Fall 1989

Some Muniments of Bell Court, Lexington

James D. Birchfield

University of Kentucky, j.birchfield@uky.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://uknowledge.uky.edu/kentucky-review

Part of the Architecture Commons

Right click to open a feedback form in a new tab to let us know how this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Available at: https://uknowledge.uky.edu/kentucky-review/vol9/iss3/5

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the University of Kentucky Libraries at UKnowledge. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Kentucky Review by an authorized editor of UKnowledge. For more information, please contact UKnowledge@lsv.uky.edu.
The suburban development of Lexington has frequently been accomplished through subdividing the parks and pleasure grounds of its great antebellum houses. It has not been at all uncommon—as at Ingelside, the Meadows, Glendower, Lyndhurst, Alleghan Hall, Forkland, The Woodlands, and many more—to raze the original houses either before or after the subdivision has been made. In some cases, the original structure remains concealed within the new neighborhood, as with the John Pope house (or Johnson Hall), the Higgins Mansion, Clay Villa, Elley Villa (or Aylesford), Hartland, or Meadow thorpe. Several historic dwellings, however, have been to some extent successfully buffered by a much reduced but pleasing greensward, and these include, for example, both Ashland and Loudoun. Also among these more tasteful adaptations to the needs of suburban development is Bell Court, one of Lexington’s most charming neighborhoods, built around one of the community’s particularly interesting and significant architectural examples. The history of Bell Place—the Bell family dwelling, and of Bell Court—the subdivision, may be more fully traced today, as a result of the recent acquisition of a group of documents, drawings, and photographs by the University of Kentucky Libraries. These, with other resources, outline for the student of urban development the building, first, of Henry Bell’s Woodside; Woodside’s later rebuilding as D. D. Bell’s Bell Place; and, finally, the creation of Bell Court.

The land upon which Bell Court stands today was owned originally by Col. John Todd. It is part of a tract of 400 acres on which John May, on behalf of Todd and at Todd’s expense, raised a crop of corn in 1775, and which John McCracken further
The original assignment of the present Bell Court tract to John Todd in 1780, copied from the books of the Virginia Land Company’s meetings in Harrodsburg. (Todd Family Papers, University of Kentucky Libraries)

improved for Todd by building a cabin. Todd was issued a certificate to the property and 1,000 acres adjoining it at a meeting of the Virginia Land Commission at Harrodsburg on 25 February 1780, and a contemporary transcription of this transfer is today in the Todd family papers at the University of Kentucky Libraries.¹ In August of 1782 Todd fell at the Battle of Blue Licks, and on 18 September 1790 his heirs conveyed, for £60 Virginia currency, 1,000 acres to Capt. James Masterson, a veteran of the Revolution who died in Lexington in 1838 and whose house stands today at 715 Bullock Place. The tract passed afterwards through various hands until on 17 April 1845 a parcel of thirty-five acres, one rod, and twenty-two poles, beginning east of Megowan’s line (just east of the present Forest Avenue), described as being on the northeast side of the old Boonesboro Road (now Richmond Road), was
transferred to Henry Bell for $8,750.²

It was on this site that Henry Bell, then thirty-seven years old, proposed to build Woodside, one of Lexington’s largest residences. Bell, born in Georgetown, Sussex County, Delaware on 28 March 1808, moved to Baltimore as a youth and became a store clerk. When he arrived in Lexington in 1832 he brought with him a wife, Clarissa Davis Bell, daughter of Daniel Davis of Salisbury, Maryland. Bell established himself initially as a merchant in Lexington, and by the 1840s he was a director of the Northern Bank of Kentucky.³ By the time he decided to build his suburban seat, Bell was well-established as a businessman and financier.

