

SHOWCASING LOCAL HISTORY:
THE HERITAGE CENTER IN MODERN TOURISM

by

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I dedicate this thesis to JP, Mo, and Cairo. Thank you for the late night company.

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ABSTRACT

Heritage centers play a prominent role in the modern American tourism industry. Acting as a combination of a welcome center and a museum, these centers introduce visitors to the history and culture of a specific society and geographic place and cater to tourists who are looking for authentic local experiences. The Heritage Center of Murfreesboro and Rutherford County provides a case study for a successful heritage center, while the future Sumner County Music and Heritage Center provides a new opportunity for a development plan based on the successful center in Murfreesboro. Utilizing the best practices from the case study and implementing new ideas can catapult Sumner County into an ideal heritage tourism location. This study traces the evolution of the heritage center concept and then evaluates how this concept can be used to benefit Sumner County.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF FIGURES.....	vi
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER I: THE EVOLUTION OF HERITAGE TOURISM IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH.....	7
Travel Journals.....	13
World Expositions in America.....	15
The Age of the Automobile.....	22
Resurgence of Heritage Awareness.....	24
Heritage Tourism and the Heritage Center.....	29
CHAPTER II: THE HERITAGE CENTER OF MURFREESBORO AND RUTHERFORD COUNTY: A CASE STUDY.....	34
CHAPTER III: PROPOSAL FOR THE SUMNER COUNTY MUSIC AND HERITAGE CENTER.....	60
Sumner County History.....	61
Sumner County Convention and Visitors Bureau.....	66
The Heritage Center Proposal.....	70
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	80
APPENDIX A: “CELEBRATE THE SOUNDS, EXPLORE THE SIGHTS” EXHIBIT PLAN.....	89

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
FIGURE 1.....	17
FIGURE 2.....	18
FIGURE 3.....	18
FIGURE 4.....	38
FIGURE 5.....	38
FIGURE 6.....	39
FIGURE 7.....	41
FIGURE 8.....	41
FIGURE 9.....	43
FIGURE 10.....	43
FIGURE 11.....	64
FIGURE 12.....	64
FIGURE 13.....	68
FIGURE 14.....	68
FIGURE 15.....	70
FIGURE 16.....	71
FIGURE 17.....	71

INTRODUCTION

What is heritage tourism? It is an American pastime and a family adventure. It is a trip just down the road or halfway across the country. It is visiting a cemetery in search of an ancestor's grave or picking produce at a farmer's market. It is attending a local music festival or touring a Civil War battlefield. Heritage tourism comes in many forms, and every year millions of people embark on journeys to explore the cultural landscape of America seeking personal and authentic experiences. They come for genealogy, agritourism, music, and history. They look for answers, experiences, memories, and new stories. They seek a connection or entertainment. They stay at B&B's, taste regional foods, visit locally significant historic sites, and meet and converse with residents. They come alone, with family, or with friends.

Heritage tourism is a return to the past to recapture supposedly simpler times. For many tourists, it is a time to slow down and enjoy the small things like the crunch of fried chicken or the rush of air on an open-car train ride. This slow-paced cultural journey allows participants to reconnect with family, with heritage, with people, or with nature. It means different things to different people, but those heritage tourists look for something more than a quick thrill; they want an authentic experience that changes them.

But where do these tourists start? Out-of-towners often have little sense of where to go or how to get there, and many local residents have never been a tourist in their hometown. Without any sort of orientation center to the town,

county, or region, visitors are at a loss. The Internet can provide information, but the medium typically lacks a personal connection to a destination. The heritage center fixes this problem by providing a hybrid welcome center and museum that caters to tourists and residents alike. The mission of the heritage center is to serve as a welcome facility and community resource that provides information and fosters shared ownership.

The heritage center accomplishes this mission through several key components. The facility needs to be in a central location. This centrality is necessary for easy accessibility to and from other tourist attractions, but also so that the entire community feels connected to it. Obviously, customer service is a key component of the heritage center because the staff needs to be friendly and knowledgeable, providing a reliable source of information for tourists and residents looking for either a specific site or just general information. The staff must relate to children and adults, conduct educational programs, and present a professional appearance while still remaining relatable to the general public. The center also needs a place for brochures and other printed resources as well as a space for exhibits. The presence of brochures, flyers, and exhibits are essential for the heritage center's success because while a regular visitors' center might be able to offer such amenities, a heritage center can provide flyers for local community events, more in-depth exhibits that highlight key components of an area's history, and enough space to encourage community interactions on site. A heritage center creates an experience for their visitors that leaves them feeling confident about the rest of their trip, as tourists and locals alike know there is a

friendly face waiting in the heritage center to answer their questions and point them in the right direction.

This last major key component, space, is vital for the heritage center. While a brochure rack can be stored anywhere and even an exhibit can be squeezed into a small room, the heritage center falls short of its mission within a confined space. For the community to be able to utilize the space and feel connected to it, there must be enough room for lecture series, book signings, receptions, meetings, lunches, and other activities that community members need to create a common bond among themselves and a commitment to the site.

While obvious issues of funding, staffing, and location exist everywhere, these standards are possible to meet as demonstrated by the Heritage Center of Murfreesboro and Rutherford County in Tennessee. This Downtown Heritage Center combines all of these components to create an orientation and community center that offers tours, exhibits, educational programming, lectures, and meeting spaces for organizations like schools, lawyers, book clubs, and preservation groups. The Heritage Center of Murfreesboro and Rutherford County also provides a prime example of what can be achieved through public and private partnerships and a commitment to a tourism center that benefits the city both economically and culturally.

