

# RAGSDALE HOUSE

**Compiled by members of Leadership Brentwood Class of 2008:**

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**The attached information was compiled from the following sources:**

- Historic Description by T. Vance Little.
- Location Map by City of Brentwood.
- Photos by City of Brentwood.
- Historic Description put together by Betsy Ragsdale, now deceased (her husband was a Ragsdale descendant).
- Little, Vance T. (November 7, 2007). Ragsdale place sits empty after two centuries of history. *The Tennessean, Brentwood Journal*.

## Hill-Ragsdale House

The Hill-Ragsdale House is one of the oldest houses still standing at this writing in Williamson County. At least a part of it was built around 1800 by Spencer Hill. He had bought 180 acres from Elisha Fly in 1796.

The property was a part of a 4,800 North Carolina land grant to Dr. James Fergus as compensation for his services as a surgeon in the Continental Army of North Carolina in the Revolutionary War. It was one of the largest North Carolina land grants in Williamson County.

It apparently was a tradition in the Hill family that Spencer Hill had received his land for service in the Revolutionary War. The origin of that tradition was explained in a 1901 affidavit of George W. Fly, a great nephew by marriage of Spencer Hill. He said that he had always heard that James Fergus received the land grant but in turn had doled out parcels of the land to some of the men who fought in his unit during the Revolutionary War. It makes a good story even though the chain of title as evidenced by the deeds does not verify the family tradition.

The property remained in the hands of the Hill and Ragsdale families until the death of Mattie Sue (Mrs. Walter D.) Ragsdale August 5, 2000.

At the death of Spencer Hill his house and 80 acres passed to his son Hezekiah Hill, who had married Matilda Fly. They never had children. At her death in 1874 Hezekiah Hill invited his wife's nephew George W. Fly and his wife Edline Stephens Fly to come and live with him. They did so and remained there until his death in 1892. At his death Hezekiah Hill left the place to George W. Fly and his wife Edline Stephens Fly.

George W. Fly and his wife Edline Stephens Fly were the parents of LaUna Fly, who married James Matthew Ragsdale. The place passed to them at the death of George W. Fly and his wife. Mr. and Mrs. Ragsdale were the parents of Walter D. Ragsdale. At their death Walter D. Ragsdale and his wife Mattie Sue Ragsdale bought out the shares of his brothers and sister. They lived there for the balance of their lives.

The home was originally a two-story log house that was added on to through the years. The two-story part is still standing.

The house is in a fair condition, but the barn is in mint condition. It is of an extraordinary construction. It is built on five different levels. It is built of solid poplar.

There is also a blacksmith shop on the premises, which is one of only ones remaining in Williamson County.

