

THE SERVANT HOUSEHOLDS OF GREEN HILLS

VERSION 1.0 · 2026-06-11 · ALEX PEMBERTON

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

FINDING

The 1930 census records at least eight Green Hills East households with live-in domestic workers, at least four Black women. The MHZC's Short Histories honor a subset of those same households by owner's name and omit every worker. The pattern reproduces the division the 1927 covenant drew.

SUPPORTS IN THE ARTICLE

- *at least eight households on these streets employed live-in domestic workers*
- *at least two appear on the MHZC honor roll; none of the workers is named in any Short History*

ABSTRACT

The Plat 1 covenant that governed Green Hills East barred occupancy by anyone of African descent “except in the capacity of servants,” and the federal census shows that exception in constant use. On three streets in 1930 and 1940, enumerators recorded at least eight households that kept a live-in domestic worker, at least four of them Black women. The MHZC’s *Short Histories* — the neighborhood’s own commemorative document — honors a subset of those same households by the employer’s name and omits every worker. The pattern is structural: the *Short Histories* were built from city directories and property records, instruments that documented owners and passed over the people who worked in their homes. The commemorative document inherits that silence and reproduces, in the present, the division the covenant drew in 1927.

METHODOLOGY

The eight households were reconstructed from the federal manuscript census, not from any index or aggregate. For 1940, every sheet of enumeration district 19-264 (Sheets 3A through 6B) was read directly from high-resolution images of the original schedules. The 1940 form records the street name in a single handwritten column, written once per street grouping and inherited by every line below it until the enumerator writes a new street; each sheet’s street column was isolated and read so that no household was assigned a street by inference from its neighbors. Servant and maid entries were confirmed by reading the name and relationship columns line by line. For 1930, the Bean household on Observatory Drive (ED 19-220) is confirmed verbatim against the sheet; the 1930 Green Hills Drive district (ED 19-226) was not visually re-read and is treated as a floor, not a ceiling. The “at least” in every count is therefore literal.

SOURCES

Primary documents

- U.S. Census, 1930, Davidson County, Tennessee, ED 19-220, Sheet 7A (Bean household, Observatory Drive). National Archives and Records Administration.
- U.S. Census, 1940, Davidson County, Tennessee, ED 19-264, Sheets 3A–6B (images 00104–00111), covering Observatory Drive, Burton Avenue, Green Hills Avenue/Drive, Eden Avenue, and Bonner Avenue. National Archives and Records Administration.
- Metro Historic Zoning Commission, *Short Histories* of Green Hills East (draft, “NCZO-TOC-PartII-GHE”), pp. 5–8, profiling Bean, Lackey, and other early residents by name and occupation.
- Green Hills East subdivision, Plat 1, Covenant 4 (“except in the capacity of servants”), treated in the companion brief on the racial covenant.

Scholarship

- Lisa M. Tucker, “The Labor-Saving Kitchen: Sources for Designs of the Architects’ Small Home Service Bureau,” *Enquiry: An Open Access Journal for Architectural Research* 11, no. 1 (2014): 52–63. A 75-variable analysis of the 99 kitchen designs in the bureau’s first plan book (1921), reading them against Frederick Taylor’s scientific management and the home-economics labor-saving literature, and documenting the bureau’s 1924 partnership with Better Homes in America.

FINDINGS

AT LEAST EIGHT HOUSEHOLDS ON THREE STREETS KEPT A LIVE-IN DOMESTIC WORKER

On Observatory Drive the census records Holt Bean (1930), with Sally Carpenter; John S. Milam (1940), with Mary Floyd; William B. Hunt (1940), with Frances Walker; and Albert Ackerman (1940), with Lillie Hamm. On Green Hills Drive, written “Green Hills Ave.” on several 1940 sheets, Albert Marshall (1940) kept Martha Crittenden, Vaden M. Lackey (1940) kept Minnie Mitchell, and John L. Norton (1940) kept Nettie McReynolds. On Eden Avenue, Otto Jones (1940) kept Lucile Tatum. Each worker is recorded in the household line as “Servant” or “Maid.” Burton Avenue and Bonner Avenue, walked in the same district, show no live-in domestic workers; the pattern concentrates on the three streets named here.

shower,” and the 1930 census places Sally Carpenter in the household that occupied it. The clause named a household structure these blocks actually had; a form deed’s stock language would not have produced so exact a fit.

The model home that opened the subdivision belonged to a movement then redesigning the kitchen itself. The home-demonstration campaign promoted the “labor-saving kitchen,” the room reorganized as a workstation on Frederick Taylor’s scientific-management principles — the routes for preparing and clearing a meal separated, the worker’s steps counted and cut. The Architects’ Small House Service Bureau had built that arrangement into its plans from its first plan book of 1921, and by 1924 it was the credited designer of the houses the campaign celebrated (Tucker, 2014). A kitchen so arranged rationalized the labor of whoever worked it; in the Bean household, that worker was Sally Carpenter.

1930 U.S. Census, Davidson County, ED 19-220 – Green Hills East households. (National Archives, RG 29.)

A SUBSET OF THESE SAME HOUSEHOLDS APPEARS IN THE MHZC SHORT HISTORIES, HONORED BY THE EMPLOYER’S NAME

The *Short Histories* profile Holt Bean at length — his model home, his insurance career, his death in 1960 — and list Vaden and Mildred Lackey by their coal company among early Green Hills Drive

residents. Both households kept a live-in worker; both appear on the neighborhood's honor roll. Every household the *Short Histories* commemorate is one of the eight: five of the eight householders — Hunt, Ackerman, Marshall, Norton, Jones — do not appear in the *Short Histories* at all, by name or fragment, on a full-text check. That overlap — the Bean and Lackey households — is the “at least two.”

NONE OF THE EIGHT WORKERS IS NAMED IN ANY SHORT HISTORY

All eight servant names were checked against the full text of the *Short Histories*; none appears, in full, as a variant, or as a surname fragment. The omission is structural: the *Short Histories* are built from city directories and property records, which document the owners while passing over the people who worked in their homes. The commemorative document inherits the silence of the records on which it rests and reproduces, in the present, the division the covenant drew in 1927. The household that is honored and the household that is omitted are frequently the same house. The Short History names the man whose name was on the deed and omits the woman the deed permitted only as a servant.

The 1930 Green Hills Drive district (ED 19-226) was not visually re-read, so any servant households enumerated there fall outside the eight, and the figure stands as a floor. The 1940 street assignments for several households are approximate, read from the house-number column and not yet confirmed against a 1940 city directory. Neither gap reaches the finding it would have to overturn: at least eight servant-keeping households on these three streets, at least four Black women among the workers, and a commemorative record that honors a subset of the employers while naming none of the people who worked in their homes.

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SUGGESTED CITATION

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