

“The Dryad Days”:

Frances Hodgson Burnett in East Tennessee, Part 1

By Paul F. Brown*



At the turn of the twentieth century, Frances Hodgson Burnett was arguably the world’s most famous author—female or male. Her novel *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, which began life as a magazine serial in 1885, found enormous success in print and on stage and screen. The book inadvertently popularized the dressing of boys in lace collars and velvet suits. Even though most of her novels were written for adult readers, Burnett is best known today as the author of children’s books like *A Little Princess* (1905) and *The Secret Garden* (1911), both of which continue to enjoy reissues in multiple languages. And while much of Burnett’s work has remained in print, *The Secret Garden* is by far her most relevant work for modern readers. It became a popular 1991 Broadway musical, which saw a revival in 2017, and a successful motion picture that in 1993 critic Roger Ebert rated four stars and called “far and away the best family film of the year.” *The Secret Garden* continues to inspire film projects, including “The Misselthwaite Archives,” a multimedia webseries” that aired on YouTube in 2015, and a forthcoming StudioCanal feature starring Colin Firth.¹

Biographical interest in Burnett began soon after she died in 1924. Ada Campbell Larew, a Knoxville physician’s daughter who was born around the

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¹ “The Secret Garden,” *Internet Broadway Database*, <http://www.ibdb.com>; Roger Ebert, “The Secret Garden,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, August 13, 1993; Roger Ebert, “The Best 10 Movies of 1993,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, December 31, 1993; Roger Ebert, “A Little Princess,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, May 19, 1995; “Frances Hodgson Burnett,” *Internet Movie Database*, <http://www.imdb.com>; Orlando Parfitt, “Colin Firth, Julie Walters to Star in ‘The Secret Garden’ for StudioCanal, Heyday,” *Screen Daily*, April 27, 2018, <https://www.screendaily.com/news/colin-firth-julie-walters-to-star-in-the-secret-garden-for-studiocanal-heyday/5128635.article>; The Misselthwaite Archives, <http://misselthwaitearchives.com/>.



time the Hodgsons moved there from New Market, retained clear memories of Frances and wrote a couple of short memoirs about her.² Frances's son Vivian published the first full biography, *The Romantick Lady*, in 1927. He portrayed her as a fairy who, to the detriment of her own health, tirelessly sought to grant happiness to those around her.³ While it did nothing to revise Vivian's unwelcomed reputation as the original Fauntleroy, his work stood for several decades as the only full and authoritative Burnett biography, and subsequent biographers drew heavily from it. In 1965, Vivian's widow, Constance Buel Burnett, published a short biography, *Happily Ever After: A Portrait of Frances Hodgson Burnett*, which added some new details to the story but mostly relied on her husband's book and Frances's 1893 memoir, *The One I Knew the Best of All*.⁴ Next, Ann Thwaite's *Waiting for the Party: The Life of Frances Hodgson Burnett*, a full biography published in 1974, provided the first detached appraisal of Burnett and suggested that, despite her many successes, Frances's fairytale wishes never materialized.⁵ Exactly thirty years later, Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina published *Frances Hodgson Burnett: The Unexpected Life of the Author of The Secret Garden*, the most detailed and thoroughly documented biography to date, and one that more fully considered Burnett's legacy.⁶

Each of these biographers wrote about the years when Frances resided in the Tennessee towns of New Market and Knoxville, but they also overlooked significant details and did not follow up on her legacy and commemoration there. Vivian Burnett confessed that he had collected more information than a single-volume biography would allow and therefore had to omit much about his mother's life in Knoxville.⁷ Considering her text was so brief, it is doubtful that Constance Burnett conducted any research in Knoxville. Both Thwaite and Gerzina consulted the Calvin M. McClung Historical Collection in Knoxville during their research, but their interpretations of Frances's homesites in the city remain vague or, in a few instances, misleading. Further, East Tennessee writers have often confused details when recounting

² Ada Campbell Larew, "Childhood Recollections of Frances Hodgson Burnett," *Sunday [Knoxville] Sentinel Magazine*, July 26, 1925, 6; Ada Campbell Larew, "Memoirs of Frances Hodgson Burnett," unpublished typescript, n.d. (ca. late 1920s), Ada Campbell Larew Papers, Calvin M. McClung Historical Collection, East Tennessee History Center, Knoxville.

³ Vivian Burnett, *The Romantick Lady (Frances Hodgson Burnett): The Life Story of an Imagination* (New York, 1927).

⁴ Constance Buel Burnett, *Happily Ever After: A Portrait of Frances Hodgson Burnett* (New York, 1965).

⁵ Ann Thwaite, *Waiting for the Party: The Life of Frances Hodgson Burnett, 1849-1924* (New York, 1974).

⁶ Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina, *Frances Hodgson Burnett: The Unexpected Life of the Author of The Secret Garden* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2004).

⁷ Larew, "Memoirs of Frances Hodgson Burnett," Larew Papers, McClung Collection.

Burnett's life in the region.⁸ A few local writers have contributed much to Burnett scholarship. Jack Neely wrote about her multiple times in his history columns for the *Metro Pulse* and the *Knoxville Mercury*.⁹ Another scholar, Lee University professor Katherine Leigh Carlson, explored "Burnett sites and resources in East Tennessee" in her fall 2015 Women Writers course and published the project as a webpage.¹⁰

A recent milestone renewed interest in Burnett's East Tennessee connections. In 2015, the sesquicentennial of the Hodgsons' arrival in Tennessee, a resident of New Market organized three days of related events and scholarly presentations, including one by Frances's great-granddaughter. In 2018, an anniversary of greater significance was celebrated, though perhaps not as widely. The year marked 150 years since Frances's first stories—ones she penned in Knoxville—appeared in print, in June, October, and November 1868. With a focus on Frances Hodgson Burnett in the place where her career began, the time is right for compiling all that is known about her life, work, and legacy in East Tennessee.

Frances lived in East Tennessee, off and on, from the summer of 1865 to her final months as a resident in 1877. During that period she was primarily known as Fannie and published as "Fannie E. Hodgson" through December 1876, when she finally asked her editor to cite "Frances Hodgson Burnett" on all of her future publications. "I was never called Fannie until I came to America & dont like it," she wrote. "It is too babyish for a woman & might mean any body."¹¹ Despite Burnett's distaste for the nickname, this article refers to her as "Fannie" because it represented her East Tennessee identity.

This essay, the first of two parts, focuses on her years in the region up to 1872, before she temporarily left Knoxville on a fourteen-month sojourn to Europe. Particular attention is given to clarifying the locations of her homesites and presenting a fuller picture of Fannie's personal and professional activities as a single woman in New Market and Knoxville, and how those experiences influenced her writings. Later in life, she romanticized these years in East Tennessee, and herself as a nymph footloose among its hills, and called them her "dryad days."¹²

⁸ For example, one columnist erred twice by stating that Burnett wrote *Little Lord Fauntleroy* in Knoxville and that to escape city noise she moved from downtown to a cabin near Knoxville College. See, "Author of *Little Lord Fauntleroy* Lived Here," *Knoxville Sentinel*, November 2, 1921.

⁹ Jack Neely's columns about Burnett included, "Vagabondia Castle," *Metro Pulse*, August 27, 1993; "Finding Vagabondia," *Metro Pulse*, June 18-25, 1996; "Boom Town," *Metro Pulse*, November 11, 1999; "His Wretchedness at Times," *Metro Pulse*, January 30, 2003; "The Bower," *Metro Pulse*, April 24, 2003; "Exotic Breeze," *Metro Pulse*, July 1, 2004; "Frances Hodgson Burnett, the Knoxville Years," *Knoxville Mercury*, November 18, 2015; "Finding Vagabondia," *Knoxville Mercury*, March 8, 2017; "The Case of the Mislplaced Markers at Volunteer Landing," *Knoxville Mercury*, April 12, 2017.

¹⁰ Katherine Leigh Carlson, "Francis Hodgson Burnett in Tennessee," <http://katherineleighcarlson.com/frances-hodgson-burnett-in-tennessee/>.

¹¹ Gerzina, *Frances Hodgson Burnett*, 65.

¹² The title "The Dryad Days" comes from the fourteenth chapter of her memoir, Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The One I Knew the Best of All* (London, 1893; facsimile ed., 1974).

Knoxville (Summer 1865)

Fannie was born in Manchester, England on November 24, 1849, the second child of Edwin and Eliza Hodgson. Edwin died in 1852, and after struggling for years to maintain his business during a poor economy, Eliza considered relocating to America. One of her brothers, William Boond, had immigrated to Tennessee and found success as a merchant before the Civil War began.¹³ In his letters he promised Eliza's sons employment in Knoxville and the family a prosperous future there.¹⁴ In late 1864, she sent Herbert, her eldest child, to Knoxville ahead of the rest of the family.¹⁵ Eliza and her other children—John, Fannie, Edith, and Edwina (nicknamed Teddy)—left the following spring accompanied by Fred Boond, Eliza's nephew from another brother, John Clegg Boond.¹⁶ On May 11, 1865, just before the end of the Civil War, the family sailed from Liverpool to Quebec. A Canadian passenger list, dated June 22, listed the six members of the Hodgson party.¹⁷ They were temporarily delayed in Quebec before continuing south for several more days by rail. It may have been early July before they reached the Knoxville depot, "a wooden shed badly in need of paint." William Boond greeted them at the platform.¹⁸

Boond and his wife, Anne, had arrived in East Tennessee as early as 1859, and at some point resided in the small crossroads village of Talbott, eight miles up the railroad from New Market.¹⁹ The community was then part of Jefferson County; a decade later Hamblen County was established and its boundary drawn through the middle of Talbott. Even if Fannie was later unaware that her aunt and uncle had lived in that community, she must have known its name from the many times she passed through it on railroad trips through the area. This tiny village may have partly inspired a setting in Fannie's 1899 novel, *In Connection with the De Willoughby Claim*, which opens at a post office at "Talbot's Cross-roads" in "Hamlin County," North

¹³ "St. John's Episcopal Church, Knoxville, Tennessee, Records, 1844-1971", volume 1, 1844-86, microfilm, McClung Collection. William and Anne Boond were communicants of the Knoxville church in 1859-1960, but resided part of that time near the Talbott community of Jefferson County, as noted in the church registry. Their names, however, do not appear in Knoxville's first city directory, published in 1859.

¹⁴ Thwaite, *Waiting for the Party*, 23.

¹⁵ Gerzina, *Frances Hodgson Burnett*, 3.

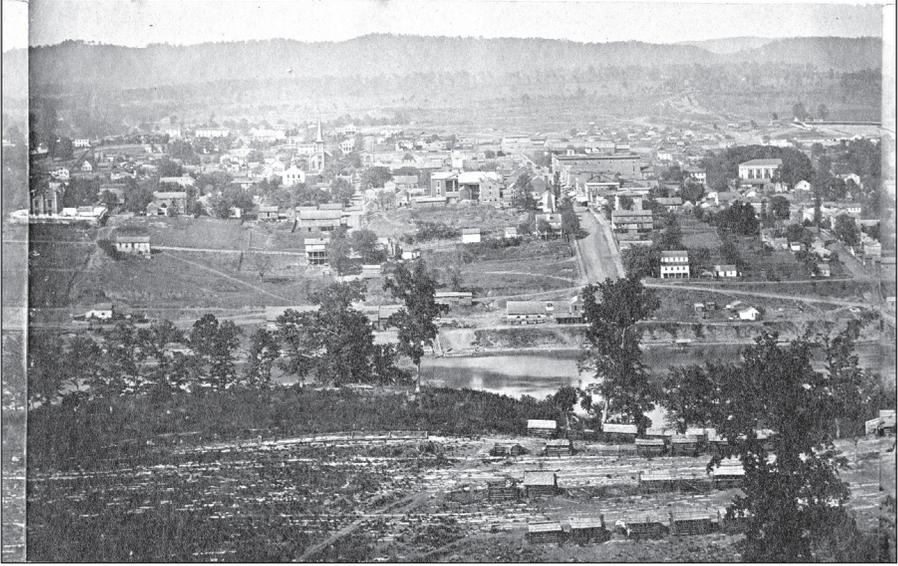
¹⁶ Edith Mary Jordan, "My Sister—An intimate, loving story of one of the world's most beloved writers," *Good Housekeeping*, July 1925, 142. Edith wrote that "there was the boy cousin who had come out with us from England." See also, Frederick John Boond, "Manchester, England, Church of England Births and Baptisms, 1813-1915," <http://www.ancestry.com>. For John Clegg Boond and his siblings see combined register index see, "Baptisms at St. Ann in the City of Manchester," *The Church of St. Ann, Manchester, in the County of Lancashire*, <http://www.lan-opc.org.uk/Manchester/Manchester/stann/>.