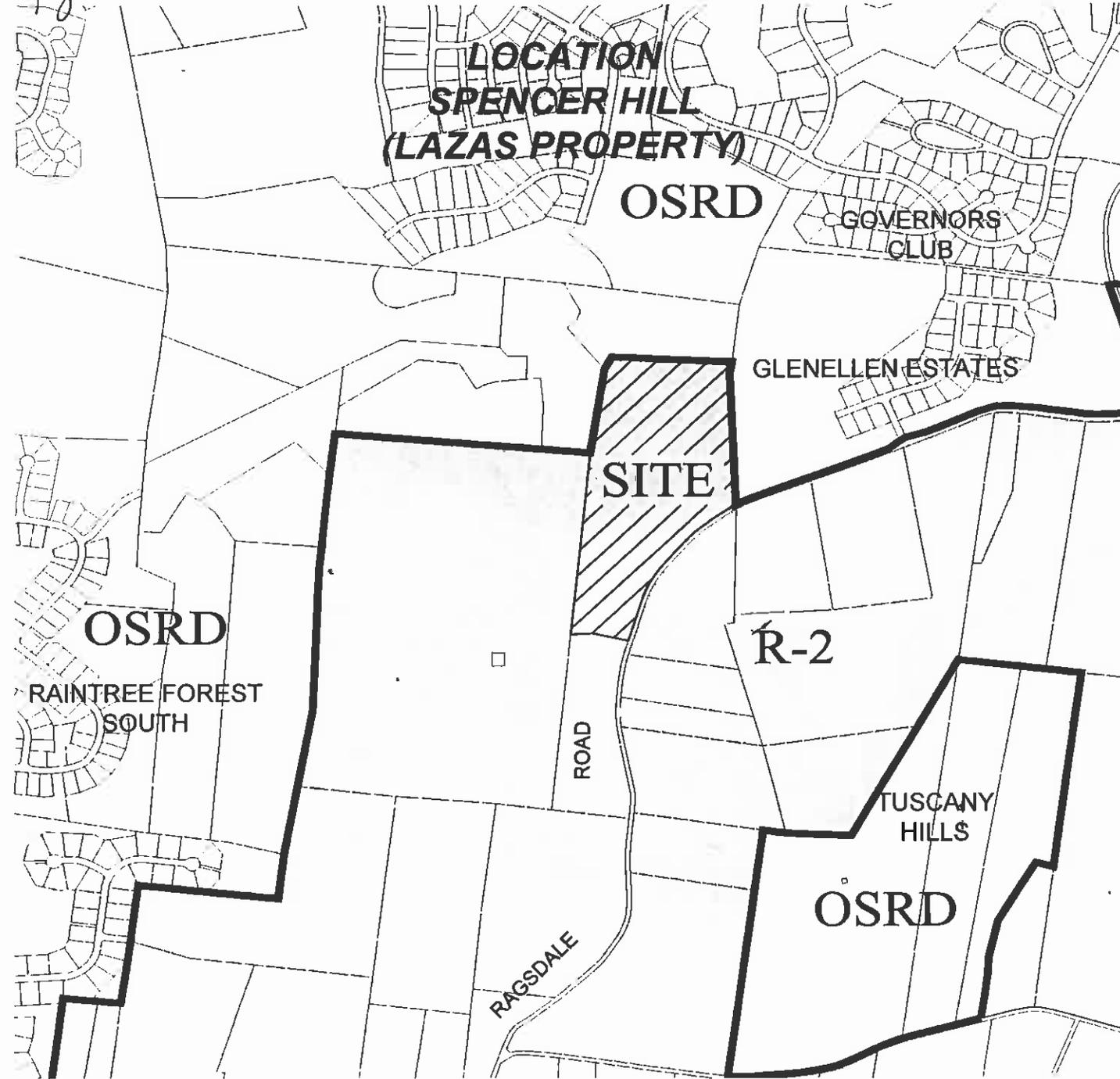
One of the most outstanding features of the Hill-Ragsdale House is the stone work. It is very fine and extensive.

There are some 35 acres remaining in the place.

Spencer Hill, the builder of the house, and his wife Penelope Hill are buried in a cemetery on the place. Spencer Hill was one of the founders of the Liberty United Methodist Church. He was one of the original trustees when land was deeded to build the church in 1806.

The Ragsdales and Hills were excellent stewards of the land. They raised sheep, cattle, and other livestock. In addition to small grains and vegetables, they raised tobacco and had extensive orchards. They were well known for the vinegars they made there.

*Ragsdale House*



***HISTORIC RAGSDALE HOUSE  
SHOWING CLAPBOARD EXTERIOR***





***HISTORIC FIVE STORY BARN***



JEREMIAH HILL  
GEO. W. FLY SAYS JEREMIAH HILL  
TOLD HIM HOUSE WAS HOME OF SPENCER  
HOUSE BUILT 1800 TO 1813 - WHEN HE DIED -  
GOT LAND & WHEN HE DIED -  
MAYBE BY  
1798

Spencer Hill was born about 1760 , maybe in Northumberland Co. VA or Northampton Co. NC. In 1790 he is shown in Northampton Co. NC. He married Penelope \_\_\_\_\_ probably in NC before 1783, maybe in Northampton Co. Their first of eight children was born in NC in 1783. In March of 1796 he is shown as a witness to a deed made between James Barnes of Southampton Co. VA and Elisha Fly of Northampton Co. NC. He appears in the January 1797 session of the court of Davidson Co. TN as a subscribing witness to this deed. He appears on the first tax list 1800 of Williamson Co. TN with 180 acres of land.