The purpose of this paper is to use the heritage center in Murfreesboro as a case study for a future heritage center in Sumner County, Tennessee. Located just northeast of Nashville, Sumner County possesses many of the components for a proper heritage center like location, space, and staffing; however, it lacks

some critical resources, specifically exhibits, needed to encourage community and tourist attendance. With the Murfreesboro center as a model, this paper demonstrates how the county and the Convention and Visitors Bureau can create a viable heritage center that highlights the attributes of Sumner County and builds an intimate partnership with the community.

The evolution of heritage tourism from the nation's beginning to the modern-day tourism industry is necessary to understanding the impetus behind heritage centers. The first chapter follows the long history of heritage tourism that begins in the early nineteenth century and leads to the present. Starting in the 1820s, elite Americans and wealthy Europeans took month-long sojourns to the frontier regions of the country looking to explore new sights and natural wonders that were purely American. Upon returning from their journeys, these tourists often published travelogues and guidebooks detailing their experience and inspiring new tourists. After the Civil War, wealthy Americans still traveled, but the average citizen who could not afford the expense of traveling no longer needed to spend months at a time exploring new territories; they could go to a world's fair and have representative cultures and persons in one centralized location. These fairs were enormously popular and inspired new interest in distant regions, particularly the American South, where southern states showcased their history in buildings and exhibits, many specifically designed to renew the public's interest in the antebellum plantation society.

The arrival of the automobile altered the tourist landscape forever. In the 1920s widespread ownership of cars changed Americans' attitudes towards

vacations because tourists could control their destination and their time. While the automobile increased tourism opportunities to all classes in America, it also led to the eventual destruction of areas within towns and cities. With the arrival of the interstate system, communities across the nation received virtual death sentences if the interstate bypassed their area. The highways and roads that had led to a stream of tourists were no longer relevant compared with the fast-paced interstate.

But not even the destructive effects of interstate construction or urban renewal could rid America of its touristic desires. With the arrival of the Civil War Centennial, the American Bicentennial, and the publication of *Roots* by Alex Haley, America experienced a revival in heritage tourism and genealogy research. Suddenly people cared again about where they came from and who their ancestors were. Archives and libraries saw increased traffic, and historic sites and parks across America became popular destinations again. It was a public renewal of the “See America First” campaign and the desire to connect with American roots.¹

The second chapter will continue with the resurgence of heritage tourism and the need for places to accommodate these new travelers. It will provide a case study of a successful heritage center and the positive and negative characteristics that it contends with to provide vital services to the community and tourists. The Heritage Center of Murfreesboro and Rutherford County will

¹ For additional information on the “See America First” campaign see Marguerite S. Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001).

serve as an example or model for the final chapter, which will outline the needed steps for Sumner County to create an effective heritage center.

Heritage tourism has come a long way since the nation's founding, and today, it encompasses as wide a range of activities as diverse as the American population. Heritage tourists are good for local economies and cultures because they bring new interest, new spotlights, and new dollars to the area. The heritage center can help cities and regions capitalize on this new trend by providing a starting point for heritage tourists and creating an inclusive community center.

CHAPTER I: THE EVOLUTION OF HERITAGE TOURISM IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH

The colossal cathedrals and encyclopedic museums that grace the streets of Paris, London, and Rome have long fascinated Americans, but in the early days of the United States, inhabitants longed for their own sacred sights. They wanted and needed tourist attractions that reflected the beauty and wonder of their nation while also reaffirming their claim to this wild frontier and their destiny to tame it. Tourism became a way for a new nation to establish a cultural identity that was separate from the Old World, yet outside of denominational religions or gender-specific roles. This process of creating an American tourist landscape not only helped establish an identity but also an interest in American heritage. As generations passed, traditions and sights became increasingly American, representing the vision of the country's founders and the ancestral heritage of the American people. Gradually, tourism grew from creating a national identity to celebrating one as American tourists began exploring their roots and searching for authentic representations of American life.

Since the New World lacked the historic structures and monuments that dotted the European tourist landscape, Americans had to find new sights to interpret the nation's image. In the antebellum era, they gradually found these attractions among the natural wonders, fashionable resorts, and larger cities of the new republic. Among the magnificent feats of nature such as Niagara Falls, Mammoth Cave, and the Hudson River Valley, landscapes became sacred

American places. Resorts and spas such as Saratoga Springs and the Virginia Springs were popular summer spots for the vacationing public and eased the strict standards of societal interactions in the everyday world. Major cities like Boston and Philadelphia in the North and Charleston and New Orleans in the South highlighted America's urban centers and became known for their regional and cultural distinctions. These three kinds of sights, while different, were part of the establishment of the American identity grounded in landscape, equality, and cultural fusion.

While many Americans in the early nineteenth century still embarked on the Grand Tour of Europe in search of adventure, education, and entertainment, other Americans found those exact same pursuits in the natural beauty of the American landscape. What the United States lacked in architecture and tradition, it more than made up for in raw, untouched scenery filled with awe-inspiring wonders like Niagara Falls and Mammoth Cave. These places became sacred for the American people not only because of the profound reaction visitors had upon first experiencing these sights, but also because these places were inimitable and therefore purely American. Pilgrimages to these sights became an American rite of passage; citizenship was born at these natural sights, where people finally grasped the magnitude of their country and the possibilities within it. Even today, modern Americans continue to flock to national parks and natural wonders to experience the real beauty of America.

