

A Family Legacy at Cave Hill Cemetery: The Farnsley Family



Peaslee Monument in Section A. Cave Hill Cemetery. Michael Higgs, 2023.

From the Editor

As Cave Hill Cemetery marks 175 years of service to our community this year, we are taking the opportunity to tell the stories of families that were pivotal in our early development. Be sure to look for this ongoing series of articles throughout 2023 as we discover the family legacies at Louisville's historic Cave Hill Cemetery.



Doug Farnsley, 2023. Kayla Wessling.

By Eva Stimson & Gayle Collins, Special to Cave Hill Heritage Foundation

Historical Connections

As the recently elected mayor of the city of Prospect, Louisville attorney Douglass (Doug) Farnsley has plenty to keep him busy. But he happily made time for a conversation about his family's historical connections to the city of Louisville and Cave Hill Cemetery. In a recent interview, he talked about some of the

more than 100 members of his family who are buried at Cave Hill—a host of Farnsleys, plus others whose surnames include Douglass, Peaslee, and Carter.

George Douglass, land donor

Farnsley’s mother’s great-grandfather, George Douglass, donated some of the land that became Cave Hill Cemetery. That tract of land included the Douglass family burial ground, where George was buried after he died in 1889.

“He is buried in the lot that has the wrought-iron fence around it,” Farnsley says. “The Douglass lot was the family cemetery before there was a Cave Hill Cemetery.”

George Douglass’s October 1889 obituary described him as “a financier and shrewd businessman” and noted that he was one of those involved in the creation of Western Union. He owned property in what is now the Highlands-Douglass neighborhood, which bears his family name, as do Douglass Loop and Douglass Boulevard. Douglass lived in the large white house (now apartments for the elderly) that faces Bardstown Road, next to Douglass Boulevard Christian Church.

“I have his portrait and a large mirror that sat on the mantle in the parlor of the Bardstown Road house,” Farnsley says.

George Douglass was actively involved in raising money for the bell tower at the Broadway entrance to Cave Hill Cemetery and made a substantial donation himself. Farnsley recalls standing at the graveside of his brother, Burrell Farnsley, on a clear, cold winter day. “The moment the minister concluded the burial service, the bells in the tower began to ring. I looked at my watch, and it was exactly noon. I have heard it said that there are no coincidences, and so I believe that George Douglass and other family members may have had a hand in the bells ringing when they did on that day.”

Charles Peaslee, world traveler

A large sphinx marks the lot at Cave Hill where Farnsley’s great-grandfather, Charles Peaslee, is buried. Peaslee was co-owner of Peaslee-Gaulbert Corporation, one of the largest paint manufacturers in the country and the inventor of ready-mix paint. Peaslee died in 1905 at age 61. His obituary noted that he retired from business at age 49 and then “traveled abroad extensively with his family.”

“That notation is consistent with the family’s oral history that Mr. Peaslee took his wife and three daughters (including my grandmother) on a grand tour of Europe,” Farnsley says. “We still have significant



Portrait of George Douglass. Doug Farnsley, 2023.



Peaslee family scarf. Douglas Farnsley, 2023.

souvenirs from their travels, including a framed scarf, opera glasses, and a necklace and earrings.”

Charles Farnsley, former mayor

Doug Farnsley’s father, Charles Farnsley, served in the Kentucky legislature in the late 1930s and in the U.S. House of Representatives in the mid 1960s. He played a role in creating the Louisville Fund for the Arts and in promoting racial justice. But he may be best known for his accomplishments as mayor of Louisville from 1948 to 1953.

“Dad was a great salesman for his ideas,” Farnsley recalls. “When he became mayor in 1948, the city was in dire financial straits—our streets were in disrepair and the city’s streetlights would be turned off because the city could not pay the electric bill.”

To address these and other challenges, Mayor Farnsley proposed that Louisville adopt an occupational tax, a tax on all income earned within the city. The Board of Aldermen agreed, and the city began to collect the taxes. To gain support for the tax and to let everyone know how he was using the collected funds, Mayor Farnsley called the press together.

“He told the reporters that he planned to pave a mile of streets a day for the next 100 days,” Farnsley says. “He added with a smile, ‘I know it’s 100 days until the election, but that’s just a coincidence.’”

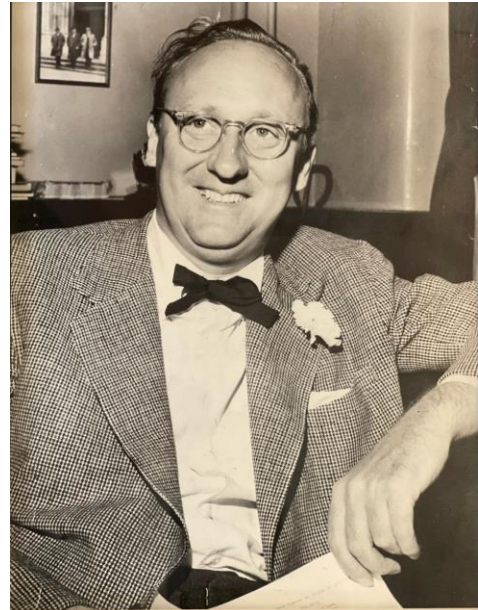
In addition to paving the streets, the city used the new revenues to support Louisville’s parks and libraries. Support for the library included the creation of public radio stations WFPK and WFPL.