¹⁷ Gerzina, *Frances Hodgson Burnett*, 4; "Canadian Passenger Lists, 1865-1935," <http://www.ancestry.com>.

¹⁸ Constance Buel Burnett, *Happily Ever After*, 49, 51, 54-55.

¹⁹ "St. John's Records," McClung Collection; *Knoxville City Directory, 1869* (Knoxville, 1869).





In summer 1865, Frances Hodgson and her siblings arrived in Knoxville. At that time, the town had a few thousand residents and the earthworks from the Battle of Fort Sanders were still apparent to the west of downtown. "View of Knoxville, TN, 1865, Part 3 of 4," T.M. Schleier, 1865, Calvin M. McClung Historical Collection, East Tennessee History Center, Knoxville.

Carolina.²⁰ Fannie also may have had specific North Carolina locations in mind while drafting the story, as she visited that state several times, especially when she lived in Washington, D.C.

As early as August 1861, Knoxville newspapers advertised William Boond as a "Grocer, Provision Dealer, and Commission Merchant."²¹ His store, whose lot he purchased from C.W. Crozier in December 1862, sat on the southwest corner of Gay and Union.²² Knoxville experienced multiple military occupations during the war, when soldiers "spent their money in Uncle William's store with the liberality of men who tomorrow may be dead."²³ In spring 1863, Boond purchased about ten city lots, including several on Dale Avenue and two on Front Street. That September, two months after he bought a burial plot at Gray Cemetery, Boond completed another transaction, a bill of sale that was not unusual for the time but to modern eyes is quite troubling. The document explained: "For and in consideration of the sum of affection I bear for my daughter Elizabeth Boond, and the

²⁰ Frances Hodgson Burnett, *In Connection with the De Willoughby Claim* (New York, 1899), 1-2.

²¹ *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, August 3, 1861.

²² Knox County, Tennessee, warranty deed B3-243, C.W. Crozier et al to William Boond, December 1, 1862, Knox County Archives, Knoxville.

²³ William MacHarg, "The Young Heart," *Good Housekeeping* (February 1922), 92.

Published in 1899, In Connection with the De Willoughby Claim offered readers a description of Knoxville during Reconstruction. The book received high praise from critics. Frances Hodgson Burnett, In Connection with the De Willoughby Claim (New York, 1899), 447.

further consideration of Five dollars, I have bargained and sold, and do hereby transfer & convey to my said daughter, free from my control, a negro child named Sally, about four years old, which negro I warrant to be sound and healthy & a Slave for life.”²⁴ Having seen Manchester’s textile industry suffer with the loss of American cotton during the war, the Boonds and Hodgsons were not abolitionists—nor was Fannie progressive in her later depictions of African Americans. Ever since reading *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) as a child, Fannie had romanticized slavery, and the African American characters in her writings appear as little more than “happy servants.”²⁵

To the family members he met at the train station, William’s appearance belied his earlier claims of prosperity. In describing the sight of him decades later, Constance Buel Burnett relied on an unnamed source for the details. She wrote: “There was a neat but unmistakable patch under one sleeve of Uncle William’s jacket. His two horses were thin, tired-looking nags, and the surrey into which he helped Mamma and the girls sagged on one side.”²⁶ With “conservatively shocked awe,” the family viewed William as something like “a gambler in business ventures. Several times he had, with extreme rapidity, made fortunes,” only to lose them “with even greater promptness.”²⁷ Instead of a land of opportunity, postwar Knoxville presented itself as little more than a “frontier village.” Wartime conditions had depleted local business to the point that William’s grocery store became “an actual drag on family resources.”²⁸

THE NOVELS AND STORIES OF
Frances Hodgson Burnett

CHARLES SCRIBNER’S SONS, PUBLISHERS

“We have no hesitation in saying that there is no living writer (man or woman) who has Mrs. Burnett’s dramatic power in telling a story.”—N. Y. HERALD

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MRS. BURNETT’S new novel is a literary event of the highest importance. From first to last one reads on with breathless interest of the winning of the great claim which was to reinstate good-natured “Big Tom” De Willoughby in his birthright. Interwoven with it is the story of a woman deceived by the man of whom the world would have least expected it, his identity being effectually concealed till the terrible revelation of the dramatic final chapters. The fate of the heartless fanatic who stood nearest the loving couple, brutal in his loyalty to his idea of the right, has a dramatic significance which is intensified in the light of his past conduct.

As if to compensate, however, for the mother’s grief, her child survives her; and in this beautiful child-life Mrs. Burnett has added another charming portrait to her gallery of juvenile characters. How Tom De Willoughby’s life was saved from blackness and desolation and made to overflow with happiness—this the reader will learn for himself.

The tragedy of the story, intensified by the contrast of the fanatical New England temper with Southern chivalry and kindness, is not its only side. The love between a beautiful, romantic child and a strong man who is her protector fills the book with a sweetness that matches its dramatic fire.

²⁴ Bill of sale B3-458, William Boond to Elizabeth Boond, September 3, 1863, Knox County Archives.

²⁵ Gerzina, *Frances Hodgson Burnett*, 6-7, 44, 56, 79.

²⁶ Burnett, *Happily Ever After*, 55.

²⁷ MacHarg, “The Young Heart,” 92; Gerzina, *Frances Hodgson Burnett*, 6.

²⁸ Burnett, *Happily Ever After*, 56.

In Connection with the De Willoughby Claim (1899), partly set in Tennessee, contained Fannie's clearest depiction of Reconstruction-era Knoxville. In this work, she fictionalized Knoxville as Delisleville, a "county town" which "contained six thousand inhabitants, two hotels, and a court-house."²⁹ By comparison Knoxville had about five thousand residents in 1860 and more than eighty-six hundred a decade later.³⁰ Like Knoxville, Delisleville contained a market house where farmers sold their produce. Fannie described "a broiling July morning" when "the market waggons which had come in from the country laden with vegetables and chickens and butter were drawn up under the shadow of the market house, that their forlorn horses or mules might escape the glaring hot sun."³¹ The town "also had two or three business streets." But Delisleville had been "battered" by the "passing armies" during the war, and the town appeared "deserted" compared to its former self.³² The description of the town continued:

Its broad verandahed houses had seen hard usage, its pavements were worn and broken, and in many streets tufted with weeds; its fences were dilapidated. . . . Houses built of wood, after the Southern fashion, do not well withstand neglect and ill-fortune. Porticos and pillars and trellis-work which had been picturesque and imposing when they had been well cared for, and gleamed white among creepers and trees, lost their charm drearily when paint peeled off, trees were cut down, and vines were dragged away and died.³³

The Boonds, despite living hand to mouth, opened their home to the new arrivals, but Eliza "realized very soon that the addition of six people, five of them blessed with young, healthy appetites, was an imposition on already needy relatives." William "confessed, a few days after his sister's arrival, that the store could 'use' Herbert, but as for the younger boy, John, he was having to make other plans."³⁴ It is unclear how long the Hodgsons remained in Knoxville in 1865 before relocating. According to one story, the family lodged for "a few weeks in the Lamar House," the best hotel in town. This scenario is plausible, but unconfirmed.³⁵ Whatever the case, Herbert indeed began working at the grocery store in Knoxville. Fred Boond would

²⁹ Burnett, *De Willoughby*, 11.

³⁰ *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, ed. Carroll Van West, Tennessee Historical Society, s.v. "Knoxville," <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net>; U.S. Census, 1870, Knox County, Tennessee.

³¹ Burnett, *De Willoughby*, 226.

³² *Ibid.*, 11, 216.

³³ Burnett, *De Willoughby*, 222; Gerzina, *Frances Hodgson Burnett*, quote 44.

³⁴ Burnett, *Happily Ever After*, 56.

³⁵ Jack Neely, *Knoxville's Secret History*, 2d ed. (Knoxville, 1999), 12.

eventually reside with the Hodgsons, but at this time he likely boarded with his Uncle William, who arranged work for John and housing for the rest of the family in Jefferson County.

New Market (Summer 1865 – Late 1866)

Sometime in mid-1865, the Hodgson family except for Herbert boarded a train and followed the tracks of the East Tennessee and Virginia Railroad twenty-five miles east to New Market. Fannie described New Market as “a curious little village [with] one unpaved street of wooden houses, some painted white and some made of logs, but with trees everywhere, and forests and hills shutting it in from the world.”³⁶ The town took its name from a large general store opened in 1822 by William Brazelton, one of the town’s original landowners, who also built a handsome brick mansion nearby.³⁷ According to a directory of towns along the East Tennessee and Virginia Railroad, compiled a few years after the Hodgsons lived in New Market, the Brazeltons operated a general store there, one of several in town. Other businesses at that time included blacksmiths, a brick mason, carpenters, a foundry, a saddler, shoemakers, a silversmith, a tanner, a tinner, and a wagon maker. The town also had an attorney, one hotel, a Masonic lodge, a photograph gallery, and three churches.³⁸ By 1870, New Market had about 1,400 residents (roughly the town’s present-day population).³⁹

Eliza found a vacant log house on a half-acre lot along the Knoxville to Morristown road.⁴⁰ Supposedly, William Boond “had some sort of claim” on the house, but his name does not appear in Jefferson County deed records.⁴¹ Two sketches, probably drawn by a family member, reveal that the house’s dovetailed-log front portion had a side-gabled roof, a centered front door, a set of first-story and second-story windows on either side of it, and a chimney on the west end. The rear one-story frame ell had a couple of doors and a porch with a roof overhang on the east side, and a chimney exiting the center of the roof.⁴² Eliza and her daughters occupied the house for about a year and a half. John lived several miles away in Dandridge and worked at a gristmill there. On weekends he joined his mother and sisters in New Market and

³⁶ Burnett, *The One I Knew the Best of All*, 232-33.

³⁷ Jean Patterson Bible, *Bent Twigs in Jefferson County* (Rogersville, TN, 1991), 26; “Gen. William Brazelton III,” memorial ID# 34250169, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/34250169/william-brazelton>.

³⁸ *Knoxville City Directory, 1869*.

³⁹ U.S. Census, 1870, Jefferson County, Tennessee; U.S. Census, 2010, Jefferson County, Tennessee.

⁴⁰ Deed records for this property prior to 1898 have not been found.

⁴¹ Burnett, *Romantick Lady*, 31.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 32.



