



METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENT OF NASHVILLE AND DAVIDSON COUNTY

Metropolitan Historical Commission
Metropolitan Historic Zoning Commission
Sunnyside in Sevier Park
3000 Granny White Pike
Nashville, Tennessee 37204
Telephone: (615) 862-7970

To: Metropolitan Council
From: Metropolitan Historical Commission, Staff
Date: January 30, 2023
Re: BL2023-1649

An ordinance to amend the Geographic Information Systems Street and Alley Centerline Layer for the Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County, by renaming Lifeway Plaza, between Rev Kelly M Smith Way and the 12th Avenue North/14th Avenue North intersection to “Josephine Holloway Avenue.” (Proposal Number 2022M-004SR-001).

The street currently known as “Lifeway Plaza” was called “Jo Johnston Avenue” from late 1900 until early 2017, when it was renamed by BL2016-532.ⁱ The name change to Lifeway Plaza reflected the relocation of Lifeway Christian Resources to this area from another location in downtown Nashville.ⁱⁱ On January 23, 2017, Metropolitan Historical Commission staff submitted a report to the Metropolitan Council regarding the history of the Jo Johnston Avenue and Line Street names. The following is an abbreviated version of that original report:

Line Street

Before it was called “Jo Johnston Avenue,” the subject street was known as “Line Street.” As one of Nashville’s original streets, Line Street served as an early marker of the northern corporation limits of the town of Nashville, as shown on Thomas Molloy’s map of 1784, and ran east-west from College Street (Third Avenue North) to Spruce Street (Rosa L. Parks Blvd.) (Figure 1). By 1854, the western end of Line Street reached McLemore Street (Ninth Avenue North). Around this intersection with McLemore Street, the western segment of the street was called Watkins Avenue (not to be confused with the north-south running *Watkins Street*), continuing past the corporation limits and running west to its intersection with Bostick Avenue.ⁱⁱⁱ

By 1877, the entire street, including the Watkins segment, was known as Line Street.^{iv} The western terminus continued to move farther westward block by block as increasing development led to the construction of new north-south running streets. By 1879, Line Street ran from North College Street (Third Avenue North) west to around today’s 20th Avenue North, as shown on the 1879 *Map of the City of Nashville and Vicinity* published by the Nashville Board of Health

(Figure 2). A 1913 map shows the western terminus decisively at the intersection with 21st Avenue North.^v

The City of Nashville changed the name from Line Street to Jo Johnston Avenue in late 1900. Councilman Chris Power presented the bill proposing to change the name of Line Street to the City Council on September 13, 1900 (Minutes of City Council, Book 10, Pages 316-317). After adjourned meetings on September 27 and October 2 (no quorum present), Bill No. 93 passed first reading (Book 10, Page 333). The bill passed second reading on October 11, 1900 (Book 10, Page 337), and the City Council approved the change at final reading on October 25, 1900 (Book 10, Page 346). Mayor James Marshall Head did not approve it until November 9, 1900.^{vi}

Jo Johnston Avenue

According to historians Ridley Wills II and William Waller, as well as newspaper accounts, a segment of Line Street located north of the State Capitol in “Hell’s Half Acre” was particularly notorious as the center of the red-light district. Residents living along the western end of Line Street near the Watkins Park neighborhood had to pass through the “infected district” when travelling to or from town on the streetcar or had to take circuitous routes in order to avoid the area altogether.^{vii} After holding a public meeting to draft a set of resolutions urging city authorities to remove the houses of ill-repute from Line Street, concerned citizens eventually petitioned to change the name of the street “in an effort to distance Line Street from its infamous past and change local perception of the area.”^{viii} The namesake for the new street name is believed to be Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston (February 3, 1807 – March 21, 1891), “a dubious compliment to Little Joe, the Confederate general,” according to William Waller.^{ix} Although official documentation, such as legislative records, specifically declaring this intention has not been found, the first public meeting regarding the reform measures was held at the Joe Johnston Lodge No. 83, Knights of Pythias Hall, which met in a drug store on Line Street, coincidentally.^x Additionally, several letters to the editor published in the years that followed imply that Joseph E. Johnston was the understood namesake for the street.

