THE LUCASES*

A Noted St. Louis Family

By

HENRY L. PATTERSON

The late Judge John B. C. Lucas, the founder of the family in America, was born in Normandy, France, in the year 1758, and died in St. Louis, August 31, 1842, aged 84 years. He came to the United States about 1784; after spending a few weeks in Philadelphia, started for the West, and settled a few miles back of Pittsburgh, farming here for twenty-five years. During that period he was returned to Congress from his district. In 1805 President Jefferson sent him to Missouri to pass upon the land claims of those who held or claimed under the former governments of Spain and France. His associates were Penrose and Donaldson. He brought with him to Missouri his wife, sons—Charles, William, Adrian, James H., and daughter Anne, who became Anne L. Hunt. Charles died in 1817, Adrian next. William, 1836; James H., 1873, and Anne Lucas Hunt in 1879, she being the last of these two generations. He was educated in France, and came to America a thorough read lawyer. All those who were contemporaneous with him, accord to him talents of the very highest order, and an integrity beyond question or doubt; his man-

*The founder of this family was prominent in the political life of Pittsburgh in the early days. In 1796, he lived on a farm on Coal Hill on the south side of the Monongahela River, in St. Clair Township, five miles above Pittsburgh. It was said of him that he was an atheist, and that his wife plowed on Sundays, in spite of which he was several times elected to the General Assembly. In 1800, he was appointed an associate judge for the county. He quarreled with Alexander Addison, the president judge of the judicial district to which Allegheny County was attached, yet he had sufficient standing in the state to cause Judge Addison's impeachment and removal from the Bench. In 1802, Lucas was elected to Congress and was re-elected in 1804. In 1805, he was appointed United States District Judge for the new territory of Louisiana, now the state of Missouri.—Editor
ners were those of an elegantly refined gentleman, high or low were always met with a suavity at once grateful and agreeable. It may be truly said he was a victim of calamities, having lost out of six sons, five by unnatural deaths. These terrible events doubtless went far to influence his later life, and to account for his withdrawal from all social intercourse. But few minds could have survived such dreadful experiences and retained anything of its original force; his did, it was powerful to the last. The foregoing sketch has an object that is to show the fallacy of memory of some men who, to glorify themselves as "old inhabitants" talk falsely and glibly of past events in the history of men and things. Referring to your issue of January 30, fourth column, fourth page, your reporter relates an interview with a prominent citizen, as follows: "I have frequently heard the story that Dorriss won the block on Eleventh and Olive streets, which goes by his name from old Mr. J. B. Lucas, the father of James H. I believe it is true. Lucas was very fond of gambling, and would sit down to poker whenever he could get a party. A number of us went up the river a good many years ago, and in the party were J. B. C. Lucas, Luther M. Kennett, who was Mayor of the city at the time, and Dorriss. A poker game was organized with these three among the players. Well, Kennett got a good hand and bet it against Lucas. Kennett won $500 during the evening from Lucas, who didn't mind the loss at all, etc., etc."

I have quoted thus freely from your article with a view to show the facility with which some old "residents" relate facts and incidents that never existed or occurred—in common parlance, lie.

The steamboat excursion referred to happened in 1852 and was on the occasion of breaking ground at Hannibal of the H. & St. Joe railroad. I was one of the St. Louis delegation and was on the boat that night and saw all. Your informant asserts he saw J. B. C. Lucas, the father of James H., at cards with Kennett. The old Judge, father of James H., so positively identified, died August 31, 1842, some ten years anterior to the steamboat excursion, which renders it quite improbable that he was "seeing poker" that evening. Gen. Dorriss was not on that boat.
James H. Lucas

James H. Lucas, the last surviving son of J. B. C. Lucas, was born November 12, 1800, near Pittsburgh, and died at St. Louis, November 9, 1873, was buried in Calvary cemetery on his birthday, November 12. He came to St. Louis with his father in 1805, a very sprightly boy of five years old. His disposition for fun and mischief was exuberant, which did not quite suit the taste of the old gentleman, so that, at about the age of sixteen, the father, with the view to tone down the youngster's spirits, sent him to school in New Hampshire, supposing that the steady habits of that latitude would influence the boy. But it was no go. The peculiarities of those people were intolerable to him. After enduring for a year or so, he resolved to quit and try life on his own hook. So, writing to his father in a "Declaration of Independence," he put out. Traveling near due west he came to and stopped at the town of Poughkeepsie, Duchess county, N. Y. Here he immediately entered the office of Elisha Williams, at that time the leading lawyer of New York, and began the study of the law, meanwhile teaching French to eke out expenses. This, however, did not last long. His roving spirit would not brook delay. Again packing his kit he starts for Arkansas and brings up at the Post. Here he was so fortunate as to win the esteem and friendship of Mr. Notrebe, a very elegant, refined and cultivated French gentleman, a leading merchant and a planter at the Post. This friendship lasted through life. Upon reaching this, his last destination, he resumed his law-reading, and, while acquiring a profession, taught school, evincing an energy and determination seldom manifested by a lad of 18 years. While pursuing his studies he was made county clerk. Soon after having obtained his license as a lawyer, he began to "ride the circuit." The extent of his practice is unknown to me, but it must have paid, for he soon married, and next we find him a planter. This was his life down to 1836, when his father, finding himself alone, William having died that year, wrote, requesting him to remove to St. Louis, with which he complied in 1837. From his advent to St. Louis until his death in 1873, he was identified with all the
leading projects, having in view the extension, beautifying and improvement of the city, and was among the foremost of public spirited men when schemes to benefit the whole community were suggested. He, O'Fallon and Page were the trio who subscribed the first $100,000 to the Missouri Pacific Railroad—this about 1850 and 1851.