The Hodgson family moved to New Market, Tennessee in mid-1865 and rented a two-story log house, part of which may be visible in the lower left third of the photograph behind the large A-frame barn. The barn still stands today, set back from Old Andrew Johnson Highway, between the Hodgson homesite and Houston's Mineral Water. "View of New Market, TN," ca. 1880s, Calvin M. McClung Historical Collection, East Tennessee History Center, Knoxville.

brought them grocery supplies, but otherwise the family scraped by; they had little money, but asked no favors. Reflecting on those years, Fannie later wrote "that in those awful, starving days in New Market we never owed any one a farthing. We went *without*—food, clothes, fire. It is not what a gentleman or lady can do—to trust to luck to pay bills."⁴³ Still, the townsfolk saw to it that the Hodgsons' needs were met. Vivian Burnett named the Jenkins and Peters families as two that charitably shared food while disguising their deeds as hospitality. Fannie later stated that "New Market was full of graduating angels of a simple gentle kind."⁴⁴

Some of Fannie's neighbors became her students when "in late 1865" she opened a "Select Seminary for Young People" on the second floor of the Hodgson home. The venture was a diversion for Fannie, but also an early attempt to improve the family situation. About "eight or ten barefoot youngsters" enrolled, but instead of paying for their lessons in cash, students paid in "meal, bacon, eggs, milk, bread," and other groceries.⁴⁵ A boy named Thomas Gallion later became a respected physician in Jefferson County and credited Fannie as one of his teachers.⁴⁶

The Johnsons and Burnetts were the Hodgsons' nearest neighbors. Samuel P. Johnson, a teacher at the New Market Academy, lived next door

⁴³ Ibid., 384.

⁴⁴ Burnett, *Romantick Lady*, 34; Thwaite, *Waiting for the Party*, 28.

⁴⁵ Burnett, *Romantick Lady*, 36.

⁴⁶ *Goodspeed's History of Tennessee* (1887; Nashville, 1972), 1171-72.

on one side of the Hodgsons and had a daughter, Mary, about Fannie's age.⁴⁷ Many years later Fay Caldwell, Mary's daughter, recalled stories her mother had told about the Hodgsons. "Mrs. [Eliza] Hodgson had brought with her a considerable number of yards of silk—perhaps some of it made up into dresses—and the family was too poor to buy the kind of dresses that were being worn by young girls of that day." Caldwell said that Fannie "had a calf for a pet" and that one day Mary observed Fannie "playing with the calf" while wearing a "long silk dress." But calico was one of the few types of fabric the Hodgsons could afford to purchase. At least once in New Market, Fannie picked and sold berries so that she could purchase some of it. "My mother told me it was one of the happiest days of Fannie's life when she had picked enough blackberries to buy some calico—it sold for five cents a yard back then—to make a bright new dress," said Caldwell.⁴⁸

Separated from the Hodgsons' home by "an intervening lot," the Burnetts lived in a "sizeable and white" house that "stood a little back from the street and had several large trees shading the flower-bordered brick walk leading up to the front porch."⁴⁹ They were among New Market's most respected families. Dr. John M. Burnett practiced medicine there, and his wife, Lydia, was related to the Pecks who founded the nearby town of Mossy Creek (later renamed Jefferson City).⁵⁰ Two of their children, Swan Moses and Anne P. Burnett, would become intimately tied to the Hodgsons in the coming decade. It was later reported that Fannie's first sight of Swan was a humorous one, that "glancing from a window of the little farmhouse on a certain occasion, she saw him on the turnpike outside, contending with a refractory mule." Since childhood Swan had "walked with a pronounced limp," possibly the result of an injury he had sustained while playing "mumble the peg" (or "mumblety-peg"), a game of dare in which players fling a pocket knife into the ground as close as possible to their own feet.⁵¹ Perhaps this physical weakness drove Swan toward academic achievement and interest in literature, as it later steered Fannie's sympathy toward him.⁵² Fannie would eventually marry Swan there at his parents' home. And even after she relocated to Washington, D.C., New Market remained somewhat of a home base for Fannie and particularly her sons, whom she sometimes sent there to board with her parents-in-law. But in 1866, whether or not they had yet imagined a future together, Fannie and Swan went their separate ways—she to Knoxville and he to medical school in Cincinnati.

⁴⁷ Burnett, *Romantick Lady*, 38.

⁴⁸ Bible, *Bent Twigs in Jefferson County*, 142-43.

⁴⁹ Burnett, *Romantick Lady*, 34. Dr. John Burnett had purchased the home in 1847. See, Williston Tolbott to John M. Burnett, deed book 1-169, April 1847, Jefferson County Archives, Dandridge.

⁵⁰ Bible, *Bent Twigs in Jefferson County*, 144.

⁵¹ "Famous Story Teller. Side Lights on Marriage of Frances Hodgson Burnett," *Washington Post*, April 8, 1900, 22; Gerzina, *Frances Hodgson Burnett*, 27-28.

⁵² Burnett, *Romantick Lady*, 35; Gerzina, *Frances Hodgson Burnett*, 28.

As for the Hodgsons' log house, stories conflict about whether any part of the original structure survives. The house currently located at 1009 West Old Andrew Johnson Highway shows no external signs that it was originally built of logs, and property records give 1940 as the construction date (though this is probably inaccurate).⁵³ However, its shape certainly resembles the Hodgsons' sketches already mentioned; its front door and four of its five front windows are similarly placed, as is the chimney on its west end. One can imagine that the decorative front gables and portico were simply added to embellish the flat face of the weatherboarded log house. Public comments about the house's fate have not been found before 1955, the year New Market celebrated Fannie with a pageant written for the occasion. At that time Helen Bettis Leimkuhler, whose family purchased the property in 1907, claimed that the rear kitchen section was the only remaining part of the original house.⁵⁴ Reportedly, one of her relatives had "added a second story to the [front of the] property."⁵⁵ In 1966 Leimkuhler sold the home and listed it as the "Frances Hodgson Burnett Homesite in New Market. Two story colonial



Today, the Frances Hodgson Burnett Homesite located in New Market, Tennessee is a private residence. The Tennessee Historical Commission placed a marker there in 1955. Photograph by the author, 2017.

⁵³ "Real Estate Assessment Data," parcel # 033CE-015.00, Tennessee Property Viewer, <http://tmap.tn.gov/assessment/>.

⁵⁴ "Souvenir Program, 1955, Frances Hodgson Burnett Celebration," Jefferson County Chapter, APTA, in Frances Hodgson Burnett biographical file, McClung Collection; Bible, *Bent Twigs of Jefferson County*, 146, 148.

⁵⁵ Vita Reed, "Historic New Market Homesite Sells—Author Once Lived on Property," *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, January 19, 1992, G1.

frame home with city conveniences . . . 3 bedrooms, electric heat, shady lawn. Approximately one acre of land . . . near Carson-Newman College and 20 minutes drive from Knoxville.”⁵⁶ Jack Rader, who served as “New Market’s first mayor” after it incorporated in 1977, purchased the property and would own it for a couple of decades.⁵⁷

The house was remodeled sometime in the 1990s. Doyle Pettit, who did much of the work, found evidence of primitive construction in the front section of the house, suggesting that some of the original structure had remained. “It had logs for floor joists. The floor was sagging and had rotted out. I put new floor joists in,” said Pettit. While he could not positively date the house, Pettit believed that the original “structure is still there” even with alterations and “some windows added” over the years. He said that “the lumber” used in the floor joists “was hewed with a foot adze—it’s an axe you chop between your feet, like a hoe, but it’s sharp as a razor. . . . [The logs] were not sawed; they were split and then hewed. They took a wedge . . . and split boards twelve feet long, then chopped them off level with that foot adze. I tore out a lot of it and replaced it.” To do this, Pettit had to dig out beneath the structure since the house lacks a basement. He saw that the “ten-inch floor joists” rested on stacked stones, with “about four or five inches between the ground and the bottom of the logs.”⁵⁸

Knoxville (Late 1866 – Spring 1872)

Uncle William Boond closed his Knoxville store in the spring of 1866 after placing a final advertisement in *Brownlow’s Knoxville Whig* on March 21. He failed to pay two years’ worth of taxes and subsequently became involved in a drawn-out lawsuit.⁵⁹ Herbert found work with a Gay Street jeweler, Joseph Wood, and would develop a reputation as a skilled watchmaker. A couple of his creations included an electric clock and a miniature watch that fit inside a ring on his finger.⁶⁰

According to biographers, the rest of the Hodgsons moved to Knoxville from New Market sometime in 1866. If the family indeed lived in New Market “about eighteen months,” as Edith Hodgson later stated, then it was probably December 1866 before they all returned to Knoxville.⁶¹ However,

⁵⁶ “Historical Landmark,” *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, March 19, 1966.

⁵⁷ Reed, “Historic New Market Homesite Sells.”

⁵⁸ Doyle Pettit, phone conversation with author, May 3, 2018.

⁵⁹ Trust deed C3-483, Knox County Archives; *Brownlow’s Knoxville Whig*, March 21, 1866. For examples of William’s subsequent financial and legal troubles see, “Tax Sales,” *Brownlow’s Knoxville Whig*, May 29, 1867; “Knoxville Corporation Tax Sales,” *Brownlow’s Knoxville Whig*, April 8, 1868, 3; “Circuit Court—Knox County,” *Knoxville Daily Chronicle*, February 24, 1871, 5; “In Chancery Court at Knoxville, Tennessee,” *Knoxville Daily Chronicle*, January 21, 1874, 8.

⁶⁰ “A Knoxville Genius,” *Knoxville Daily Chronicle*, April 23, 1871, 4; Lucy Curtis Templeton, “Books—Old and New,” *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, August 14, 1927, 3.

⁶¹ Jordan, “My Sister,” 55.

their time in New Market may have been several months shorter than Edith remembered, because a member of the family took a public step of faith in a Knoxville church that fall.⁶² William Boond and his siblings, including Eliza, had all been associated with the Church of St. Anne in Manchester, England. Downtown Knoxville offered variety in its houses of worship, with Baptist, Catholic, Episcopal, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches clustered within a few blocks of each other. In one of Fannie's Knoxville-inspired sections of *In Connection with the De Willoughby Claim*, she wrote that the fictional Delisleville contained "half a dozen churches, all very much at odds with each other. . . . The 'first families' (of which there were eight or ten, with numerous branches) attended the Episcopal Church, the second best the Presbyterian, while the inferior classes . . . drifted to the Methodists."⁶³

Just after William and his family arrived in Knoxville around 1859, they began attending the town's only Episcopal congregation, St. John's Church, located on the northeast corner of Cumberland and Crooked (now Walnut). That year William's wife, Anne, was confirmed at the church, and both she and William were listed as communicants through 1860. It seems certain that Fannie's family also attended St. John's after returning to Knoxville from New Market, because on October 28, 1866, the Reverend C.J. Quintard (later the Bishop of Tennessee) confirmed William's daughter Elizabeth along with her nineteen-year-old cousin, John Hodgson. It is curious that John, the future "black sheep" of the family, was the only one of Eliza Hodgson's children to be noted for religious commitment at St. John's or any church in Knoxville.⁶⁴

Noah's Ark

The Hodgsons found "a small frame house" for rent on Clinton Pike, roughly a mile and a half northwest of town.⁶⁵ Ada Campbell Larew later claimed that the Hodgsons "lived in a house owned by my father, Dr. Andrew Jackson Campbell, on the site of the present campus of Knoxville College."⁶⁶ While a deed has not been found to substantiate this claim, Campbell and his family did reside nearby. The 1869 city directory locates Campbell's

⁶² "St. John's Records," McClung Collection.

⁶³ Burnett, *De Willoughby*, 11.

⁶⁴ While St. John's noted Herbert's 1870 marriage to Ann Burnett, Fannie's 1873 marriage to Swan Burnett does not appear in the registry. In fact, none of the Hodgson girls' names appear in St. John's church records. Both Edith and Edwina were married at Second Presbyterian Church (Pleasant Andrew Fahnestock became a member through baptism in 1868), yet no Hodgsons are listed in the church records of either First or Second Presbyterian. See, "St. John's Records," McClung Collection.

⁶⁵ Jordan, "My Sister," 55. Google Maps gives a distance of 1.4 miles between the former homesite along modern College Street and the middle of Wall Avenue, near Market Square.