The land Spencer Hill lived upon is first found as part of a 4800 acre Revolutionary War Land Grant, made in 1786 to James Fergus for his services as a surgeon in the Continental Line of North Carolina, the land being in the Territory South of the River Ohio, late a part of North Carolina and on the waters of Mill Creek and Big Harpeth. In 1794 James Fergus of New Hanover Co. NC sells for 100# of North Carolina Currency 480 acres to James Barnes of Southampton Co. in the State of Virginia. In March of 1796, James Barnes of Southampton Co. Virginia, sells to Elisha Fly of Northampton Co. North Carolina a tract of 480 acres situated in the Territory South of the River Ohio, late a part of the State of North Carolina, for 72# of Virginia Currency this tract of 480 acres (Spencer Hill a witness to the deed as noted above). On Dec. 5, 1796, Elisha Fly of Davidson Co. Tennessee, sells to Spencer Hill, also of Davidson Co. for 100# of Virginia Currency, a tract of 180 acres on the waters of Mill Creek containing 180 acres.

We can only speculate as to whether the log part of what became the Ragsdale home was built by Spencer Hill and was it the home of Spencer and Penelope and the eight children. The log house has generally been dated 1806-1812, the late Walter Ragsdale stating that Jeremiah Hill, son of Spencer and Penelope built the house. This would seem to make the house more than likely built in 1820.

Spencer Hill died in 1816. In his will, made in 1813, he leaves tracts of land in Bedford Co. Tenn. to his four sons and the daughter. The "plantation I now live on" goes to wife Penelope and at her death goes to 3 sons Jonothan, Jeremiah, and Hezekiah. Elisha Fly and Lawrence Fly are witness to the will.

And so Jeremiah Hill comes into possession of this 60 acres, we assume in 1851 when Penelope is said to have died and been buried with Spencer in the cemetery behind the house on the northwest part of the place, said to contain 1/2 acre.

Some tax receipts of Jeremiah Hills were found in the attic of the Ragsdale home in 1998. They are dated 182\_ , 1823, and are scattered dates, the last being in 1875. They range from \$1 31cents 2 1/2 mills in 182\_ to \$27.48 in 1875. Jeremiah shows in the 1840 census of Williamson Co., apparently his mother living in the household. Jeremiah Hill was born on Sept. 28, 1799. On 26 December 1838, Jeremiah Hill married Matilda Fly, the girl next door, the daughter of Lawrence Fly and Catherine Mayberry. Matilda was born 19 Oct. 1818 and died 14 Oct 1874 and is buried in the Fly Cemetery on what is now the Wilburn property on Ragsdale Road.

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The Fly family lived on the property adjoining Spencer Hill's place. Young George W. Fly was the grandson of Lawrence Fly and Catherine Mayberry. His parents were Sterling Brown Fly and Emily Barnes. Young George W. Fly was born in 1844 and with high hopes in October of 1861 went to Nashville and joined Co. "F" of the 4<sup>th</sup> Tennessee Cavalry, for one year and furnishing his own horse valued at \$115. When the War ended, young George W. left Middle Tennessee and went to Plano, Texas. In a letter dated 12 November 1870 he writes to a Fly cousin that his cotton will make a bale to the acre and his corn 50 bushels to the acre.

Meanwhile, back in Middle Tennessee, James W. Stevens and wife Nancy and their children still at home move from Millview in the 14<sup>th</sup> District of Williamson Co. James W. Stevens purchased from James H. Stanfield, executor of John D. Stanfield 126 acres in the 16<sup>th</sup> District known as the Tindall tract. This house on the corner of Pleasant Hill Road and Split Log Road purchased in 1875 became the Stevens home.

Among the Stevens children, moving to the 16<sup>th</sup> district, was Edline, born 5 July 1850. Just around the corner, returning from the war and his adventures in Texas was George W. Fly. George and Edline married 15 February 1872.

George W. Fly's father was Sterling Brown Fly, a brother to Matilda Fly who had married Jeremiah Hill. George's Aunt Matilda Hill died and somewhere in this period George and Edline moved to the Jeremiah Hill farm.

George and Edline became the parents of three daughters. LaUna, born 23 October 1874, married James Matthew Ragsdale 13 November 1890. The other two daughters were Adline born in 1880, married Charlie Williams and Daisy born in 1882 and married Emmet Williams.

