



COVENANT
COLLEGE

of
PLACE
and
PURPOSE

*105 years after Courtland Jackson arrived on Lookout
Mountain to establish a Kingdom witness*

BY GARY LINDLEY '72

GENERATIONS OF COVENANT COLLEGE STUDENTS have known that a small family cemetery sits on the western edge of the campus, along a service road, surrounded by a rusty chain-link fence, overgrown and neglected. Those who have ventured through the gate could not help but notice the name “Jackson” etched in marble on the largest of the tombstones, but making out much more of the detail is difficult, the stones eroded by decades of rainfall and partly covered over by moss. Those students who have hiked the Bluff Trail may have noticed that the trailhead on the south end is indicated by a Park Service sign which says “Jackson Spring,” and the occasional history buff might have known that the knoll on which the college sits used to be known locally as Jackson Hill.

The three grave markers belong to Courtland Columbus Jackson (C.C.), his wife Sallie Preston Rhea Jackson, and one of their sons, Courtland Stonewall Jackson. C.C. was born near Albany, New York in 1825, while Sallie, 16 years younger, was born in Washington County, Tennessee. They came to Lookout Mountain in 1859 from Abingdon, Virginia, under the auspices of the American Sunday School Union (ASSU) in order to establish Sunday

Below: Sallie Preston Rhea Jackson



schools in a “destitute place.” The ASSU had been established in 1824 in Philadelphia for the purpose of promoting literacy and “spiritual formation” in thousands of destitute places in the expanding United States, especially in the sparsely-settled southern and western states. This 19th century combination of schooling and evangelism, and more particularly moral instruction through literature, may be best understood in the broader context of several factors at work in American history: the Second Great Awakening and frontier revivalism beginning in the early 1800s; the growth of a democratic ideal in the first half of the century and the need for an educated citizenry; the expansion westward of a European population, and here in the South, the forced removal of the Cherokees in the 1830’s.

No doubt Lookout Mountain, here on the southern end of the Appalachian Range, was one of those destitute places. Yes, by mid-century there were some summer homes and a modest hotel or two on the north end of the mountain overlooking the tiny city of Chattanooga, the only access to the mountain from the city by that trail known as the Whiteside Turnpike. But a few miles south, settlement had to be sparse and life difficult. While today tourism and outdoor activities make Lookout attractive and prosperous, how did its occupants make a living 150 years ago? Cutting timber, gathering stone, and especially coal mining appear to be the only income-producing options; the soil in most places is too poor to be worth the agricultural effort.

Nevertheless Jackson and his family were prompted to move further south from Virginia in 1859, obviously not knowing that their plans would soon be interrupted by the War Between the States. Property transfers recorded in Dade County indicate that in May of that year, he purchased 160 acres from Robert Parris and 80 acres from John Perkins, those 240 acres now including Covenant’s present campus and stretching from Dade County into Walker County. (Today Covenant sits just hundreds of yards from the Walker county line to the east, but in 1855 when Georgia governor Herschel Johnson conveyed to Parris his acreage, the entire area was designated as the County of Cherokee.)

Parris and Perkins appear to have been major landowners, likely interested mostly in the potential mineral rights on the mountain, buying and selling various tracts of land as early as 1849 and even to one another in the years leading up to the war. (In

fact, Jackson's original purchase allowed Parris and Perkins to retain the mineral rights to the land, the original owners apparently assuming that there might be something of value buried beneath.) How they became landowners in the first place is at least partly explained by the "Land and Gold Lotteries" conducted by the State of Georgia which parceled out that territory taken from the Cherokees in the 1830s and was in most cases allotted to military veterans or their families.

Jackson Hill was never the site of any engagement between Union and Confederate troops, but like so many locations in the South it was not exempt from the war, nor was this family above the war's passions.

According to their great-grandson Rufus Triplett, Courtland sided with the Union in the conflict, and Sallie was an ardent secessionist. Mr. Triplett has in his possession a document issued by the Union Army replacing foodstuffs taken previously from the Jackson farm, and according to family lore, in September of 1863 Union cavalry came up through Jackson Gap from Lookout Valley to the west in order to reconnoiter the east side of the mountain; traveling as far as LaFayette and not finding any Confederate positions, they returned the way they came. The same

