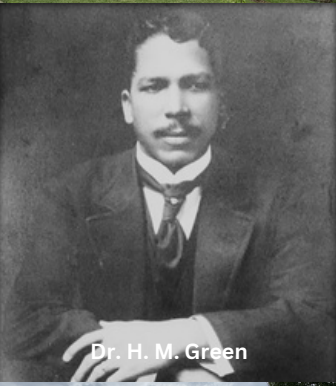


James and Ethel Beck Grave

<< Proceeding west on Knoxville College Drive turn right onto Reynolds Street >>



Charles Cansler House



Dr. H. M. Green



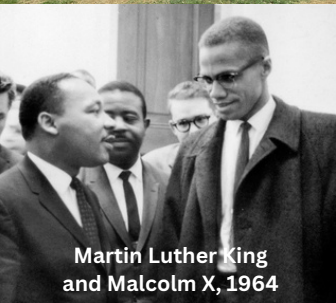
Wesley House



Beardsley Farm



Beardsley Farm



Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, 1964

Brandau Hill, the western part of Knoxville College's campus, bears the name of an early resident, Dr. Gustavus Reinhard Brandau, who was known as a heroic Union surgeon for the 11th Tenn. Volunteer Cavalry by the time he settled on this northwest side of downtown with his wife, Charlotte Caribbean Roehl Brandau. An immigrant who was well-known in the German-speaking community of Wartburg before the Civil War, Brandau lived here just after the war, as he gained newspaper support for his candidacy for state senate in 1869, advertised as a "faithful energetic man" who supported "universal suffrage." Known for growing excellent strawberries here, Dr. Brandau died in 1875, leaving his wife and one daughter, and earned the honor of a burial at Arlington National Cemetery in Washington. His widow outlived him by 53 years, moving to Laurel Avenue, where she lived supported by Dr. Brandau's veteran's pension.

College Street was formerly a road that ran around the periphery of Knoxville College, but around 2000, was re-aligned to be a north-south street, as Knoxville College Drive approximates its original western course. Although the buildings are gone and the streets realigned, this general area of the old western stretch of College Street was the site of two once-important institutions. Knoxville Medical School, a college to train Black doctors, was in operation between 1900 and 1910. Likewise, this was near the site of Knoxville College Hospital from 1907 to 1926. Its chief of staff was nationally known physician Dr. H.M. Green, who also served on Knoxville City Council.

Just off Reynolds Street, to the left, is the Charles Cansler Home at 1805 Brandau Street. Perhaps Knoxville's best-known African American intellectual of the early 20th century, Charles Cansler (1871-1953) was a public-school teacher and longtime principal of Austin High School, and had a reputation as a mathematical genius, but he was also a cultural leader in the community at large. His 1939 book, *Three Generations*, tracks his own genealogy of an unusual free family of color in North Carolina and Tennessee before, during, and after the Civil War. Cansler was also an important influence on a particularly talented student, artist Beauford Delaney (1901-1979), encouraging and sponsoring the future master's early education beyond high school. Well-connected, Cansler often recruited Black writers and thinkers to come to Knoxville to speak, and he was personally acquainted with Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. DuBois, George Washington Carver, and many others. Some of them, including Washington, James Weldon Johnson, and singer Roland Hayes, are reported to have stayed with Cansler in this house during their visits. Cansler is believed to have built this house around 1905, and lived here until his death in 1953. Its architect is unknown, but the house is one of several built by Knoxville College students.

Wesley House (1719 Reynolds Street) is a Methodist charity founded originally to serve as a safe, educational, daycare for working families associated with Brookside Mills, but eventually it evolved into a much broader service, supporting children and parents in need. Originally located over near North Central, within walking distance of that major textile factory, it moved to the Beaumont area in the 1950s, and recently settled here, in the building constructed in 1951 to be an African American school, Cansler Elementary. The school building later served as a Boys and Girls' Club.

Beardsley Junior High School, which first opened in 1936, was named, as a result of a community petition, for Gertrude Beardsley (1878-1958), originally of Toledo, Ohio, who was an officer in the Knoxville Board of Education and founder of the charitable Children's Clothing Center. It was a continuation of old Mechanicsville School, and was a school for Black children until desegregation; it closed in 1990. (Its address was originally 1901 College Street). —

Founded in 1998, Beardsley Farm (1741 Reynolds Street), with its greenhouse, is named for the old junior high school. It's a community garden, or "urban farm," sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, to both provide food and food education to low-income neighbors. This acreage has an agrarian heritage; before it was the campus of Beardsley Junior High, this area was part of what was known as the Knoxville College Farm.