The journeys to these natural wonders have changed significantly over time. What can be easily reached today was formerly an adventurous and

treacherous journey. With poor roads, dangerous conditions, and no maps, tourists had to have the courage and means to leave behind the comforts of home to travel in America. These trips were expensive and time-consuming; thus in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, only the elite could afford vacations. Travel in America at that time was slow and difficult, and only the Southern planters and wealthy Northerners could afford the long, grueling journey.² Indeed middle class professionals like lawyers, schoolteachers, businessmen, and farmers could not afford the time away from work, and their diaries rarely contain any reference to vacations before the late nineteenth century.³ John F. Sears outlines the conditions needed for tourism to take hold among larger portions of the population. Citizens must have the time and money to travel, a reliable and affordable mode of transportation, a safe and comfortable place to stay, and of course, interesting and unusual things to see.⁴ Before the 1820s, America struggled to meet any of these requirements since they were caught up in wars against the French and Indians, the struggle for independence from Britain, and the establishment of a new nation and its government. Thus, vacationing was left for the American elite who not only toured the country's

² These early tourists often had to rely on extended family, friends, acquaintances, or even complete strangers for lodging, food, and transportation since the "tourist infrastructure of hotels and public conveyance was still in its infancy." Cindy Aron, *Working at Play: A History of Vacations in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 129.

³ Instead, middle and lower class families used religious camp meetings as vacation destinations. It allowed them time off work but combined vacation with religious revivals that satisfied the Puritan work ethic that dominated the middle and lower classes. Aron, *Working at Play*, 29-30.

⁴ John F. Sears, *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), 3.

nationally treasured landscape but also spent time taking the waters at fashionable resorts. Intended as a form of convalescence for ailing members of society, resorts became a means of escape from the cities during the summer when heat and disease reigned. High society headed to the mountains, lakes, and beaches to experience the relaxing atmosphere of the resort. They also journeyed there to enjoy a place where societal rules were relaxed, and men and women could engage in mutual activities like taking the waters and playing ninepins without accusations of impropriety.⁵ Resorts were a place for rest and relaxation, but still a place almost exclusively reserved for the rich until the mid-nineteenth century. At that time, rapid advancements in transportation including the construction of turnpikes and the introduction of the steamboat and railroad led to a tourism explosion.⁶

The rise of fast and affordable transportation meant that the rapidly expanding middle class had access to vacations for the first time. However, as Cindy Aron notes, the rise of vacationing among the middle class also led to an internal struggle with the idea of leisure. Americans, particularly those with middle class occupations, believed that hard work and discipline were the principles of a successful society. Vacations meant not only taking time off work but also seeking leisurely activities, which to middle class Americans signified laziness and frivolity. Aron uses this fear of leisure and the desire to find ways to justify vacations to explain why sightseeing, camping, religious meetings, and

⁵ Aron, *Working at Play*, 25.

⁶ Sears, *Sacred Places*, 3-4.

touring workplaces such as factories and prisons were so popular among middle class tourists. These locations provided a perceived benefit, whether it was expanding the visitor culturally, spiritually, or physically, and these activities allowed middle class tourists to justify their vacations as productive.⁷ Popular attractions at this time included universities, libraries, churches, asylums, cemeteries, and museums. Later in the nineteenth century, this list would grow to include Civil War battlefields and memorials.⁸

The point of this type of vacationing was to explore places that stimulated the visitor in some way, which often meant going to sites where other people labored in an attempt to understand the mechanisms and techniques behind other professions.⁹ Dean MacCannell calls this “a touristic desire to share in the real life of the places visited, or at least to see that life as it is really lived.”¹⁰ Tourists searching for an educational experience into the inner workings of a factory, farm, or public building were hoping to break the proverbial fourth wall and gain access to behind the scenes information that was unavailable to regular visitors. However, MacCannell argues that in most of these cases, where groups take tours of restaurant kitchens or bank vaults, the guests were receiving staged authenticity—a view into the back that is set up just as much as the front.¹¹ Even today tourists are willing to forgive a little staged authenticity in exchange for the

⁷ Aron, *Working at Play*, 128.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁹ Aron, *Working at Play*, 145.

¹⁰ Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 96.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 98.

appearance of insider information, but in the nineteenth century not only would they forgive this fake reality, but also they would have been ignorant of any false pretenses. In the mid-nineteenth century, these visits to places of work or education created the first acts of heritage tourism: the interest of having an authentic experience to rediscover a part of one's culture or in these cases to better understand the technology and structure of American life. While Aron may argue that people were seeking out these experiences to rationalize their leisure time, they were also seeking out different experiences. They were not necessarily looking for the adventure of a natural landscape, the relaxation at a resort, or even the religious reassurance from a camp meeting. Instead, they were looking to explore the American heritage from its industrial roots to its monuments and cemeteries. People were no longer solely interested in just exploring America; they also wanted to understand it.

These tours were the first forays into American heritage tourism and the search for authenticity. While there are different variations on the definition of "heritage tourism" most modern organizations adhere closely to the definition put forth by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which defines heritage tourism as "traveling to experience the places, artifacts and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past...[including] cultural, historic, and natural resources."¹² The words "heritage tourism" have only recently entered into the industry's regular vocabulary, but clearly the act of

¹² "Heritage Tourism," Preservation Nation, accessed October 2, 2013, <http://www.preservationnation.org/information-center/economics-of-revitalization/heritage-tourism/>.

exploring authentic sites to better understand a culture has been around in America for much longer. Indeed, the diaries of early American tourists divulge not only the education they received by observing other people's work and customs but also the delight they took from these multi-cultural travels.¹³ These diaries and travel logs would gradually become the lifeblood of the early tourism industry, informing those back home of their travels and encouraging others to seek these places on their own terms.