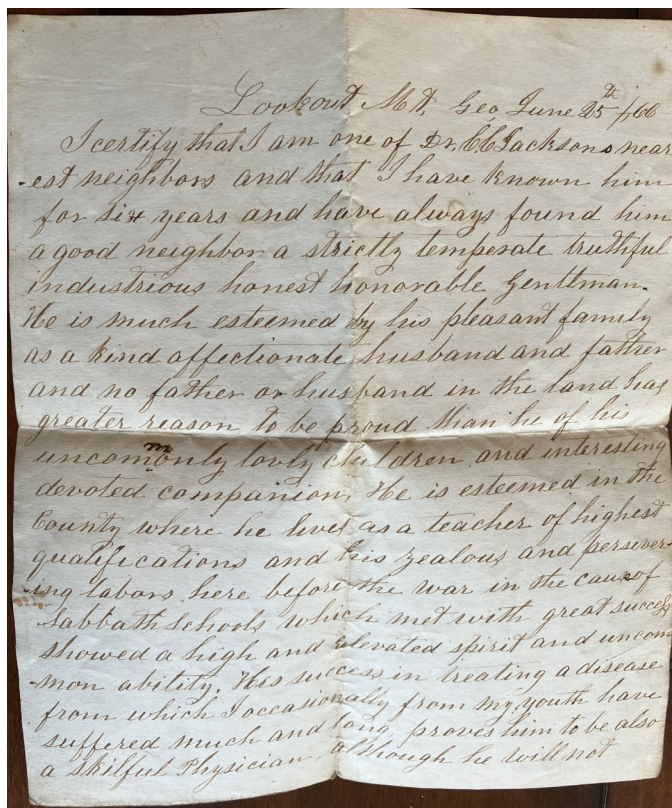
family narrative records the family watching the smoke plumes and listening to the cannon roar of the two-day Battle of Chickamauga a few miles to the southeast in late September, 1863, from the heights of Jackson Hill.

What brought Courtland Jackson to Lookout Mountain is thus partly known; what is also partly known is the extent to which he pursued this original calling. A document in Mr. Triplett's possession dated May, 1863, at Summertown lists 12 local families and their 25 children who had signed up for his tutelage

[Summertown was the name given to the sparse settlement on the front of the mountain.] Specifically, "to forward the establishment of Grand Alpine Institute at Summertown on Lookout Mountain under the management of Dr. C.C. Jackson, we agree to send pupils as follows." Among the adults listed with the numbers of their pupils are at least four military officers, likely Confederates, as the Union Army of the Cumberland had not yet advanced on Chattanooga.

In a testimonial dated June 25, 1866, written by "one of Jackson's nearest neighbors" and apparently to attest to his good character in what would become the Reconstruction South (and he had always been a

Unionist), the neighbor asserts: "He is esteemed in the county where he lives as a teacher of highest qualifications and his zealous and persevering labors here before the war in the cause of Sabbath schools which [sic] met with great success [and he] showed a high and elevated spirit and uncommon ability."



Lookout, Mo. Sec June 25 / 66
I certify that I am one of Dr. C.C. Jackson's nearest neighbors and that I have known him for six years and have always found him a good neighbor a strictly temperate truthful industrious honest honorable gentleman. He is much esteemed by his pleasant family as a kind affectionate husband and father and no father or husband in the land has greater reason to be proud than he of his uncommonly lovely children and interesting devoted companions. He is esteemed in the county where he lives as a teacher of highest qualifications and his zealous and persevering labors here before the war in the cause of Sabbath schools which met with great success showed a high and elevated spirit and uncommon ability. This success in treating a disease from which I occasionally from my youth have suffered much and long, proves him to be also a skilful Physician. although he will not

Family tradition also holds that a couple of the churches some miles south of the Covenant campus exist today as "descendants" of his Sunday school establishing efforts. We also know that while the congregations which developed from his

schools are now Baptist and Methodist churches, he himself was a Presbyterian (studying for a time at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia) and during the war became friends with Thomas Hooke McCallie, pastor of First Presbyterian Church. As the McCallie family scrambled in September, 1863 to accommodate the Union troops' occupation of Chattanooga and even the family home (on the site of today's First Centenary Church), the McCallies hid away some of their important papers in the Jacksons' cabin on Lookout Mountain, where they remained forgotten for more than seven decades until the cabin



Above: Sallie (right) in c. 1913 with her daughter Mary Marquis Jackson Triplett (left) (Rufus' father is the infant)

(with the papers) was burned by vandals in the 1940's.

Jackson's grave marker would indicate that he remained in the area until his death in 1912 at the age of 87. Sallie lived until 1920, and the son also buried in the family plot lived on the east side of Scenic Highway in the general area of The Kirk (the former RP Church building). The original Jackson cabin stood near today's Frontier Bluff Road, just west of the little family cemetery. Portions of the foundation are still visible on the grounds of a private residence.

What we do know with more certainty, however, is that in 1925-26 James I. Carter and his son Paul B. Carter bought up hundreds of acres of land on the Georgia side of Lookout Mountain. In 1925 they purchased the college's present site from R. K.