⁶⁶ Margaret Ragsdale, "Author of 'Little Lord Fauntleroy' Found Romance and Happy Home in Knoxville," *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, December 11, 1949, A8.

residence on “Rebel Hill [at] Western and Montgomery Turnpike.” Rebel Hill was probably named for the line of Confederate fortifications that crossed Clinton Road northwest of town during the war.⁶⁷ Some locals knew the same area as Longstreet Hill, named after Lieutenant General James Longstreet, who in November 1863 had camped his Confederate troops there before a failed attempt to overtake the Union defenses during the Battle of Fort Sanders. Even though that short battle was fought on a ridge almost a mile south of it, Longstreet Hill reportedly remained scarred with “trenches” and “foxholes” into the mid-1870s.⁶⁸ Larew said her family lived on Pern Hill.⁶⁹

Surely Fannie would have remembered if Dr. Campbell owned the Hodgsons’ small house off Clinton Pike, as she became closely acquainted with the Campbells during her years in Knoxville. Rather, the property owner “was not a Tennessean, but a New Yorker or Bostonian, I do not know which,” Fannie said. “He was a young man and scarcely knew me at all, except as one of three little girls who . . . lived in a little frame house on some land which belonged to him.” She elaborated, “He had bought as an investment the land about us and on which the little house was built, and occasionally he used to ride over from the town on a sort of tour of inspection.” The man “was very blonde, and rode a rather smart bay horse, and when he rode by I always watched him with the deepest interest.” Fannie sensed “that he was a gentlemen, and an educated person, and I used to wish we knew him. I wondered very much if he had ever realized that, in spite of our bare little house and shabby calico frocks, we were ladies, and had been born in the world to which I suspected he himself belonged.”⁷⁰

Deed records suggest two main candidates for that gentleman on horseback, though neither man perfectly matches Fannie’s description. One was Colonel Charles Seymour, who at forty years old may not have appeared as “a young man” to Fannie. Born in Ireland in 1826, Seymour moved to the United States in 1849.⁷¹ He arrived in Knoxville just after the Civil War as an agent for the U.S. Sanitary Commission—an organization that helped Union veterans “collect pensions, arrears of pay, bounty and other claims against the Government”—and by early August 1865 he had opened an office

⁶⁷ See, “Topographical Map of the Approaches and Defences of Knoxville, Tennessee, Shewing the Positions Occupied by the United States Rebel Forces During the Siege,” 1863-64, Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division, Washington, D.C., <https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3964k.cw0427100>.

⁶⁸ Robert J. Booker, *And There was Light!: The 120-Year History of Knoxville College, Knoxville, Tennessee, 1875-1995* (Virginia Beach, VA, 1994), 11, 12; Joan L. Markel, “The Battle of Eastern Tennessee Turns into a Futile Attack,” *Hallowed Ground Magazine* (Fall 2013), <http://www.civilwar.org/hallowed-ground-magazine/fall-2013/knoxville-a-near-death.html>.

⁶⁹ Larew, “Childhood Recollections.”

⁷⁰ Frances Hodgson Burnett, “How I Served My Apprenticeship,” *Lady’s Realm* 1 (November 1896-April 1897): 77.

⁷¹ *Men of Affairs in Knoxville* (Knoxville, 1917), 195.



In 1866, the Hodgson family moved into a home near where Knoxville College would be built a decade later. The home offered a mountaintop view and Fannie named it "Noah's Ark, Mount Ararat." This photograph was taken near the present-day intersection of University and Western avenues. McKee Hall, center, burned a few years later and was rebuilt, but Wallace Hall, the smaller campus building to its left, remains. Noah's Ark may appear as one of the dwellings on the far right side of the photograph, though it cannot be positively identified. "Knoxville College," ca. 1890, Beck Cultural Exchange Center, Knoxville.

at the Lamar House.⁷² He also partnered into a local real estate agency. In November 1866, Seymour acquired, through a quitclaim, thirty acres of property along Clinton Road; at least some of his acreage later became a college campus.⁷³ In 1873, Seymour purchased another thirty-eight acres of Clinton Road property from Charles D. McGuffey—the other candidate.⁷⁴ Although McGuffey hailed from Cincinnati, not New York or Boston, he was only seven years older than Fannie, practiced law, and was unmarried at the time the Hodgsons lived at the cottage.

Larew stated that her family's home sat "upon the brow of a hill known as Pern Hill" and that "the Hodgson family lived in a small house at the foot of the hill."⁷⁵ Fannie remembered the location somewhat differently, that the small white house sat "not at the foot of a hill" but "at the top of one. It was not a very high hill, and the house was a tiny one, balanced quaintly on the summit, as if some flood had left it there on receding"—hence the nickname that Fannie created, "Noah's Ark, Mount Ararat."⁷⁶ An acquaintance later confirmed that the "humble little abode . . . stood on the [Knoxville] side

⁷² "U.S. Sanitary Commission Army and Claim Agency," advertisement, *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, August 2, 1865, 3; "Real Estate Agencies," *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, September 26, 1866, 3.

⁷³ L.I. Coker to Charles Seymour, November 7, 1866, quitclaim book D3491, Knox County Archives; Booker, *And There Was Light!*, 58.

⁷⁴ Charles D. McGuffey to Charles Seymour, August 11, 1873, WD J4-298, Knox County Archives.

⁷⁵ Larew, "Childhood Recollections."

⁷⁶ Burnett, *The One I Knew*, 237.

of the hill” and that “there was quite a little space around it, some trees and vines, grape vines, I think, in the rear, at that time a field.”⁷⁷

Fannie’s favorite spot on the hillside was “a little thicket” that lay “about a hundred yards from the house. . . . Sassafras, sumach, dogwood, and young pines and cedars grew in the midst of a thick undergrowth of blackberry vines and bushes.” One of Herbert’s or John’s more helpful friends cut “a narrow path” through the brush so that through the opening Fannie could walk “as if through a gateway between two slender sentinel sassafras-trees.” She dubbed it “the Bower” and spent as much time there as the weather allowed.⁷⁸

In addition to the birds and squirrels and rabbits that inhabited the woods, the hillside also hosted roaming “colonies of dogs” that sometimes loitered around Noah’s Ark. Fannie and her family intended to keep a dog that had followed Herbert or John to the house from town, but after they chastised “Pepper” for behaving badly, the dog ran off to find another place to live. Then sister Edith found a “big, yellow canine” in the woods nearby. Seeing that he had a more “domestic” personality than the other strays did, Edith brought him to the house and was perhaps the sibling who named him “Mr. K.” The dog became a favorite pet, though the family disapproved of his habitual fighting with other dogs, particularly one named “Tige” that lived at the foot of the hill.⁷⁹

Beyond this immediate landscape, the hillside afforded a clear view of the Smoky Mountains, roughly thirty miles to the southeast. “One stood on the little porch of Noah’s Ark and looked out over undergrowth and woods and slopes and hills which ended in three ranges of mountains one behind the other,” wrote Fannie. “The farthest was the Alleghanies.”⁸⁰ The house itself “was a planked up arrangement with crude windows and doorways that were practically covered with morning-glory vines,” said Larew. “It was the ordinary cabin home, such as one often sees in rural districts today, but it was neat and home-like, and nestled among the pines that stretched their gnarled arms in a most friendly manner toward the little primitive home.”⁸¹ Vivian Burnett wrote that the dwelling was “a tubby kind of structure” with “an ell for the kitchen” and “a pointed roof.”⁸² A family acquaintance recalled that the house contained “two rooms and I believe a porch and upstairs two little attic rooms,” and Edith said that “a winding stairway led directly from the living-room to the upper story.”⁸³ In her third-person memoir, *The One I*

⁷⁷ Templeton, “Books—Old and New.”

⁷⁸ Burnett, *The One I Knew*, 239-40.

⁷⁹ Gertrude Van R. Wickham, “Dogs of Noted Americans,” *St. Nicholas* 15 (June 1888): 599.

⁸⁰ Burnett, *The One I Knew*, 238.

⁸¹ Larew, “Childhood Recollections.”

⁸² Burnett, *Romantick Lady*, 38.

⁸³ Templeton, “Books—Old and New”; Jordan, “My Sister,” 142.

Knew the Best of All, Fannie described the attic as being “a queer little room with unfinished walls and rafters where she had a table by a window and wrote stories in wet or cold weather when the Bower was out of the question. There was no fireplace and she used to sit wrapped in a shawl for warmth. She had a little cat [Dora] which always followed her and jumped upon the table when she sat down.” In this attic, during her first year at Noah’s Ark, Fannie wrote only for diversion, with little thought that she might one day receive “remuneration” for her stories.⁸⁴

Fannie retained vivid impressions of Noah’s Ark and would use similar settings in her fiction. In “Toinette,” which *Peterson’s Magazine* published in March 1873, stepsisters Janet and Toinette live in a modest house in Normandy that:

had been chosen by our father for no other merit than its position upon the summit of a slope, that overlooked miles of the surrounding country. It had no other attraction, certainly; it was not convenient; it was not sightly; but Toinette and I forgot that, when we saw the rambling, old-fashioned garden, run over with a very waste of summer’s bounty, with fruit-trees, tangled vines, and heavy-blossomed roses.⁸⁵

Two of Fannie’s longer works of fiction, though published decades after she left Knoxville, also include settings that appear to be based on Noah’s Ark and the surrounding hillside. In her novel *In Connection with the De Willoughby Claim*, main character Tom De Willoughby flees Delisville to escape humiliation and family rejection, and moves to Talbot’s Crossroads, a small village in the mountains where he operates a general store. One night he is called to the bedside of a dying woman, whom he cannot save, and must raise the woman’s baby girl as his own. The novel’s rural scenes are set in the mountains of North Carolina, but in describing the setting Fannie may have alluded to parts of her Tennessee past. Just as she had lived on a hillside in Knoxville in a white cottage “covered in morning-glory vines” with a nearby thicket she called the Bower, Tom raises the girl, Sheba, “in a comfortable white house over whose verandah honeysuckles and roses soon clambered and hung. . . . [T]he ground enclosed about it had a curious likeness to the bowery unrestraint of the garden he had played in during his childhood.”⁸⁶ Just as Fannie had considered herself “a young, young Dryad” during “her Dryad days” in Tennessee when she witnessed “the violets” and “the blossoming of the dogwood trees and the wild plum,” Sheba’s “thoughts

⁸⁴ Burnett, *The One I Knew*, 257-58, 279.

⁸⁵ Frances Hodgson Burnett (as Fanny Hodgson), “Toinette,” *Peterson’s Magazine* 63 (March 1873): 182.