Progress on Bell’s Woodside may be traced from remaining notes in the business diary of its architect, Maj. Thomas Lewinski.⁴ The first record of the enterprise appears among entries for the date of Wednesday, 18 June 1845, where Major Lewinski writes: “Made survey with Bell, Esq. of his ground and proposed to design and superintend the erection of his house for $2 per day from the breaking of the ground to the delivery of the key.” Ten days later, however, another entry indicates that the arrangement had been renegotiated: “Agreed with Mr. Bell to complete drawings for and superintend the erection of his mansion for three hundred dollars.” After some preliminary designs, the architect began plans for the Bell project on 11 July. By 23 July he could record “Bell’s plans completed,” and at this point he began preparing specifications, with “rough copies” completed on 28 July. On the following day he noted, “Commenced Bell’s working drawings.” Although Lewinski did not consistently enter the number of hours devoted to a project each day, it is apparent that he spent over 100 hours on plans between 11 and 24 July, working on them between five and sixteen hours per day, along with other commissions; the specifications required thirty-six hours over four days, when “rough copies” were completed. During the same period Lewinski was drafting plans for a new court house, for Clay Villa, for a villa for Dr. Robert Peter, and for the gardener’s cottage at Ashland; he was also undertaking alterations for James O. Harrison and improving the Upper Street Market House. (The architect’s hours were not consumed solely by buildings, however, as he was also commissioned to design a fine bookcase for Dr. Peter, an elaborate gothic chair for the Knights Templar, a table and chair for James B. Clay, as well as a hearse; he also gave lessons in French during this period.)
Detail of 1857 "View of the City of Lexington, Ky.," showing Henry Bell’s Woodside at right and James B. Clay’s Clay Villa at left. Both were designed by Maj. Thomas Lewinski.

By the beginning of August, Major Lewinski was in the process of bidding, or “tenders,” as he termed it, and, on 4 August he wrote: “Received tenders for Mr. Bell’s house—consulting, revising and advancing plans, estimates, &c.,” and he specifically noted time spent estimating costs for the foundations and carpentry. After securing estimates for awnings and making his “final report,” he made needed changes in the specifications on 6 August, wrote an agreement for Bell and a contractor named Uttinger (probably Jacob Uttinger, listed in the 1838-1839 city directory as a joiner), and “Let out ground for digging” on the following day. Almost daily entries follow, stating “Surveyed Mr. Bell’s,” along with visits to other sites, such as Thomas Hart Clay’s Mansfield. On 10 November he signed the mason’s contract for Woodside. On 6 December he began designing the capitals for Henry Bell’s pillars. He continued with various working drawings for the Bell project in 1846. On 1 April he consulted with Henry Bell about a “proposed improvement on upper floor,” evidently
the "stairway from chamber story to roof" contracted on 3 April for $87. By 10 April he was copying specifications for "the plasterer's and painter's work at Bell's." He continues notes on working drawings for Bell, with a record on 11 July about altering a dining room cornice design. On 17 July he measured the work of the bricklayers. On 3 August he was at work on the plans for paving the portico of Woodside, writing Mr. Bell the following day about a "plan of marble paving," and billing Bell on 16 August for charges for the marble.

On Friday, 20 November 1846, Lewinski made his last recorded survey of the construction of Woodside. On the Saturday following, according to his diary, he "Made out, completed and reported the final settlement of accounts between Bell and Uttinger," and no more is seen of Henry Bell's great Greek Revival mansion among the architect's diary entries thereafter. The planning and building of Woodside had required eighteen months.

The Bells had lived at Woodside for less than two years when Mrs. Abraham Lincoln, with her mother, Mrs. Robert Todd, visited there in May of 1848. She was deeply impressed by the establishment she found on the site that had once belonged to her great-uncle. To her husband she wrote: "Ma & myself rode out to Mr. Bell's splendid place this afternoon to return a call. The house and grounds are magnificent." The Bells' plantings about the house reflected Lexington's tradition of enthusiasm concerning botany, for a certain acquaintance, wrote Mrs. Lincoln, "would have died over their exotics." A view of Woodside appears on an 1857 pictorial lithograph of Lexington and offers a sense of the scale of the estate Mrs. Lincoln viewed. Judge Charles Kerr, writing in 1922, characterized the house as "for many years the most pretentious home in Lexington and even to this day comparing favorably with more modern architecture." The hospitality of the Bell family sustained the house's reputation as a showplace.

