

THE MODEL HOME'S INTERIOR: A CENTURY OF PHOTOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE

VERSION 1.0 · 2026-06-11 · ALEX PEMBERTON
 COMPANION TO "VENEERS OF HISTORY IN GREEN HILLS EAST", NASHVILLE SCENE

FINDING

Twenty listing photos from the 2014 sale of 1612 North Observatory confirm the house's 1927 signatures — beamed ceiling, inset niche, painted brick — and document the lower level lit by short foundation windows, where the 1927 plan placed a servant's room and the census placed Sally Carpenter.

SUPPORTS IN THE ARTICLE

- *Sally Carpenter slept in the servant's quarters under seven-foot ceilings*
- *her basement room was lit by half-windows punched from the foundation with sills at eye level*
- *the model home stands at 1612 North Observatory, its 1927 architecture still legible inside*

ABSTRACT

The twenty photographs made for the 2014 sale of 1612 North Observatory Drive are the fullest publicly available interior record of the model home since the *Tennessean* photographed it new in 1927. The house remains visible beneath a century of additions: the living room retains the beamed ceiling and inset shelving niche; the exterior walls retain their painted brick veneer; the English Cottage massing and hipped roof stand as drawn a century ago. Announcing Holt Bean's purchase on May 16, 1927, the paper described "an 8-room cream-painted brick structure with servants quarter and two inbuilt garages in the basement," and the photographs answer that sentence clause by clause: the brick is painted cream, the two-car garage sits in the foundation where the lot falls away to the north, and the sunken level beneath the main floor keeps the conditions the 1927 specifications wrote into it as a "servant's room and shower." Three photographs reach the basement. Read by proportion against doors, counters, and headboards, its ceiling stands at roughly seven feet, a foot and more below the beamed main floor, and its short, wide windows sit high in the foundation wall, their sills near the eye of a person standing in the room — the level the 1930 census populated when it entered Sally Carpenter, twenty-eight, servant, on the line beneath Holt and Salome Bean. The later layers — a cathedral-ceilinged sunroom, a remodeled kitchen, the finished lower-level rooms — are named so they are not mistaken for original fabric. Every dimension is a proportional estimate, open to correction by field measurement; no interior finish is offered as original; and the identification of 1612 as the model home rests on the deed, census, and architectural record, which these photographs corroborate.

METHODOLOGY

The source is the set of twenty photographs published with the February 3, 2014 sale of 1612 North Observatory Drive and still carried on the property's Homes.com record. They are the listing photographer's work, described here but not reproduced. The reading proceeds by proportion: the standard parts of a house supply the scale — a door leaf stands about six feet eight inches, a kitchen counter about three feet, an upholstered headboard about four — and ceilings, sills, and window heads are measured against them. Original fabric is separated from later work by comparison with the 1927 *Tennessean* specifications and photographs and with the architectural identification in the companion brief [Identifying the Model Home](#): the beamed ceiling, the inset niche, the brick veneer, the hipped roof, and the basement-level garage answer to the 1927 record; the cathedral sunroom, the refitted kitchen, and the finished lower-level rooms do not. Where a dimension appears, it is an estimate read from a photograph, marked as such, not a surveyed figure.

SOURCES

Primary source

- [Homes.com property record, 1612 North Observatory Drive, Nashville, TN 37215](#), comprising twenty photographs from the February 3, 2014 sale (last sale price \$553,990). The photographs are described here, not reproduced; the listing is the citation, and each photograph is linked at the phrase it supports.

Period reporting (public domain)

- *Nashville Tennessean*, May 16, 1927, "Tennessean Model Home Purchased; Many Visit House." Announces Holt Bean's purchase and describes the house as "an 8-room cream-painted brick structure with servants quarter and two inbuilt garages in the basement" that "sits regally, yet snugly, on its picture-like knoll."
- *Nashville Tennessean*, January 30, 1927, p. 34, and February 6, 1927, p. 32. Construction reports and C. J. Burnell photographs recording the wood-frame structure and the roof "silhouette" before the brick "enclosing"; the February caption describes "the wide sweep of the roof" and the "large openings for doors and windows" promising "sunny rooms."

Companion briefs and prior record

- [Identifying the Model Home: 1612 North Observatory, Not 1637 South](#). Establishes the identification on the deed, census, architectural, and Sanborn record; the 1926 rendering, the 1938 Sanborn map, and the May 1927 interior photographs are treated there in full.