George and Edline continued to live on the Hill Tract with Jeremiah Hill. In 1883 Jeremiah Hill wrote his will leaving the farm and furniture and livestock to George and Edline Fly, for the natural love and affection and consideration he had for them as they had taken care of him in his own home. Jeremiah Hill died on September 29, 1892, and was buried with Matilda in the Fly Cemetery next door.

James Matthew Ragsdale and LaUna were living in Nashville on Haslem Street. James was born in Hickman Co. TN in 1863 to Matthew W. Ragsdale and Ophelia Anderson. They lived in Dyer Co. TN for sometime after the close of the War, where Matthew practiced medicine. Matthew died in 1879 and James M. and his mother moved back to Hickman Co. James M. farmed and taught school in Maury Co. His mother died in and with no reason to stay in Hickman Co. he armed himself with recommendations written by himself and signed by 17 neighbors and came to Nashville. He secured a job driving the mule drawn street cars and then conductor and in March 1892 cashier.

James Matthew Ragsdale kept a Journal, the earliest entry existing entry being in Dec. of 1893. The last is 22 Nov. 1952. There are a number of skips in dates but in general he

records expenditures, weather, church happenings, deaths, events of the day, farm life in general.

He states in a newspaper story that he and LaUna returned to help her parents on the farm in 1892. In 1926, Mrs. Fly gave the Hill tract of 88 acres to LaUna, at the <sup>HER</sup> death of (Mrs.) Fly) Jim and LaUna in turn deeded the tract to Walter and Mattie Sue Ragsdale.

The dates of additions to the house have not been found. The date that the big barn was built is unknown. Jim remembers his father Evan Ragsdale and Walter Ragsdale saying the Mr. Fly received some sort of head injury either by a falling timber in building the barn or a fall. Mrs. Edline Fly states in a newspaper that George W. Fly suffered a long illness before his death in 1903. No date is known for the building of the cistern under the dinning room and porch. The cellar back of the kitchen was built by Mr. James Cyrus in 1911, the cost being recorded in JMR Journal and the 1911 date carved in a stone on the cellar. The gas house was in front of the house.

Scattered entries from the journal of James Matthew Ragsdale:

1893	Dec. 19	for Marvin a cap	.40
	Dec. 19	for Marvin a rolling ball and wheelbarrow	.75
	Dec. 19	for Daisy Fly a doll	.25
	Dec. 19	two dozen oranges	.40
1937	Feb. 22	Vance Little fell from car and fractured his skull	
1937	Oct. 7	50 years ago today I started driving mule cars	
1932	July 11	plowed cantaloupes with Beck my 32 year old mule	
1932	Oct. 24	Nolensville Bank closed broke	
1916	Aug. 18	final payment on kitchen cabinet \$10.50	
1934	May 27	Walter let his car run off the bluff	
1933	Nov. 10	Cousin Het Edmondson died	
1929	Nov. 27	We killed an 80 lb shoat & Jack and Steve dogs got it.	
1929	Dec 6	Bruce McCaleb and family came and brought me a shoulder of meat and some sausage. I gave them Jack dog.	
1926	9 March	I planted some kudsu seed.	

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Wednesday, 11/07/07

## Learn Brentwood: Ragsdale place sits empty after two centuries of history

By T. VANCE LITTLE  
For Brentwood Journal

Walter Ragsdale died in 1995 at the age of 89. He died at the old Ragsdale home place on Ragsdale Road in east Brentwood, the same house where he was born. He never lived anywhere else. The house still stands. It is in a dilapidated condition and has been vacant for several years.

The Ragsdale property was part of a North Carolina land grant to Dr. James Fergus. He was a surgeon and received a 4,800-acre land grant for his services to the North Carolina Line during the Revolutionary War. It was one of the largest North Carolina land grants in Williamson County. Fergus never came to Tennessee. At his death the land was divided into smaller tracts. According to family tradition, Spencer Hill received land from Fergus because he served under his command in the Revolutionary War.



