

Soldiers of many wars from the time of Charles II down to the World War have had a share in this hospital tract near Murfreesboro.

For the Soldiers First and Last

By HELEN DAHNKE

SOLDIERS of other wars have fought for it, plowed it, cleared its timber, and from it sent their sons to new wars.

And now the government is to make of 600 acres in Rutherford County a haven for soldiers of the World War, mental and nervous victims of modern war machines which in 1918 forever removed glambur from war as a personal adventure.

If stones and trees might speak, the land bought for the site of the United States Veterans Hospital could tell a story which in part would be America's saga.

For the 600 acres, four miles north of Lebanon on the road to Murfreesboro on which will be started in a few months the central unit of the hospital costing \$1,650,000, has a history in its titles which stretches back to Charles II and the six noble gentlemen to whom he first granted it.

Last May when Ewing Smith, Murfreesboro attorney, completed negotiations and abstracts of the titles, 603.7 acres, owned by six other gentlemen—Tennessee farmers—went back to the federal government by purchase. Land which in 1700 had cost its original settlers, Thomas and James Rucker, 50 cents an acre, returned to the government at Washington at an average cost of more than 300 cents an acre. The government gave it to

a Revolutionary soldier long ago and now the government buys it back for other soldiers' cure and treatment.

J. M. NIXON, manager of the United States Veterans' Bureau in Nashville, whose office will be moved to the veterans' hospital after it is completed in Rutherford County, is one who has shared in tracing the land's connection with soldiers of another time.

For back of the transfer of six modern-day farmers' of their smaller acreages, totaling 603.7 acres to the United States government for a total of \$58,650, there lies a story of land division which has all of history written into it. Leon H. Batey sold fifty-six acres, Frank Batey sold 156 acres, John Posey sold 179 1/2 acres, John Sullivan sold eighteen, J. E. McCrary sold seventy-six acres and A. L. Carnahan 116 acres.

And yet the story goes back to six gentlemen of quite a different type, according to Mr. Nixon's research. For according to land history uncovered by Mr. Nixon, on March 24, 1663, Charles II of England, that gay and dashing king of the Stuart line—"the divine right of kings" fellow if you please—granted in fee simple to six noble subjects all of what now constitutes Tennessee and North Carolina. In the days of the Restoration the Stuarts were cutting a wide swath. So what mattered it to Charles II

gave to Edward, Earl of Clarendon, Lord Craven, Lord Ashley Cooper, Sir John Calleton, Lord John Berkeley, Sir William Berkeley and Sir George Carteret the wide swath of land lying between the thirty-first and the thirty-sixth parallels from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Coast? What mattered it if no one had seen all this land or knew not how far the Pacific lay away!

Yet within that grant lay the 5,000 acres on Stone's River which in 1787 the State of North Carolina conferred on Col. Isaac Shelby, and which that gallant officer of King's Mountain was to sell, without ever looking on its tall cedars, its lusty yellow poplars along the river banks, its gray hillside stones and rich rolling fields.

It was in 1787 that the first large group of settlers arrived in Middle Tennessee. Among them were the Rucker brothers, two gentlemen of Virginia. They bought the 5,000 acres, part of which is to be used for the 350 beds for tired, nerve-shattered World War veterans, and moved their families there, paying only \$2,500 to Colonel Shelby for it.

THE land across which Indians had tramped and hunted, which even DeSoto on his explorations northward for the Spanish throne may have looked upon, began to bear fruit in the years between 1600 and the present. Thomas and James Rucker, each had many children. They cleared

acres, sold some of it, divided it when they came to die, gave a bit here or there to some faithful slave. From it they sent sons to the Mexican War and in 1860 the land saw other soldiers marching across it.

