

# THE MISIDENTIFIED LOT: 1637 SOUTH OBSERVATORY AND THE BURTON CLUSTER

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 COMPANION TO "VENEERS OF HISTORY IN GREEN HILLS EAST", NASHVILLE SCENE

## FINDING

The lot the MHZC named as the 1927 Tennessean Model Home was bought in January 1927 by Mizella Burton Grant, daughter of the Life and Casualty Insurance founder who recruited the home's actual owner. The commission's wrong house and the right one belong to the same employer-patriarch network.

## SUPPORTS IN THE ARTICLE

- *1637 belonged to Mizella Burton Grant, A.M. Burton's daughter*
- *the misidentified house belongs to the same insurance-executive cluster as the model home*

## ABSTRACT

The lot the Metropolitan Historic Zoning Commission misidentified as the 1927 Tennessean Model Home was not owned by Holt Bean — it was owned by Mizella Burton Grant. Grant was the daughter of Andrew M. Burton, founder of the insurance company at which Bean rose to executive rank and for which a street in the subdivision is named. Bean never owned the misidentified lot, as [Identifying the Model Home: 1612 North Observatory, Not 1637 South](#) shows; what the lot actually is follows from its own deed record. Grant purchased it in January 1927, in the same originating-deed round that placed Bean six lots away, and held it for nine years. The chain of title and census records together confirm that the commission's wrong house and the right house belong to the same employer-patriarch network. The fuller account of Bean's career and the Burton connection is in [Holt Bean: A Life](#).

## SOURCES

### Primary documents

- American Trust Company, Trustee, to Mizella Burton Grant, Davidson County [Deed Book 716, page 312](#) (dated Dec. 15, 1926; recorded Jan. 12, 1927). Originating deed for Lots 12 and 13; \$2,400 cash; inline racial covenant present.
- Mizella Burton Grant and Otis P. Grant to William B. Hunt and Geneva Taylor Hunt, [Deed Book 1011, page 296](#) (dated Aug. 28, 1936; recorded Sept. 5, 1936). \$9,500: \$3,500 cash plus assumption of a \$6,000 Grant mortgage at [Book 751, page 692](#). Derivation back to Book 716, page 312.

- Sixteenth Census of the United States (1940), Tennessee, Davidson County, Civil District No. 7, Enumeration District 19–264, Sheet 3A. Records the Bean household at household 53 (Holt J. Bean, “Investment Manager, Insurance Co”); the same ED records the Andrew M. Burton household on Hillsboro Road, including daughter Mizella Grant (b. 1906) and son-in-law Otis P. Grant (“Personnel Director”).
- Green Hills Subdivision Plat 1, Davidson County [Plat Book 547, page 128](#); master covenant, Book 770.
- Davidson County ParcelViewer record for parcel 186563 (APN 11715008400), “LOT 12&13 GREEN HILLS SUB,” current owner Observatory Dr Revocable Trust.

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## FINDINGS

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### **THE MISIDENTIFIED HOUSE IS 1637 SOUTH OBSERVATORY – LOTS 12 AND 13, NOT THE MODEL HOME’S LOT 6**

The MHZC nomination treats 1637 South Observatory as the site of the 1927 Tennessean Model Home. The model home stood at 1612 North Observatory Drive (Lot 6), on the opposite arm of the Observatory Drive horseshoe; the 1940 enumerator walked past both the Bean home and the Hunt-owned Lots 12 and 13 on the same day, on the same sheet. Two distinct households, two distinct lots, opposite sides of the loop. The proof that 1637 South is not the model home is set out in [Identifying the Model Home: 1612 North Observatory, Not 1637 South](#); the misidentification is taken as given here, and the question is what 1637 actually is.