Members of the Spencer Hill family were the first people to occupy the land received from Fergus. He built the log part of the house that is still standing. According to family lore, the house was built between 1800 and 1812. At the death of Spencer Hill the land passed to his son Jeremiah. He married Matilda Fly, the "girl next door." She was Walter Ragsdale's great-aunt.

George Washington Fly, a brother of Matilda Fly, was Walter Ragsdale's

grandfather. He was born in 1844, just in time to join Company F of the 4th Tennessee Calvary during the Civil War, which was the second cavalry unit formed in Williamson County. It was formed at Carrton Plantation. James W. Starnes was elected captain of the company, comprised mostly of men from northeast Williamson County. Because they had to provide their own weapons, they were poorly armed. They also had to provide their own horses, which were generally very excellent. The horses were raised on Middle Tennessee bluegrass. Most of the men had ridden their horses since they could walk. George Washington Fly's horse was valued at \$115 by Confederate authorities.

### War tale recollected

One of this writer's earliest childhood memories is of sitting on the back porch of the

### ASK VANCE

Have a question about Brentwood's history, ancient or otherwise? Is there a particular landmark, road or era you would like to know more about? Ask T. Vance Little so he can answer it in a future *Brentwood Journal*. Write to him in care of Learn Brentwood, Williamson A.M., 121 Second Ave. N., Franklin, TN 37064, or e-mail him at [tvlittle@aol.com](mailto:tvlittle@aol.com).

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Ragsdale home and hearing Mrs. Fly tell about the time that the "Yankees came" during the Civil War. They stole the horses and anything they could carry off. While listening to the stories we had to sit on chairs on the porch because the "recliner" was reserved for a big brown dog named Sandy. The dog was friendly, but he was adamant that he had preemptive rights to the recliner.

Walter Ragsdale's grandfather on his father's side was a physician and practiced medicine in Hickman County. His father, James Matthew Ragsdale, taught school in Hickman County and later moved to Nashville. Before moving he armed himself with a letter of recommendation that he had written himself and gotten 17 of his neighbors to sign.

He got a job driving a mule-drawn streetcar. One day he helped a pretty young lady from the country board the streetcar. She was smitten by his courtesy and charm. They were later married and moved back to the country.

The Ragsdale place was small, but they were industrious and used it to its best advantage. They grew an abundance of fruits and vegetables as well as cotton and tobacco. They had sheep and cattle. They had extensive apple orchards and made vinegar to sell to neighbors. During World War II, "victory gardens" were popular. Farmers were encouraged to produce the foodstuff that they consumed. The Agricultural Extension Service had contests and awarded prizes for the best gardens. The Ragsdales usually won second prize, the first prize going to the J.W. Littles, who were the parents of this writer.

#### **Remnants still there**

Farm buildings on the Ragsdale place were reminiscent of days long gone by. They had a barn that was built on a hillside. The barn was on five levels. Remnants of the old blacksmith shop are still there as well as the tobacco barn, stables and other outbuildings. Even the old toilet is still standing in the backyard.

The Ragsdales were members of Liberty Methodist Church. Their Fly ancestors were founding members of that church. Walter Ragsdale was the longtime Sunday school superintendent there, as were his father and grandfather before him.

Walter Ragsdale married Mattie Sue Vernon, who lived in the neighborhood. He often said when he was courting her, he went in a horse and buggy and had to open and close five gates on the way. She was a descendant of Capt. Richard Vernon, a captain in the North Carolina Militia during the Revolutionary War. He and his family came to Williamson County with a large migration of settlers from Rockingham County, N.C., who settled near Nolensville. Mrs. Ragsdale was best known for her German chocolate cakes, which sold for hundreds of dollars at the annual youth choir auction at Brentwood United Methodist Church.

James M. Ragsdale, father of Walter Ragsdale, kept a journal. Some of the entries were: Oct. 7, 1937: 50 years ago today I started driving mule cars. July 11, 1932: Plowed cantaloupes with Beck, my 32-year-old mule. Oct. 24, 1932: Nolensville Bank closed, broke. May 27, 1934: Walter let his car run off the bluff. March 9, 1926: I planted some kudzu seed. Editorial comment: Planting kudzu was a big mistake. It was planted to prevent erosion but turned out to be very invasive.

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