⁸⁶ Larew, “Childhood Recollections”; Burnett, *De Willoughby*, 244.

and fancies might have been those of some little faun or dryad” as she “saw the dogwood covered with big white flowers and the wild plum-trees snowed over with delicate blooms, and found the blue violets thick among the wet grass and leaves.”⁸⁷

Although Fannie later stated that her walled garden at Maytham Hall in Kent, England, prompted the titular setting of her novel *The Secret Garden*, her memoir *The One I Knew the Best of All* suggested she had other models, much earlier in life. Besides the garden at her family’s brief residence at Seedley Grove in Pendleton, Lancashire, Fannie wrote of spending hours in the Bower, adjacent to Noah’s Ark. In comparing circa-1866 Fannie Hodgson to *The Secret Garden*’s protagonist, Jack Neely pointed out a few parallels. He explained: “Fannie was only half-orphaned, but like Mary Lennox, family instability after a parent’s death had forced her to move to a new country and circumstances that were, in many ways, frightening. Like Mary, Fannie sought a refuge in nature, in a place where she could read, and perhaps write: a hidden place in the woods she called ‘the Bower.’” Although it was not surrounded by “stone walls, as in the novel,” said Neely, Fannie did ask “a couple of boys . . . to help clear” a path into the thicket. Perhaps the closest connection to the novel was Fannie’s memory of following a familiar bird through the wooded area: “Sometimes she believed the birds came and sang near her, under cover, for the mere fun of leading her through the woods. They would begin on a tree near by and then fly away and seem to hide again until she followed them. She always followed until she caught sight of her bird.”⁸⁸

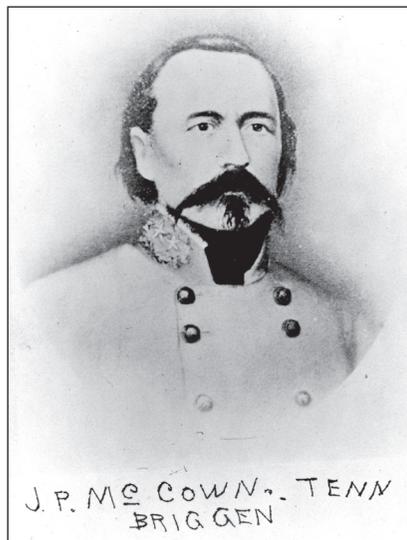
Before Fannie ventured toward writing for profit, she returned to the select seminary idea of teaching as a way to supplement the family’s income, as she had done in New Market. This time she attempted “to organize a little dancing class.” John Porter McCown, a former Confederate general who lived further up Clinton Pike with his sister, Mrs. John Rogers, often passed the Hodgson home. Somehow hearing of Fannie’s endeavor, “McCown took his nephew, little ‘Sammy’ [Samuel Ramsey Rodgers] to enroll him in the class.” Although Samuel was “pleased” and “charmed” to meet Fannie, “he drew the line at learning to dance,” wrote his wife, Mrs. E.S. Rodgers, years later. “Gen. McCown was humiliated and disappointed. . . . They tried every inducement but [Samuel] would not give in so he never learned to dance, as he should have and from such a notable lovely person. . . . I think he ran away from the house and left the dignified old uncle alone with Miss Frances.”⁸⁹

As much as Fannie enjoyed her little home “nestled among the pines,” she was isolated, physically and intellectually. Although she occasionally

⁸⁷ Burnett, *The One I Knew*, 246, 251; Burnett, *De Willoughby*, 241.

⁸⁸ Thwaite, *Waiting for the Party*, 8-9; Neely, “The Bower,” *Metro Pulse*, April 24, 2003; Burnett, *The One I Knew*, 253.

⁸⁹ Templeton, “Books—Old and New.”



John Porter McCown, a former Confederate general, lived close to the Hodgson family and learned that Fannie taught a children's dance class. McCown enrolled his nephew Samuel Ramsey Rodgers in the class. "J.P. McCown," ca. 1861-1865, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C., <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/99471726/>.

welcomed visitors to the cottage, she “knew very few people indeed,” and wrote later that the family had “no neighbors but the woods” and that “the town was too far away to be visited often by people who must walk.” If her memory was

accurate, the “walk to town and back was a matter of two or three hours.”⁹⁰

The distant town, she said, was “a small provincial one, whose inhabitants were certainly not literary people nor connected in any way with the literary world. If any of them were reading people, those were not the ones I knew.”⁹¹ Knoxville had a much richer literary history than Fannie realized. The city boasted the region’s first newspaper and one of its first colleges. The state’s first novel, Charles Todd’s *Woodville* (1832), was published in Knoxville. In 1858, another local writer, Robert Houston Armstrong, christened his new Knoxville mansion “Bleak House,” after the Charles Dickens novel published in book form five years earlier. Armstrong’s riverside mansion, now known as Confederate Memorial Hall, still stands along Kingston Pike. That same decade, Knoxville writer George Washington Harris began publishing his Sut Lovingood stories, which influenced later and better known authors like Mark Twain, William Faulkner, and Flannery O’Connor. Although Harris left town during the war, his only book, *Sut Lovingood: Yarns Spun By a Nat’ral Born Dum’d Fool*, appeared in 1867 while Fannie resided in Knoxville. Two years later Harris was passing through on a train when he fell ill and was taken to the Atkin Hotel nearby. As doctors there scratched their heads, Harris uttered a single word—“poisoned”—before he died. The new manuscript he had carried with him on the train disappeared without a trace.⁹²

⁹⁰ Burnett, “How I Served My Apprenticeship,” 77; Burnett, *The One I Knew*, 238, 269.

⁹¹ Burnett, “How I Served My Apprenticeship,” 77.

⁹² Jack Neely, “Excavating Knoxville Literature,” in *Knoxville Bound: A Collection of Literary Works Inspired by Knoxville, Tennessee*, eds. Judy Loest and Jack Rentfro (Knoxville, 2004), 184-85, 188-89, 190; Jack Neely, “Literature’s Influence on Knoxville’s Christmas,” *Knoxville Mercury*, December 11, 2015; Neely, *Knoxville’s Secret History*, 46-47; Donald Day, “The Life of George Washington Harris,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 6 (March 1947): 37-38.

Although Knoxvilleians had pushed for a public library as early as 1817, the town did not establish a permanent one until 1879.⁹³ Fannie longed for the easy access to books that she had enjoyed in Manchester. “I had no library and knew no one who had one,” she wrote. “In my early years in England my friends and relations had books in their houses whether they cared very much for them or not. In Tennessee I had no books.” Fannie was surprised one day when the property owner helped meet this need during one of his rare trips to the cottage. “I think he only entered [our house] on one occasion,” she recalled. “I believe that he was out shooting and the friend who was with him met with a trifling accident, and they came to us for some slight aid. I was in the room, and we exchanged a few words.” Somehow the subject of books entered their short conversation. “The whole incident was only a matter of a few minutes, but when he went away he had promised to send me a book. It was Mrs. [Elizabeth] Gaskell’s ‘*Sylvia’s Lovers*,’ and the joy of reading it was immense. I remember the stiff, formal little note of thanks I wrote when I returned it to him.” After this meeting, Fannie “was so full of trembling hope that he would send me another book and come again,” and believed that “he would have sent me all the books he had, if he had only known,” but she did not want to exhibit “unseemly eagerness” by asking. Years later she imagined that, had they been more acquainted, this man “might have proved to be the person who ‘encouraged’” her literary pursuits. “But he was young and had many interests, and could not have been expected to remember a little tenant in such a shabby frock. Nevertheless, I remember his one kind thought to this day, and thank him for it, wherever he may be.”⁹⁴

Besides Seymour and McGuffey, one of whom owned Noah’s Ark, another man reputedly lent Fannie books as well, after the Hodgsons moved downtown. A “Mr. William S. Mead, who it is said was interested in her literary success, kindly opened his library to her,” according to John S. Van Gilder, vice president of wholesaler C.M. McClung & Co., in 1936.⁹⁵ Mead (or Meade) was a Knoxville Iron Company executive and resided on Main Street in 1876.

Edith recalled a visitor with whom her older sister became better acquainted, an older man that visited often and provided the intellectual stimulation Fannie sought. “There was a Mr. S—, a charming man, who used to ride out frequently to the Noah’s Ark, just to talk with her,” Edith said. “I recall thinking how much I wished I could go to school again, and study history and philosophy, just to be able to talk with Mr. S— the way Frances did. . . . He was middle-aged and far too comfortably placed to arouse her

⁹³ Neely, “Excavating Knoxville Literature,” 184; William Rule, ed., *Standard History of Knoxville, Tennessee* (Chicago, 1900), 541.

⁹⁴ Burnett, “How I Served My Apprenticeship,” 77-78.

⁹⁵ John S. Van Gilder, “1865 4-Part View of Knoxville with Numbers,” 1936, McClung Collection.



protecting tenderness, so there was no love affair in it on her part.” It is possible that this visitor was, as biographers Ann Thwaite and Gretchen Gerzina have suggested, an unnamed professor who later allowed Fannie to use his name as a return address for her submitted manuscript.⁹⁶ But it is odd that Fannie remembered the young landowner, who lent her a book once and spoke only “a few words” to her, but not “Mr. S,” with whom she “frequently” conversed. One cannot help wondering whether Fannie and Edith had remembered different versions of the same person, who could have been a youthful middle-aged man. Could “Mr. S” have actually been Charles Seymour?

Noah’s Ark is notable as the residence where Fannie began her writing career. “At fifteen I completed a story I had begun at twelve and had laid away unfinished,” she later wrote, apparently forgetting that she was fifteen when her family first moved to Tennessee. She would have been eighteen, or close to it, at the time she reworked for publication the story she had written in Manchester. “It was very necessary that I should do some work which might finally be a means of support. As I was shy about the venture of sending a story to a publisher, I wished to keep the matter secret unless the result was successful. I confided in my two younger sisters, and together we concocted a plan for getting the money to buy foolscap and stamps.”⁹⁷ The story has been repeated many times of how Fannie picked and sold wild grapes at the market in Knoxville, and with the proceeds purchased the writing paper and postage that allowed her to submit her first stories to a magazine and see them published in 1868. Recounting the tale, Edith stated that Fannie and she picked grapes together, then “got the colored women at the foot of the hill, who did our washing, to sell them on commission in the market.”⁹⁸ Fannie wrote that two girls, whose family “lived at the foot of Mount Ararat,” sold the grapes for Fannie and were allowed to keep part of the money earned. The girls’ identities have always remained a mystery since their mother, “Aunt Cinthy,” was the only family member Fannie named with certainty (she fictionalized one of the daughters’ names as “Ser’phine”).⁹⁹

In 1935, *Knoxville News-Sentinel* columnist Bert Vincent interviewed Harry C. Cansler, a man associated with Knoxville College and whose “wife’s mother was one of the little mulatto girls that showed [Fannie] how to pick wild grapes.” Cansler’s wife, Cinthia Greenway Cansler, was the daughter of George and Cornelia Greenway. Cornelia’s parents, Abraham and Cynthia Gay, married in 1866 and lived in a house on Clinton Road. Cynthia was Abe’s second wife and stepmother to his five children. Their three girls—Isabella, Cornelia, and Florence—would have been, respectively,

⁹⁶ Thwaite, *Waiting for the Party*, 34; Gerzina, *Frances Hodgson Burnett*, 32.

⁹⁷ Burnett, “How I Served My Apprenticeship,” 76.

⁹⁸ Jordan, “My Sister,” 55.

⁹⁹ Burnett, *The One I Knew*, 252, 274, 278.

about thirteen, six, and four in 1868.¹⁰⁰ This was probably the same family whose dog, “Tige,” fought “two or three times a week” with the Hodgsons’ dog, “Mr. K.”¹⁰¹ Although it cannot be known for certain which of her sisters helped Fannie sell grapes, Cornelia Gay Greenway contributed to the start of Burnett’s writing career.

Godey’s Lady’s Book and Magazine published Fannie’s story “Hearts and Diamonds” in June 1868 and “Miss Carruthers’ Engagement” (her first submission) that October, both under the cryptic byline “The Second.”¹⁰² For these two stories the magazine paid Fannie \$35, which Edith later said seemed like an “enormous” amount of money.¹⁰³ Then in November, “Ethel’s Sir Lancelot,” by “F. Hodgson,” appeared in *Peterson’s Magazine*.¹⁰⁴ These early successes boosted her confidence and confirmed, as Edith said, “that she was accepted as a writer.”¹⁰⁵ A \$40 check arrived next and allowed Fannie to purchase alpaca material from which her mother—“a wonderful needlewoman”—made dresses for her daughters.¹⁰⁶ The stories also foreshadowed Fannie’s productivity to come, as the next decade would see very few dark months in which no new stories were published. But after “Ethel’s Sir Lancelot” there is a mysterious twenty-two-month gap in Fannie’s known bibliography, with nothing appearing in print until September 1870, when *Peterson’s Magazine* printed the first installment of her serial “Kathleen’s Love-Story.”¹⁰⁷ Was Fannie stockpiling stories or drafting novel-length works during 1869 and most of 1870? Did the move from Noah’s Ark temporarily disrupt her writing as she entered a different social sphere in downtown Knoxville? Or did she, perhaps under an alias, actually publish stories during that interval that biographers have not yet identified?

