



METROPOLITAN
HISTORICAL
COMMISSION

To: Metropolitan Council
From: Metropolitan Historical Commission, Staff
Date: March 27, 2018
Re: BL2018-1113

An ordinance to amend the Geographic Information Systems Street and Alley Centerline Layer for the Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County, by changing the name of a portion of Charlotte Avenue to “Dr M L King Jr Boulevard.” (Proposal Number 2018M-001SR-001).

The subject portion of Charlotte Avenue, which runs from Third Avenue North to I-40/George L. Davis Boulevard, was named Cedar Street until 1941 (4th Avenue North to 20th Avenue North) and 1956 (3rd Avenue North to 4th Avenue North). To understand the history of the name “Charlotte Avenue,” it is important to review the history of this roadway through Nashville and Davidson County and its names at various times and locations, including Cedar Street, Charlotte Avenue, and the Nashville-Charlotte Turnpike or Charlotte Road. While this report does not contain a complete mile-by-mile history of the road and does not address the history of all modes of transportation along the thoroughfare (i.e., streetcars), it should provide enough background on the history of the road’s names for Council Members to make an informed decision about the proposed renaming.

Cedar Street was one of the earliest roads in Nashville and appears on the “Plan of Nashville, as the town was originally laid out by Thomas Molloy (1789)” (Fig. 1).¹ Thomas Molloy (for whom Molloy Street is named) is credited with completing the first survey of the town in 1784. Reportedly, the original copy of the survey was lost, and Molloy completed another survey in 1789 for Hon. John Overton. On this map, Cedar Street runs from the Public Square, also known as College Street and later Third Avenue, to half a block past Spruce Street, later known as Eighth Avenue. Another map, “Nashville in 1804,” drawn in 1858 by William A. Eichbaum from the recollections of Mrs. Harriet Temple, the daughter of Duncan Robertson, shows Cedar Street running past a “Cedar Knob,” which explains the background of the name “Cedar” for the road.² Outside of town, Cedar Street continued into the Charlotte Road, the main road leading from Nashville to the town of Charlotte, Tennessee, which generally followed the Chickasaw Trace.³ It is commonly said that General James Robertson founded the town of Charlotte and

¹ “Plan of Nashville, as the town was originally laid out by Thomas Molloy (1789),” Tennessee State Library and Archives <<http://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p15138coll23/id/9013>> Accessed 22 March 2018.

² “Nashville in 1804,” Tennessee State Library and Archives <<http://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p15138coll23/id/9432>> Accessed 22 March 2018.

³ Sarah Foster Kelley, *West Nashville...Its people and environs* (Nashville: S.F. Kelley, 1987), 25.

named it for his wife, Charlotte Reeves Robertson. Also commonly reported, Robertson and his slaves cut the road from Nashville to Charlotte in 1804.⁴



Figure 1: Plan of Nashville, as the town was originally laid out by Thomas Molloy (1789). Cedar Street circled in red.

According to historian Sarah Foster Kelley, after a tornado devastated the town of Charlotte and nearly destroyed Charlotte Road in 1830, plans were set in motion to charter a turnpike company to re-establish and maintain the thoroughfare. As part of a stagecoach route running from Nashville through Charlotte to Memphis, the road between the two towns appeared as an “important road” on the “1832 Map of the State of Tennessee, Taken from Survey, by Matthew Rhea (Columbia, TN).”⁵ The Nashville-Charlotte Turnpike was chartered in 1838.⁶ Often shortened to “Charlotte Turnpike” or referred to simply as “Charlotte Road,” the turnpike commenced near Nashville’s western corporation limits. The map titled “Nashville in 1854” from A. W. Putnam’s *History of Middle Tennessee* shows the transition from Cedar Street to the Charlotte Turnpike occurring around McLemore Street (later, Ninth Avenue, now YMCA Way).⁷ After the Civil War, railroad lines running through southern Dickson County shifted growth away from Charlotte toward the town of Dickson, and the use of the Nashville-Charlotte Turnpike began to diminish. “Before the construction of the railroads it was an important road, as it was the main road leading toward Memphis.”⁸ By 1901, the “Free Turnpikes” movement was well underway in Davidson County, and the County Court began acquiring turnpikes with

⁴ Kelley, 41, cites *DAR Minute Book*, James Robertson Chapter of DAR, page 215, read by Mrs. Watkins Crockett, Regent. Robertson made inroads into the Western Highland Rim when he put the first iron furnace to blast at Cumberland Furnace in 1796, per George E. Jackson, “Cumberland Furnace,” *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* <<http://tennesseencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=337>> Accessed 22 March 2018.

⁵ “1832 Map of the State of Tennessee, Taken from Survey, by Matthew Rhea (Columbia, TN),” Metropolitan Planning Department, digital collection.

