

The Bugle



The Bugle, named for the first newspaper in Brentwood
-a publication of the Brentwood Historical Society

ELLIS HOUSE ENJOYS RECENT PRESERVATION EFFORT BY JOE LASSUS

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Those driving busy Concord Road on the eastern edge of Brentwood may have noticed the recent renovation work on the historic farmhouse located at 9710 Concord Road. This property was recently purchased by Debbie Laster who has made great initial progress

on the project. Local history has recorded the farm as owned by the Ellis family for the longest continuous period, and was dubbed "Mulberry Hill" by the last owner.

The site actually contains two historic structures, a two-story frame farm house and a log cabin.

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The primitive core of the larger farm house dates from the pre-Civil War period. This is the case with numerous historic Brentwood homes that were eventually enlarged and improved during succeeding years. Many such homes were eventu-



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RECENT PRESERVATION...(CONTINUED) BY JOE LASSUS

ally covered with clapboard siding as was accomplished on this structure.

The second historic building is a log cabin that was moved to this site in the recent past. This cabin was originally built further east on Concord Road near the Mill Creek bridge. Its original location is now occupied by the Whispering Hills Church of the Nazarene near the Brentwood – Nolensville border.

Vance Little’s book on cemeteries in northeast Williamson County records that the graveyard in this front yard belongs to the Ellis family, and “is located on the Emmett Mitchell farm.” The elder Richard Ellis (1850-1901) is buried in this plot along with at least five other relatives. Vance records



that one Ellis is listed in the 1820 Census of Williamson County, John J. Ellis.

Finally, this historic home has another interesting aspect of its past. It was the scene of one in a series of several robberies by the Torture Gang of the early 1930’s. The severe societal stresses of Prohibition and the Great Depression spawned a wave of lawlessness across the country. Criminals such as John Dillinger, Al Capone, and Bonnie & Clyde were notorious during this era. You will read in the next article on how such gangland activity came to Brentwood and Williamson County of the early 1930’s.



The Bugle, a publication of the Brentwood Historical Society
(editor: Joe Lassus)

A citizen organization supporting the Brentwood Historic Commission, and dedicated to the study and preservation of the City’s history and culture.

For information and membership, contact the Brentwood Municipal Center at 371-0060, Linda Lynch, Community Relations Director, T. Vance Little, City Historian.

We’re on the web!! Go to:
www.brentwood-tn.org
...click on “history” to find us!

The Brentwood Historical Society wishes you and yours a joyous and blessed Christmas !!!



Brentwood History On Your Television-Channel 19

For several years now, Vance Little and various members of the Brentwood historical community have been producing a series known as “Conversations from Concord House.” The program regularly airs on Comcast cable Channel 19 at 7 pm on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Recently, our own Julian Wells was taped with Vance Little discussing the Franklin Interurban Railroad that was completed in 1908. This commuter line ran through Brentwood to Nashville, operating for several decades of the twentieth century. Look for this newest edition of “Conversations” to be shown soon on Channel 19.

Brentwood Historical Society Winter Event Scheduled!!!

Michael Moore to Speak on Native American Artifacts!!

Join us at the Brentwood Library on Sunday, February 19th at 2 p.m. in the afternoon. Library Director Chuck Sherrill will introduce the Brentwood Historical Society to the Brentwood Room to open the program. Michael Moore of the state archeology office will then present and discuss the Native American artifacts found at the library site several years ago.

PREHISTORIC VILLAGE DISCOVERED (CONTINUED)

human remains were unearthed in stone box graves. State Archeologist Nick Fielder was summoned to the site, and he verified the prehistoric remains. The entire development covers over two hundred acres, but this section which proposed nine residential lots contains 6.5 acres of land.

The construction activity was immediately halted and a detailed archeological investigation commenced at the site. A

series of test trenches were carefully dug that unearthed the extensive finds outlined in the report. With the exception of two adult graves, the balance of the graves were scattered throughout the site, typical of the children that were often buried near the domestic structures.

As this information has come to the editor late in the assembly of this edition, more information will be provided in subsequent issues of The Bugle in 2006.