Regardless of these questions, by 1869 Fannie’s publications and her brothers’ steady employment—Herbert making watches at Joseph Wood’s shop and John tending the bar at John Scherf’s Lamar House saloon—had indeed improved the Hodgsons’ financial situation enough that the family

¹⁰⁰ Bert Vincent, “Flagpole Hill, Still a Place of Beauty in Sunset, Proved Inspiration for Girl Writer,” *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, November 14, 1935; Wallace Campbell to Abram Gay, July 3, 1862, deed book A3-528, Knox County Archives; Abraham Gay marriage to Cynthia Hays, September 25, 1866, “Tennessee, County Marriages, 1790-1950,” <http://www.familysearch.org>; U.S. Census, 1870, Knox County, Tennessee, population schedule, Knoxville.

¹⁰¹ Wickham, “Dogs of Noted Americans,” 599.

¹⁰² Frances Hodgson Burnett (as The Second), “Hearts and Diamonds,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book and Magazine* 77 (June 1868): 524-28; Frances Hodgson Burnett (as The Second), “Miss Carruthers’ Engagement” *Godey’s Lady’s Book and Magazine* 77 (October 1868): 311-21.

¹⁰³ Gerzina, *Frances Hodgson Burnett*, 35.

¹⁰⁴ Frances Hodgson Burnett (as F. Hodgson), “Ethel’s Sir Lancelot,” *Peterson’s Magazine* 54 (November 1868): 365-69.

¹⁰⁵ Gerzina, *Frances Hodgson Burnett*, 35.

¹⁰⁶ Jordan, “My Sister,” 142.

¹⁰⁷ Frances Hodgson Burnett (as Miss F. Hodgson), “Kathleen’s Love-Story,” *Peterson’s Magazine* 58 (September-December 1870): 188-200, 266-78, 347-57, 430-41.





The popular Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine was a monthly magazine first published in Philadelphia in 1830. It included color illustrations of recent fashions and accessories. Fannie's first published works appeared in the pages of this magazine in 1868. Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine 77 (October 1868): 287.

moved from Clinton Pike to a house in Knoxville proper.¹⁰⁸ According to Ada Campbell Larew, "Herbert and John had good positions, rented a nice house overlooking the Tennessee River and moved their mother and sisters there."¹⁰⁹ Five years later, in March 1874, Charles Seymour sold about five acres of his Clinton Road property to the United Presbyterian Church of North America, which founded Knoxville College in 1875 and erected its first building the following year.¹¹⁰ Noah's Ark sat adjacent to the campus through the turn of the century and was known by students as the house where Fannie Hodgson had once lived. "Burnett is said to have written her first work in the dilapidated building just outside our grounds and to have gathered blackberries on the commons to pay for its publication. This is a literary hill," wrote a columnist for the campus newspaper, *Aurora*, in 1889.¹¹¹ Three years later the newspaper ran another editorial which provided the clearest picture of the house's structure:

¹⁰⁸ Gerzina, *Frances Hodgson Burnett*, 35-36.

¹⁰⁹ Gerzina, *Frances Hodgson Burnett*, 25; Larew, "Memoirs of Frances Hodgson Burnett," Larew Papers, McClung Collection.

¹¹⁰ Charles Seymour to United Presbyterian Church, March 31, 1874, warranty deed book M3-389, Knox County Archives; Booker, *And There was Light!*, 11-12.

¹¹¹ "Observations," *Aurora*, October 1889.

Perhaps some of our readers do not know that the early home of the authoress of *Little Lord Fauntleroy* is on the lot adjoining Knoxville College. It is a very plain little weather-beaten house, now showing decided signs of neglect and old age. It has a door and two small windows on the front, two windows on each end, and a door, with a porch over it, at the back. At one time, plainly, there was a coat of paint on the front side of the house, but its only effect now is added shabbiness to the place. One redeeming feature however the house does possess: it has a beautiful situation. It stands on the hillside, with the cedars stretching away behind it to the north east; while before it lies the valley, with the city of Knoxville, beyond which from north east to south east extend range after range of hills, and in the blue distance the Great Smoky Mountains. . . . In the house itself it would be difficult to feel much interest save for the consideration that it was the home of Frances Hodgson [sic] Burnett, a fact that sits quaintly enough on the lowly little place.¹¹²

Decades later James Cary, a professor at Knoxville College, wrote, "I saw the old house before it was destroyed by fire in 1900. Many pictures were made and many descriptions were written of it by students of Knoxville College. Some of the pictures are now available."¹¹³

In April 1904, Charles Seymour sold the United Presbyterian Church another lot, which he described as "opposite the Knoxville College cornering on the corporation line of the City of Knoxville to wit the land bounded by the old Clinton Road the road known as Surray Street along the Moses Addition and the property of said College through the centre of Maynard Street."¹¹⁴ The same year, the college constructed a brick home for the school president on that property, very near where the Hodgson home had burned. The new residence therefore became a convenient landmark for locating the Hodgson homesite, as did the chapel building erected in 1913.¹¹⁵ "The exact spot on which [Burnett's] house was located . . . is between the president's home and the McMillan Chapel," Cary stated.¹¹⁶ These structures also helped an *Aurora* columnist pinpoint the location of Noah's Ark, "which stood in what is now the backyard of the [president's home]. . . . From this slight elevation, the home of Miss Hodgson faced down toward McMillan

¹¹² "Editorial," *Aurora*, November 1892, 2.

¹¹³ J.C. Cary, "Wants Further Honor Done Mrs. Burnett," *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, August 3, 1941.

¹¹⁴ Charles Seymour to the Board of Missions to the Freedmen of the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church of N.A., April 4, 1904, Knox County Archives.

¹¹⁵ Booker, *And There Was Light!*, 53, 56.

¹¹⁶ Cary, "Wants Further Honor Done Mrs. Burnett."



Chapel, which, of course had not been constructed at that time.”¹¹⁷ Today both the president’s home and McMillan Chapel remain on the historic Knoxville College campus.

The pictures of Noah’s Ark that Cary referenced have not been found in the Knoxville College Archives and are not known to exist elsewhere. A possible image of the house is found in a ledger book the Hodgsons carried from England to America and kept for many years and which is now housed at the University of Virginia’s Special Collections Library. Along with many of Frances’s earliest writings, the book includes an unattributed sketch, titled “A Quiet Place,” which shows part of a small cottage with what appears to be a weathervane on one end of a cross-gabled roof. The sketch may have been drawn by the family’s youngest member, Edwina.¹¹⁸ A panoramic photograph of Knoxville College, taken about ten years after the house burned, shows the president’s house in the foreground and campus buildings—including McKee Hall, Elnathan Hall, and Carnegie Library—in the background. Behind the president’s home there appears to be a pile of stones, which may be remnants from Noah’s Ark. Harry Cansler, son-in-law of Cornelia Gay Greenway, heaped stones to mark the house’s location sometime after it burned. Additionally, the photograph clearly shows a spindly tree beside the president’s home. This was probably the same locust tree that locals believed grew near the former Hodgson property. Some claimed that young Fannie had “hung her swing years ago” from its branches. The tree survived until July 1943, when a storm knocked it down.¹¹⁹

Vagabondia Castle

After moving from Clinton Pike, the Hodgsons rented “a rather roomy, but dilapidated brick house with a back yard running down to the Tennessee River,” which at the time was called the Holston River. Roughly two years earlier, in March 1867, Knoxville experienced the worst flooding in its history when hard rains and higher than normal levels of snowmelt from the mountains raised the Holston thirty-three feet. The surging “fresket” washed away bridges and houses—and likely contributed to the “dilapidated” condition of the Hodgsons’ riverbank rental home. The house faced north, and as one acquaintance stated: “We could see the river from the back door.”¹²⁰ According to writer Elizabeth Bryant Johnston, who knew Fannie, the Hodgsons “chose this house because its tiers of wide verandas made

¹¹⁷ “World Famous Novelist, Frances Burnett, Once Lived on Knoxville College Campus,” *Aurora*, May 21, 1936.

¹¹⁸ The image “A Quiet Place” appears in Gerzina, *Frances Hodgson Burnett*, following 174.

¹¹⁹ *Knoxville College Bulletin, Catalogue for 1909-1910* (Knoxville, 1910), 6-7; Bert Vincent, “Burnett Tree Falls,” *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, July 27, 1943.

¹²⁰ Burnett, *Romantick Lady*, 48; Jack Neely, “Knoxville’s Greatest Disaster: The Fresket of 1867,” *Knoxville Mercury*, September 11, 2017; Burnett, *Romantick Lady*, 55.

it resemble a boat."¹²¹ Much has been written about this place, including that it became for Fannie and her siblings a bohemian enclave they named Vagabondia Castle, that it was the site of informal music performances and boating on the river, and that it partly inspired Fannie's first serialized novel, "Dorothea," which *Lady's Friend* ran between April and December 1873. Fannie later republished the novel in book form as *Dolly* and then *Vagabondia*.¹²²

Despite her apparent lack of stories sold in 1869 and much of 1870, Fannie indeed wrote diligently at Vagabondia Castle. One friend and frequent visitor to the house remembered the Hodgson sisters warning, "Be quiet, and don't go upstairs, for Frances is writing."¹²³ Fannie likely began drafting "Dorothea" while she lived there, as her fictional Crewe family greatly resembled the Hodgsons at the time they resided at that location after their mother died. Fannie, Herbert, his wife Annette, and sisters Edith and Edwina all have their respective literary counterparts in *Dolly*, Phil, his wife 'Toinette, and sisters Aimee and Mollie. Swan Burnett was also fictionalized, with a changed vocation, as a lowly writer named Griffith "Grif" Donne. Through these characters, Fannie captured the Hodgsons' bohemian interests and financial straits ("shabby" or a variant appears thirty times in the story). She depicted Phil as an artist, which corresponds to Herbert's achievements as an amateur painter. But notably absent from the Crewe family is any character resembling brother John Hodgson.

There is no question that Fannie had the house in mind when she wrote about the delightfully cluttered interior of the Crewe home, as in this extract from an early draft of the novel's opening paragraph:

A poor little square parlor with a queer . . . look about it, a threadbare & jaded but once rich carpet on the floor its large medallions oddly out of place taken into consideration with the size of the room, numberless pictures hanging on the walls, numberless books & papers scattered upon tables & chairs, numberless sheets of music manuscript & otherwise lying here & there near various musical instruments. . . . [H]ere was a room truly making no pretensions on earth to anything but shabbiness, overpowering & irredeemable & still at the same time impressing the beholder in defiance of all rules of nature, with an index of presiding spirits at once general, careless & desperately cheerful.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Elizabeth Bryant Johnston, "Frances Hodgson Burnett," in *Our Famous Women: An Authorized and Complete Record of the Lives and Deeds of Eminent Women of Our Times* (Hartford, CT, 1888), 165.

¹²² See, Thwaite, *Waiting for the Party*, chapter 2; Gerzina, *Frances Hodgson Burnett*, chapter 4.

¹²³ Burnett, *Romantick Lady*, 55.

¹²⁴ Frances Hodgson Burnett, manuscript ledger, no date, 115, Clifton Waller Barrett Library, Accession #6817, Special Collections, University of Virginia, Charlottesville; Gerzina, *Frances Hodgson Burnett*, quote 37-38.