“Today, 75 years after the creation of the tax, more than 50 percent of Louisville’s revenues come from the occupational tax,” Farnsley says. “Because of the tax the city remains on a sound financial footing.”

Ann Farnsley, creator of “spacescapes”



Ann Farnsley. Doug Farnsley, 2023.



Mayor Charles Farnsley. Doug Farnsley, 2023.

Doug Farnsley’s older sister, Ann, is buried in the Farnsley lot at Cave Hill. Ann, who died in October 2021 at age 80, was an accomplished professional artist. From 1970 until her death, she lived in Vevay, Indiana, a lovely and historic Ohio River town. Ann’s work included portraits, landscapes, abstracts, and fantasy paintings she described as

“spacescapes.” These whimsical, childlike representations of people and animals were intended to entertain and bring happiness to the viewer.

“Following Ann’s death, we organized an exhibition of her work that was hung in Vevay and then in New Albany,” Farnsley says. “John Begley curated the exhibition and created a terrific catalog that tells the story of Ann’s life and of her art.”

One of Ann’s close friends was the Louisville-based artist and graphic designer Julius Friedman. She painted a portrait of Friedman, which hangs in a reading room of the Filson Historical Society. Another of her paintings is in the collection of the Hite Institute of Art at the University of Louisville. Many of her paintings are owned by private collectors.

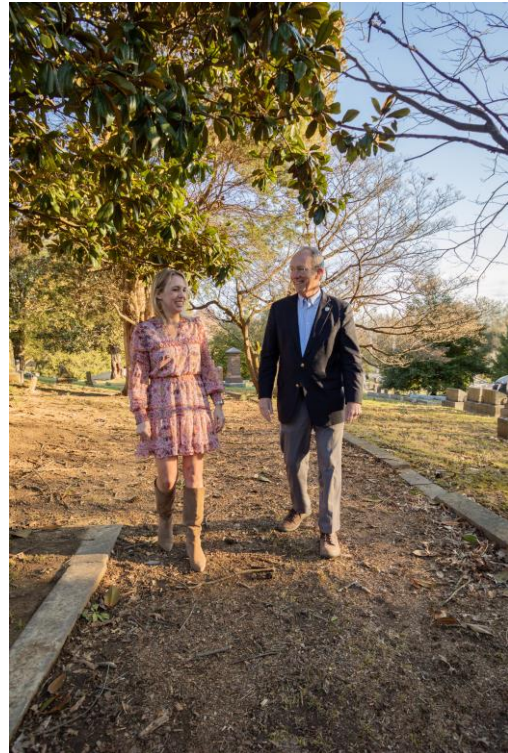
Honoring the dead and the living

Doug Farnsley’s earliest memory of Cave Hill dates to 1954 or 1955, when his mother, Nancy Farnsley, took him there for a visit when he was 4 or 5 years old. He remembers that the fence around the Douglass family lot was covered with honeysuckle. His mother pointed to something on the ground. He looked and saw a bird’s nest with eggs in it nestling in a protected spot between the fence and honeysuckle vine.

Farnsley recalled that first visit when he took his 10-year-old granddaughter, Wynn Evans, to Cave Hill one fall Saturday seven years ago. They visited the lot near the Grinstead Drive entrance where his maternal grandmother, Nancy Carter, is buried. Farnsley’s grandfather, Ellerbe Carter, bought the lot, with space for eight graves, in 1941 after his wife died unexpectedly when she was only 50 years old.

Farnsley showed Wynn the cenotaph (a monument to someone buried elsewhere) in memory of her great-grandfather. He explained that Ellerbe Carter had remarried and moved to Titusville, Florida, and that he is buried there. The cenotaph notes that Ellerbe was a brigadier general and includes his full name, Ellerbe Winn Carter. Farnsley explained to his granddaughter that her parents had chosen a family name for her, but they changed the “i” in Winn to a “y,” which they believed was more feminine.

“When Wynn saw the cenotaph, she was pleased to see that her great-grandfather’s middle name was the same as her name, and she reached over to place her hand on her name,” Farnsley recalls. “That moment and small gesture became an especially important and dear memory for me.”



Doug Farnsley and daughter, Julie Farnsley Evans. Kayla Wessling, 2023.

Farnsley treasures such memories and hopes to pass them on to succeeding generations. “For me,” he says, “Cave Hill is a place to honor the memories of our family members and friends and to be reminded that we are all mortal.”

Because Cave Hill Cemetery is so important to the city of Louisville as well as to his own family legacy, Doug Farnsley says he is glad to donate regularly to the Cave Hill Heritage Foundation. He donates to make sure the cemetery, with its stately monuments and lush arboretum, continues to be available for others to enjoy for many years to come.

The Art of Ann Farnsley



Untitled Works of Ann Farnsley. Doug Farnsley family collection, 2023.

