Frank Cheatham Gorrell, SMA '45
(1928 – 1994)

Photograph from: records.ancestry.com

Frank C. "Tucker" Gorrell was born on June 20, 1927, in Russellville, KY, and entered Staunton Military Academy (SMA) in the fall of 1943 from Russellville as a junior. He was an All-state tackle on the varsity football team in both his junior and senior years and was Captain of the team as a senior when they were named the State Military Champions. He was also on the Varsity Boxing Team as a senior. Frank graduated as a sergeant in A Company in 1945.

Frank attended Vanderbilt University, where he played football for Coach Red Sanders. When Coach Sanders left Vanderbilt to become the head football coach at the University of California-Los Angeles, Sanders offered Frank an assistant position at UCLA. Frank was a student at the Vanderbilt Law School at the time and a part-time assistant football coach at Vanderbilt. He turned down the job in California after making a decision that he wanted to pursue law as a career.

In 1947, while still a student at Vanderbilt, Frank married Bette Jamison and, after graduating from law school, he joined the Nashville law firm of Bass, Berry, and Sims. Cecil Sims, a founding partner in the firm, encouraged young lawyers to do public service work and urged Frank to run for a vacant seat in the Tennessee State Senate in 1962. Gorrell was elected and quickly rose to a position of prominence in the Senate as well as the state Democratic Party in which he was a leader for more than 30 years.

At the time Gorrell took his seat in the Senate, the state constitution specified that the presiding officer or Speaker of the Tennessee State Senate would also serve as the lieutenant governor even though the Speaker was elected by the members of the Senate rather than by the voters at large. The governor had significant influence over the members of the Senate from the governor's political party and dominated the choices of leadership positions in the General Assembly. The majority party's caucuses decided all positions of leadership in the Tennessee Senate and House. Although the office of the governor of Tennessee had been held by Republicans from time to time since the end of Reconstruction, the

Democratic Party dominated the General Assembly. When the sitting governor was a Democrat, he wielded considerable influence over the positions of leadership in the General Assembly.

After Frank Gorrell was elected to the Senate, he observed how much influence the governor had over the Senate itself. At this time, The powerful Democrat, Frank Clement, was governor. Jared Maddux, a state senator from Cookeville and a political ally of the governor, served as lieutenant governor. Gorell decided the time was right for a change in senate leadership and challenged Maddox for the position of Speaker of the Senate when the General Assembly convened in 1965 for a new term. During the 1964 elections, Gorrell had traveled across the state speaking in the districts of other members of the Senate. In each of his speeches, he spoke out in favor of an independent legislature, free of influence from the governor. Gorrell's decision to run for the Speaker's position touched off a vigorous debate.

As the January 1965 opening of the General Assembly neared, it appeared that both Gorrell and Maddux had twelve votes each within the Democratic caucus in the Senate. Although there were eight Republicans in the Senate at that time, it was assumed that the person selected by the caucus to be lieutenant governor would be elected by the full Senate as a formality. State Senator Charles O'Brien, a Memphis Democrat, was undecided when the Senate convened. On the day of the vote, Senator O'Brien failed to appear at the meeting. It was reported that he had slipped in his bathtub and injured his back. O'Brien then returned to Memphis for medical reasons, but rumors abounded around the Capitol about his mysterious disappearance. After several tie caucus votes over the course of several days, Gorrell himself traveled to Memphis to meet personally with O'Brien and secure his support. When the caucus reconvened in Nashville, a Maddux supporter suddenly made a motion to adjourn the meeting without the vote taking place. The vote was thirteen to twelve with O'Brien voting with the Maddux supporters for adjournment. Since the Democratic caucus had not chosen a candidate for speaker, the full Senate then took up the decision. When the final vote was cast on the floor of the Senate, all of the Republicans voted for Maddux, and Gorrell was defeated.

Gorrell's turn was to come two years later when he was elected unanimously as the 47th Lieutenant Governor of Tennessee, and served from 1967 to 1971 during the second term of Governor Buford Ellington. He was credited during his tenure with providing leadership to make the General Assembly independent of the governor.

Gorrell returned to his law practice in 1971 and became a successful lobbyist and Democratic Party fundraiser. In 1972, he was selected to join the American College of Trial Lawyers. As a trial lawyer, Gorrell handled litigation and government affairs for a variety of prominent Fortune 500 corporations. As a lobbyist for General Motors, Gorrell guided the passage of Tennessee's mandatory seat belt law in 1968 in spite of intense opposition. The bill passed and has been credited with saving thousands of lives.

Frank Gorrell was regarded as the most influential lobbyist in the state at the time of his unexpected death on March 12, 1994 at the age of sixty-seven. He was survived by his wife, Candy Young Gorrell, two sons, Frank, III, and Rick, children from his first marriage to Bette Jamison Gorrell who died in November of 1991, a brother, William Gorrell, and two grandchildren, Beau and Vannie. He is buried in the Mt. Olivet Cemetery in Nashville.

From an article in tennesseeencyclopedia.net by Carole Stanford Bucy of the Volunteer State Community College, and from Wikipedia. Edits by Kelly McGavock, SMA '59.

To read a specific memorial to Frank Gorrell from the law firm of Bass, Berry, and Sims go to:
http://www.nashvillebar.org/Committee/Historical/Memorial/Resolution/GORRELL,FrankC-Honor.pdf