1904 – “Changing Street Names,” To the Editor of The American, from T.T.W.: “Old Line street is now Jo Johnston avenue. I have always felt like blushing when the name of so distinguished a man and soldier as was Gen. Johnston is applied and associated with such an inferior section of the city.”^{xi}

1904 – “Opposes Changes in Street Names,” To the Editor of The American, from An Old Fogy: “It was a shame to change Line street’s original name; that meant something – the original line of the city. It is not nor ever will be any compliment to Gen. Johnston to call Line street after him. Yet Line was all right. Everybody regrets that change; let’s not make any more.”^{xii}

Joseph E. Johnston was a career U.S. Army officer, serving with distinction in the Mexican War (1846-1848). He was the highest-ranking U.S. Army officer to resign his commission at the start of the Civil War and helped lead Confederates to victory at the First Battle of Manassas in July 1861. Confederate President Jefferson Davis appointed Johnston commander of the Army of Tennessee in November 1863 and again in February 1865. General Johnston surrendered his army to Union Major General William T. Sherman on April 26, 1865, under the same terms

Union Lt. General Ulysses S. Grant gave Confederate General Robert E. Lee at the April 9 surrender in Appomattox, effectively ending the war for almost 90,000 soldiers in the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida. After the war, Johnston represented Virginia's 3rd district in the U.S. House of Representatives (1879-1881) and as a U.S. railroad commissioner under President Grover Cleveland (1885-1889).^{xiii}

Current Conditions

The segment of Lifeway Plaza currently under consideration for renaming has experienced significant changes through urban renewal, including the creation of James Robertson Parkway and the building of Interstate 40/65. Prior to these changes, "Jo Johnston Avenue" ran continuously, without a break, from downtown (Figures 3-5).^{xiv}

