

History of Old Sumner Fairvue, Part Two – The Reed Era

Fairvue has always attracted attention. The land along its two fertile creek valleys leading to rich river bottoms must have looked like paradise to the first settlers. Revolutionary War Veteran James Franklin, along with his five sons, soon claimed it. One of them, Isaac, became hugely rich trading in slaves, land and cotton, - precious cotton, rapidly replacing wool as the worldwide fabric of choice.

Isaac built the largest plantation house in Tennessee on the high ground between the two creeks. In 1839 he married the stunning Adelia Hayes of Nashville, and together they had four children and the management of 10,000 acres in seven plantations spread from Tennessee downriver to Louisiana. They also had the care and feeding of 600 slaves.



Fairvue Plantation With Icehouse – Bill Puryear - 12"x24" – Oil on Panel

Four decades and a Civil war intervened. Franklin and all his children died, the South lay devastated, the slaves fled, the fields lay untended, and Fairvue, like mythic Tara, was an empty shell, its glory gone with the wind.

Anyone who then predicted that this ruined plantation would again attract wealthy owners and admirers from as far away as New York, London, and Europe would have been thought crazy. Yet the next century brought to it titans of industry, royalty, and the international champions of the sport to which she was best suited, the breeding and racing of thoroughbred horses.

In 1882 the Adelia sold Fairvue to Charles Reed. Virtually everybody acquainted with the history of the American turf had heard of the New Yorker who had paid \$100,000 for St. Blaise, the winner of the English derby. This was the record for a racehorse, equivalent to several millions of dollars today. By comparison, for Fairvue and its 2,000 acres, he paid only \$50,000.



Ann Jane and Charles Reed, about 1873



Reed was a self-made man in every respect, accustomed to getting his way. As a teenager he ran away from home, then dug gold in California, ran the blockade for the South during the War, married an Irish lady in England, became a major gambling house operator, first in New Orleans, then in New York and Saratoga, knew the leaders of sport, finance, and the theatre, and owned and bred champion racehorses. At 55, he was described as good-looking, strongly built, brusque and domineering. His clientele at his New York gambling house included Theodore Roosevelt, August Belmont, Lillian Russell, Buffalo Bill and Sarah Bernhardt.

At Saratoga he first met Isaac Franklin's nephew, Captain James Franklin, who bred thoroughbred racehorses at Kennesaw, across the pike from Fairvue



Pilots' Knob - 30"x12" - Watercolor on Fabriano paper

Kennesaw, under Pilots' Knob – Bill Puryear

.Impressed by the superiority of the Tennessee-bred horses, Reed bought two yearlings at W.G.Harding's sale at Belle Meade in April of 1882. In September of that year, he bought Fairvue, settling the difference between the \$50,000 bid and the \$60,000 asked by the flip of a coin.

Reed changed the name of the place to Fairview and planned to raze the crumbling plantation house with a home in the style of the day with turrets and gingerbread., but his wife, Anne Jane, talked him out of it. Instead, he spent \$200,000 in fitting Fairview as a home and horse breeding establishment.

It was never Reed's policy to skimp. As Margaret Lindsey Warner, in her book The Saga of Fairvue relates it:

“Penny people, nickel people, quarter people, and dollar people were the ways Charlie Reed graded his acquaintances. He was definitely a dollar person. Dandelions would be dug out of the bluegrass by as many as a hundred Negro men,

women, and children. If fifty yearlings were to be led about a mile to the flag station (Peytona siding on the railroad) for shipment to New York, they would be led all the way by fifty retainers. Nails would be purchased by the barrel. Nearly a hundred exercising saddles were at the barns.

Mr. Reed in true New York spirit named the main road from the turnpike to the house *Broadway* and a parallel one *Fifth Avenue*” Along this road were 24 acre paddocks, each containing a small stable with cypress shingle roof...

At its peak, this famous Thoroughbred nursery had 286 box stalls distributed over a number of stables. In 1897 there were about 150 broodmares. Some stalls were 24 feet square. All had piped in water and oat sifters.

(He) built the five stallion boxes which stand today on the west side of *Broadway* (as well as) the massive stone stable with chestnut lined stalls eighteen feet square with a covered track on all sides.



Stallion Barns at Fairvue – Bill Puryear – 24”x36” – Oil on Panel

Reed bought three carloads of furniture used by Marie Antionette and later by Napoleon and shipped part of it to Fairview. Some of these furnishings did not leave the place until the final dispersal sale, 120 years later.

Reed divided his time between his gambling houses in New York and Saratoga and Fairview, leaving its day-to-day management to wife Anna Jane and son, Maurice. Lavish parties were held during the Reed’s early tenure. The guest included not only locals such as the Allens, Franklins, Haynies, Gardners, Peytons, Kirkpatricks, and

Witherspoons, but notables from New York, as well, including the Peabodys, brought in by special Pullman car.