Travel Journals

Although in the modern era travel guides and accounts have disappeared in the face of GPS navigation, smart phones, and television, in the early nineteenth century people relied on these written sources heavily. If a person had the time, money, and ability to travel, these accounts were the only way of finding where to go and what to expect at different locations. Additionally, if a person did not have the ability to travel, these accounts were windows into an unreachable destination. People relied on these books and guides to transport them to different places literally or from the comfort of their armchair. Thomas Clark's exhaustive effort to compile an annotated bibliography of almost every travel guide or journal created about the South from 1790-1950 creates the most reliable starting point. His work contains everyone from German travelers and English princes to minorities like women and freedmen. He comments on famous names like Frederick Law Olmsted as well as unknowns who created accurate and thought provoking accounts that detailed all aspects of Southern

¹³ Aron, *Working at Play*, 136.

society and culture. These journals provide important glimpses into modes of transportation, hotels and taverns, manners and customs, and many other aspects of Southern life as witnessed by nineteenth century tourists.

The third volume of Clark's bibliography covers 1826-1860 during which time over three hundred and fifty people wrote and published their experiences traveling in the South. This large number suggests a significant interest in the region at this time, an interest that could not even be quelled by the rising tensions of the looming Civil War.¹⁴ His bibliography includes authors like Mrs. Basil Hall whose astute observations provided one of the best descriptions of antebellum Southern life by an outsider.¹⁵ Clark also lists journals like those of A. De Puy Van Buren who visited only a few plantations in the Yazoo region upon which he based his view of the entire South. His "rose colored" interpretation of the South is woefully misguided according to Clark.¹⁶ Clark also includes more formal guidebooks that lack much commentary but instead provide approximate travel times, hotels, streets, and other useful travel information. While the guidebooks were clearly meant for actual travelers, the journals with their colorful commentary and dialogues were meant for everyone as entertainment.

These journals continued to attract attention during and after the Civil War, where the role of the writers slowly shifted from authentic descriptions to rebranding efforts. Southern travel writers became a part of a mass-marketing

¹⁴ Thomas D. Clark, ed., *The Antebellum South, 1825-1860: Cotton, Slavery, and Conflict*, vol. III, *Travels in the Old South: A Bibliography* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959), ix.

¹⁵ Clark, *The Antebellum South*, 48.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 387.

system that included guidebooks, advertisements, and pamphlets designed to create a specific image of the South that appealed to the tourists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Popular travel series included “Picturesque America” in *Appleton’s Journal* and “The Great South” in *Scribner’s Monthly Magazine*, both series providing travel accounts as well as frame-worthy illustrations of the South.¹⁷ Readers and tourists were less interested in the efforts of Reconstruction and the true state of race relations below the Mason-Dixon line; they wanted to hear about Southern chivalry and complacent servants. As the journals began catering to the new “Dixie” marketing strategy, a new touristic experience began to gain popularity, one that would allow people to experience the South in person and not on the page.

World Expositions in America

A new tourist experience began with the Philadelphia World’s Exposition in 1876. This exposition/fair quickly took hold in the United States, one that created rivalries between cities, inspired designers to create thrilling new attractions, turned organizers into fierce competitors, and attracted millions of eager attendees. World’s fairs encompassed everything that heritage tourists were searching for in one location. They could learn about new advancements in technology, explore new cultures from around the world, try new foods, and meet new people all within a single vacation. For those patriotic Americans looking to

¹⁷ Rebecca Cawood McIntyre, *Souvenirs of the Old South: Northern Tourism and Southern Mythology*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 5.

understand their own country, there were many opportunities to see federal and state buildings filled with exhibits highlighting American achievement.

All of the world's fairs in the United States hosted exhibit buildings dedicated to certain areas of the American economy and culture like horticulture, transportation, machinery, fine arts, and electricity. Other buildings were dedicated to groups of people like women, blacks, and children. Yet, some of the most popular buildings were those organized by states. Beginning at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876, states were encouraged to sponsor their own building that would personify their state through architecture, agriculture, industry, and culture. Often these buildings represented a significant building within their state. Although these early buildings served mainly as residences for the state commissioners at the fair, they would eventually become grand exhibit halls that highlighted the commodities and contributions of each state.¹⁸

By the time of the Chicago Columbian Exposition in 1893, fair coordinators had perfected the idea of creating an elaborate, temporary city where fair goers could experience new thrills, technologies, and cultures. State buildings were a major part of these cities, designed to act as life-size logos; visitors were meant to immediately recognize the building or at least relate it to that particular state or region. This led many Southern states to create plantation homes as a representative of regional architecture. At the Columbian Exposition in Chicago,

¹⁸ *Visitors' Guide to the Centennial Exhibition and Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1876), 18.