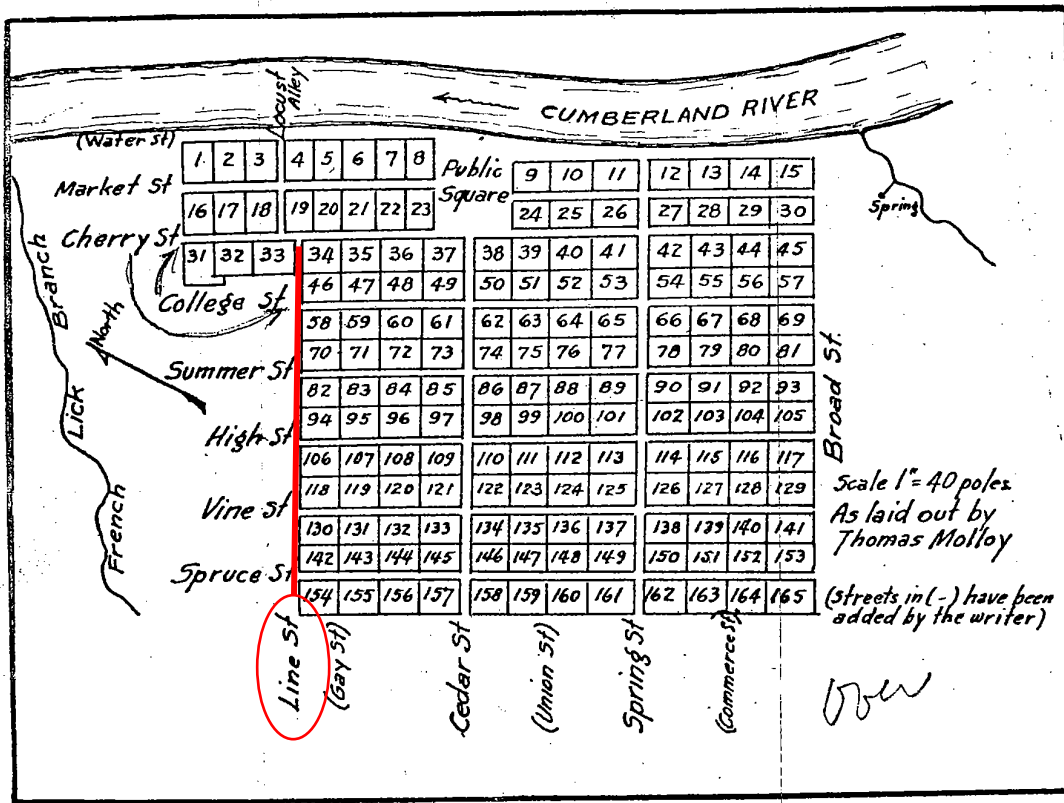


Figure 1: Thomas Molloy's Map of 1784, reproduced and printed in *The Tennessean*, January 20, 1952. Line Street in red.

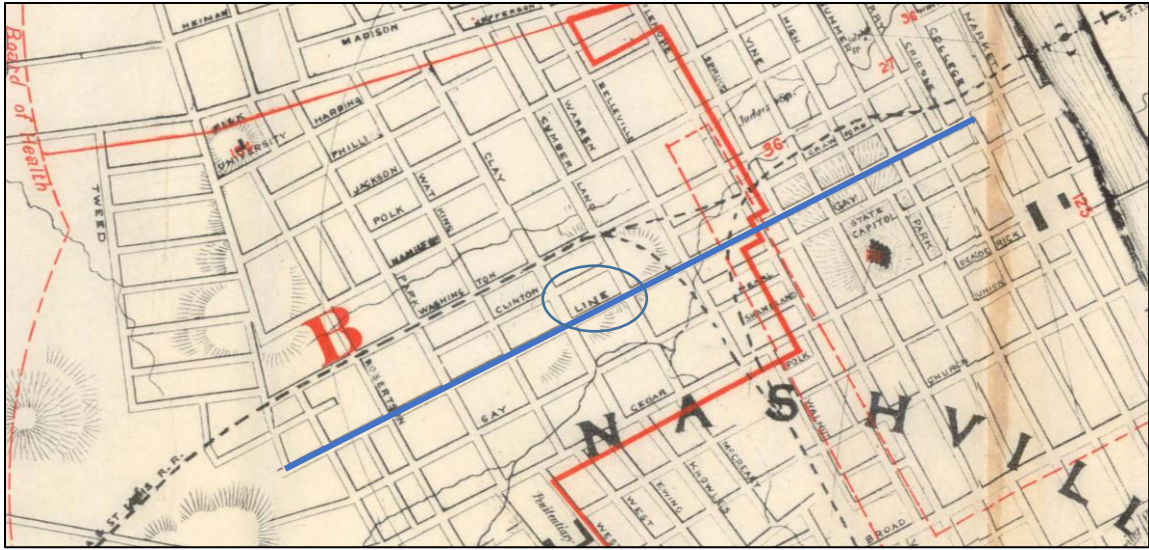


Figure 2: Map of the City of Nashville and Vicinity, Published by the Nashville Board of Health, 1879. Line Street marked in blue.



Figure 3: Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1951. Vol. 1, Site map. Jo Johnston Avenue in red.