Fannie, however, transplanted the story to a rowhouse in London's Bloomsbury district, nowhere near Knoxville and the Tennessee River.

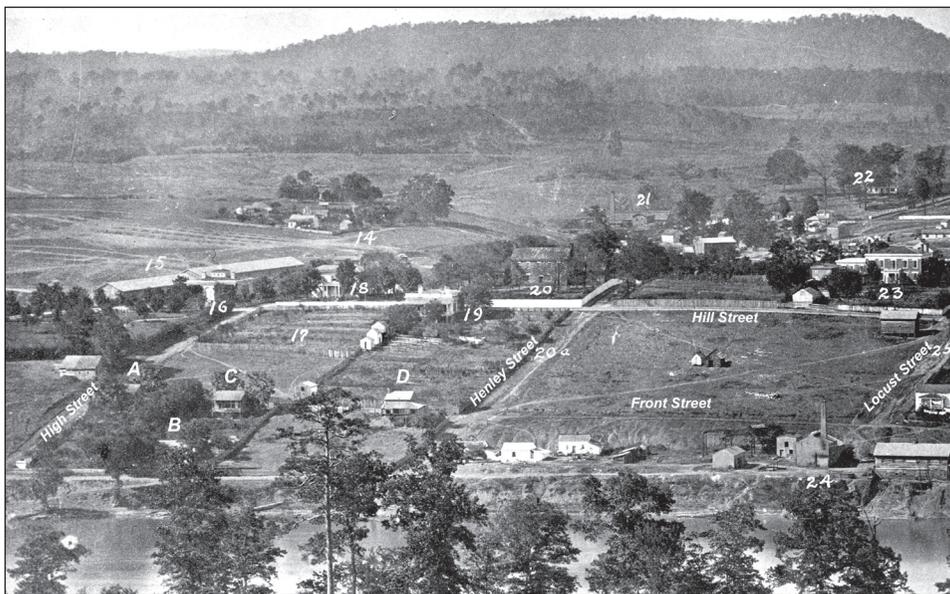
She based another, lesser-known story on her family's circumstances at Vagabondia Castle, though she set this one in Florence. In "The Black Lace Mantilla," published in *Peterson's Magazine* in April 1878, Fannie again modeled characters on Edith, Edwina, herself, and Herbert, but not John. She wrote: "There were four of us—Philippa, Meg, myself, and our brother, Laurence, who was our head and protector. We were poor, and rather proud people, at least we were rather proud of our old name. . . . Each of us was the possessor of the smallest of incomes, and these little incomes, added to the proceeds of Larry's pictures, supported us, and allowed us to indulge in our favorite Bohemian style of living, first in one place, and then in another."¹²⁵

The location of the real Vagabondia Castle has never been identified with any precision. The Hodgsons leased the property from an unknown landlord, so the specific plot of land cannot be traced through deed records. And during the nine years Fannie lived near Knoxville, only a single edition of the Knoxville directory was issued. The 1869 city directory may have been compiled when the Hodgsons still resided on Clinton Pike. It listed the occupations of Herbert and John Hodgson, but not the family's address.

A few strands of evidence narrow down the location to a particular block. Around 1869, while Swan Burnett was still a medical student in New York, Fannie sent him a letter in which she complained of the family's "shabby" life in Knoxville. Besides her chronic desire for "an occasional new book to provide against mental starvation," she longed to live on "a front street *not* close to the gas works."¹²⁶ Knoxville Gas Works sat on the riverbank between Henley and Locust, perhaps only one or two blocks from the Hodgson home. In writing "a front street," Fannie may have referenced her actual address; Front Street ran past the gas works and paralleled Hill Street, one block to the north. Descriptions of Vagabondia Castle are compatible with many of the houses on Front Street's south side, which indeed had backyards that sloped to the river. In addition to informative statements from Vivian's biography and Fannie's letter, the 1870 census suggests that the Hodgsons lived very near to Sam Logan, an attorney whose property was located on the southwest corner of Hill and Henley and which extended south one block to Front Street. The Hodgsons (misspelled Hodgden) immediately followed Logan on the census page. While other interpretations are possible, these pieces of evidence strongly suggest that Vagabondia Castle was located on Front Street near Henley. Contemporary images—an 1865 photograph of Knoxville by T.M. Schleier, and an 1871 "bird's eye view" map of Knoxville—

¹²⁵ Frances Hodgson Burnett, "The Black Lace Mantilla," *Peterson's Magazine* 73 (April 1878): 252.

¹²⁶ Burnett, *Romantic Lady*, 47; Thwaite, *Waiting for the Party*, 38; Gerzina, *Frances Hodgson Burnett*, 30.



In 1869, the Hodgson family moved into a home near the Holston (later Tennessee) River waterfront on Front Street. Fannie nicknamed the house Vagabondia Castle, which partly inspired short stories and later a book. This 1865 photograph of Knoxville, taken from a bluff south of the river, includes numbers that correspond to locations John S. Van Gilder identified in 1936. Four letters (A-D) have also been added to show possible locations for Vagabondia Castle. Houses C and D are the most probable, due to their proximity to attorney Sam Logan's property (19) and Knoxville Gas Works (24). "1865 4-Part View of Knoxville with Numbers, Part 2 of 4," T.M. Schleier, 1865, Calvin M. McClung Historical Collection, East Tennessee History Center, Knoxville.

of that intersection show several "rather roomy" two-story homes with "wide verandas" between Henley and High, whereas the few homes between Henley and Locust were smaller, one-story structures.¹²⁷ If indeed the Hodgsons lived on the south side of Front Street between Henley and High, Vagabondia Castle was part of the Williamsburg subdivision, bounded to the north by Main Street, to the south by the river, to the east by Henley, and to the west by Second Creek.¹²⁸

According to Ada Campbell Larew, the view from the back of the house triggered at least one story idea. "Frances took my sister and I many times across the river just for a stroll and to gather inspiration for a story, for the scenery was very fascinating," Larew said. "One day she gathered us close to her side and as she looked down on an island in the river, told us an Indian legend that was so strikingly beautiful that it sank deep in my young brain."

¹²⁷ "Bird's Eye View of the City of Knoxville, Knox County, Tennessee 1871," Library of Congress Geography and Map Division, Washington, D.C., <http://www.loc.gov/resource/g3964k.pm008990/>.

¹²⁸ "Plan of Williamsburg," 1861, Knox County Archives.

Although Fannie apparently never wrote the story down, Larew's mother transcribed it for Ada, who published a more detailed version decades later in a newspaper article.¹²⁹

Larew also remembered when Fannie's mother became ill. "In the spring of 1870 my father, Dr. Andrew Jackson Campbell, was called to the bedside of Mrs. Hodgson. . . . [She] had a distressing cold that lasted for some time," Larew said. "In those days doctors were duty bound to answer a call whether he received pay or not." Eliza Hodgson died on March 23, 1870, and was buried in Old Gray Cemetery (probably in the plot her brother William had purchased in 1863).¹³⁰ Two months later, on May 30, Herbert E. Hodgson and Anne P. Burnett acquired a marriage license in Jefferson County. They were married in New Market on June 1, presumably at the Burnett home. Swan M. Burnett served as a bondsman, and William Graham as minister.¹³¹ The next day, a man visited the Hodgsons' home to list its occupants for the federal census. The household included Herbert and Ann, John, Frances, Edith, Edwina, and cousin Fred Boond. With Eliza's death, Fred at age twenty-six had become the oldest person in the house.¹³²

Bohemian Life in Knoxville

Even though Fannie had clearly found her calling as a writer, the 1870 census listed her occupation as "music teacher," further evidence that the move to downtown Knoxville temporarily halted her publications. Because she was an extrovert and writing was an intensely solitary activity, teaching provided her an opportunity to socialize. The Hodgsons often invited friends to play music together at Vagabondia Castle. "Herbert played the piano; so did Frances. She sang; so did Edith," wrote Vivian Burnett. "Frank Bridges was more than an expert performer on flute; Fred Boond played the bass viol, and Charles Haynes came in to play the violin. Pleasant Fahnestock . . . was a 'beginner' on the clarinet, occasionally invited into the ensemble."¹³³ Charles was a fellow native of England and the only full-time musician in the group; he performed in town and at venues like the luxury hotel at Blount County's Montvale Springs.¹³⁴ Frank, or Francis, worked with Jacob Havelly, a "house, sign and ornamental painter" whose office was on Main Street. Pleasant was a carpenter and architect, and had introduced the idea of "boating on

¹²⁹ Larew, "Memoirs of Frances Hodgson Burnett," Larew Papers, McClung Collection; Larew, "Childhood Recollections."

¹³⁰ Larew, "Memoirs of Frances Hodgson Burnett," Larew Papers, McClung Collection; Eliza Boond Hodgson headstone, Old Gray Cemetery, Knoxville.

¹³¹ "Jefferson County Marriages, 1861-1900," Jefferson County Archives, 142.

¹³² U.S. Census, 1870, Knox County, population schedule, Knoxville, 358.

¹³³ Burnett, *Romantick Lady*, 49.

¹³⁴ U.S. Census, 1870, Knox County, Tennessee, District 12, 227b; "Montvale Springs," *Knoxville Weekly Chronicle*, June 22, 1870, 5.



In the early 1870s, Fannie was a member of Knoxville's bohemian social circles, most known for her writing. She was twenty-two when this portrait was taken in June 1872, just before she sailed to England on an extended holiday. "Frances Hodgson Burnett," photographed by Bundy, Hartford, Connecticut, Calvin M. McClung Historical Collection, East Tennessee History Center, Knoxville.

the river . . . for the entertainment of Edith," whom he was courting; she later stated that her brothers "bought a boat" and that "there were moonlight parties on the water."¹³⁵

With Edwina, the youngest Hodgson, soon courting Frank, this "enthusiastic group of youngsters" ranged in age between sixteen and twenty-six. If they considered "themselves as Bohemians," as Vivian wrote, it "was not all pose, for most of them had but

little money, not too much food, and barely enough clothing"—but their lives were joyful and, to varying degrees, artistic.¹³⁶ Years later, while writing the novel *In Connection with the De Willoughby Claim*, Fannie modeled the fictional "youth of Delisleville" on her own memories of Knoxville, where the young people "had little parties at which [they] danced . . . little clubs which were vaguely musical or literary . . . [and] an ingenuous belief in the talents and graces displayed at these gatherings."¹³⁷

Like a true bohemian, Fannie joined a local acting troupe. On the night of her twenty-second birthday, November 24, 1871, she appeared with the Thespian Society in two plays at Hoxsie's Hall. In Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*, Fannie "played the comedy woman's part"—likely the fretful Mrs. Hardcastle—alongside Lizzie Crozier, who "acted the leading role as [the daughter] Miss Hardcastle." Crozier, just months away from marrying William French, would become a well known educator and suffragist. She thought Fannie a "gifted" actress. The same night, Fannie also portrayed "Miss Dinah Blowhard" in a one-act farce, *Slasher and Crasher!* by John Maddison Morton, whose script called for Dinah to wear a "yellow silk and pink high dress, head dress with flowers, pink ribbons, sash." Fannie

¹³⁵ *Knoxville City Directory, 1869* (Bridges, Havelly); U.S. Census, 1870, Knox County, Tennessee, Knoxville Ward 5, 409; *Knoxville City Directory, 1876* (Fahnestock); Jordan, "My Sister," 142.

¹³⁶ Burnett, *Romantick Lady*, 49.