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### **LOTS 12 AND 13 WERE BOUGHT IN JANUARY 1927 BY MIZELLA BURTON GRANT**

The originating deed (Book 716, page 312) conveyed the two lots together from American Trust Company, as trustee, to Grant for \$2,400 cash, recorded January 12, 1927 — in sequence with the other January 1927 Green Hills deeds, including the round that placed Holt Bean on Lot 6. The all-cash \$2,400 was the largest cash figure recorded across the studied lots — a sign of means, not of a mortgage-dependent first home.

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### **GRANT HELD THE LOTS NINE YEARS AND SOLD TO THE HUNTS IN 1936**

On August 28, 1936, Mizella Burton Grant and her husband Otis P. Grant conveyed Lots 12 and 13 to William B. and Geneva Taylor Hunt for \$9,500 — \$3,500 cash plus assumption of a \$6,000 mortgage Grant had taken at Book 751, page 692 (Book 1011, page 296). From the Hunts the title ran to the Schwartzes (1973), the Hamiltons (1978), and finally the Beverstein family’s Observatory Drive Revocable Trust, the present owners who objected on the record to the use of their house as the overlay’s central artifact. Holt Bean appears nowhere in this chain.

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## **MIZELLA BURTON GRANT WAS A. M. BURTON'S DAUGHTER, AND BURTON WAS THE MAN BEHIND HOLT BEAN'S CAREER**

The 1940 census household on Hillsboro Road records Andrew M. Burton (head, 60), founder of the Life and Casualty Insurance Company, with his daughter Mary J. and a married daughter, Mizella Grant (34, b. 1906), and her husband Otis P. Grant. Life and Casualty is the company at which Bean, a federal civil servant and boarder as late as 1920, became an investment manager by 1940, and later assistant vice president. The model home's owner and the misidentified lot's first owner were drawn into Green Hills by the same employer-patriarch: Burton employed Bean; Burton's daughter took title to the lot the commission would, decades later, mistake for Bean's. The census and city-directory record establishes the Life and Casualty link between the two men; the further claim that Burton personally recruited Bean is set out in [Holt Bean: A Life](#).

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## **THE ERROR LANDED INSIDE THE KINSHIP CLUSTER**

The favored quarter of Green Hills was assembled by a small, interlocking set of insurance executives and their families in a single development season. Burton to Grant on Lots 12 and 13; Burton to Bean to Life and Casualty on Lot 6. The wrong house and the right house sit inside one family network. Whether other January 1927 Green Hills buyers were also Life and Casualty figures, which would widen the cluster from a coincidence into a pattern, is not yet established: a buyer-by-buyer occupational audit of the 1927 cohort is not in the record, though [The Better Homes in America Movement](#) frames the marketing apparatus that drew such buyers.

The cluster finding rests on the Burton-Bean shared employer, which the census and directories establish; personal recruitment is a further claim (see [Holt Bean: A Life](#)). The lot is recorded as 1637 *South Observatory* throughout the deed and parcel record, though it has at times been called "North." The \$2,400 all-cash figure is the highest among the lots studied, not a figure for every 1927 Green Hills deed.

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## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

American Trust Company, Trustee, to Mizella Burton Grant. Deed Book 716, page 312. Davidson County, Tennessee. Dated December 15, 1926; recorded January 12, 1927.

Grant, Mizella Burton, and Otis P. Grant, to William B. Hunt and Geneva Taylor Hunt. Deed Book 1011, page 296. Davidson County, Tennessee. Dated August 28, 1936; recorded September 5, 1936.

Green Hills Subdivision, Plat 1. Plat Book 547, page 128. Davidson County, Tennessee.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940. Tennessee, Davidson County, Civil District No. 7, Enumeration District 19-264, Sheet 3A. Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration.

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## **SUGGESTED CITATION**

Pemberton, Alex. "The Misidentified Lot: 1637 South Observatory and the Burton Cluster." Research Brief E3, *Veneers of History in Green Hills East*. alexaustinpemberton.com/journalism/veneers-of-history/#misidentified-lot-1637. Accessed [date].