⁶ Kelley, 42, “Directors were elected on March 17, 1838 to serve for one year...with William Watkins as president.”

⁷ “Nashville in 1854,” Metropolitan Planning Department, digital collection. Also available as an insert in Putnam’s *History of Middle Tennessee* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1971).

⁸ “Turnpike History,” *The Nashville American*, Monday, 14 October 1901, Page 7.

plans to open them as free, public thoroughfares. In October 1901, the Turnpike Committee of the Davidson County Court valued the Charlotte Turnpike property at \$8,000.⁹ By December 1901, the County Court had purchased the Charlotte Turnpike for the same amount. The county continued to operate the Charlotte Turnpike and other purchased roads “at the regular rates of toll” with grand plans to “throw all of the gates open on Jan. 1.”¹⁰ On Wednesday morning, January 1, 1902, *The Nashville American* announced “Turnpikes of the county will be open to the public today.”¹¹

As Davidson County faced the transition to open public thoroughfares, the City of Nashville faced the ongoing struggle of duplicate and mismatched street names. The issue was particularly challenging each time the City of Nashville annexed new territories from Davidson County into the city government. The Cedar Street to Charlotte Turnpike road was no exception. As a major thoroughfare through the western part of the city and county, the road was located within or adjacent to some of the most significant annexations to the city, from 1830 to 1952, including the annexation of West Nashville.

An early effort to establish consistency along this road occurred in 1910. Councilman J. W. Scott introduced a bill in the City Council on July 14, 1910, with the intention of correcting confusion about the name.¹² According to the local paper, “The street was formerly Charlotte pike and with no official title by which to designate it now, there has been considerable confusion as to names since this part has been included within the city limits by the corporation extension.”¹³ On August 26, 1910, Mayor Hilary E. Howse approved Ordinance No. 83, changing the name of “Cedar Street,” commencing at the west side of 20th Avenue and extending to the corporation line, to “Charlotte Avenue.”¹⁴ At that time, following substantial annexations, including the town of West Nashville in September 1906, the corporation line was located near Richland Avenue, known today as 54th Avenue North.¹⁵ Comparison of the street name listings of City Directories from 1908, 1910, and 1911 further explain the name change (Figure 2).¹⁶

In **1908**, CEDAR STREET ran from 401 Public Square West to the *city limit* around 19th/20th Avenues North. CHARLOTTE ROAD was simply the *continuation of Cedar* west.

By **1910**, CEDAR STREET ran from 401 Public Square West to *32nd Avenue North*. CHARLOTTE AVENUE was the *continuation of Cedar from 32nd Avenue North west to Morrow Road*. Beyond the 5400 block of Charlotte Avenue, CHARLOTTE ROAD was the *continuation of Charlotte Avenue*.

⁹ “Ho, for Free Roads,” *The Nashville American*, Tuesday, 8 October 1901, Page 10. The turnpike company had valued its property at \$10,000, see “Free Turnpike Being Considered,” *The Nashville American*, Monday, 27 May 1901, Page 5.

¹⁰ Tollgates Will Go,” *The Nashville American*, Sunday, 29 December 1901, Page 15.

¹¹ “Local News,” *The Nashville American*, Wednesday Morning, 1 January 1901, Page 1.

¹² City Council Minute Book 12, Page 589.

¹³ “New Name for Cedar Street,” *The Nashville Tennessean*, Tuesday Morning, 28 June 1910, Page 1.

¹⁴ Ordinances of the Common Council, 2/8/1906 to 10/13/1913, Page 402.

¹⁵ Territorial growth map, Metropolitan Planning Department, digital collections.

¹⁶ Major changes, like street renamings, often appear in the city directory published the following year. When not stated outright, the author determined road termini using intersections and street numbers.

In 1911, CEDAR STREET ran from 401 Public Square West to 20th Avenue North. CHARLOTTE AVENUE was the continuation of Cedar from 20th Avenue North to Morrow Road.

In other words, the City of Nashville started using “Charlotte,” the name used outside of the city limits, once it acquired large areas through which the road traversed. After 1910, the use of “Road” or “Pike” versus “Avenue” distinguished between county and city roads, respectively.

YEAR	Public Square To 20 th Ave N	To 32 nd Ave N	To Morrow/Richland/54 th Ave N	Beyond
1908	Cedar Street	Charlotte Road		
1909			Charlotte Avenue	
1910				
1911				
1941				
1942				
1955				
1957				Charlotte Pike

Figure 2: City Directory street listings according to year and terminus.

Despite these renaming efforts, in December 1913 confusion about the road’s name apparently still remained, as evidenced by F.J. Vaughn’s letter to the Real Estate Editor, *Tennessean and American*:

Dear Sir—I am a resident of Cedar street, and am of the opinion that it would be in the line of progress and regularity if the city authorities would change of [sic] name of Cedar street to Charlotte avenue.