¹³⁷ Burnett, *De Willoughby*, 232.



undoubtedly relished such a frilly costume. The next day's newspaper stated that she had "faithfully portrayed" her character.¹³⁸

Knoxville's "social life" included "dancing entertainments often rising to the dignity of 'balls,'" Vivian wrote. Turner Hall, part of the Franklin House Hotel on Main Street between Prince (now Market) and Gay, hosted various dances and formal events. On February 28, 1872, Fannie was one of many costumed guests that gathered in the hall around 9:00 p.m. for a Mardi Gras "Bal Masque." Dressed as "Aurora," the Roman goddess of dawn, Fannie won an award "for the best lady mask." Her brother "Johnnie" was hardly recognizable costumed as a "fierce Papal Zouave" soldier. Herbert entertained along with his "Hodgson's Quadrille Band." As Ada Campbell Larew wrote, "Fannie had many friends and was the center of attraction at parties and dances where she usually went with her brother Herbert, who was a musician and a jovial spirit among the young folk."¹³⁹ John Hodgson still worked for John Scherf, who owned and operated the Lamar House Saloon in the hotel's basement, where the saloon "occupied roughly the same space in that old building as the Bistro [at the Bijou] does today."¹⁴⁰

At the time, Knoxville had four hotels: the Atkin House, Bell House, Franklin House, and Lamar House. While all of these venues occasionally hosted parties and events, such as the masquerade at the Franklin House's Turner Hall, Fannie later stated that "the Lamar House [was] where I think at that time all the balls were given."¹⁴¹ When she wrote, in her novel *In Connection with the De Willoughby Claim*, that the "Delisle House" was Delisleville's "principal hotel," where "all important festivities were held in its long dining-hall disguised as a ballroom," she almost certainly had the Lamar House in mind.¹⁴²

By 1872, the Hodgson siblings no longer needed one large house for the whole family. Edith had married Pleasant on November 15, 1870, and at some point the new couple moved in with the Campbells, who had relocated downtown from Clinton Pike. About fourteen months later, on January 9, 1872, Edwina married Frank. The Reverend N. Bachman, of Second Presbyterian Church, officiated both ceremonies.¹⁴³ One of these marriages

¹³⁸ "The Tableaux," *Knoxville Daily Chronicle*, November 17, 1871, 4; "The Thespians," *Knoxville Daily Chronicle*, November 25, 1871, 1; "With 71 Candles on Birthday Cake Mrs. L. Crozier French Reminiscences on the Past," *Knoxville Sentinel*, May 28, 1922, Lizzie Crozier French Scrapbook, 14, McClung Collection; John Maddison Morton, *Slasher and Crasher!: An Original Farce in One Act* (London, ca. 1860).

¹³⁹ Burnett, *Romantick Lady*, 49; "The Masquerade," *Knoxville Daily Chronicle*, February 28, 1872, 5; Larew, "Childhood Recollections."

¹⁴⁰ Neely, "His Wretchedness at Times," *Metro Pulse*, January 30, 2003.

¹⁴¹ Bonnie Tom Robinson, "Ft. City Library Gains Noted Woman's Letter on 'Unmarried Wedding Dress,'" *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, June 15, 1940.

¹⁴² Burnett, *De Willoughby*, 21.

¹⁴³ "Tennessee, Marriage Records, 1780-2002," <http://www.ancestry.com>; "Married," *Knoxville Daily Chronicle*, January 9, 1872, 2.



likely prompted Fannie and her remaining siblings to vacate Vagabondia Castle for a smaller house.

Other Residences

The three residences listed above—the log house in New Market, and the Knoxville homes known as Noah’s Ark and Vagabondia Castle—have been confirmed by biographers as well as Fannie’s own writings. But after Edith’s marriage in late 1870, the family’s residence history turns murky. In the four-and-a-half years that followed, Fannie spent about fourteen months abroad, returned to marry Swan, grieved the death of another family member, and gave birth to her first son, before moving from Knoxville for the last time in the spring of 1875. According to claims Knoxvilleians made in the years and decades following her death, Fannie lived in several houses in town. Since no city directories were published during this period, these addresses cannot be confirmed. The scant evidence helps make guesses at the locations.

In June 1869, Dr. Campbell “sold or rather exchanged” his Clinton Pike property “for a fourteen room house on Walnut and Oxford street in Knoxville.” He “opened an office in two rooms [in] back of the house, separate and apart from the main part of the house.”¹⁴⁴ Edith and Pleasant Fahnestock moved there shortly after marriage and “had rooms above [Campbell’s] office facing on Walnut Street.” This arrangement certainly meant more frequent visits by Fannie, who Larew explained was “mother’s dearest friend and lived practically with us.”¹⁴⁵ Elsewhere, Larew stated that Fannie and she “lived under the same roof,” and that “Fannie later stayed with us for some time. I used to sit and watch her write.”¹⁴⁶

Rose Campbell Lennon, a younger Campbell sister whom Fannie knew as Rosie, described Fannie as a “woman of great charm with large eyes, reddish gold hair and great kindness.” Lennon confessed that as a child she sometimes misbehaved and had to be corrected by Fannie. Once Rosie walked past “a fruit stand then run by an Italian,” near the corner of Gay and Union, and took an apple without paying for it. Back at the Campbell home, Fannie’s discipline seemed more like a reward, and foreshadowed the way the author pampered her own children: she carried Rosie “in her arms up to her room and [told] her that she must be a good little girl. And then she [gave] her loaf sugar from a bowl on her bureau.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Larew, “Memoirs of Frances Hodgson Burnett,” Larew Papers, McClung Collection; *Knoxville Daily Chronicle*, March 4, 1874, 1.

¹⁴⁵ Lucy Curtis Templeton, “Summit Hill, One of High Points in City, Was Formerly Favored Residence District,” *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, October 19, 1947.

¹⁴⁶ “Fauntleroy Becomes Prohibitionist,” *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, May 14, 1933; Ragsdale, “Author of ‘Little Lord Fauntleroy.’”

¹⁴⁷ “‘Be a Good Girl,’ Fauntleroy’s Author Told Knoxville Child,” *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, June 27, 1936, 3.





In the early 1870s, Edith and Pleasant Fahnestock moved into the Dr. Campbell House, which faced Oxford Street at the corner of Walnut, in downtown Knoxville. Oxford Street no longer exists, and the Langley Garage parking structure now occupies the former residential block where the Campbells lived and where Edith's sister, Fannie, made frequent visits. "J.S. Hall House," 1876, Calvin M. McClung Historical Collection, East Tennessee History Center, Knoxville.

Fannie stayed with the Campbells enough that Swan Burnett often called on her there. "Dr. Swan Burnett came courting from New Market," Larew said. "Fannie hid behind the door. She said she just couldn't see him—her hair was all topsy-turvy and she looked a sight. . . . I let him in the door. He patted me on the head and said, 'Little One, please tell Miss Fannie I'm here.' I didn't know what to say, but just then he saw Fannie. It was a long time later that she married him."¹⁴⁸ According to Lennon, the couple "took a room" in the house shortly after their own marriage, perhaps before they moved to Temperance Hill.¹⁴⁹ On New Year's Eve, 1875, Dr. Campbell sold the house to James S. Hall. Eventually the house would be addressed as 503 Oxford Place. It was torn down for a parking lot around 1932.¹⁵⁰

Some have claimed that Fannie occupied a house on West Cumberland Avenue and Henley Street, on the northwest corner of that intersection. Fannie and her biographers never mentioned this house, and there are no records to prove she lived there. If Fannie indeed resided there, it was likely after her

¹⁴⁸ Ragsdale, "Author of 'Little Lord Fauntleroy.'"

¹⁴⁹ "Be a Good Girl."

¹⁵⁰ A.J. Campbell to James S. Hall, December 31, 1875, WD O3-154, Knox County Archives.

family vacated Vagabondia Castle and before she married Swan. For a short period in the 1890s, Laura Tyler—the mother of future Pulitzer Prize-winning author James Agee—occupied the house with her parents and siblings.¹⁵¹

Two other purported residences are difficult to identify without further information, but may be among Fannie’s homes already described. Anna French Johnson, author of the autobiography *The Making of a Minister’s Wife* (1939), claimed that her family occupied a home that “had just been vacated by an English family named Hodgson. It was here that the young daughter, later known as Frances Hodgson Burnett, wrote the first of her stories.” This brief statement suggests that the Frenches may have lived in the house known as Noah’s Ark.¹⁵²

Although deed records provide no evidence that Anna’s father, farmer John N. French, owned the property that Charles Seymour sold to Knoxville College in 1904, the 1870 census at least places her family in the right area—beyond the town limits, in the twelfth district of Knox County.¹⁵³ Another Knoxvilleite, Mrs. M.B. Aiken, claimed that Fannie “lived in one of the houses owned by her father here.”¹⁵⁴ Her father, William G. “Parson” Brownlow, was Tennessee’s governor when the Hodgsons arrived in the state, and had left his son in charge of Knoxville’s main newspaper, *Brownlow’s Knoxville Whig*. In 1869, immediately following the end of his second term as governor, he took office as a U.S. senator.¹⁵⁵ Between 1859 and his death in 1877, he owned various properties in Knoxville, but none appear to be associated with Fannie.¹⁵⁶ Perhaps future biographers will successfully fit the Brownlow property and the Oxford Place and Cumberland Avenue residences into Fannie’s Knoxville timeline and discover how the locations influenced her writings.

* * * * *

The circumstances that brought young Fannie Hodgson’s family to East Tennessee also compelled her to write for profit. By the spring of 1872, Fannie had been writing professionally for almost four years, with a dozen or more stories in the American magazines *Godey’s Lady’s Book* and *Peterson’s Magazine*. Hodgson later admitted her distaste for “Fannie,” the nickname she acquired in Tennessee, but nevertheless answered to it among local acquaintances during her entire residency in the state while she also employed “Fannie E. Hodgson” as her official byline. Although her ambitions and sophisticated tastes eventually drew her away from East Tennessee, Fannie could not deny

¹⁵¹ *Knoxville City Directory, 1897* (Knoxville, 1897); Brown, *Rufus: James Agee in Tennessee*, 23.

¹⁵² Templeton, “Books—Old and New.”

¹⁵³ U.S. Census, 1870, Knox County, Tennessee, 227-28.

¹⁵⁴ “Fauntleroy Becomes Prohibitionist.”

¹⁵⁵ *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, ed. Carroll Van West, Tennessee Historical Society, s.v. “William Gannaway ‘Parson’ Brownlow,” <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net>.

¹⁵⁶ William G. Brownlow, deed index, Knox County Archives.



that her “dryad days” in the region’s wild and open landscapes had stimulated her imagination, especially after a childhood in Manchester, where nature seemed confined to small gardens boxed in brick walls or manicured park lawns on which walking was forbidden.

In fictionalizing her East Tennessee experiences and homesites, Fannie most often transplanted details to other locations, as when she set “Dorothea” (later *Vagabondia*) in London even though its fictional Crewe family and their residence were based on Fannie’s own in Knoxville. In fact, she named Tennessee as a location in only two pieces of fiction—one being *In Connection with the De Willoughby Claim*, the other being the short story “Seth” from 1877. Years later, long after she had become famous, Fannie claimed that experiences in East Tennessee had provided her a lifetime’s worth of literary material. She explained: “Not until after I was twenty did I find out that during those years spent among the woods and mountains of East Tennessee, I had been accumulating material out of which I could build, and from which I should draw as long as I lived.” She said that “it was [not] merely East Tennessee material, or character, or dialect,” but “*human material*” that interested her.¹⁵⁷

Fannie indeed absorbed settings, characters, dialects, and situations from life in East Tennessee and incorporated them into her fiction. In examining her years in that region in greater detail, then, one may come closer to understanding her work as well as her personal experiences that motivated it. Her published work reflected strong connections to East Tennessee, despite there being limited evidence of her actual residences and contributions. The second part of this study will appear in volume 91 (2019) of *The Journal East Tennessee History* and continue the story of Fannie’s East Tennessee life and legacy.

¹⁵⁷ Burnett, “How I Served My Apprenticeship,” 76.