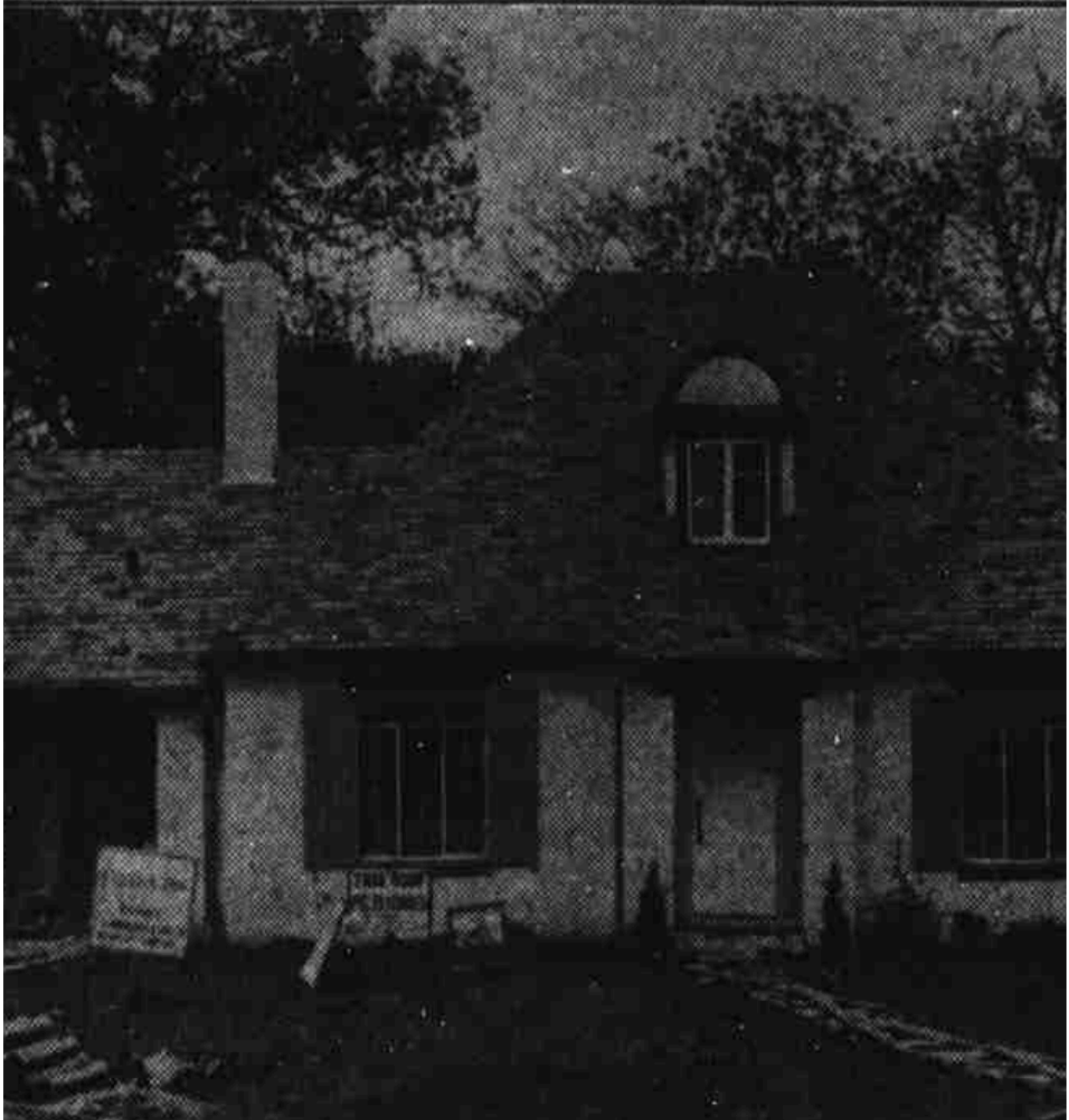
- [Holt Bean: A Life](#). Records the 1927 *Tennessean* specification of a basement “servant’s room and shower” and the 1930 census enumeration of the Bean household with Sally Carpenter.
- [Sally Carpenter’s Documentary Trail](#). The servant the photographs’ lower level concerns.