Above: Jackson family cabin located near Frontier Bluff Road

and Mary Triplett, C.C. and Sallie Jackson's son-in-law and daughter. Paul Carter was the far-sighted developer of the Lookout Mountain Hotel, whose construction began in June of 1927 and was completed just a year later. Somewhat as war had interrupted Jackson's plans 70 years earlier, the stock market crash and subsequent Depression pretty much scuttled Carter's plans. (In his autobiography published in 1977 by newspaperman Roy McDonald, Paul Carter suggests that indeed his plans were too far-sighted, having been warned by New York Times publisher Adolph Ochs and others that his location was too remote and would go "bust.")

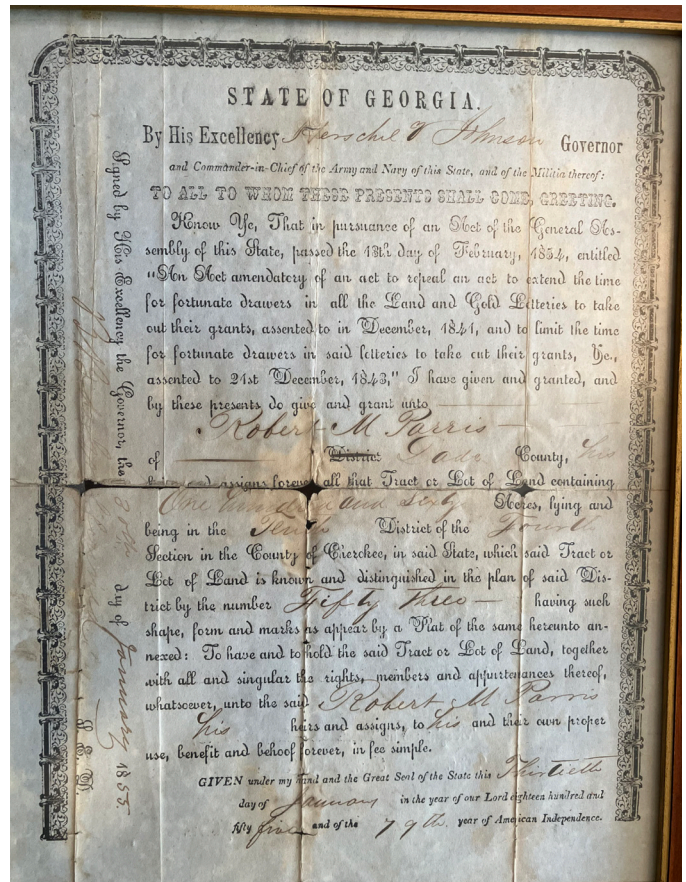
But if his plans were far-sighted, they were also grandiose. The hotel was to be the centerpiece of a master plan called Lookout Mountain Estates, with streets and building lots all around and below the main building, especially to the north and east. Jupiter and Apollo Roads and Diana Lane remind us of this layout; Venus Lane, Mercury Drive, and Hellicon Drive (the latter connecting Scenic Highway and the golf club) were to be cut in the woodlands below the college and east of Scenic Highway but were never developed.

Fast forward to 1963-64 and the Covenant College Board of Trustees' deliberations concerning the college's future and the need for more space. From former history professor William S. Barker's history of the college published in 2005:

“It was into this context that businessman, realtor, and new trustee, Hugh Smith from Huntsville, Alabama, made the board aware of the vacant Lookout Mountain Hotel. . . Marion D. Barnes, who was elected to the board in 1958 and became chairman in 1961, recorded in 1982 that ‘his first impression of this facility was that it was completely beyond our means. . . We knew nothing about Chattanooga or Lookout Mountain except that a tourist attraction widely advertised over the country, called Rock City, was located there. This did not seem at all like a proper location for our college.’ When Hugh Smith reported at a subsequent meeting that the hotel was off the market, the board breathed a sigh of relief.”

After being rebuffed in its initial effort to secure financing for a new dorm at its St. Louis campus, “the board heard Hugh Smith report at its next meeting, ‘What do you know, the hotel is back on the market! I believe this is the place where we should move instead of building a dormitory here in St. Louis.’” The board debated back and forth, finally deciding that out of respect for Mr. Smith, they should at least look at the property. Barker continues:

“President Rayburn and Business Manager Edward A. Steele, Jr. made the trip to Chattanooga and found the hotel to be situated in a lovely residential area on top of Lookout Mountain, not isolated nor remote from the city as had been imagined. The facility, while not well maintained during several years of being vacant, possessed potential for accommodating a student body of 500, three times the current enrollment, with dining hall and kitchen equipped with china and silverware, space for chapel, library, classrooms and offices. . . The board was still doubtful. Dr. Barnes later wrote, ‘After we had learned that another group was placing a bid of \$350,000 on the facility, we decided to test the Lord’s will in the matter by offering a bid of only \$250,000. We felt quite confident that the firm offering the building for sale, the American National Insurance Company of Galveston, Texas, would unquestionably take the higher bid. . . Within about six weeks, to our very great surprise, we received notification from the [insurance company] that they had accepted our bid.’”