Virginia created an exact replica of Mt. Vernon, the home of President George Washington, and filled it with artifacts, portraits, and books from old Virginian families.¹⁹ At the same fair, Louisiana and Kentucky both built Colonial-style homes with the Louisiana building reflecting the state's Creole heritage and the Kentucky building echoing the state's upper class homesteads.²⁰

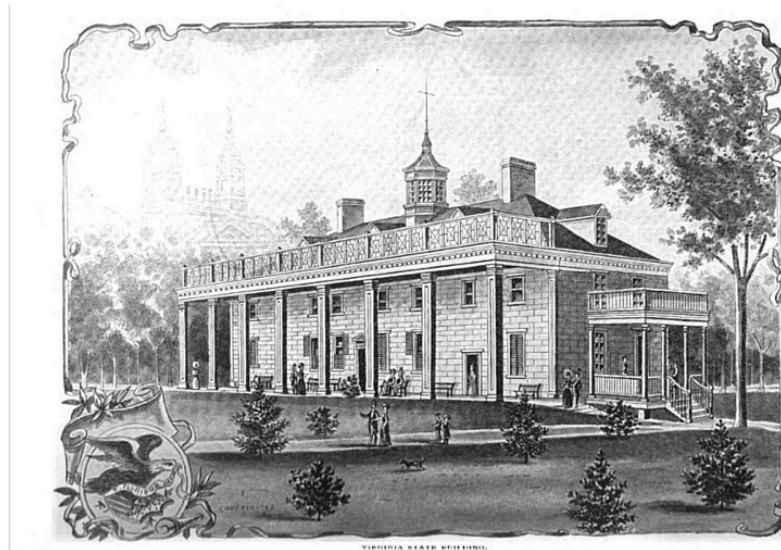


Figure 1. The Virginia State Building was an exact replica of Mt. Vernon at the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893.²¹

¹⁹ Moses P. Handy, ed., *The Official Directory of the World's Columbian Exposition* (Chicago: W.B Conkey Company, 1893), 99-100.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 85-86.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 820.

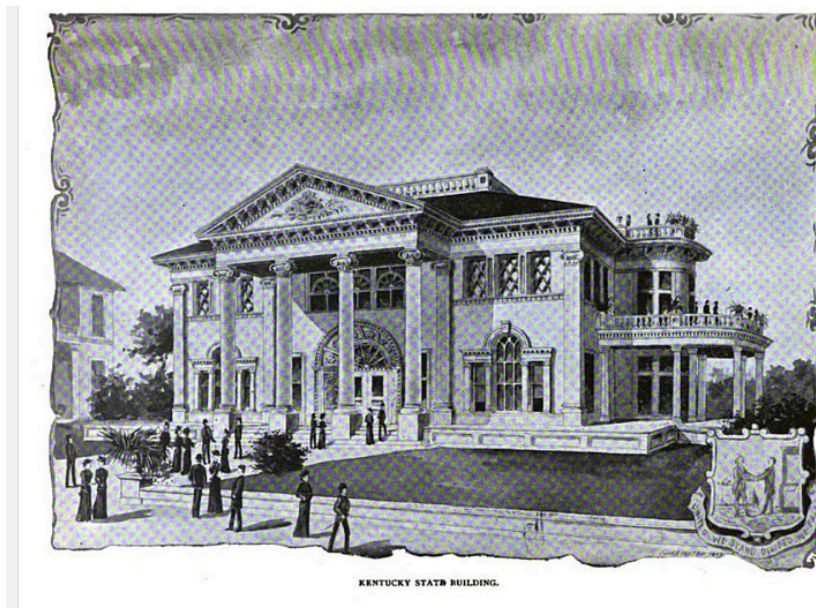


Figure 2. Kentucky State Building in the Southern Colonial-Style at the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893.²²



Figure 3. The Louisiana State Building in the Creole-Colonial style at the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893.²³

²² Handy, *Columbian Exposition*, 997.

²³ *Ibid.*, 1001.

Other states like Tennessee would follow Virginia's lead in honoring a president and would twice replicate Andrew Jackson's Hermitage at the St. Louis Louisiana Purchase International Exposition in 1904 and again at the San Francisco Panama Pacific International Exposition in 1915.²⁴ Every detail of these replica homes was made to look like an antebellum plantation from the Colonial and Jacksonian-era furniture to the black servants waiting on guests. This unequivocal acceptance by the Southern states that their true appeal lay in the memories of the antebellum South demonstrates not only the power of the post-Civil War marketing strategy but also the effortless techniques it took to manipulate tourists into thinking something was an authentic representation.

The diverse and educational elements of world's fairs clearly answered a touristic desire at the turn of the century since between 1879 and 1916 almost one hundred million people visited American expositions.²⁵ Robert Rydell suggests that these fairs acted as "world universities" allowing Americans to compare themselves to other countries and arguably other regions and states.²⁶ A negative side effect of this side-by-side contrast was the tendency to portray other cultures as backwards or even barbaric. Fair organizers at Chicago created the first Midway, which presented other cultures as something to be gawked at and not understood or respected. And organizers did not stop at

²⁴ Mike Gregory, *Expo Legacies: Names, Numbers, Facts & Figures*, (Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2009), 137 and 190.