The Ed Cothran Pool (1737 Reynolds Street) is a public swimming pool that's also on the old property of Beardsley Junior High. It's a legacy of an older pool by the same name, originally located at the long-gone Leslie Street Park, which was a few blocks west of here. It's named for Lt. Edward Cothran, a Knoxville College graduate and a member of its once-famous singing quartet who was killed in action in Europe in October, 1944. In an era of segregation it was first a pool only for Black people; in 1946, City Manager George Dempster proposed naming it in honor of Cothran. The modern pool, of course, has never been segregated.

On the right is Malcolm Martin Park (2247 Western Avenue), named in 1976 with surprisingly little controversy in honor of two very different African American civil-rights leaders, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King. In its first year, long before King's birthday was honored with a federal holiday, local community leaders honored the day with a march from the park across town to the Civic Coliseum. (It was not until 1989 that the city established Martin Luther King Avenue on the east side of town.)

The western side of Western was commonly known as McAnally Flats, or as it was known less frequently, "New Mechanicsville." It was another dense neighborhood, that emerged a generation after Mechanicsville, with mostly modest houses, originally just outside of city limits, and primarily white working class. Unlike Mechanicsville, McAnally was not incorporated into Knoxville until 1917. It's referred to in novels *Bijou* by David Madden and *Sultree* by Cormac McCarthy, and often confusing to new readers, because it no longer exists as a neighborhood, almost entirely wiped out by interstate construction, a fact referred to near the end of *Sultree*.

<< Follow Reynolds Street to Western Avenue >>

Option: Down Western Avenue to the right are entrances to the Beaumont and Lonsdale areas.



Beaumont lies between Mechanicsville and Lonsdale.

Mostly wooded and high on a hill hard to reach by streetcars, Beaumont was largely ignored by Knoxville until the development of Lonsdale to its north, and the Spanish American War, when the U.S. government used it for training national recruits of the U.S. Signal Corps, and as the quartermaster's stables. Knoxville has never played such a formal training role in any war as it did in 1898. Many of those trained here went off to fight in Cuba and the Philippines.

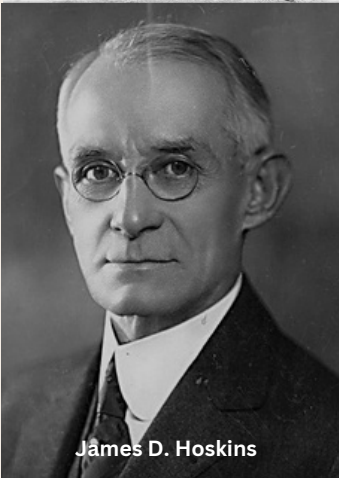
The wooded area, barely out of the jurisdiction of Knoxville police, was notoriously a refuge for gamblers, once referred to facetiously around 1902 as "the arboreal Monte Carlo of Knoxville." Young men and boys came here for card games and cockfights.

Beaumont, which means "beautiful mountain" in French, was the name of a 1906 real-estate development here. Most who bought here were working-class white people employed at nearby factories, especially Brookside Mills. News reports at the time noted that an unusual number of Beaumont's first home-site buyers were women.

The original developers were Doll, Mynderse, and Brandau. The name of developer **Walter Mynderse (1867-1933)**, a progressive who was once chairman of the City Planning Commission, remains on an avenue leading up the hill to Lonsdale and Beaumont from Western Avenue. Another partner was merchant-developer **Alex L. Brandau**, who died of Bright's Disease at age 46 in July, 1906, just as the development was commencing. Although he lived off Dandridge Avenue in East Knoxville, he was the son of Dr. Brandau, the German immigrant who lived on Brandau Hill, near here.



Beaumont School, a continuation of what had been known as Beaumont Avenue School since 1898, was built in 1915, with some assistance from then-thriving Brookside Mills, presumably on behalf of their employees who were parents of schoolchildren. Among those attending its dedication was Brookside superintendent Larkin Brown, the father of major Hollywood director Clarence Brown; also there was future UT president James D. Hoskins and several prominent attorneys and judges, attesting to the importance of the facility. What's there today has been described as a major enlargement of the original walls, some of which still exist at the core.



