

Following is an article, entitled “A Place for Hopes and Dreams” by Ruth Klippstein which was published in the *Scottsville Monthly* (2000):

A Place for Hopes and Dreams



Arthur and Marie Combs Lane

Arthur Lane and Marie Combs Lane, area natives and Scottsville High School graduates, returned to Scottsville to retire in 1999. Now they share their history with us, spreading out books on their dining room table, with photographs, magazines, and other materials achieving the dynamic rise of the Lane Family whose many members and activities range through our local history and beyond, telling one of the remarkable stories of the South.

For many, the name ‘Lane’ and the term ‘cedar chest’ are synonymous. No mistake: The Lane Company was once the largest producer of such chests and tried hard to make them a necessary piece of furniture for us all. Here is the text from a 1920s *Saturday Evening Post* advertisement: “And now...to kindle romance in maiden breasts...to simplify June gift-giving (commencements, engagements, weddings, birthdays, confirmations) ...to bring home to women everywhere the priceless benefits of a big, beautiful, fragrant, moth-killing cedar chest...”

Another ad from the same time period shows three chests, "built to sell from \$40 to \$50," offered during Girl Graduate Week for \$25 to \$50," offered during Girl Graduate Week for \$25 to \$35. One is the "beautiful Dowling Dowry Chest – steeped in the romance of the past. Here is the hope chest, and here is how our story unfolds."



**Last winter's furs and woolens
CLEAN, FRESH, SAFE!**

NO moths, no dust nor dampness can spoil the furs and woolens so conveniently stored in a LANE Red Cedar Chest. The LANE is the chest for the things you prize—from the least expensive sports apparel to that costliest of winter coats. It keeps them safe!

These LANE Chests of fragrant red cedar heart-wood are built to last for generations. Each of the many different sizes and styles (all cedar or cedar lined mahogany and walnut) is as beautiful as care can make it and as decorative as one's heart can desire. Cushioned, the LANE provides a charming window seat or convenient dressing lounge at the foot of a bed. It is the cedar chest which every woman should have.

LANE permanence is insured by discolored panels and inter-locked corners. Lids are dust-proof, bottoms damp-proof. Yale locks and the finest hardware only are used. Because these chests are unexcelled be sure that the name, LANE, is burned inside the lid of the one you buy. If your furniture or department store cannot supply you with the genuine, write to us for name of LANE dealer nearby.

THE LANE COMPANY, Inc., Altavista, Virginia

**LANE
CEDAR CHEST**

(In using advertisements see page 4 137)

Lane Cedar Chest Ad from *Saturday Evening Post*, 10 Nov. 1923.

Two members of the Lane family – John Haden Lane (Arthur Lane's great grandfather) and his brother, William George Lane, lived in Fluvanna and joined the Confederate Army together. According to the pact they made when William was killed at Gettysburg, John Haden returned to marry the widow and adopt his nephews. The new couple had four more children and lived at Broken Island, now across from Lake Monticello.

Jon Haden Lane was not interested in farming, however; a 1924 article in “Virginia,” by the American Historical Society, calls him a “teacher, soldier, scholar, and author ...especially interested in the literary pursuits.” He bought land in Porter’s Precinct, now on Porter’s Road, soon after the Civil War, calling his place, Esmont Farm. John Haden established a small furniture shop.

Not having much experience with the work, Lane started small. He purchased his lumber from his neighbor, Tom Henry Childress, chiefly walnut and cedar. One of the first articles he manufactured was a small stool. Marie proudly displays an early Lane stool, its rich old wood in several tones of reddish cedar, the top-remaining as they inherited it – with fraying woven brown strings. Sturdy and functional, it only hints at the chests, chairs, and furniture to come.



Laura and Henry Lane

Henry Lane’s wife, Laura (Arthur Lane’s grandmother), lived at Esmont Farm for 60 years. This is where the author, Jan Karon, now lives. Arthur’s grandmother, a “very aristocratic” person, was in charge of the farm; she was a strong-minded manager, Arthur remembers, as he laughs away the word “bossy.” Marie says she still recalls the old woman sitting on her porch, doing “a lot of embroidery and crocheting.”



1890 Lane Walnut Bed Adorned with Grand's Crochet Cover

The Lanes have the walnut bed (shown above) made in 1890 for his great grandparents, probably from Childress trees, graced with one of his grandmother's crocheted covers (see above). The dark wood headboard rises quite high, with elegant and restrained hand carving. Lane tells how long bolts secure the bottom of the bed, which is solid. The bed's dimensions are between those of a current double bed and a queen-sized bed; the Lanes had to have a mattress custom-made to fit.

The Lane brothers built a brick office building in Esmont, now the Esmont post office. Business was growing, as well as the family. In 1888, Henry Lee Lane, Arthur's grandfather and a self-taught engineer, went into the railroad business with his brother, John. Henry was underage at the time, and John acted as his guardian in legal matters until he reached 21.

Their first contract was building a rail line between Bristol and Big Stone Gap for the Southern Atlantic in Ohio, later the Souther Railway. The other brothers joined the firm, and after a period of poor financial management – bidding too low for contracts to make a profit – the young company was working successfully for the Chesapeake and Ohio as well as the Baltimore and Ohio in North Carolina, Maryland, West Virginia, and Virginia.

To handle this scope of business, they incorporated as Lane Brothers Company in 1901, which went on, all through the eastern half of the United States and part of Canada, to build railroads, canals, municipal works, and the first dam, in Georgia, to raise water 100 feet above its original surface.