Above: The original land grant from the State of Georgia to Robert Parris in 1855

For some sense of perspective, that \$250,000 in 1964 dollars would be \$2.35 million in today’s inflation-adjusted dollars (2022), a relative pittance for seven acres with a majestic view of the mountains both to the east and the west and a five-story, castle-like building containing many thousands of square feet.

And not only did the Lookout Mountain Hotel become the centerpiece of the Covenant campus, but Mr. Carter later gave to the college hundreds of acres of mountain property, this property becoming collateral for future bank loans and a source of income as portions of it were sold at auction. In a conversation in his later years with Covenant’s Vice-President of Development Allen Duble, Paul Carter expressed some regret that his plan to bring people from all over the country to vacation in this beautiful location on Lookout Mountain had apparently failed and that Duble’s visits only reminded him of the failure of his dream. As recorded in the autumn 2015 edition of View, Duble replied: “I don’t know whether you have thought of this or not, but your dream has been fulfilled in far greater measure than you ever could have dreamed it. We’ve got kids here from 24

states and 17 foreign countries. And they don't come for a weekend—they come for four years. Your dream has been fulfilled.”

So here we come full circle. If Covenant was somehow the fulfillment of Paul Carter's vision, then as an educational institution it was even more the fulfillment of the Jacksons' vision. Courtland Jackson and his wife Sallie, both from Scottish Presbyterian families, came to the hill which bears his name in order to establish a witness for Jesus Christ. Paul Carter purchased that hill 75 years later with the hope of enticing visitors from all over the country, and in a remarkable real estate “fire sale,” Covenant College and its Scots were practically given both the hill and the building in order to establish a clear Reformed witness for the preeminence of Christ in all things and among students from all over the world. How many schools can make such a claim regarding the significance of their physical place and its relation to their mission?

But there's another narrative which enters the story here. While we don't know much detail about Mr. Jackson's pursuit of his calling to establish a Kingdom witness here on Lookout Mountain, we do know that he was an enterprising fellow. Sometime around the turn of the last century, he collaborated with Chattanooga attorney and real estate developer Robert T. Wright to survey and lay out a subdivision which they named Jackson Vista within a proposed township called Marquis, Georgia, both contained on that stretch of land just southwest of the hill. (The name “Marquis” traces back to Sallie Preston Rhea's Scottish ancestry and was the middle name of the Jacksons' daughter, Mary Marquis Jackson.) According to Wright's grandson Sam Lowe, writing in 1996, “there were streets, city lots, and even a post office for the town. It was to be supplied with water from Jackson Spring on the side of the mountain.” While some homes were later constructed in this area, this development, like Lookout Mountain Estates, also never came to pass.

[Of note here: Among the Dade County deeds, there is a record of land conveyed to Mr. Wright in payment of a \$100 debt by Bert and Henrietta Barrows at Marquis, Georgia. Covenant students may remember “the Barrows house,” the red brick house still located on the east side of Scenic Highway across from the soccer field parking lot.]

Now to pick up on Robert Wright's part in Covenant's history: through several land purchases beginning in 1899, he began accumulating the acreage which would be his family's summer home known as The Wayside. This approximately 40-acre homestead just south of Covenant's campus remained in the Wright family for three generations. By a process of eminent domain (U.S.A. vs. Estate of Edmund A. Wright, et.al.), the federal government purchased 28 of those acres to build in the late 1950's the family housing for those airmen stationed at the Flintstone Air Station, which functioned from 1955-61 as part of the nation's air traffic control. When the government abandoned this project, many of those tract houses became affordable homes for Covenant faculty, students, and graduates, while the air station property itself eventually became Covenant's Shadowlands soccer field, softball field, and baseball field. The remaining 12 acres were purchased by Covenant alumni Gary and Patricia Lindley in 1983 and subdivided as Wayside Estate, becoming home to ten families, thus partly explaining our personal interest in this story and our own appreciation of the significance of place!

Below: The tower under construction, likely taken by C. S. Jackson, who continued to live just south of the hotel after the sale of the land to the Carters