This would make Charlotte avenue commence at the Public Square, instead of nobody knows where.

Any street with one name at one end and another name at the other end is necessarily confusing, and I do not think any one can say on any good authority where Cedar street ends and Charlotte avenue commences.¹⁷

The challenge of duplicate and mismatched street names continued into the late 1930s. Council Member Harry Hite took up the cause of street uniformity as chairman of the council’s special committee on street names. By 1941, the city and county governments joined together in a concerted effort to eliminate duplicate names of Nashville streets and create a uniform numbering system. The Board of Governors of the Nashville Chamber of Commerce supported this effort, selecting the need for permanent and suitable street name signage and the correction of duplicate street names as one of its activities for 1941.¹⁸ In January 1941, a joint committee of the City Council and the County Court met with City-County Planning and Zoning Engineer

¹⁷ “Change Name of Cedar Street,” *Nashville Tennessean and The Nashville American*, Sunday Morning, 14 December 1913, Page 3 (Real Estate and Classified Section).

¹⁸ “National Defense is Selected Major 1941 C. of C. Activity,” *The Nashville Tennessean*, Tuesday Morning, 14 January 1941, Page 3.

Charles W. Hawkins and instructed him to “prepare a map and list of all streets having duplicate names and of those which have more than one name.” The City Council would address the affected city streets while the Davidson County Quarterly Court addressed the county streets.¹⁹ By June, the City Council began to make serious movement forward with the project. An early attempt, an action to adjust 258 street names to avoid duplication, was introduced but deferred mid-June.²⁰ Later that month, *The Nashville Tennessean* reported that the City Planning and Zoning Commission, under the direction of Hawkins, had prepared a plan for renaming. Council members were reviewing the proposed changes in the respective wards, and a draft of the name change bill was expected by July 15, 1941.

“Hawkins said that the county was cooperating with the city in the movement to smooth out names of streets, since there are 47 duplications in names of city and county thoroughfares.

Along with changes in these 47 cases, the commission’s plan calls for 121 ‘continuation’ adjustments – that is, to apply one name instead of two or several throughout the length of, for what is to all practical purposes, one street even though this street may have slight offsets at intervals- 70 adjustments in cases of duplications of similarities, and 20 changes for some other reason.”

The proposal included the renaming of Cedar Street to Charlotte Avenue in Wards 3 – 7 and 9.²¹ At the time, per the 1939-1941 city directories, Cedar Street ran from the Public Square west to 20th Avenue North, while Charlotte Avenue was the continuation of Cedar from 20th Avenue North west to the city limits near Richland Creek (around the 5400 block), and Charlotte Road was the continuation of Charlotte Avenue from Richland Avenue West (Figure 2).

On Tuesday, October 14, 1941, Mayor Thomas L. Cummings approved [Substitute] Bill No. 1526, which “established an official street name map of the City of Nashville showing its streets and their names, locations and termini.” Additionally, “Be it further enacted, that where the names, locations or termini of the various streets as they now exist have been changed by said map, the same shall be as now shown by it, and attached hereto is a list of specific changes in street names being made by said map.”²² Bill No. 1526, which eliminated “about 50 duplications

¹⁹ “Street Naming, Plan to End Duplication to be Prepared for Council,” *The Nashville Tennessean*, Wednesday Morning, 29 January 1941, Page 16. At that time, there were about 400 street naming duplications, “City Parks Get Previous Fund,” *The Nashville Tennessean*, Wednesday Morning, 22 January 1941, Pages 1-2.

²⁰ “City Agrees to Maintain New Airport Building for 20 Years,” *The Nashville Tennessean*, Wednesday Morning, 18 June 1941, Page 2.

²¹ “Street Name Bill Drafted – 250 Changes in Act to be Given Council Probably July 15,” *The Nashville Tennessean*, Sunday Morning, 29 June 1941, Page 50.

²² Ordinance Book 5, Page 497. “Read in full and passed first reading by the unanimous vote of the Council,” Bill No. 1526, “To make an official map of the City of Nashville, its streets and alleys, and their names,” was introduced and presented for first reading on Tuesday, August 5, 1941 (Book 25, Page 323). It was presented for second reading on Wednesday, August 20 and again on Tuesday, September 2, 1941. On both occasions “upon motion duly seconded action on this Bill was deferred.” The record does not speak to the deferral, but “and alleys” was removed between the final second reading and third (Book 25, Pages 332 and 336). On September 16, 1941, upon the third occasion of the second reading of Bill No. 1526, Council Member Harry Hite “moved to be permitted to introduce a substitute bill, which moved being duly seconded was adopted.” Then, Substitute Bill No. 1526 passed second

in street names throughout the city,” changed the names of “135 streets or sections of streets.”²³ Said Councilman Hite, “I have been working for two years on these changes.”²⁴ Among the changes was the name of Cedar Street, from downtown to 20th Avenue North, to Charlotte Avenue. Although the Council minutes do not list each and every name change, the Master Index to Council Minutes notes the Cedar Street renaming.