²⁵ Robert Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 2-3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

creating a mockery of other nations; they even assisted in perpetuating the racial stereotypes among Americans, portraying Southern blacks as uneducated entertainers and willing servants. Beginning at the Philadelphia Exhibition, African Americans were presented as subservient, complacent “darkies” playing their banjos and fiddles to appease the whites. Fair organizers promoted the happy, carefree blacks and ignored “the harsh realities of sharecropping, lynching, and political exclusion.”²⁷

While fairs in the North were intended to promote American advancement, fairs hosted in the South during this period were aimed at promoting Southern progress and regional reconciliation.²⁸ These Southern expositions were not meant to be “nostalgic retreat[s] into myth;” they were an introduction to the New South, a place of progress and technology as well as beauty and charm. The three major Southern fairs were New Orleans, Atlanta, and Nashville, which saw a combined total of over four million visitors, signifying a massive amount of interest in the South and its culture after the Civil War.²⁹ These Southern fairs were brilliant serenades to the world’s businessmen as well as to international tourists. Fair organizers reintroduced the “antebellum imperial dream” to the world, evoking nostalgia and progress simultaneously.³⁰

The educational and entertaining value of these world expositions cannot be underestimated. Professionals exhibit designers like G. Brown Goode from

²⁷ Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 28-29.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 73.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 102.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 104.

the Smithsonian Institute were responsible for many of the exhibits at these events.³¹ Goode, a dedicated museum specialist with a vision for the future, believed that international fairs held amazing potential to educate large amounts of people. Goode was a proponent for the “museum of the future” and knew that the antiquated depositories of the past must be replaced with updated institutions dedicated to enlightenment.³² He also thought that museums should be more democratic and tell stories that every man could relate to not just those of the country’s elite.³³ With a man of such vision designing the exhibits in Chicago, it is no wonder the fair ended up inspiring the Field Museum, and Goode would go on to continue his talents at the Southern expositions eager to inspire museums of the future in that region as well.³⁴ His creativity and design techniques may have drawn in thousands of people, but his ideas of democracy in museums suggests the beginning of the professional world’s interest in heritage tourism. Goode’s thoughts on the “museum of the future” show that powerful people in the tourism industry were beginning to realize the value of attracting the lower classes and the profit both economically and culturally that could be made by educating these people through exhibits and events.

³¹ Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair*, 43.

³² G. Brown Goode, *The Museums of the Future*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1891), 427.

³³ *Ibid.*, 432.

³⁴ Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair*, 99.

The Age of the Automobile

While world's fairs continued to be popular tourist attractions into the twentieth century, the evolutionary tables of the tourism industry were spinning again, this time introducing an entirely new method of vacationing based upon the popularity and wide-spread ownership of the Model T. Gone were the days when people had to rely on timetables for stagecoaches, steamboats, and trains. Enter the days of the automobile, the highway, and the family road trip. Tourists were no longer relegated to one-day excursions or month-long sojourns; they could travel where they wanted and when they wanted. Additionally, the development of the paid vacation helped expand the reach of tourism to the working class. Progressive-era employers realized that offering paid vacations created a happier, more efficient labor force that resulted in financial profit.³⁵ With this change, vacationing became a true American pastime, accessible to all classes. The rapid expansion of roads and highways in the twentieth century meant that Americans suddenly had the time, means, and ability to explore places that previous generations had only read about or experienced through world's fair exhibits.

Suddenly families were driving through cities and towns, staying in motor courts and motels, and seeing sights and attractions that were previously inaccessible. Tourists began experiencing authentic culture on an entirely new level, spending time in small towns on the Dixie Highway or visiting Civil War battlefields. All of these activities spurred a new interest in heritage tourism. The

³⁵ Aron, *Working at Play*, 205.

road trip became not only a bonding experience for families but also a way to explore exciting cultural sites and new areas of the country. The tourism industry experienced an explosion during this time with new highways constructed, motels and hotels springing up on roadsides, and towns and cities receiving new streams of travelers. While these are undoubtedly positive effects of the automobile's arrival, there were also major drawbacks, mainly in the form of the interstate system. Although built to aid the country's military defense, the interstate system would ultimately pronounce a death sentence on many small towns and additionally lend a hand to the demise of historic sections of larger cities.

Under the auspices of urban renewal and slum clearing, Congress passed the Housing Act of 1949 and later the 1956 Interstate Highway Act to rid cities of blighted, dangerous areas and to revitalize downtown districts. These policies did indeed create new opportunities for downtown areas; hotels, offices, convention centers, and apartments sprung up on these cleared areas, and highways made cities more accessible.³⁶ However, these policies also led to the loss of homes, streets, neighborhoods, and ultimately identities. Poor minorities were most commonly the targeted population leading many to rename urban renewal, "Negro Removal." In Chicago, a professor at DePaul University revealed that 80% of those forced to relocate for urban renewal were black while

³⁶ Andrew Hurley, *Beyond Preservation: Using Public History to Revitalize Inner Cities*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 10.

90% of those moving into these upgraded areas were white.³⁷ Overall, the process became known for its ability to remove the poor and replace them with the rich. Between 1949 and 1967, more than 600,000 people lost their homes to urban renewal or highway construction.³⁸ Slowly, the “seedy” areas of town were removed, but so too were the people, the stories, and the places that they called home. A significant loss of heritage took place during these decades, and people who spoke up against these tactics were often called selfish and shortsighted. The idea of adaptive reuse or revitalization based on a neighborhood’s original character would not truly take hold until after a complete resurgence of heritage awareness that began with a couple of kick-start events and the publication of a simple book.

Resurgence of Heritage Awareness

After the ravaging effects of urban renewal took place in cities across America, entire populations and areas lost their unique identities and histories. People lost connection with the places they called home because of change and modernization. The heritage of individual places seemed to matter less, and with the all-consuming worldwide events like the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement taking place, Americans seemed little concerned with connecting to their roots. However, this slowly began to change in the 1960s with the Centennial Commemoration of the Civil War.

³⁷ "Neglect Of Cities Neglects Nation," *The Times-News* (Hendersonville, NC), February 29, 1968, 9.

³⁸ Hurley, *Beyond Preservation*, 10.