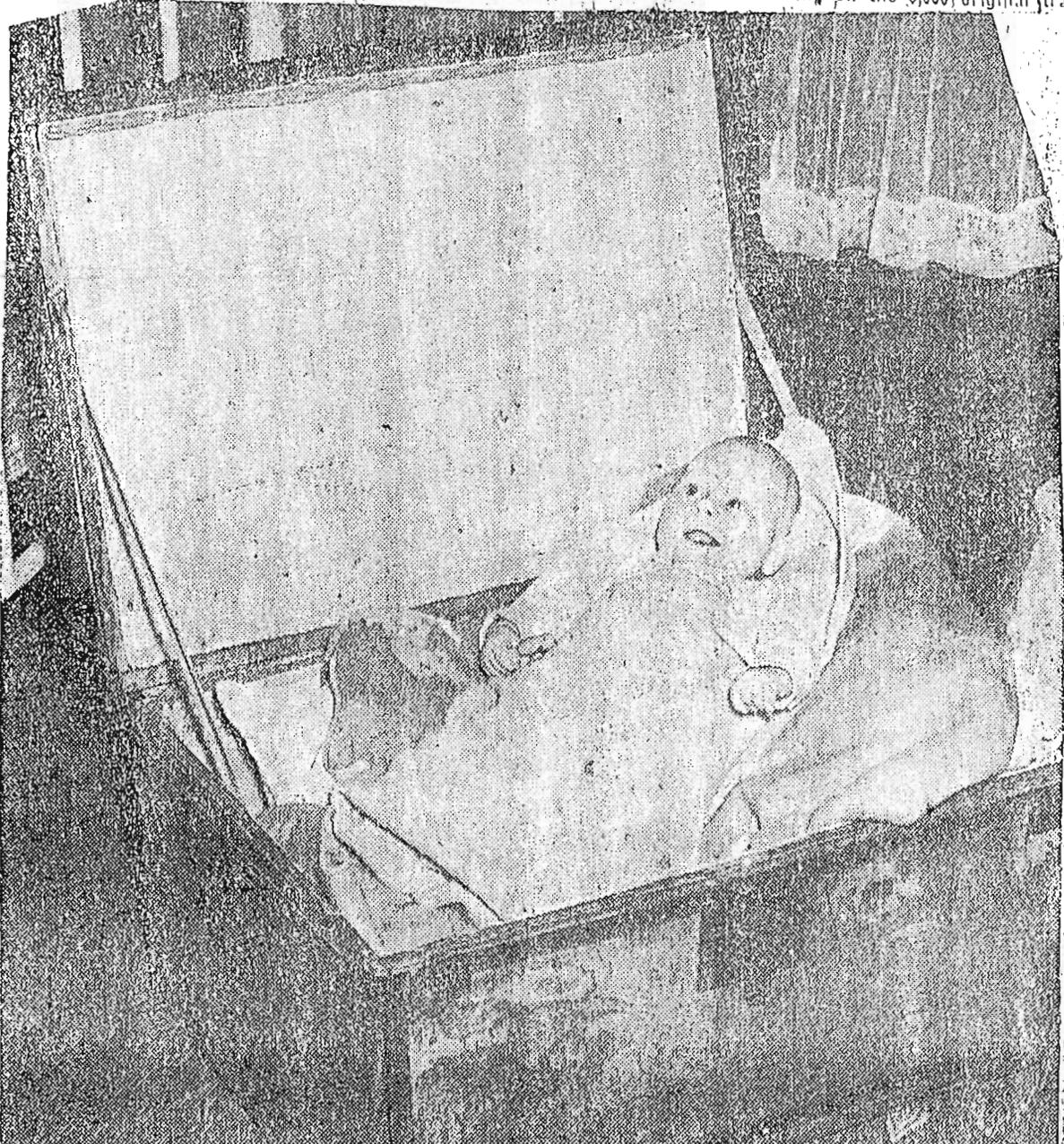
Tradition in Rutherford County has it that the Ninetieth Ohio Infantry camped on the Thomas Rucker homestead in the winter after the Battle of Stone's River. Certainly the large cave on Sullivan's land, near the curve in the road where the old Thomas Rucker home stood until a few months ago, would house a regiment. In latter days the cave has been used as a roadside restaurant and drink stand.

And now soldiers are to have 600 acres of the 5,000 back again. While ground plans of the hospital have not been revealed from Washington, hardly a week passes but that some engineer or architect is in Nashville or Murfreesboro to push forward the plans. Mr. Nixon says that increasing needs of hospitalization of World War veterans will doubtless lead to a program of expansion which will finally include 1,000 beds at the hospital. One floor of the first unit is to be given over to the Veterans' Bureau administrative offices now located in Nashville. Soldiers who were at Argonne wood and St. Mihiel will find a welcome from the land. If land can speak, for the 600 acres are soldiers' ground first and last.

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The Pickard house between Walter Hill and Lascassas is one of the old Rucker homes still standing on the 5,000 original tract granted to a Revolutionary soldier. Staff Photos by Ed Clark



3 1/2 months old
Miss Pickard
Mrs. Pickard

John Marlon Pickard, 11th generation to live in this Rucker home, might be called a Veteran of Future Wars. He lies in a trunk brought to the State before 1800.

MRS. JOHN MARION PICKARD is the last descendant of the original Ruckers who is living on a part of that first 5,000-acre tract which Thomas and James Rucker bought from Colonel Isaac Shelby. She and her husband today own a farm of 100 acres across Stone's River from the hospital tract which is the northeast corner of the original 5,000 acres. Their home is a great house of timbers built later but similar in its basic design to the house of Thomas Rucker which was recently torn down by Sullivan.

"I don't know whether there are very many descendants of Thomas Rucker living in Murfreesboro, though my own ancestor, James Rucker, has a number of descendants in this general section," Mrs. Pickard says.

Mrs. Pickard is the granddaughter of Samuel Rucker, one of James Rucker's sons. Her grandfather, who was born in Amherst County, Virginia, in 1794, came with his father and uncle, Thomas Rucker, to Tennessee before 1800. Family records in Mrs. Pickard's possession show that her grandfather, Samuel Reed Rucker, entered the practice of law at Murfreesboro in 1815, building the house in which his granddaughter now lives, in 1829, on the 500 acres which he inherited from his father James' estate.