"Western Heights" was originally the name of a commercial area much closer to downtown, on the south side of Mechanicsville along Western Avenue. However, after the same name was chosen for a New Deal-era subsidized-housing project on this higher ridge to the northwest, "Western Heights" became more associated with the Beaumont area. In 1939, when the city used federal funding to build 244 units here, it was claimed to be the single biggest building project in Knoxville history. (In 1953, 444 more were added.)

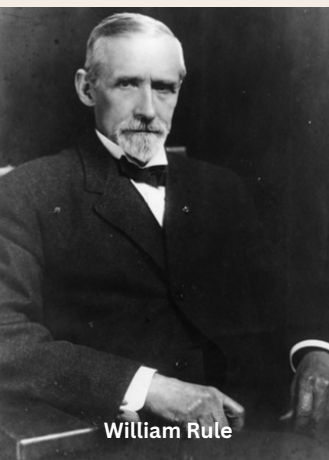
In that segregated era, Western Heights, a collection of small brick apartment buildings, was an all-white facility, meant to be a counterpart to all-Black College Homes in nearby Mechanicsville. College Homes was demolished around 2000, but Western Heights, long since open to all races, remains.

At 1601 Beaumont, UT alum **Tillman Keller (1910-2004)** opened a grocery store in 1939. He eventually built the business into a major food-service industry called Kelson. Another ambitious food-service pro who worked here with Keller was J.B. Wright, who later founded the Wright's Cafeteria, which was a Middlebrook Pike landmark for 60 years.



Near the very apex of what was become known during training for the Spanish American War of 1898 as Flag Pole Hill is the **Greater Bush Grove Baptist Church**, at 1455 West Fourth Ave., which features a plain steeple and an unusual arched stairway from the sidewalk, which has been there since 1962.

Frajan Campbell Park, at 1300 Moses Avenue at the intersection of Wallace, is a tiny pocket park of only 1/3 acre that nonetheless features a small playground and a basketball court. Its unusual name is that of the widow who was director of the Western Heights Recreation Center, and donated the land, stating that it had been a park at some time in the past, and helped establish it as a city park. The project was completed in 1995, seven years before Ms. Campbell's death.



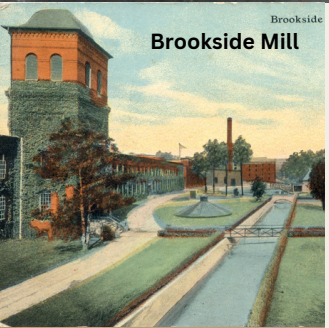
William Rule

At the ridgetop between Maryland and Vermont Avenues, not far east of Western Avenue, is what remains of Rule High School. Established in 1927 as an honor to journalist-mayor **William Rule (1839-1928)**, the Union veteran who was then in his 80s and still the active editor of the Knoxville Journal, after a career that lasted for more than 60 years.

Rule became one of Knoxville's biggest high schools, with a capacity of 1,300 students. No school offered a better view.

During the segregation era, Rule was an all-white school, but in its later years, its student body included a large African American population, as many of its white students moved to suburban schools.

The school had a total enrollment of only 400 when it closed in 1991. For 30 years, preservationists hoped the enormous school's solid brick walls would remain, perhaps to be converted as a residential facility, as has worked with several other old school buildings all over town. But Rule stood empty and little maintained until Knox County government acquired it from the school system and demolished it in 2023.



Brookside Mill

Lonsdale is among the least well-known neighborhoods of Knoxville's historic core, simply because it's not clearly visible from major automobile arteries. It's more sharply defined than some neighborhoods, in a lofty valley separated from Mechanicsville, Beaumont, and Western Heights by the top of the steep ridge.

It was a mainly rural area of forests and fields, but apparently as early as the 1870s, it was the site of an African American church called Mitchell's Chapel, at the foot of Sharps Ridge, in the northwestern portion of present-day Lonsdale. The church sometimes doubled as a dance hall, and the name Mitchell's Chapel came to be applied to the community itself, the term still in use long after the church disappeared. A rarely visited cemetery remains.



William Baxter Ragsdale

An 1890 residential development by William Baxter Ragsdale (1853-1892) attracted men and women who had jobs at factories along Second Creek, especially just down the hill at the Brookside Mill, which was one of Knoxville's major employers. "Lonsdale" combined his mother's name, Lonas, with his father's name, Ragsdale.