THE PAINTED BRICK AND THE ROOFLINE ARE THE 1926 RENDERING, WEATHERED

The front of the house stands as the *Tennessean* drew it in December 1926. The walls are brick veneer painted a pale cream, the coat that gives the brick the look of an age it never had; the roof is hipped and shingled, broken on the rear slope by the half-round dormer of the original sketch; a tall chimney climbs the gable end. Green louvered shutters flank leaded casement windows, and a small gabled hood shelters a board-and-batten door. [The rear elevation, photographed across the lawn](#), shows the same hipped mass with its gabled wings and, at the right, the glazed conservatory pavilion that was added later. The form is the diminutive English Cottage the newspaper published, not the Tudor sprawl of 1637 South Observatory the commission named — grown a canopy of trees and a coat of paint, its lines unchanged.

THE TENNESSEAN

Model Home to Be Opened Formally

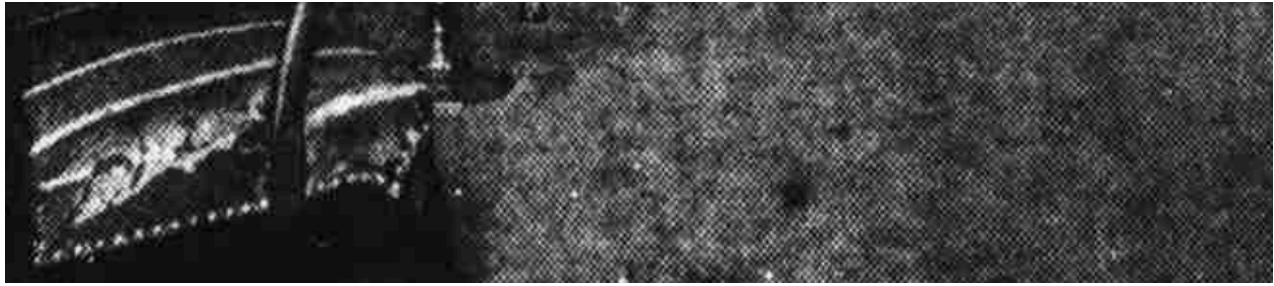


The Model Home as completed in 1927, 1612 North Observatory Drive — *The Nashville Tennessean*. The cream-painted brick, the hipped roof, the half-round dormer, and the paired chimneys all stand today. Public domain.

THE LIVING ROOM HOLDS WHAT THE TENNESSEAN PHOTOGRAPHED IN 1927

The room behind the front door keeps the two features the May 1927 interior photographs fixed: an exposed beamed ceiling, dark timbers crossing cream plaster, and an inset shelving niche set into the wall by the hearth. The fireplace is tiled and flanked by chairs; the front door, seen from inside, is the vertical-board leaf with a small leaded vision-light. Wide openings carry the eye into a dining room under crown molding and, beyond a turned baluster, up a stair. The carpet is a later teal and the furniture is the 2014 owner's, but the shell — beams, niche, hearth, leaded glass — is the shell through which the newspaper toured fifteen thousand visitors on the first of May, 1927, and the match is exact enough that the identification needs no other interior proof.





The Model Home's living room, 1927 — the beamed ceiling, the arched inset niche at left, and the board door at right, the same features the 2014 photographs show — *The Nashville Tennessean*. Public domain.

THE HOUSE FALLS WITH THE HILL, AND THE REAR SETS A GARAGE IN THE FOUNDATION

The lot drops to the north, and the drop is the structural fact behind everything below the main floor. The rear elevation, shot from the garden, shows the house standing two full stories over a basement that meets the ground at grade: a two-car garage is set directly into the foundation, the brick of the front giving way to wood siding on the upper rear wall, and the conservatory pavilion — hipped roof, glazed walls, a small monitor at its peak — extends to one side over the falling ground. A garden path climbs to it through crape myrtles. Inside, the same grade registers in a short flight of steps between the dining room and the living room. The 1938 Sanborn map recorded this fall and this basement garage; the photographs confirm that the house still rides its hillside exactly so, which is what allows a basement to hold habitable rooms with windows at the back.