The year following Mary Todd Lincoln's visit saw the birth, on 6 June, of David Davis Bell, the eventual heir to Woodside, and within a matter of years Henry Bell was engaging his sons, of which there were seven, in his business interests. By 1860 Henry Bell had established commercial interests in Missouri, and the St. Louis city directory of that year lists the firm of Bell, Tilden, & Co. at 146 Main Street; the directory indicates that Henry Bell resided in Lexington. By 1863 the firm had become Henry Bell & Son, Wholesale Dry Goods, and the elder Bell had moved to St.
Louis to join his son Daniel there. At the end of the Civil War, however, Henry Bell was again in Lexington and was serving as President of the Branch Bank of Kentucky. When he was elected a director of the Northern Bank of Kentucky in 1867, the Lexington Observer & Reporter described him as “recently moved to Lexington.” He lived at the same home he had built in the 1840s, near the city limits; a receipt written in New York on 3 August 1869 by the Liverpool and London and Globe Insurance Company showed that Woodside, described as a “2 Story Brick Dwelling near Richmond Turnpike Lexington Ky,” was insured for $8,000. On 5 September 1877 Bell’s son Noah, attended by the father, died at Booneville, Missouri, and a few hours later at St. Louis Daniel, the partner in Henry Bell & Son, died also. The brothers were brought by train back to Lexington, the Episcopal funeral service was read at Woodside by Dr. Berkley of St. Louis, and a cortege followed to the Lexington Cemetery.9 The Bell family interests were centered thereafter in Lexington.

The only son of Henry Bell to survive him was David Davis Bell. In the fall of 1879, at the age of thirty, D. D. Bell purchased Hollyrood, an Italianate villa on the Harrodsburg Road. The house was built in 1870 by Mrs. Phoebe Cassell, daughter of Thomas Bryan, whose home, Springhurst, was situated just across the road. On 15 April 1880, D. D. Bell married Sydney Theodore Sayre at the home of her parents, Ephraim D. and Elizabeth W. Sayre, on Mill Street in Lexington. They remained at Hollyrood until 1883, entertaining, it was said, “the year round with luncheons and dinners, balls and hunts and card parties.”10

D. D. Bell’s mother, Clarissa Davis Bell, died at Woodside on 27 June 1882. Henry Bell himself is said to have become ill while attending the funeral of former Gov. James Robinson; in failing health, he left for a Southern tour, and died at Jacksonville, Florida on 7 April 1883.11 Henry Bell’s will, recorded in 1883, conveyed his house to his son:

I give to my son D. D. Bell my Residence called Woodside containing about Thirty five acres situated mostly in the city limits all my Household and Kitchen Furniture, Horses, carriages and all the personal property on and appertaining to my said Residence, it being my intention that my Son have my Residence with everything appertaining to it at my death and that no inventory, appraisement or sale be made
of any of said property.  

D. D. Bell sold Hollyrood and moved into the family home in Lexington.

Not long after D. D. and Sydney Sayre Bell moved to Woodside their only child, Clara Davis Bell, was born on 10 March 1884. Woodside had housed three generations of the Bell family. In the summer of 1884, however, Woodside was largely destroyed by fire.

Under the heading "Rebuilding," the Lexington Press of 30 September 1884 states, "Mr D. D. Bell has begun the work of rebuilding his old place, recently burned, on East Main Street." Thomas Lewinski, the original architect, had died on 18 September 1882, two years before the conflagration. To carry out the reconstruction, Bell secured the aid of Samuel Eugene Des Jardins (1856-1916), a Cincinnati architect active in Kentucky in the 1880s and 1890s; Bell's contractor was William H. Stewart of Cincinnati. Des Jardins was a native of Michigan, and his parents were French-Canadian. His career began in Toledo, and, in 1875, he moved to Cincinnati. He studied architecture in Europe as well as in the United States and was responsible for the design of a number of churches as well as plans for imposing residences in Cincinnati. Most recently, he had built Lynwood (1883), the Pattie Field Clay house in neighboring Richmond. He was to design three other residences in Madison County, the Bennet house (1885-90), Amberley (1885), and Elmwood (1887), the latter said to be the only Chateauesque dwelling in Kentucky outside of Louisville. Des Jardins's Cincinnati firm also designed Richmond's Glyndon Hotel. It is likely that his work is represented in other central Kentucky counties, as well.

