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Bequest preserves 65 acres of city's Civil War grounds

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Estate in Oak Hill largest intact piece of 1864 battle site

By MICHAEL CASS
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An almost 150-year-old Oak Hill home that served as a field hospital during the Battle of Nashville will be preserved along with the **65 acres** of open land surrounding it.

The Glen Leven estate is the largest piece of Nashville's Civil War battlefield still intact, said Civil War preservation expert Doug Jones.

Susan McConnell West, who died Nov. 26, left Glen Leven to The Land Trust for Tennessee in her will, officials said. The Greek Revival house, built in 1857, is on Franklin Road south of Thompson Lane.

West's will stipulated that the land can never be developed or subdivided. The decision thrilled historic preservationists, open-space advocates and people who simply don't want to see another important site give way to retail development or condominiums.

"It's just another incredible opportunity for the city, for the state," said Jones, a board member and immediate past president of the Battle of Nashville Preservation Society.

"This is national news. Anybody who's interested in American history should be extremely pleased about what has occurred."

Home's future undecided

The Land Trust for Tennessee, a not-for-profit organization, typically works to save large tracts of land through conservation easements, which put permanent restrictions on future uses. It generally doesn't acquire houses, president and executive director Jean Nelson said.

The house and **65.94 acres** are appraised for tax purposes at more than \$1.08 million, according to the Davidson County property assessor's office. Tax appraisals are typically lower than a property's open-market value, especially if the property is ripe for development.

Land trust officials just received the Glen Leven property in the past three weeks and haven't decided what they'll do with the home, Nelson said.

They plan to gather public input and review Oak Hill zoning ordinances before making any decisions.

"This is a holiday present to the community," Nelson said in a telephone interview.

Preservation 'amazing'

Glen Leven was built using handmade bricks by John Thompson, a wealthy businessman and landowner for whom Thompson Lane is named. West was a great-great-great-granddaughter of John Thompson's father, Thomas, who arrived at Fort Nashborough in 1780.

The two-story house stood between the Confederate and Union lines at the start of the Battle of Nashville in December 1864. It served as a hospital for Union troops after the battle moved south; one story has it that the piano became an operating table, though it's not clear if that's fact or legend, said David Currey, executive director of nearby Travellers' Rest Plantation.

Nelson said in a news release that the road from The Hermitage to Travellers' Rest apparently ran along the back of the property that would become Glen Leven, "so we know Andrew Jackson likely traveled over this land to visit his friend, Judge John Overton, to discuss presidential campaigns."

Jackson was elected president in 1828.

Not only is the land the largest existing piece of the Nashville battlefield, Jones said, it's one of the largest remaining battlefield tracts in the South.

Metro Councilman Parker Toler, who heard about West's decision at a meeting last week, said the land's preservation has been "amazing."

"It certainly is something we absolutely need to save, without a doubt," Toler said. "It's certainly a public asset."

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CAPTION: "This is a holiday present to the community," Jean Nelson, president of The Land Trust for Tennessee, said of Glen Leven.