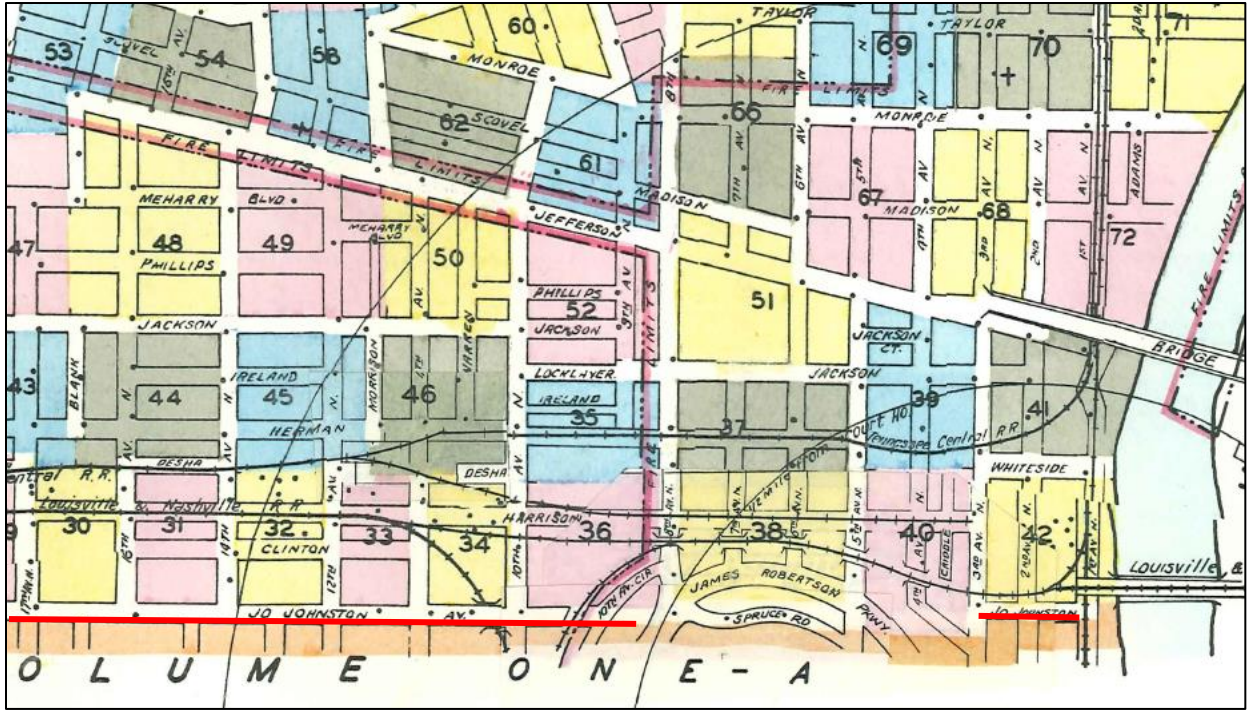


Figure 4: Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1957. Vol 1, site map. Two segments of Jo Johnston marked in red.