The Lucas Estate

The Lucas estate extended from the east side of Fourth Street west to Jefferson Avenue, St. Charles Street on the north and Market Street on the south, the heart of St. Louis. When he took charge in 1837 there were not one hundred houses in the district. Look at it now. Public and private buildings counted by the thousand bear ample testimony of the liberal policy of the proprietors inviting all to come in, aiding and encouraging improvements, and themselves building houses by the hundred. In his social relations he was kindly, gentle and affectionate, one of the most approachable of men—a magnanimous auditor, for out of the hundreds of trusts and mortgages he held on property sold, not to exceed five were ever forcibly closed, and these generally at the request of the debtor. His charities were liberal, unostentatious—I may say, secret. Take him all in all, his character was beautiful. He died in the day of his usefulness deeply regretted by this community. These are the two men whose memories are stigmatized by certain old residents—mental vagabonds rather—who walk our streets licking up every defamatory item of gossip, stowing it away in their mean souls for future use, and when opportunity offers palming them off on "innocent reporters" as facts of their own knowledge. As an illustration of this base habit, look at the short dialogue as given in your issue of January 30, page 4, fifth column, to-wit:

Reporter—"The Dorriss Row on Olive Street. I believe that was won in a night, wasn't it?"

Old Resident answers: "Yes; Gen. Dorriss won that of J. B. C. Lucas on three nines, and to this day among the gambling fraternity three nines are known as a 'Lucas.'" Here the slanderer answers unequivocally, "Yes," without the grace to qualify by saying, I have heard so and so.
The following facts and figures most conclusively show that there never was a word of truth in the tale of the three nines. Referring to the records of St. Louis county: (see book A, page 85, February 7, 1849.) Deed of James H. Lucas and Anne L. Hunt to John Cavender for 49 7-12 feet on north side of Olive and west of Eleventh. Again, same book and page, date February 12, 1849: E. C. Hutchinson to John Cavender, 80 8-12 feet on north side Olive in block 506. Book O. 5, page 278. December 18, 1849. Deed of Lucas Hunt to Edward A. Meany, of Chicot County, Ark., for 75 feet on north side of Olive Street, in block 56. These three deeds embraced the entire 205 feet covered by the Dorriss Row. Gen. Dorriss became a resident of St. Louis in 1868. Just about nineteen years after Lucas and Hunt had ceased to own a foot of the ground, Gen. Dorriss purchased of Wayman Crow, and, if the tale of three nines is to be maintained and repeated, I respectfully refer old residents to Mr. Crow for further information, as he was the last owner of the premises before Dorriss. This exposition may deprive the smart "ten cent ante" fellows of a standard joke, and cause "old residents" to cease their lying.

Anne Lucas Hunt

Anne Lucas Hunt, the only daughter, was born near Pittsburgh, September, 1796; came to St. Louis with her father in 1805, then in her ninth year a bright, precocious child. Education at that early day was a difficult matter to attain. There being no first-class schools, no colleges or convents, the young folks were dependent upon home instructions, and these varied according to the abilities of parents. Our heroine was more fortunate than most of her companions in having a father of genius and high classical attainments and a well educated, sensible mother. From these she mainly obtained such culture and knowledge as enabled her to appear to advantage in cultivated and intelligent society. Her career as a belle was short, for in her eighteenth year she married Capt. Theodore Hunt, formerly of the United States Navy; this in 1814. He died in 1832. Afterwards in 1836 she married Wilson P. Hunt, who died in April 1842. About this time her life became one of systematic benevolence, seeking out the poor, the suffering and
afflicted. While administering to their wants she sought more extended fields for her charities, and appropriated largely of her estate to endow and build up societies, orders and institutions for the relief of the poor, and the extension of good morals. The tale of misery and suffering always touched her heart and opened her hand. She saw the vicious of both sexes becoming daily more numerous and more degraded; she also saw the world condemning, but doing little to alleviate or reclaim.

Mr. Editor, I feel that I would trespass too far upon your army of twenty thousand daily subscribers were I to go into a detail of the very many noble bequests of this remarkable lady. I will mention but one, to-wit: "The Convent of the Good Shepherd," founded by her in the interests of fallen humanity—an institution comparatively speaking in its infancy, containing today within its walls four hundred and seventy-five souls—a vast multitude. Who can analyze its moral and vicious composition, ranging from the highest type of angelic virtue down to the most degraded habits of vice? Monuments of marble and bronze are erected in memory of and to perpetuate the name and fame of those who have done great things in their day, and are intended to excite admiration and invite imitation, but they are silent. Not so this monument; the prayers and aspirations of these four hundred and seventy-five beings daily ascend to heaven beseeching God's blessings on their generous foundress, who for all time has provided them a home, where, secure from the sneers and temptations of the world, they may recover a self respect, abandoning the life of sin, and once more placing themselves in the line of God's favor. Therefore, so long as sinful women shall exist on earth, this monument will speak, and she who, disregarding earthly values gave freely of her substance will be called "blessed of women."—St. Louis Post-Dispatch, February 18, 1882.