So extensive was the project at Woodside to be, that Des Jardins, like Lewinski before him, began by preparing architectural drawings, of which seven examples drawn on silk survive today. He also drafted specifications for implementing the work. D. D. Bell was billed for the drawings from Des Jardins's office (in Room 60 of Pike's Opera House Building at Cincinnati) on 4 October 1884; charges of $350 were "For Drawings & Specifications &c." Two sets of specifications are extant. One, headed "SPECIFICATION of labor and material to rebuild and complete the residence of D. D. Bell, Esq., Lexington, Kentucky," is a twenty-three page typewritten document with manuscript
additions; the second, entitled "Specification and description of the materials and workmanship necessary for the completion of the residence of D. D. Bell Esq at Lexington Ky.," is a five-page manuscript document. The specifications of Des Jardins are of keen interest not only as they interpret the components of Bell Place but as an example of the methods and standards of their time. Insistence on the best quality of materials and workmanship is reiterated throughout, and there are details that remain of significance for those involved with architectural history, with restoration techniques, or with preservation responsibilities.

"All materials used to be of the best kind and quality," writes Des Jardins, "subject to the approval of the proprietor or sup’t of the work in every particular. And all workmanship must be executed in the most approved substantial and workman like manner perfected in all its parts." This insistence on quality continues in the description of lumber ("free from all shake—sap—knots &c"), plaster ("lime freshly burned" and "well slacked plasterer’s hair"), slate roofing ("best quality of black Virginia slate"), plastering ("well troweled and smooth" and "level even and plumb"), and carving of the pillar capitals ("by an artist carver in
the most artistic manner" at Cincinnati), and masonry (bricks "to be wet when laid"). The superlative of adjectives and adverbs appears frequently, and there is nowhere any requirement for economies.

Des Jardins's comments about the brickwork show some sympathy with the remains of Lewinski's building. "All the walls now standing and in good condition," he writes, "are to remain except where they must be changed to be in conformity with the drawings"; however, "where the walls are fractured or other wise injured by the fire they are to be removed and rebuilt." He calls for old brick to be used "as far as suitable for the purpose," but "no brick with burned smoked or stained surface must be used in facing either interior or exterior of walls." He calls for the careful removal of exterior brick for re-use, and indicates that new masonry "be made to correspond with the old work as nearly as possible." The entablature, he states for the bricklayers, is to be "about a foot higher than before," and "the parapet walls at East and West sides are to be taken down to the level of cornice"; the walls above the cornice are now to be "rebuilt or carried up with the best hard burned new front brick." The architect specifies that the arches (probably jack arches) above the old side windows are to be replaced by new cut stone sills, and he directs that the "second story windows are to be increased in height." The columns for the portico are to be of brick. Des Jardins also calls for opening the flues and relining them with terra cotta. In addition, he gives instructions for the building of a cistern to collect water from the downspouts. He gives specific instructions for bridgework beneath floors, heating ducts, shutters, and tinwork for gutters, flashing, and valleys. "All tin" he requires to be painted "prince brown" in "two coats of the best quality of mineral paint," with the underneath to be painted before installing. Woodwork is to receive "three coats of the best quality of Anchor brand white lead paint and linseed oil to finish in colors approved by the proprietor." The final painting both of tin and woodwork, following the brickwork, "will be done near the completion of the building."

The manuscript contract details much relating to finish woodwork—the main stairs of cherry, the parlors in maple, the breakfast room in walnut and maple, the library and dining room in cherry. Des Jardins defines the thickness of various doors, and he calls for "variegated woods" for certain floors, with the owner
to have a choice of cherry, walnut, or maple. For the linen closet he specifies cedar drawers. For bedroom closets he outlines “two wide shelves all around and a rack board 6 in.—with hooks for hanging clothes, each closet to have a shoe box with lid hinged.”