The Reeds produced outstanding thoroughbreds while at Fairview, importing the best stallions and mares from England, Australia, or from wherever they might be found at whatever price. The long list of champions bred at Fairview included Dobbins, Sir Francis, Yorkville Belle, and The Bard, as well as the second rank of Agitator, Refugee, Peter, and Don Alonzo.

Gallatin became a social mecca, with the glitter of celebrity added by New York visitors including Pierre Lorillard, W. C. Whitney, and August Belmont. The area around Fairview became studded with a number of tracks and some of the best examples of thoroughbred farms of the Tennessee Bluegrass Region, including Kennesaw, Avondale, Foxland Hall and St. Blaise. When St. Blaise himself, the most famous stallion of the time, arrived at Peytona siding, a crowd gathered to watch \$100,000 of horseflesh arrive at his new home..

Then, the old gambler's luck turned. Five of his eight children died, his "fast" daughter ran off to Paris to pursue a stage career, and son Maurice, whose only job skill was writing tip sheets on the races when in England, was caught juggling the accounts at Fairview. Octavia, her mother's favorite and an accomplished pianist, died in 1893, the fine piano was locked, and the formal parlors were seldom opened thereafter. Anne Jane became an invalid from a kick in the back from a two-year-old colt, and now too frail to ride, got about the place driving a mule hitched to a buckboard, wearing a Mother Hubbard dress and a sunbonnet. St. Blaise brought \$2,500 a stand, but his foals disappointed, and the \$100,000 stallion ultimately was sold for \$5,000. The Reed's closed down their place in Saratoga.

In 1902 Reed, now 75, had had enough, and "because of age and desire for rest and quiet", sold all his breeding stock and retired from the horse game. His 127 brood mares and 11 stallions brought only \$76,650. His luck was no better with pigeons, which he tried the next four years, turning the sale ring into a giant birdhouse and importing 1,100 from Belgium. He also tried tobacco, as well as Berkshire hogs, turning Isaac Franklin's tomb and St. Blaise's stable into boar houses. The worms ate most of the tobacco, and the investment in birds and Berkshires was short lived. The entire place was sold in 1908 for \$75,000, to local buyers who cut it into tracts, which brought \$150,000 within a year.

The Reed era at Fairview was over, but not Reed's bad luck.

The Reeds returned to New York, to their society friends, many of whom owed them old debts, the proceeds of which they expected to live on. Instead, their wealth reduced, they were snubbed, and the old debts were dishonored. As Margaret Warden relates the story,

"Remembering the kind people in Gallatin, they returned in a few years, bringing several trunk loads of their last worldly finery. They bought a modest frame house and about 40 acres on Long Hollow Pike three miles from town. One payment was

all the Reeds could make. The payments were continued by W.Y.Allen who was one of the five who had made a large profit on Fairview and the one who remembered the Reeds in their hour of need, paying their burial expenses also.

The adventurer who said his religion was a sack of flour and a load of coal, died April 18, 1914, age 86. Anna Jane survived him nearly three years, cared for by Maurice and Amelia Christy, a Negro maid who stayed with her impoverished and ailing mistress out of loyalty and pity, whether she was paid or not.

When Maurice was evicted from the little house, he had nowhere to go, and Mr. and Mrs. Will Witherspoon invited him to spend the night at their home on Factory Street until he could decide what to do. He stayed eight years, 'too lazy to put more coal on the fire' and wearing dirty old clothes. He wore a pair of diamond cuff links which he had Mrs. Witherspoon sew into his shirts. He never offered to pay his board bill. At his death they (the cufflinks) disappeared. As always he was an habitual beer drinker, but never seen drunk. Even the Witherspools remembered him kindly, as good looking and gentlemanly, but without character.

So ends the story of Fairview's picturesque riches to rags occupants."



Sources: In compiling this I have drawn heavily from Margaret Lindsey Warner's fine little book, The Saga of Fairvue, as well as from the stories and personal recollections of her good friend and mine, Ellen Stokes Wemyss, Mistress of Fairvue for the 63 years from 1939-2002. The photos are from her book, except the first of St. Blaise, the winner of the English Derby, which is from A Pictorial History of Sumner County, by Walter Durham and James Thomas, published by The Sumner County Historical Society in 1986. The rest, including the paintings, places and local lore are accumulated from the many good days I have enjoyed at Fairvue, as well as from my father, who grew up on St. Blaise Farm at Peytona.

Paintings: A limited number of unframed Giclee prints are available of the paintings shown here, in the sizes shown. The oils are on canvas, are damar varnished, and may be framed without glass, as any original oil. The watercolors are on 140 lb. cold pressed watercolor paper and should be framed under glass. Giclees are permanent works of art and do not fade, as do ordinary prints. The watercolors may be expected to be colorfast for 100 years, and the oils 25, if not covered with glass.

Prices and delivery dates may be obtained by contacting Linda Martus, tel. 615-264-8731, dmartus@comcast.net, or by contacting the artist directly at 452-1540, pury@comcast.net.