James and Thomas Rucker, coming from Amherst County, Virginia, first settled in Clover Bottom near Nashville, the rich Stone's River bend east of Nashville which is connected so closely with the history of Andrew Jackson and the Don-

elson family. While they were living at Clover Bottom James' younger daughter was married to Severn Donelson, and it was their child, Andrew Jackson Donelson, who was adopted by the childless master and mistress of the Hermitage. For some reason the Rucker brothers decided to move from Clover Bottom and negotiated with Colonel Shelby for the purchase of 5,000 acres farther south on Stone's River, which in 1787 had been granted to him by the grateful state of North Carolina.

SO FAR as any records show Colonel Shelby, who was to become Governor of Kentucky and to leave his name on towns and counties of both that state and Tennessee, never saw the 5,000 acres which had been handed to him by the mother state. Land was plentiful in those days, ripe for an ex-soldier's taking, and Colonel Shelby had been granted other acres in payment for his gallant services. The Ruckers paid Colonel Shelby

50 cents an acre for the 5,000 acres. They and their sons began to clear timber, build homes, sell crops and take part in the new county government.

"A number of the large old houses built through this section of the county were built by Rucker kinsmen," Mrs. Pickard says.

The Thomas Rucker homestead, facing the road to Lebanon and situated on an 18-acre tract which was purchased by the government for the hospital site, was the granddaddy of all these old houses. Though the exact date of its building is not known, tradition has it that Thomas built it in 1800 and already had his household settled there when the first session of Rutherford County Court was held in 1804.

Sullivan, who tore the old Thomas Rucker house down a few months ago, after the government purchased his farm, has moved its timbers across the pike and from them is constructing a modern house on another part of its land. He and his wife lived in the old Thomas Rucker house for 13 years. Before then it had been in many hands, but they express a fondness for it as deep as though one of their own ancestors had built it.

Measurements of the timbers, which he took from the old house sound so fabulous that one wonders if Rutherford countians have not imaginations as tall as their county's primeval trees.



Mrs. Pickard, descendant of the original settlers, looks at the tiny trunk brought to Tennessee by Sally Clay, a Revolutionary heroine of South Carolina.

"There was not a nail in the old house structure. Its joints were mortised and pegged together. Yellow poplar, cedar and white oak were used in it throughout. The corner posts were of white oak 12 inches square which had been hollowed out for the corner pieces to fit in. That 36-foot beam of yellow poplar, which I have used across the front of my new house from pillar to pillar was 44 feet long in the old house. I cut off eight feet of it. Think of it, 44 feet of wood, 20 inches square that had stood 137 years and was still good. The shingles from the roof were of cedar an inch and half thick. People came here and asked for some of them as souvenirs," Sullivan says.

BRICK from the two large chimneys was evidently hand-made from clay on the place, Sullivan says. There was enough to build the chimneys in his new house as well as in his son's new house. His small grandson found among the bricks ones which had been marked by the tracks of a possum, a wild turkey and a coon while they were still soft years ago.

"The boy had a good deal of pleasure showing his teacher the tracks which had been made more than 100 years ago," Mrs. Sullivan says.

Tradition has it that the first county court meetings in Thomas Rucker's large house were stormy ones. Thomas was a recalcitrant citizen and apt to want to rule the court. At one session held in his home the other members of the court voted to place him in stocks, but written history is vague as to whether this leading citizen was so ever humiliated.

In 1811 Thomas gave a part of his 2,500 acres to build a church. And for generations Ruckers and their descendants have attended the Providence Primitive Baptist Church which still stands on this gift from Thomas. Preaching is now held there only once a month, but Mrs. Pickard is one of the congregation who attends regularly at the church of her great-great-great-uncle donated to the Baptist faith.

Whether Thomas and James were veterans of the Revolution Mrs. Pickard does not know. If they were, they served in Virginia before they moved to the Tennessee wilderness and started anew. But on another branch of her family tree Mrs. Pickard traces back to one Sally Clay of South Carolina who defied her parents to marry Matthew Martin, who settled in Bedford County. Sally Clay made South Carolina history during the American Revolution by working with her sisters to intercept British messages whose bearers had stopped overnight at her father's house demanding hospitality. Sally and her sisters secured the messengers of British operations against the militia army of General Nathan Greene, and Sally rode through the woods at night to get them to General Greene, thereby aiding him in his spectacular defeats of the English soldiers, which saved the Southern states for the American rebels. Sally must have been a spunky lass, for some years later she defied her parents to elope with

Matthew Martin and with him came west to Tennessee. It was her daughter, Mattie Bedford Martin, who married the young Murfreesboro lawyer, Samuel Reed Rucker, and came to live at the home which Mr. and Mrs. Pickard own. In that house five generations of Mrs. Pickard's kin have been born, the latest of them being John Marion Pickard III, who, though only three months old, enjoys the privilege of having for his own cradle a horse-hide trunk which his great-great grandfather, Samuel Reed Rucker, brought from Virginia.