In 1957 Congress created the National Civil War Centennial Commission designed to organize and provide for nationwide commemorations and ceremonies that would appropriately pay respect to the memory of the Civil War. The aim of the commission was to create opportunities for distinguished programs and events that would avoid sectionalism and political strife and instead promote unity and devotion during the Cold War. Activities were designed to avoid controversial issues and instead focus on microfilming historic Civil War records, creating commemorative stamps, and publishing educational materials.³⁹ Forty-five states established Civil War commissions and contributed vastly to the centennial by staging statewide programs, sponsoring essay contests, erecting highway markers, and renovating monuments.⁴⁰ However, despite these positive initiatives made by local commissions, the Centennial was anything but a harmonious event, and in the South was a heavily biased celebration of the Confederacy. In states like Tennessee most of the events celebrated Confederate victories or leaders, and when none were to be had, they mourned the Lost Cause. Although the Civil War Centennial event was mishandled by officials and created an exclusive commemoration honored mainly by whites, it did bring thousands of new tourists to the South and encouraged a renewed interest in the past. People became aware of national battlefields in their hometowns; they took pride in their ancestors who had fought in the war; and they participated in community commemorations for major events. Although

³⁹ Civil War Centennial Commission, *The Civil War Centennial: A Report to Congress* (Washington: United States Government, 1968), 10.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 51-52.

the war commemorations of the 1960s were still segregated and biased, they began the conversation in America of the importance of history and heritage.

This commemoration was followed by two major events that sparked a larger, nationwide interest in history and community heritage: the American Bicentennial and the publication of Alex Haley's *Roots* and the subsequent television mini-series. Americans nationwide became obsessed with celebrating the creation of the American nation while others frantically searched for their ancestors' stories. The glory of the modern era lost its shimmering touch, and people instead began to see real possibilities in their heritage, leading to a renewed search for authenticity.

The American Bicentennial got off to a slow start. In 1966 President Johnson set up a Bicentennial Commission whose job was to organize a theme and a main event; however, after seven years they achieved little, received their discharge papers, and were replaced. By this time, the major cities that the government had hoped would host a world's fair could not afford such an endeavor, so the new American Revolution Bicentennial Administration (ARBA) called for a national celebration to be held in each and every community across America. Congress gave ARBA a \$22 million budget to provide grants for sanctioned projects. Over 3,000 communities submitted plans for grant money, which included books and music, plays and films, and fireworks and parades. Some projects seemed less connected to the overall bicentennial celebration but were still attuned to the idea of a heritage celebration. For instance, Sumner, Missouri built a giant goose statue as a tribute to its title as the "Wild Goose

Capital of the World,” and Texas held a statewide chili cook-off.⁴¹ These sideshow events were not without their critics, but what better way to celebrate two hundred years of America than by displaying the unique and diverse culture that exists within the country’s borders? The Lewiston *Morning Tribune* summed it up best when they called the Independence Day celebrations of 1976 “happy, kooky, solemn, patriotic extravaganza[s].” John W. Warner, the head of ARBA, said, “ ‘America is getting exactly the Bicentennial it wants.’ ” While most of the American celebrations consisted of fireworks with some additional entertainment, others chose this moment to focus on local history and adaptive reuse. Warner himself claimed that his favorite bicentennial projects were the “ ‘hundreds of railroad stations, courthouses, and schoolhouses that have been restored and turned into museums and civic centers.’ ” While many Americans honored the Founding Fathers, others looked to their own ancestors like New Mexicans retracing the Dominguez-Escalante Trail, New Orleans French cuisine, music, and Creole history, and Elko, Nevada’s Basque festival. Other places chose a different approach like Lake, Pennsylvania, where the city decided to “look in the other direction, to the future” by building a UFO landing pad. As their project director said, it is “ ‘bringing the whole town together. And isn’t that what the Bicentennial is all about?’ ”⁴²

⁴¹ "Bicentennial: slow start," *The Gadsden Times* (Gadsden, AL), April 14, 1975, 4.

⁴² "Bicentennial: a national mosaic," *Lewiston Morning Tribune* (Lewiston, ID), July 3, 1976, 5C.

What began as a slow-rolling, national event turned into local, community-driven projects based on celebrations that encouraged people to explore their heritage and the history around them instead of searching for meaning in an expansive event that would ultimately have been exclusive. Americans created their own bicentennial with each celebration based on an authentic representation of that community. The excitement and participation that surrounded the bicentennial only intensified with the release of *Roots* and the televised version of it that aired a year later. “*Roots* held the nation enthralled for eight days. Prime-time television, public libraries, and Alex Haley won’t ever be the same.” The 12-hour miniseries based on Haley’s book about his slave ancestors created a massive wave of interest in genealogy. Thousands of people flocked to libraries and archives to trace their own lineage and find their own story. Haley himself commented that his book “ ‘evoked this universal need of people who want to know who they are and where they came from. The main thing is that the book and film touched—and are touching—some pulse.’ ” The National Archives in Washington reported a huge bump in their numbers in the months following the mini-series premier, including a tripling in the number of African American visitors.⁴³

Roots started an obsession with genealogy in America that even today has yet to subside. The book lives on in television shows like *Who Do You Think You Are?*, where this PBS show traces the ancestors of American celebrities,

⁴³ "'Roots' Send Thousands In Search Of Ancestors," *The Telegraph* (Nashua, NH), July 12, 1977.

and websites like Ancestry.com, a subscription-based service where visitors can search genealogy records online from the convenience of their home. Archives and libraries are still filled with people searching for their ancestors, and as people begin discovering their roots, they find themselves wanting to visit the towns and cities where their ancestors lived, worked, or fought. This desire for a personal connection has led to a substantial makeover in the tourism sector. The family road trip now includes small towns and cities again, but this time in search of a particular house or restaurant that they know their parents, grandparents, great-grandparents visited, lived in, or worked at. People search for some deeper connection to their family and its story, and somehow standing in places that they stood, walking down streets that they walked, and visiting people and places they once knew, makes that connection more tangible.