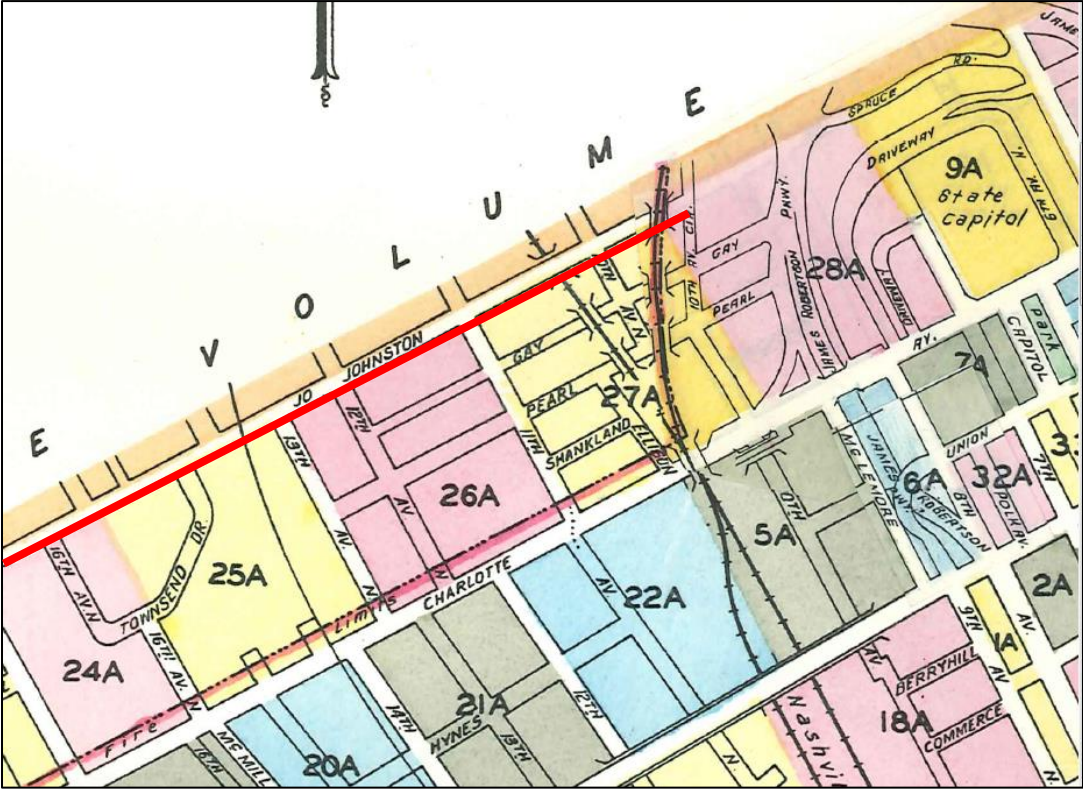


Figure 5: Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1957. Vol. 1A, site map. Jo Johnston marked in red.

ⁱ BL2016-532 passed third reading by Metropolitan Council, March 7, 2017. Approved by Mayor Megan Barry, March 8, 2017.

ⁱⁱ The previous Lifeway Plaza was renamed JM Frost Plaza by BL2016-531.

ⁱⁱⁱ The name may have changed at the intersection with Belleville Street, the next street west of McLemore. Maps aren't precise here, but as the corporation limit, McLemore is the logical point of transition. Use of "street" or "avenue" can be inconsistent, but one 1860 map clearly shows Watkins Avenue as running east-west and Watkins Street running north-south. The two roads intersected about a block from Watkins Park, 1860 *City of Nashville and Edgefield, Davidson County, Tennessee* (Published by Haydon and Booth, Civil Engineer). See also, 1854 *Map of Nashville*; 1860 *Map of the City of Nashville and Suburbs* (Drawing Expressly Engraved for the Nashville City Directory); 1871 *Map of Davidson County, Tennessee: From Actual Surveys Made by Order of the County Court of Davidson County* (Surveyed and Mapped by Wilbur F. Foster Civil and Topographical Engineer), Metropolitan Planning Department Digital Collections.

^{iv} January 1877 *Map of the City of Nashville and Vicinity* (Compiled from Official Records and the latest Surveys for Tavel, Eastman, and Howell), Metropolitan Planning Department Digital Collections.

^v 1913 *New Map of Nashville, Tennessee*, Published by Marshall & Bruce, Co., Metropolitan Planning Department Digital Collections.

^{vi} Handwritten minutes record the name as Jo Johnson. 1941 legislation records the name as Jo Johnston.

^{vii} *The Tennessean*, 20 June 1900, page 6. See also, 16 June 1900, page 5; 19 June 1900, page 5.

^{viii} Ridley Wills II, *Nashville Streets and Their Stories* (Franklin, TN: Plumblin Media, LLC 2012) 88.

^{ix} Ibid. William Waller, ed., *Nashville in the 1890s* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press 1970) 143.

^x *The Tennessean*, 20 June 1900. According to Bobby Crowe, Grand Secretary for the Knights of Pythias Grand Lodge in Tennessee, the Joe Johnston Lodge No. 83 organized around 1891 and disbanded around 1900.

^{xi} "Changing Street Names," *The Nashville American*, 13 March 1904.

^{xii} "Opposes Changes in Street Names," *The Nashville American*, 15 March 1904.

^{xiii} John L. Bell, Jr., and Brendan Wolfe, "Joseph E. Johnston (1807-1891)," *Encyclopedia Virginia* <http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Johnston_Joseph_E_1807-1891> accessed 20 January 2017. Recommended reading.

^{xiv} The name of Locust Street, running from 1st Avenue North to 3rd Avenue North, was changed to Jo Johnston Avenue by Mayor Thomas L. Cumming's approval of the "Official Map of the City of Nashville" on October 14, 1941 (Bill No. 1526, Ordinance Book 5, Page 497).