The streets were named after states and, perhaps inspired by the retrospective look at the Civil War that came with Knoxville's successful Blue-Gray Reunion of veterans in 1890, after Civil War generals of both sides, though Union generals seem to have been favored, 7-4. And though the states (and one territory, Dakota) represent both north and south, most are northern ones.

One of the most vigorous real-estate promoters of his era, Ragsdale convinced several affluent peers to move to Lonsdale, among them his widowed father. However, the developer never saw his dream come alive. He had been hard at work promoting Lonsdale in the summer of 1892, when he took a long July weekend off to relax at his father-in-law's resort, Tate Springs, when he died suddenly of a heart attack at age 39. His funeral was in his father's new home in Lonsdale, and he was buried nearby at recently opened New Gray Cemetery.

Lonsdale was initially slow to develop, almost scuttled by Ragsdale's death, followed by the Panic of 1893, the most ruinous economic collapse before the Great Depression. Knoxville attorney-capitalist Leon Jourolmon (1847-1920) purchased much of the hilltop, and continued what Ragsdale had started. His name remains on a long avenue across Beaumont.

A Lonsdale School developed up here in 1898, and the beginning of a Lonsdale Methodist church in 1899. Serving the neighborhood's Black community was the Mitchell Chapel School, which emerged by 1901.

Lonsdale's population was always biracial, though mostly segregated. Today, its population is still both white and African American, but now with a substantial number of Latino residents as well, some of whom operate thriving businesses here.



Knoxville Iron Co.

In 1903, Knoxville Iron Foundry, the same factory that spawned the development of Mechanicsville, moved to Lonsdale, primarily to escape city taxes. Lonsdale was then just barely outside of city limits, though not for long. Lonsdale incorporated as its own town in 1907. It elected its own mayors, both of whom were prominent physicians. Lonsdale's own city jail was at the corner of Belt and Burnside.

However, only 10 years after incorporating itself, Lonsdale was included in a massive Knoxville annexation in 1917. Rather than moving again, Knoxville Iron Co. apparently just accepted the reality of city taxes.

The legacy of the Knoxville Iron Works, which moved to the neighborhood in 1903, survives in Lonsdale with a significant industrial plant, CMC Steel Tennessee, the only steel mill in the state. Also nearby is Towe Iron Works and some other iron-related businesses.



CMC Steel Tennessee

Lonsdale developed its own downtown area, with a Lonsdale Café, shoe shop, furniture store, shoe store, barber shop, groceries and saloons, much of it on Tennessee Avenue. Protestant churches for both races were scattered throughout the neighborhood.



A large two-story building of unknown age at 2601 Johnston, standing at two cross-street intersections, was an **Odd Fellows lodge**, perhaps the "large hall" referenced to have been built around 1902 after a fire had destroyed a previous one. It was used by the Odd Fellows and perhaps also the Masons until the 1960s, when it was converted into a furniture store. It's now still standing, but apparently vacant and in poor condition.



The city established the Lonsdale Firehall in 1917, the year of Lonsdale's incorporation, at New York and Burnside. The building at 1216 New York Avenue is still Firehall #7 today. A small library, a suburban branch of Lawson McGhee, opened in the Lonsdale Firehall in 1925.



For a time Lonsdale supported its own cinema, known as the Lee Theater, which opened in 1941 at 1341 Tennessee Avenue between Bragg and Burnside. It presented second-run Hollywood films and occasionally live country-music acts from WNOX, including, in 1942, Johnny Wright and the Tennessee Hillbillies—who at the time often included two future stars: Wright's wife, Kitty Wells, and guitarist Chet Atkins. The Lee continued showing movies until at least 1956, when many neighborhood theaters were closing due to the competition of television.

Lonsdale also developed a reputation for some varieties of vice, especially bootlegging. Legendary bootlegger Big Six was known by that nickname even before her customers knew her gender; Lucille Mills/Fortson (1893?-1954) was in fact a very large woman, known to go armed. She was persuasive at the courthouse; she escaped hard time on murder charges for the three men she confessed killing, on a self-defense plea. She spent most of her career on Minnesota Avenue.

Much of "downtown Lonsdale" has been lost over the years, but scant remnants of commercial buildings remain along Tennessee Avenue between Bragg and Johnston Streets. A Hispanic market remains at Tennessee and Johnston, in one of the few 20th-century commercial buildings remaining.