Late in the reconstruction of the Bell residence came a bill of 12 August 1885 from J. H. Weston of Nos. 25 and 26 West Sixth
Street, "Manufacturer of and Dealer in Galvanized Iron and Copper Tube, Copper Covered, Section and Cable Lightning Rods." Mr. Weston gave his account "To Roding [sic] residence & Stable" at a cost of $308.

An interesting feature of the Weston invoice is that it is made to "D. D. Bell (per W. H. Stewart)." William H. Stewart of 303 Plum Street, Cincinnati, has generally been credited as the man who rebuilt Bell Place, and, under Des Jardins, Stewart must have performed the role described in the specifications as "superintendent of the works." The participation of Des Jardins has not been recognized in recent times.

Although Des Jardins took general charge of plans for the reconstruction, there were certain aspects of the finished building that he left to D. D. Bell for independent contracting. These included, for example, tiling. "The owner," too, "assumes all painting—glass—Mirrors—Dumbwaiter—Register facings &c."

Among the remaining papers of D. D. Bell are an undated six-page bill from the firm of J. L. Wayne, Jr., of Cincinnati, for hardware; included on the list, among much more, are a silver-plated sliding door lock, eleven silver doorknobs to be replated, three hammered bronze door knobs, one bolt "to be first class in every respect," fifty-two hammered bronze shutter knobs, forty-four nickel-plated sash lifts, and four dozen nickel cuphooks.

On 29 November 1884 Bell acquired from the New York house of J. S. Conover & Co., "Manufacturers of artistic open fireplaces and parlor grates," tile fireplaces and hardware for the dining room, the library, the bathroom, and four bedrooms, totalling $403.50. On 31 December for his two parlors he acquired two copper frames and metal fireplaces, onyx marble facings, tile hearths and nickeled portable grates totalling $270 and also a hob grate, tile panels, tile facings and hearth valued at $74 for his breakfast room. These came from William H. Jackson & Co. of Union Square, New York; the billhead of Jackson & Co. is a fine display of Arts & Crafts design work and states that they are importers of tiles and designers and manufacturers of grates, fenders, and "fireplace novelties."

The typed contract of Des Jardins concludes with several handwritten additions, the last providing that all painting "be done as soon as ready except the painting of brickwork and the last coat of paint on tin, iron & wood work which will be done near the completion of the building." On 18 September 1885 W. Corrie, "House Painter and Paper Hanger" of No. 44 North Limestone,
D. D. Bell and his daughter Clara D. D. Bell with Shetland pony in front of Bell Place, architect S. E. Des Jardins’s rebuilding of the earlier architect Thomas Lewinski’s Woodside.

Lexington, rendered to D. D. Bell a bill of $1,162.70 for painting. This includes $600 for “Painting outside of House” as well as interior work; there are charges for varnish, shellac, and putty, as well as for glazing work and for painting gates, ice house doors, stable and cow stable, and chicken coop. This appears to have been the finishing touch for Mr. Bell’s manor, now known as Bell Place. The work had taken a year to carry out.

In 1890 D. D. Bell enlarged his holdings by acquiring what he called “Bellview Addition,” a 100’ x 200’ tract on Walton Avenue. Bell’s designs in increasing the grounds around his house are illumined by his words of April 1892:

I contemplate during my life dividing up the tract of land on which my residence is situated on east Main Street in Lexington, Kentucky. I propose to lay off say about twelve (12) acres with a convenient front on Main Street and extending back of equal width so as to include the dwelling house and the stables and out buildings in the rear of the
dwelling to be wide enough so as not to crowd the dwelling house, and to open streets through my property.

Bell was a wise observer of Lexington's growth. In April of 1889 the Belt Land Company, a business "interested in the development of 'real estate on the circumference of the city,'" formed the Belt Railway Company to further the organization's interests. By 1890 Lexington's first electric trolleys were in place, and this proof of efficient transportation outside of the center of town was the key to suburban development. The success of Bell's proposed venture was assured.

