

Information for this article came from "Green Trees" by Shirlye Runnels Chaney. The book, which debuted last September, is an official history of La Vergne.

By Angie Mayes

Just because La Vergne celebrated its 25th anniversary last year doesn't mean it's a new town.

The history of the city goes back to the 1700's when the ancestors of some of La Vergne's current residents settled in the area to begin their new life. The Buchanan, Mason, Hall, Waldron, Blair, Moore, Montgomery, Mullins, Johns and other families settled into rural life south of Nashville and created a longstanding family line which still exists.

When Tennessee achieved statehood in 1796, Rutherford County was quick to follow in establishing a government in 1803, holding their first court in 1804.

The man considered to be the "father of La Vergne," Francois Leonard Gregorie de Roulhac de lavergne, was born in Limoges France in 1767. He left for the West Indies in 1787 but returning to France in 1792 when an insurrection arose in the West Indies.

When a revolution began in France, Roulhac said that since he was a royalist, if he was to fight, he'd do it in the West Indies. He boarded ship, heading back to the islands, but was detoured when the ship was captured and sent to America.

Roulhac went to visit his brother in Norfolk, Va., where he was encouraged to study a profession. He first took up law and passed the bar, only to decide that law was not for him.

Medicine became his life's work and after marrying Margaret Gray in 1804, he had a successful practice in Florida. His wife's sister had been married to a man from Tennessee. After the Tennessean's death, Roulhac and his wife followed her sister to Tennessee to claim 100 acres of land left to her by her father-in-law.

When Roulhac came to America, he dropped the "de lavergne" from his name. "De lavergne" was a family name which probably noted Auvergne, the area from which the family came in France.

In Tennessee, Roulhac lived on the land, often turning his cattle onto what he reportedly termed as "la vergne." Many historians have translated that to mean "the green" -- as in green pasture -- and say that's how the town got its name.

Others however, say that the town was named La Vergne because of Roulhac's family name. Yet others say that it was named after the "vergne" tree in France.

In 1987, the name was officially changed from one word to two

However the name came to be, the United States Post Office officially gave the city its name the same day that Roulhac died in 1852. As a point of interest, the Roulhac home was where Bridgestone is located now.

La Vergne was the scene of a major battle in late 1862. In fact, both the Union and the Confederacy held La Vergne at one point or another during the war and one of its most famous homes, Cherry Shade (the 'hub' of La Vergne, built by the Roulhac's daughter Margaret and her husband John Hill) was used as a hospital during the war. When the home burned in 1971, blood stains from soldiers were still evident on tile outside the home.

La Vergne was burned during the war; so badly, in fact, that a postman noted that as he arrived on Mt. View (along where Starwood is located now) the entire town appeared to be in flames.

In 1960, when the Waldrons were building a new subdivision along Rock Springs Road, they found shells from the war, still unexploded.

La Vergne was also the home of Kate Kyle, one of the more famous confederate spies during the Civil War. Kyle, daughter of a physician, could easily slide between the lines, gathering the information she needed to take to the other side while transporting medicine and supplies to the troops. She also helped capture a union spy in the area who was posing as a cattle buyer.

La Vergne was first incorporated Feb. 28, 1861. In 1881, with the city trying to recover from the burning and the economy bleak, those outside the city limits came to the resident's assistance. They appealed to the Tennessee General Assembly to repeal the 1860 act to incorporate La Vergne. The petition stated that no city officials had been elected since the first election and there wasn't enough adults to let the town organize a board of Mayor and alderman and town constitution.

"Since that time the town has never been rebuilt, having been destroyed almost entirely during the late war and now only contains a few dwelling houses, some saloons, there being perhaps a dozen voters in town," the petition stated.

The incorporation was rescinded March, 10, 1881.