THE TENNESSEAN'S OWN DESCRIPTION OF THE HOUSE STILL ANSWERS TO THE PHOTOGRAPHS

When the paper announced the sale on May 16, 1927, it set down what Bean had bought: “an 8-room cream-painted brick structure with servants quarter and two inbuilt garages in the basement,” a house that “sits regally, yet snugly, on its picture-like knoll.” Eighty-seven years on, the photographs answer the sentence clause by clause. The brick is still painted cream. The two inbuilt garages are the two-car bay set into the basement at the rear, where the slope brings the foundation to grade. The servant's quarter the paper named is the sunken level whose low ceiling and high foundation windows the photographs still show. The knoll is the rise the front walk climbs under its canopy of trees.

The construction record fits the same way. The *Tennessean* photographed the house through January and February 1927 as bare wood studwork, its frame “completed” and its roof silhouette taking shape before, in the paper's word, the “enclosing” began — the brick going on last, as veneer. The house still carries the order of that work: brick on the front it turns to the street, plain wood siding on the upper rear wall the display elevations never faced. The February caption promised that “the wide sweep of the roof is designed to give a definite feeling of shelter” and that “the large openings for doors and windows” would make “sunny rooms”; the hipped roof still sweeps low over the walls, and the leaded casements still bank the rooms in glass.

THE LOWER LEVEL KEEPS THE SERVANT'S ROOM'S DIMENSIONS AND ITS LIGHT

Three photographs reach the basement. The first is a finished rec room: green walls, built-in shelving, a low flat ceiling studded with recessed lights and carrying ductwork close overhead, louvered bifold doors closing off the mechanical space. A second is the laundry and utility room: a suspended acoustic-tile ceiling hung on its grid below the joists, a long fluorescent fixture, a run of cabinets and a utility sink, a washer, a dryer, and a chest freezer, and — here too — small windows set high in the wall, one tucked just beneath the ceiling in the corner. The third is a basement bedroom. Its windows are short and wide — landscape panes a foot or so tall — and they are set high in the wall, their heads almost at the ceiling and their sills above the height of the headboard beneath them, near the eye of a person standing in the room; through one, the grade and its greenery sit at the glass. Measured by proportion against the door, the headboard, and the lamp, the ceiling reads at roughly seven feet, a foot and more below the beamed main floor. These are the conditions the 1927 specifications wrote into this level as a “servant's room and shower,” and the conditions the 1930 census made flesh when it entered Sally Carpenter, twenty-eight, servant, on the line beneath Holt and Salome Bean. The paint is lavender and the carpet is new; the low ceiling and the high foundation windows are the room.

THE LATER LAYERS ARE A SUNROOM, A REMODELED KITCHEN, AND FINISHED FLOORS ABOVE

The remaining photographs record what the century added, named here so they are not mistaken for original fabric. Off the rear the owners raised a sunroom with a cathedral ceiling of tongue-and-groove plank on exposed king-post trusses, its walls glazed in tall lights over a low knee-wall; a second, earlier porch sits under a painted beadboard ceiling with bamboo shades and French doors to the yard. The kitchen is a late-twentieth-century remodel — cream raised-panel cabinets, tile counters and floor, a peninsula with stools, recessed cans under a soffit. Upstairs the rooms run beneath the roof: a study with its ceiling canted to the eaves and its windows backed by folding louvered shutters, a bath tucked under a skylit slope with vintage hex-tile, a primary bedroom under a tray ceiling with a window set in a deep wall reveal, a book-lined study opening to a bath, and a carpeted bedroom with a ceiling fan. The finishes are the 2014 owner's; the deep reveals, the roof-slope rooms, and the steps between levels are the 1927 house carrying its later coats.

The photographs date to 2014 and show surfaces — carpet, paint, cabinetry, the cathedral sunroom, the finished basement — laid down decades after 1927; no interior finish here can be taken for original. The basement bedroom is not offered as the room Sally Carpenter occupied, only as the level, the ceiling, and the foundation windows her room shared. Every dimension given is a proportional estimate, the roughly seven-foot lower ceiling and the eye-level sills measured against standard doors, counters, and headboards, open to correction by a field measurement. The listing's own figures — four bedrooms, three baths, three thousand five hundred square feet — describe the house after a century of additions and are no guide to the 1927 plan. The identification of 1612 as the model home rests on the deed, census, and architectural record set out in [Identifying the Model Home](#) and [Holt Bean: A Life](#); these photographs corroborate that record.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Pemberton, Alex. "The Model Home's Interior: A Century of Photographic Evidence." Research Brief E11, *Veneers of History in Green Hills East*. alexaustinpemberton.com/journalism/veneers-of-history/#model-home-interior-photographs. Accessed [date].