He did not, however, propose to abandon his handsome residence. "My purpose," he wrote, "is to retain the house and adjoining premises estimated at about twelve (12) acres, and to sell the remainder of the place for building lots, the buildings to be erected on the two streets running at right angles to Main Street and along the premises retained by me to be made to face those streets." D. D. Bell wrote these words at the age of forty-three, and the document which contained them was his last will and testament. Bell's will was witnessed on 20 April 1892. On 22 June he was stricken with paralysis. Four days later, on 26 June, he died at Bell Place.

In his will Bell indicated that should he not accomplish his plan during his lifetime, his wife should still carry it out as a means to provide an income for their daughter Clara. During Clara's minority the income generated by such a trust fund was to pay for her maintenance and education; at age twenty-one, the income was to be Clara's "to do with as she pleases." A "Statement of Securities Belonging to the Trust Estate of Clara D. Bell," dated 22 July 1899 (when she was fifteen), makes no mention of Bell Place as an asset but shows holdings of over 800 shares of Western Union Telegraph Company ($80,410), 44 shares of Maysville and Lexington Railroad bonds ($44,000), various U. S. government bonds ($166,000), various other investments, and the holding of notes on numerous outstanding loans bringing the trust fund total to $620,965.98. The fund was administered by the Security Trust and Safety Vault Company, founded by her maternal grandfather, Ephraim D. Sayre.

On 12 February 1895 D. D. Bell's widow married Arthur Cary (1841-1927), an attorney and president of the Kentucky Union Railway, president of the Kentucky Union Land Company, and
Detail of plat of Bell Place tract as subdivided. Ormsby Avenue is now an extension of Bell Court West; Blair Avenue is now an extension of Bell Court East.
president of the Lexington and Eastern Railway. Mr. and Mrs. Cary lived thereafter at Bell Place. In 1904 a description of *Country Estates of the Blue Grass* spoke of Bell Place as Clara Bell’s property and mentioned Clara’s show horse, Fancy, “which has won the first premium in every ring where she has been exhibited.” Social life included parties, and the record of one survives in the printed “Invite to the Mr. and Mrs. Cary’s Tackey Party uv a Saturday night, 8 o’clock, May 28, at Bell Place.” On 30 December 1905, at Bell Place, the wedding of Clara Bell, then twenty-one, took place. The groom was Julius Sylvester Walsh, Jr. He was the son of one of St. Louis’s chief capitalists and railroad men.

In the year following Clara Bell Walsh’s marriage, the executors of D. D. Bell conveyed to the Bell Place Land Company the lands that once defined the grounds of Henry Bell’s Woodside, reserving four and a half acres surrounding the residence to the sellers. An undated “Memorandum of Agreement Between the Security Trust and Safety Vault Company, of Lexington, Ky., Trustee of Mrs. Julius S. Walsh, Jr., (Formerly Clara D. D. Bell), and Syndicate Members” outlines the terms of the transfer and places the price at $75,000. Reference is made to a “plat or diagram made by J. R. Barr,” and on 13 April 1906 the plan of Bell Court Subdivision was recorded on page 123 of Plat Book 1. This follows the recording of the deed on 16 March 1906 (Deed Book 144, p. 285ff). On 22 April the plat, showing 134 building lots, was published in the Lexington Herald. Dispersal of the lots was handled in part through public auction. The first sale of lots was advertised in the Lexington Herald to take place on 9 April 1906. An auction of 14 May 1907 was described in the local press as generating over $20,000 for sixteen lots. Similar auctions, including at least one assisted by the music of Saxton and Trost’s band, were conducted on 26 and 29 April 1910 and on 15 May 1911. Advertisements noted roads with concrete gutters and sewers and also concrete curbs and walks in front of all lots. Terms called for one-fourth down with the balance due in one, two, or three years; financing was at 6%, and payments were due semiannually. The sale of 15 May 1916 included a two-story brick house. Among the early residents of the Bell Court Subdivision, the 1909 city directory shows the Rev. George H. Harris and his wife Ann E. on Ormsby and James B. and Margaret Stewart at the southwest corner of Blair and Boonesboro. By 1911 there were two occupied
houses on Bell Court West, two on Blair, three on Boonesboro, and three on Ormsby.