Lonsdale's multifaceted nature prevails. In the 1960s, novelist David Madden, who grew up just down the hill to the east, near Lincoln Park, used Lonsdale as a setting for a major novel. But when his New York editors read it, they found it incoherent and unbelievable—to them, this place seemed both urban and rural. Madden was obliged to rewrite his story to make it all more rural, and moved it to the hills of eastern Kentucky. Published in 1969, *Cassandra Singing* became one of his best-known novels.

Racheff Gardens (1943 Tennessee Ave): In the gardening world, Knoxville's best-kept secret may be Racheff Gardens. A labor of love by an unusual Bulgarian industrialist, the formal walled 3.5-acre garden was intended to prove that industrial sites can be beautiful.



From Lovech, Bulgaria, garden creator **Ivan Racheff (1892-1982)** began working as a consultant to Knoxville Iron Co. during World War II, and moved to Knoxville in 1946 when he purchased the company. He lived alone in a comfortable apartment on the second floor of the house that still stands within the garden compound.

In his garden, Racheff planted tens of thousands of daffodils, tulips, and hyacinths, and a variety of trees to formally qualify the garden as an "arboretum." The garden's pools, supplied by a deep well, were originally stocked with three different species of trout. In 1970, Racheff donated the garden to the Tennessee Federation of Garden Clubs.

Racheff himself began the tradition of planting dogwood trees that still thrive along Tennessee Avenue.

Harb's Market, 3001 Burnside Street, a landmark corner market at Burnside and Minnesota. Once known as Burnside Market, which dates from 1940, it has been run by the Harb family since the 1960s.



Knox County Schools' Sam E. Hill Family Community Center, 1725 Delaware Ave., is named for Sam E. Hill (1871-1940), a county school superintendent who later earned a seat on Knoxville's short-lived City Commission, sometimes serving as acting mayor. He left his role as city commissioner the same year as the establishment of Lonsdale's Sam E. Hill school for Black children in 1919. His name has remained closely associated with Lonsdale since then.

Gloria Garner Street is named for the vivacious longtime Urban League leader (1937-2019).



Texas Avenue was a traditional center of activity for the Black community. One resort called the “West Inn,” referenced early in Cormac McCarthy’s novel, *Suttree*, set in 1951, was the site of a drunken misadventure involving the title character, a white man, who walked there from McAnally Flats with his friends J-Bone and Red Callahan. After the doorman forbids them entry, he recognizes Callahan and allows them inside, where “A group of musicians played with fiddle and guitar a rustic reel.” Interpretive scholars believe the setting is that of a real place, a bootlegging spot called the West End Country Club, in a concrete-block building back from the road at 2517 Texas Ave. Although it was for Black patrons, its manager was Ed Lobetti, a former policeman of Italian descent. Today, it’s a semi-industrial spot, with nothing discernible from that era.



MEMORIALS

On Sherman at Minnesota, adjacent to the large, relatively new, Emerald Youth Center, is a roadside memorial, “Hope After Tragedy,” honoring **Brittney Daniels**, a 5-year-old child who was killed in a drive-by gang-related shooting on Sherman Street in May, 1996.

At 2701 Badgett Dr., alongside new residential buildings, is memorial park and structured playground devoted to 15-year-old high-school student **Zaezion Dobson**, who in December, 1915, died protecting his friends from a hail of gunfire near here, an act so heroic it gained the attention of President Barack Obama, who described Dobson’s deed in a speech before Congress.

At the western end of Rhode Island Road, on the slope of Sharp’s Ridge, is the **Lonsdale Cemetery**. It has been described in recent years as a Black cemetery, and it was once associated with Mitchell Chapel, a Black church, but early descriptions describe it as segregated, representing graves of people of both European and African American descent. Though it has been estimated to contain hundreds of graves, only a very few are legible, dating from between 1892 and 1970. The graveyard is challenging to find, as much of the area is privately owned, making parking difficult and exploring awkward.

Very near Lonsdale to the southwest, along Western Avenue, is **New Gray Cemetery**, which opened in 1891, to become the resting place of several remarkable Knoxvilleians, including Lonsdale developer W.B. Ragsdale, pioneer Smokies painter **Charles Christopher Krutch** (“the Corot of the South”), and singer-songwriter **Ida Cox** (“The Uncrowned Queen of the Blues”).

THANK YOU

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