HISTORICAL MARKER UNVEILED AT THE PAUL HARMON WILSON PIKE HOME

Many of you are aware that Twenty-Four Trees (Alexander Smith House) is now on the National Register of Historic Places. A group of distinguished preservationists gathered on the afternoon of November 19, 2005 to celebrate the occasion and unveil a new historic marker at the site. Vance Little unveiled the marker on behalf of the Brentwood Historical Commission, and is joined in this photograph with Herbert Harper of the Tennessee Historical Commission (on left), and long time owner of the structure, Paul Harmon (on right). Among many others in attendance were Virginia Bowman, Williamson



County Historian, Patrick McIntire of the Tennessee Preservation Trust, and Dr. Leslie Sharp of Middle Tennessee State University History Center.

WILLIAMSON COUNTY HISTORIC ROBBERIES

BY T. VANCE LITTLE

In the Depression-era days of the early 1930's, Williamson County and surrounding areas were terrorized by a series of gangster-style robberies. A group of five or six bandits selected as targets lone farm houses in remote areas where people lived who were reputed to have large sums of money on hand.

They would stop at a house late at night, knock on the door and gain admission through some fabricated tale about car trouble. Once inside the house, they would demand money. If their victims resisted or refused to cooperate, they would torture or otherwise abuse them.

One such robbery occurred at the Ellis home at 9710 Concord Road, now within the city limits of Brentwood, on the first Saturday night in August 1933. At home that evening was 78-year old widow Mrs. Josephine Redmon Ellis, her also widowed daughter Mrs. Beulah Ellis Robinson, Mrs. Robinson's 16-year old daughter Leona Robinson, and 14-year old Marvin Byrd, another grandchild of Mrs. Ellis. They had just returned from a revival meeting at the Concord Baptist Church.

At about 11:30 that night three men knocked on the door. They claimed that they were looking for an escaped convict.

The Ellis women let them in. They blew out the lamp, and headed straight for Mrs. Ellis bedroom and grabbed from the wall a pistol she kept hanging over the bed. The gangsters knew where to look.

Then the family was threatened with death if they did not hand over the family cash. Mrs. Ellis gave them her purse containing \$60 in currency. With their exit, Marvin Byrd became a little too sassy. One of the robbers struck him with the pistol and knocked him to the floor.

The robbers warned the Ellis women not to leave the house or call for help. They said that they would be watching and would shoot if they did. After a couple of hours Mrs. Robinson slipped through the fields to a neighbor's house and called her cousin George W. Redmon, a detective with the Nashville police department.

These same robbers who struck the Ellis home were also chief suspects in a two year string of robberies. Other robberies of the group known as the "torture gang" included \$3,400 from John Roach in Maury County, \$300 from Charles Rohrer in Davidson County, and two Williamson County holdups of \$250 from S. L. McCall and \$500 from Til White.

WILLIAMSON COUNTY HISTORIC ROBBERIES (CONTINUED)

There was a bizarre twist to the Ellis robbery. John (Buddy) Bush was one of the culprits in the incident. He was a known local thug and bootlegger. He was a suspect from the beginning. His sister and her husband lived across the road from the Ellis home where they rented and farmed part of the Ellis land. He and his equally notorious brothers were well known to the Ellis family.

Mrs. Ellis' nephew, George W. Redmon, the Nashville detective, grew up nearby too and knew the Bush boys. He had already been assigned to help Williamson County authorities solve the McCall and White robberies when the Ellis robbery occurred.

Buddy Bush was later apprehended and taken to Franklin to stand trial. He was identified by Mrs. Robinson and other members of the family. He was found guilty of robbery, assault, and battery. On the day of the trial George W. Redmon sat with the district attorney only a table away from Buddy Bush. He was sentenced to eight years in prison.

But Buddy Bush did not go to prison that day. He was, unwisely, released on bail pending an appeal. Not done with his mischief, he lured Detective Redmon to the Flat Rock (now Woodbine) "Dew Drop

Inn," a well known dive where the Torture Gang was wont to hang out. He telephoned Redmon and told him that he had some information for him about the McCall and White robberies. Redmon was instructed to come to the Dew Drop Inn.