With the funds produced by a generous trust, and the ample means of her husband, Clara Bell and Julius Walsh were among the very first to move into a residential suite at New York’s Plaza Hotel on 1 October 1907, the first day the hotel’s register was opened. The marriage grew disagreeable with time, however, and on 7 October 1923, the couple separated. Clara Bell Walsh presented a petition arguing that “her husband made her condition intolerable, called her insulting names and humiliated her before their friends and members of their families.” In a ten-minute hearing on 16 October she was granted a divorce. Referring to her husband thereafter as deceased, she lived on at the Plaza until her death.

At Christmas in 1907, the year she moved into the Plaza Hotel, Clara Walsh made a gift of Bell Place to her mother. In the spring of 1940, the mother and daughter joined in giving the property to the city of Lexington, though retaining a life-estate. The gift was to serve as a memorial to D. D. Bell. On 7 October 1940, when Mrs. Arthur Cary died, the property remained in the control of Clara Walsh, who eventually rented it for the general offices of the Cumberland Corporation.

Away from Lexington all of her adult life, Clara Walsh enjoyed a flamboyant existence. She entertained, raced horses, traveled, followed the theatre, and played the role of a social celebrity. Among her friends numbered Mae West, John Barrymore, Mary Martin, Dame Sybil Thorndike, Stanley Holloway, Ethel Merman, Gregory Peck, Dwight Eisenhower, and James A. Farley. An unidentified news clipping headed “Saratoga Season Nearing Zenith” speaks of “the famed Clara Bell of Kentucky, who knows more about horses than any other woman in America and so much about society that society wishes she would be stricken with a loss of memory.” On her seventy-third birthday the Plaza Hotel marked her fiftieth year as its guest with a party for four hundred. The New York Times described her on the occasion as “a leader of the international set, the New York Social Register, horse racing circles, and the theatrical world.”

A surviving letter from the Plaza Travel Service, dated 31 May 1933, details plans for a Depression era European vacation for Clara Bell Walsh and her mother, Mrs. Cary. They reserved two large double rooms on the U.S.S. Olympic for themselves along
with rooms for two maids and a chauffeur. They also secured a round-trip fare for their automobile. (Clara Walsh was noted for special lights mounted on her limousine that allowed her to park almost anywhere in Manhattan.) After the Derby in the spring, it was usual for Clara Bell Walsh to plan foreign travel for the summer. The year preceding her divorce, according to the press, she had toured Europe with Mr. and Mrs. Bainbridge Colby; he had been Secretary of State under Woodrow Wilson and also had been Mark Twain's attorney.

On 12 August 1957 Clara Bell Walsh died in New York at the age of seventy-three. With her death, possession of Bell Place fell to the city of Lexington. She was buried in the Bell family lot at the Lexington Cemetery. Curiously, in July of 1969, a court order was issued authorizing the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to make a chemical analysis of her remains. After this study, her body was cremated, and the ashes were returned to Kentucky in August of 1970 for reinterment.

The Bell Court neighborhood that surrounds Bell Place today has been home to numerous prominent Lexingtonians. Among them are A. B. Kirwan, former President of the University of Kentucky; Foster Pettit, former Mayor of Lexington; William Kenton, former Speaker of the Kentucky House of Representatives; author and bookman John Wilson Townsend; architectural historian Clay Lancaster; and writer and critic Guy Davenport. The new cache of Bell family materials at the University of Kentucky Libraries augments our knowledge of the technical and economic aspects of the reconstructed Bell Place and the life of its owners. The Bell Court neighborhood remains an appealing suburb convenient to the center of Lexington, shaded by handsome trees, and set quietly apart from the growing traffic of East Main Street. The likelihood appears strong that D. D. Bell's plan to share the congenial setting of Bell Place with others was a wise one, and represents a decision that will be sustained for many years to come.
NOTES


2The Masterson transaction is recorded in Deed Book A, p. 6. In his will (Will Book O, p. 89), he left half of the future Bell tract to son Caleb and the other half to son Robert. Caleb sold to Thomas Smith; Robert sold to Thomas S. Redd, who later sold to Smith. Bell acquired his complete acreage from Thomas Smith.