In 1901, Henry Lee Lane became general manager of the Alberene Stone Company. During this busy period, he built a railway connection between the stone company's plants in Alberene and Schuyler, "thus placing the town, together with Esmont, on the railroad way," according to the American Historical Society.

The Lane Brothers Company's success encouraged Henry Lee Lane and his siblings to purchase 2000 acres of land at the junction of two railroads, one line of which they were building south of Lynchburg. In 1906, engineers laid out their planned town; a reservoir and sewer were constructed, as well as sidewalks and a bridge over the Staunton River, a big hotel, and carefully organized "zones" of residential and business districts. No speculation in land was allowed. By 1908, the town of Altavista was a fact. Henry Lee Lane became president of the first bank and also founded a newspaper and the Lane Memorial Church. He lived in the Commonwealth Hotel he built.

The *Daily Progress* reported on December 11, 1908, the front-page news of the relocation of the Lane Brothers Company from Esmont to Altavista. "The County of Albemarle, the Southside especially, is about to sustain a great loss, and we realize the fact with much regret," says the *Scottsville Enterprise*. In a very short while – probably a week or two – Lane Bros. Co., one of the largest and best-known railroad contracting concerns in the South, will move its headquarters from Esmont to Altavista, VA, a town which this concern has practically built themselves... This immense concern is composed of men of the highest business qualifications, natives of Albemarle County, and men who have always had the interest of the county and the community in which they have lived at heart. They have done much towards the advancement of Southside Albemarle, and we repeat, the loss of the county and community will be great."

In 1912, after the move, John E. Lane purchased a bankrupt packing box plant. He suggested, as "A History of the Lane Company," by Helen Hughes Lane, 1963, states, "to his son, Edward Hudson Lane, who was nearly twenty-one years of age at the time, that he go to Altavista where the little plat was located and start making cedar chests. I'd never heard of a cedar chest," Ed Lane recalls today, "but that's how it all started!"

Edward had attended Fork Union Military Academy and two years at VPI, where he took some classes in woodworking and machine shop. He supervised his family's sawmill and, in his father's frequent absences on business, ran the electric plant for his family's Guthrie Hall estate. With this experience and consultation from his VPI woodworking

instructor, he committed \$50,000 of his father's money – “right smart amount” – to new machinery for his enterprise.

The Company, The Standard Red Cedar Chest Company, produced 10 to 15 chests a day, then 15 to 25. “We were all young then,” one of the first employees said to Helen Lane. “Our methods were pretty primitive at first. The chests were solid cedar. We nailed them together. There was no veneer nor high finish... It was different in those days, all night!”

Marketing was new to Edward Lane, but as he learned to “sell with an idea,” the company, by 1930, was making – and selling – 250 chests a day. They were by then the world's largest producer of cedar chests and began making other furniture as well. The chests were sold to college and business men for storage; as “hall and bedroom chests” to housewives for their furs and fine clothing; to use as a window seat or at the end of the bed. In 1922, the name was changed to the Lane Company and advertised nationally.



Lane Miniature Cedar Chest

One promotional campaign developed in the late 1920's and inaugurated in 1930 was the Girl Graduate Plan. Miniature cedar chests, the size of a jewelry box, were sold inexpensively to furniture companies to give away to girls graduating from high school. A special sale of full-sized cedar chests would be offered concurrently, with the hopes of catching the attention of half of graduating girls who married within 18 months of leaving high school at that time. In the early 1960's, the Lane Company estimated that “between one-half and two-thirds of all girls graduating from high school in the United States are presented...with one of these Lane Miniature cedar chests.”

In Charlottesville and surrounding area, graduating girls would get a card in the mail from M.C. Thomas furniture store. The girls would then go to the store to receive their little Lane chest.

Marie Lane has several Lane cedar chests. One was given to her when she was 18; it was the “self-rising accessory tray” and is filled with carefully-folded belongings. She and Arthur also have an old Lane walnut chair; “my mother loved these items,” Lane says, and ruefully adds that he wishes he’d “paid a whole lot more attention to her stories, as well as those of his grandmother.



Marie Lane's Cedar Chest and Walnut Chair

“Fate sends you on different routes,” Marie muses about her re-meeting Arthur Lane when they both worked in Charlottesville. Arthur received a DPA, doctorate in public administration, and taught at Radford, as well as worked in public administration in several cities. Like his Esmont ancestor, he’s loved academics. The Lanes have lived and worked in a variety of places, and while it was “exciting to move around,” Marie says, they are glad to be back home in Scottsville.

The Lane Company is “just a name now,” Lane comments, after a hostile take-over moved the furniture business to Arkansas. But all those treasured Lane cedar chests remain, solid and still-fragrant reminders of our hopes and past!

Miniature Lane cedar boxes are iconic American symbols of “days-gone-by”, “remember when”, and “back-in-the-day.” Lane, mostly known for cedar hope chests, manufactured and distributed an estimated 27 million miniature boxes from 1925 to 2004, and their innovative Girl Graduate Plan was one of the most successful marketing programs of the 20th century. Lane Furniture’s Girl Graduate Plan presented the little boxes to young ladies as high school graduation gifts through their national network of dealers.

To this day, women all across the country treasure their little boxes as reminders of their high school graduation and that special time in their lives.



Arthur Lane, Sr. (Jack) holds his daughter, Laura, as he sits beside his wife, Carrie (Butler) Lane at left who is holding their son, Arthur Lane, Jr., ca. 1930.