Within weeks of the passage of the bill, council members were already introducing changes to the new list, including 13 changes submitted in December 1941. ““It looks like all these name changes will put us right back where we were when we tried to eliminate duplicate names,” Councilman J. S. Allen said.”²⁵ By May 1942, despite the City Council returning 16 streets back to their previous names, nine street name duplications still remained in the city. Examples of these duplications included Morena Street and Marina Street, Hart Avenue and Hart Street, and two Douglas Avenues.²⁶ Among the several amendments to Bill No. 1526 was Bill No. 1600, which Mayor Thomas L. Cummings approved on August 21, 1942 to address one particular block of Cedar Street:

BE IT ENACTED BY THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL OF NASHVILLE:

SECTION 1. That Ordinance No. 1526, approved October 7, 1941, be, and the same is hereby amended so as to make changes in street names, as follows:

...

(4) By striking from page one of said ordinance the words and figures “3rd Avenue No.” after the words “Charlotte Avenue” and before the words and figures “20th Avenue No.” and inserting in lieu thereof the words and figures “4th Avenue No.”

SECTION 2. Be it further enacted, that the official street name map of the City of Nashville, which is a part of said Ordinance No. 1526, be changed in accordance with the provisions of the above Section, with a notation of the number and date of passage of this amendatory ordinance.²⁷

At that time, as the 1942 City Directory street listings explain, Cedar Street ran from 400 West Public Square west to 4th Avenue North, Charlotte Avenue ran from 405 4th Avenue North to the city limits, and Charlotte Road was the continuation of Charlotte Avenue from Richland Creek. The historical record is not clear on the reasoning behind what appears to be an un-renaming.

By 1956, urban renewal and the construction of James Robertson Parkway was well underway. On October 18, 1956, Mayor Ben West approved Bill No. 56-126 to amend Council Bill No. 1526, establishing an official street name map of the City of Nashville to include the renaming of

reading on Tuesday, September 16, 1941 (Book 25, Page 340). The bill passed third reading with 24 “ayes”, zero “noes,” and one abstention on Tuesday, October 7, 1941 (Book 25, page 345).

²³ “Much of City Liquor Taxes Wasted, Council is Told by Lechleiter,” *The Nashville Tennessean*, Wednesday Morning, 8 October 1941, Pages 1-2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Nat Caldwell, “Council Invites Smoke Survey, Votes Repeal of Bonds 1st Reading,” *The Nashville Tennessean*, Wednesday Morning, 17 December 1941, Page 2.

²⁶ “Nine Street Name Duplications Remain in City, Hawkins Says,” *The Nashville Tennessean*, Friday, 8 May 1942, Page 42.

²⁷ Ordinance Book 6, Pages 110-111. Bill introduced June 16, 1942 – passed third reading July 21, 1942.

the remaining portion of Cedar Street, “extending from Third Avenue, North, and Fourth Avenue, North,” to Charlotte Avenue.²⁸ Again, for comparison: the 1955 City Directory street listings show Cedar Street from 400 Public Square West to 4th Avenue North, Charlotte Avenue from 405 4th Avenue North west (to about White Bridge Road), and Charlotte Road as a continuation of Charlotte Avenue from Richland Creek; the 1957 City Directory street listings, after the 1956 name change, show Cedar Street as “Changed to Charlotte Avenue,” Charlotte Avenue from 400 Public Square west (to about White Bridge Road), and Charlotte Pike from the city limits west (the last address given is 6817) (Figure 2). Although the historical record does not offer an explanation, it is possible that the name change was related to the construction of James Robertson Parkway.

In summary, the Charlotte Road or Charlotte Turnpike was named for Charlotte Reeves Robertson, wife of James Robertson and one of the earliest settlers of European descent to live in Middle Tennessee. Charlotte Robertson lived in Middle Tennessee until her death in 1843; she is buried in the Nashville City Cemetery.²⁹ Cedar Street was one of the first streets surveyed in the town of Nashville. The City of Nashville began renaming portions of “Cedar Street” to “Charlotte Avenue” as early as 1910 to provide continuity with the Charlotte road name. The city changed the name of the subject portion of Cedar Street to Charlotte Avenue in 1941, with the exception of one block which changed in 1956.

²⁸ Office of the Metropolitan Clerk.

²⁹ Carole Stanford Bucy, “Charlotte Reeves Robertson,” *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* <<http://tennesseencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=1135>> Accessed 22 March 2018.