

Cary Lawn — a special place in Weakley County history

By Lucinda Leonard
Special to The Press

The many owners over the years of what Weakley County residents know as the late Gov. Ned Ray McWherter’s house, still has been preserved in what builders christened “Cary Lawn.”

The present owners, Bobby and Melinda Goode of Dresden, have opened their home many times in Weakley County for such events as the 2018 Prom Walk, and activities for UT Martin. They also celebrated the 2019 Tennessee Iris Festival with landscape lighting, basking the entire front of the home purple.

The Goodes have transformed the upstairs carriage house to an official Airbnb apartment for visitors from all over the country. They have hosted the descendants of Charlie Ewing, the wife of Rhea Preston Cary, who were the first owners of the home.

Cary Lawn’s significance is the history of the area located in Dresden. A part of 640 acres was given to Joseph Kirkpatrick for his service in the War of 1812. Although he never lived in Weakley County, his name was on the original grant.

Kirkpatrick sold the acres to William Washington Camp of Weakley County in 1831. In 1864 Mr. Camp sold most of the acreage to Emerson Etheridge, while he was serving as the U. S. House of Representatives as reported in the Weakley County Historian by Martha Shanklin.

As the property changed hands from family to family throughout the years, the boundary also changed. The west boundary changed to Main Street, and the east boundary changed from Depot Street to Linden.



Cary Lawn has changed many hands and has been a part of Weakley County History for centuries.

In 1921, Rhea Preston Cary and his wife, Charlie Ewing, of Memphis bought the property on Linden that is also known as Cary Lawn. The estate was bought for their summer home and was known as the “handsomest” house in the county.

Mrs. Cary’s husband died in 1926 and she found it difficult to maintain her Memphis home and the

Dresden property. In 1928, she sold Cary Lawn to Foster Y. Fuqua and wife Lester Hancock Fuqua for \$11,000.

When the Fuquas bought the home, they had been living in Dresden for 14 years. During the Great Depression, Mrs. Fuqua planted row after row of daffodils bulbs that expanded from the top of the hillside to the other.

They still grow and inspire visitors from all over the county. Mrs. Fuqua shared the daffodils with friends, family, weddings, and funerals.

The third owners of Cary Lawn were natives of Weakley County — Raymond H. Smith, and his wife Edith McWherter Smith — in 1940. Edith

was Gov. Ned Ray McWherter’s second cousin once removed.

In 1984 McWherter, then Speaker of the House, purchased this home and lived there until 1995. McWherter served as the 46th governor of Tennessee. When the late governor renovated the house, he added a sunroom and opened the porch across the entire back rooms with 15 columns used for support. He also purchased the lot behind the main house and covered that lot with daffodils.

On June 18, 1992, Cary Lawn was listed on the National Register of Historic Places, as reported by the United States Department of the Interior National Park Service. Although some changes have been made, the portrait of late Governor McWherter still has a place in the upstairs foyer. Key features remain in place such as



Current owners of Cary Lawn, Melinda and Bobby Goode of Dresden



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