Bush lay in wait for Lieutenant Redmon, who arrived at the appointed hour and was making his way through the parking lot. Bush aimed his gun through a window and fired at Redmon, killing him instantly. Police immediately surrounded the night spot. Bush was shot in the ensuing exchange of gunfire. Some say that he took his own life, dying a few hours later. But he lived long enough to admit firing the shot that killed George A. Redmon.

The rest of Buddy Bush's Torture Gang were rounded up. Others in the gang were Fate Hamblen, age 61, the alleged kingpin, Wesley Potts, age 34, Mack Floyd, age 34, Joe Andrews, age 31, Leonard Centrell, age 39, and Archie Bush, age 22, Buddy Bush's younger brother.

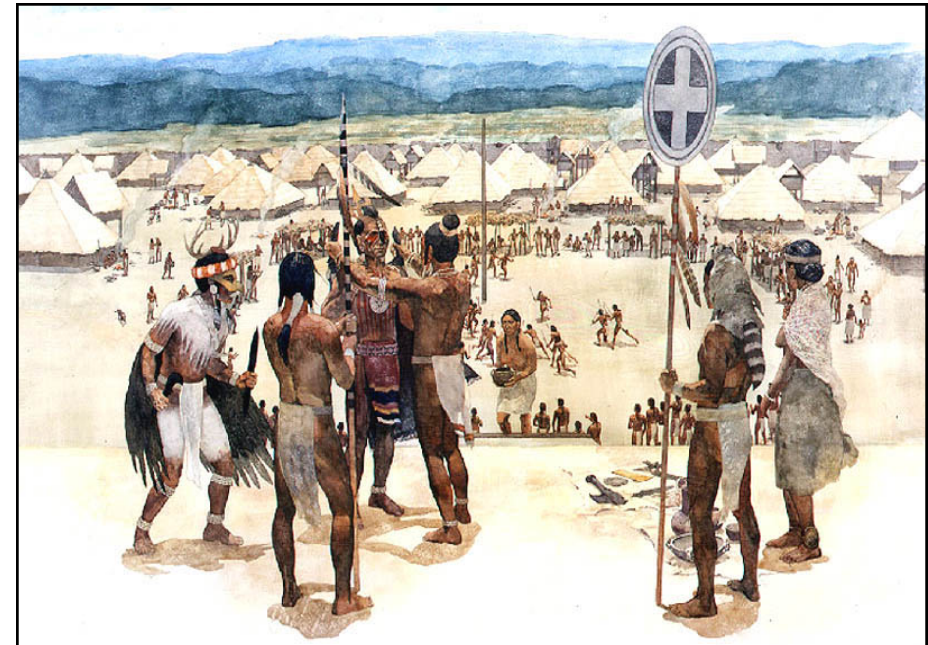
Their two year rampage of crime came to an end in September 1933. They were all tried at the Williamson County Courthouse in Franklin. Some were found guilty and sent to prison. Some were released on technicalities.

SIGNIFICANT PREHISTORIC NATIVE AMERICAN VILLAGE DISCOVERED AT INGLEHAME BY JOE LASSUS

The developer of the Inglehame subdivision has discovered a sizeable prehistoric village on the eastern edge of this tract in south Brentwood near the intersection of Split Log Road and Wilson Pike. A related report prepared by A. Merrill Dicks of DuVall & Associates details the findings, "Investigations on Tract #6 revealed the presence of the remains of a large Mississippian period village site which was previously unrecorded. These remains included human burials, house sites, pit-like

features, and numerous post holes. Some portions of Tract #6 also contained thick and well preserved midden deposits. In addition to these remains, a large assemblage of artifacts were recovered. These included large numbers of ceramics, lithics, animal bone, and botanical remains." The site is said to be in excellent condition, and eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

During the grading of a proposed cul-de-sac (Harlan Court) off of Charity Drive,



The painting on left provides a glimpse of prehistoric life in Tennessee. This work is Greg Harlin's life size mural created for the McClung Museum at UT Knoxville. It depicts a late era Mississippian town known as "Toqua."