3"Henry Bell," Biographical Cyclopedia of Kentucky (Chicago: John A. Gresham Co., 1896), 122-23; "Henry Bell" in William Henry Perrin, History of Fayette County (Chicago: O. L. Baskin & Co., 1882), 581-82. On 2 May 1843 the Northern Bank of Kentucky passed a resolution "bearing testimony of the fidelity and ability with which he has discharged the duties as Director and the efficient services he rendered the Bank in the settlement with the Girard Bank of Philadelphia." Extract from minutes in Bell Papers.

4For information on Lewinski see Clay Lancaster, "Major Thomas Lewinski: Emigré Architect in Kentucky," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 11 (1952): 13-20, Bell Place mentioned on p. 16, col. 1. The Lewinski notebook was acquired at a public auction of effects of a member of the Watkins family in March of 1903 by Judge James Hilary Mulligan; it passed to W. K. Massie, Massie's daughter Margaret Massie, the bookseller Ernest Davis, and then to the University of Kentucky Libraries. The notebook was transcribed by Judge Samuel M. Wilson, 12 June 1936. I wish to thank Mr. Burton Milward for information on the provenance of the Lewinski notebook and for making available to me his files on the Bell and Sayre families.

5These may, in fact, have been for pilasters rather than pillars. An 1857 bird's eye view pictorial map shows no pillars at the front. On this point see also Clay Lancaster, Ante Bellum Houses of the Bluegrass (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1961), 96; Lancaster likens the plan of Woodside to that of Ward Hall in Scott County. He also provides another description of Bell Place in Vestiges of the Venerable City: A Chronicle of Lexington, Kentucky (Lexington: Lexington-Fayette County Historic Commission, 1978), 238.

6Quoted in William H. Townsend, Lincoln and his Wife's Home Town (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1929), 169.

7The view was published in Cincinnati by Middleton, Wallace & Co.


9"Double Bereavement," Kentucky Gazette, 5 September 1877; "A
Double Funeral,” *Kentucky Gazette*, 8 September 1877.


11 Lexington *Transcript*, 28 June 1882; *Transcript*, 8 April 1883.


14Deed Book 92, p. 336, 8 January 1890, from J. H. Davison, et al.


16Will Book 7, p. 428; *Transcript*, 28 June 1892.

17Fayette County marriage bonds.


19Julius Sylvester Walsh,” *National Cyclopedia of American Biography* (New York: James T. White & Co., 1904), 12: 13-14. The younger Walsh was also associated with his father’s Mississippi Valley Trust Company and in a letter of 19 October 1907 outlines to Arthur Cary plans to transfer the agency of Clara’s trust fund to the Walsh family’s business.


22 “Mrs. J. S. Walsh Given Divorce: Former Lexingtonian, Nationally
Known Horsewoman, Wins Decree in St. Louis in Ten Minutes; Husband Unkind, Claim,” Lexington Herald, 17 October 1923. Though beginning with impressive capital, Clara Bell Walsh, it is clear, was content in later years to use such funds as remained to her. “Two Fayette Rulings Upheld,” Herald, 17 December 1955, reveals that she had reduced a trust fund of $391,000 left by her mother in 1940 to $2,234.59 and given three notes amounting to $110,000.

23 “Death Comes to Mrs. Cary,” Lexington Herald, 8 October 1940; “Mrs. Cary and Daughter are Donors of Tract,” Lexington Herald, 1 May 1940; “Donors of Bell Place Carry Out Tradition of Former Masters of Mansion,” Lexington Herald-Leader, 5 May 1940.


27 “When I moved to Lexington, Kentucky, fifteen years ago,” writes Guy Davenport, “I could walk to three supermarkets in my neighborhood, to the post office, and to the mayor’s house, which happened to be around the corner.” Commenting on the decline of Lexington’s downtown, he continues, “All three markets have moved miles away, to the belt line; God knows where they have put the post office.” See “Making it Uglier to the Airport” in Every Force Evolves a Form (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1987), 158.