

Don Groff—

Pines Screen Shadow Of What Might Be

There's a stand of about 70 loblolly pines in the yard at 1856 Autumn, waiting for a highway that may never come.

Dr. and Mrs. Luther Burkett planted them seven years ago, not long after they and their three children moved into the house along Overton Park's west edge.

When they bought the house the couple knew there were plans to complete Interstate 40 through the park. And those plans included elevating McLean, which runs to the west of their property, over the new stretch of highway.

The pines were to serve as a buffer against the traffic noise, Mrs. Burkett

said. The trees, only inches high when planted as seedlings, stand about 20 feet.

Mrs. Burkett said the fast-growing species, used in tree propagation projects in Mississippi, grew with little help from the family. In fact, she said, the trees are crowded despite some earlier thinning.

The pine grove is surrounded by a fence, part of which faces removal if the road project ever does get underway, for it lies along a slope easement which would be used in providing access to McLean.

"We put it up knowing we'd have to take it down if the highway came through," said Mrs. Burkett.

She said she did not attend recent meetings in Memphis between Department of Transportation officials and proponents and opponents of the longtime proposal to run the interstate through the park.

"I don't ever have anything to say about it because we moved here knowing it would be at our back door," she said.

But, she concedes, she's not disappointed that the highway hasn't gone through. "I just keep hoping it won't come."

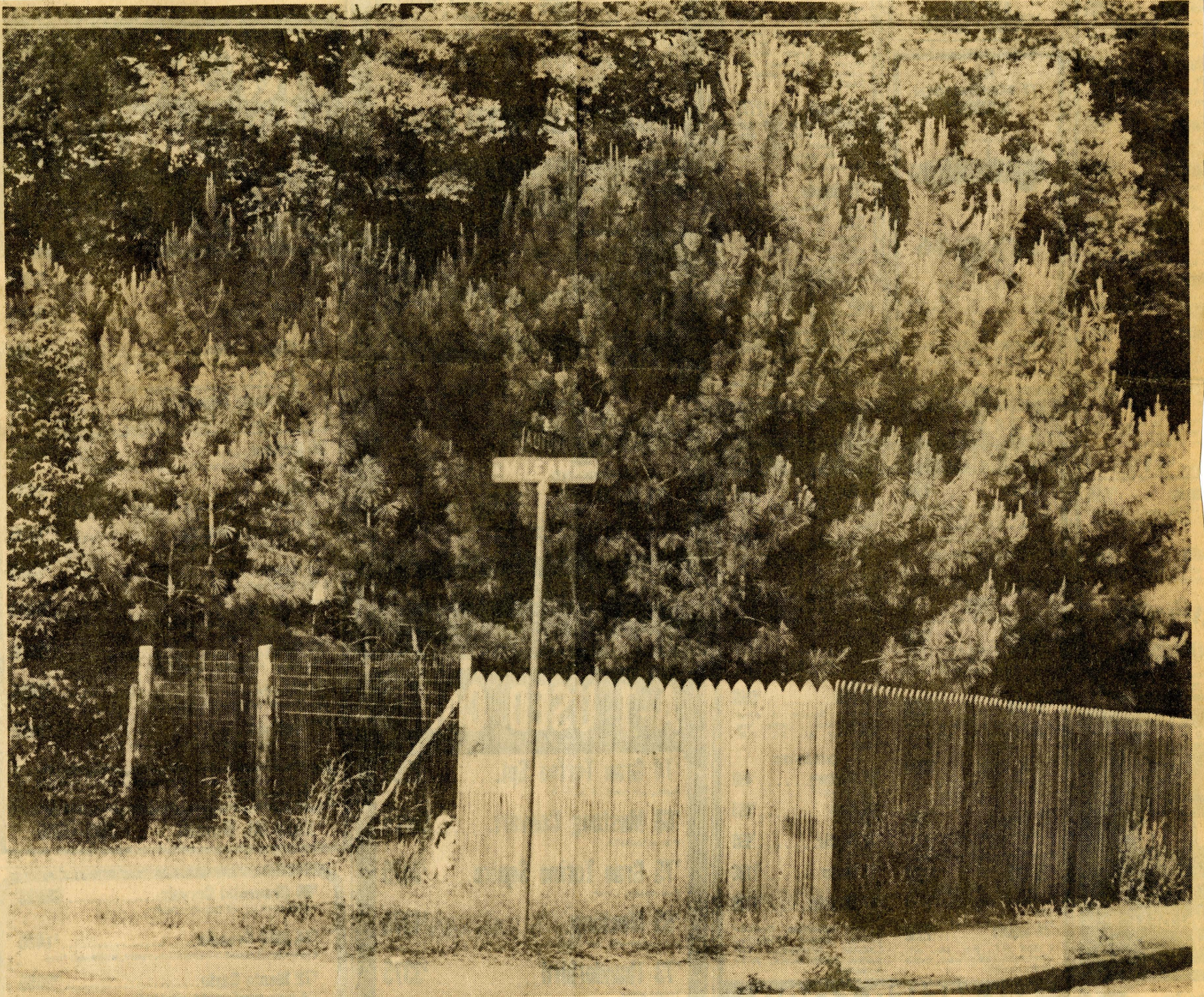
One reason the Burketts bought the home was that the prospect of the highway had depressed the property's sale price. In addition, the midtown location is

convenient to Memphis Veterans Hospital where Burkett works.

But now there's talk of running the highway through a tunnel, Mrs. Burkett said, and there's always the chance that the proposal will be scrapped.

"If it doesn't go through they say there will be lawsuits over it," she said.

But in the meantime the pines will continue to shade the two canine occupants of the fenced-in "dog yard," as the Burketts call it. And if the highway proposal is discarded, the pines will offer a pleasant reminder of the controversy that preceded the decision.



They Were Planted To Screen Traffic Noises That Never Came