Heritage Tourism and the Heritage Center

Heritage tourism in America did not appear overnight nor was it created by one particular group of people. Instead, a combined effort by the public, tourism officials, and preservationists created a marketable product that attracts millions of people every year. Tourists searching for unique characteristics of a region, cities and states looking for an economic boost, and preservationists looking for ways to preserve historic landmarks worked together to create the heritage tourism industry that thrives today.⁴⁴ Amy E. Facca and J. Winthrop Aldrich argue that the reason heritage tourism thrives is because “any community can

⁴⁴ Peter H. Brink, "Heritage Tourism in the U.S.A.: Grassroots Efforts to Combine Preservation and Tourism," *APT Bulletin* 29, no. 3/4 (1998): 59.

duplicate another community's water lines, industrial park, or development incentives, but no community can duplicate another community's historic and cultural resources or heritage."⁴⁵ And this form of tourism is not just a pastime for a handful of history buffs; it ranks in "the top three economic sectors of most states and nations worldwide" because heritage tourists stay longer and spend more money than any other kind of tourist.⁴⁶ Additionally heritage tourism in America attracts a wider segment of the population because it is increasingly popular among middle-class black Americans looking to reconnect with their ancestry despite some of the still-present bigotry at sites and museums. Angela de Silva, owner of the National Black Tourism Network in St. Louis, compares black tourists visiting Southern museums and plantations as on the same level as Jewish tourists visiting Holocaust sites—"to get in touch."⁴⁷

Of course, heritage tourism is not without its critics. Some people believe heritage tourist sites serve up history in a boring and linear fashion that is missing the human element.⁴⁸ Too often heritage sites settle for the same repetition of facts instead of confronting the controversial issues. They rest on the ability to provide visitors with comfortable stories that complement their vacation mentality instead of providing them with real stories based around the

⁴⁵ Amy E. Facca and J. Winthrop Aldrich, "Putting the Past to Work for the Future," *The Public Historian* 33, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 40.

⁴⁶ Facca and Aldrich, "Putting the Past to Work," 44.

⁴⁷ Dionne Walker, "Southern heritage tourism luring a growing market of black Americans," *USA Today*, July 25, 2005, accessed October 2, 2013, http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/travel/destinations/2005-07-25-black-tourism_x.htm.

⁴⁸ Wilton Corkern, "Heritage Tourism: Where Public and History Don't Always Meet," *American Studies International* XLII, nos. 2 & 3 (June-October 2004): 10.

human experience. However, Wilton Corkern argues that people crave the “controversial, complicated, and challenging,” which is why the U.S. Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. has such high attendance numbers. Tourists do not mind being confronted with complicated or even shocking material, but they do not receive enough opportunities that force them into this situation, where they must intellectually and emotionally connect with a place or people. Corkern believes this is the biggest challenge for heritage tourism sites in the future; they must raise the bar on what kinds of exhibits they provide and how they present their information so they can continue to compete with other popular forms of entertainment.⁴⁹

Heritage tourism today means different things for different people. For tourist organizations around the country, it means dollar signs and increased traffic to states, cities, and attractions. For some places, it means staged authenticity, either willingly complied with or forced upon them in an attempt to create a particular vision to appease tourist eyes. For other places, it means finally getting to tell their story. For tourists, it can mean either accepting stories at face value or seeking out experiences that challenge their way of thinking and broaden their understanding of American culture. Heritage tourism is by no means static. In the antebellum era, heritage tourism meant seeking sites that defined the American spirit and the complementary travel journals that painted pictures for the armchair tourist. Later, it grew into the amazingly grand displays at world’s fairs and the buildings and exhibits that highlighted the American

⁴⁹ Corkern, "Heritage Tourism: Where Public," 15.

culture. With the arrival of the automobile, it became the family road trip and the discovery of cities, towns, and roadside attractions for a new generation of Americans. Then after the American Bicentennial and the popular *Roots* mini-series, thousands of genealogy searches sent Americans crisscrossing the country searching for a connection to their ancestors. As demonstrated by this massive evolution, heritage tourism has always been a part of the American culture and continues to inspire people to search for authenticity and enlightenment.

However, in this search people often find that they do not know where to start. They want those authentic, local experiences, but they cannot find them on their own. In response to this conundrum that tourists find themselves in is the heritage center. Sometimes called a heritage museum or cultural center, these places are more than a welcome center but not quite a museum. They have exhibits like a museum, but instead of telling the whole story, heritage center exhibits introduce visitors to the area or highlight interesting aspects of the past. Their responsibility is to return people to the streets so they can explore these sights in person. They provide brochures, resources, and staff to direct visitors to the next stop on an itinerary. They can act as an orientation center of sorts for both out-of-town tourists as well as current residents. People rarely become a tourist in their hometown until they have company, and often when their company arrives, the local residents are at a loss as to where to start. A heritage center can answer that question leading people to the correct resources and sites that will give them the information or experience they are searching for.

Heritage centers are still a relatively new addition to the industry and have yet to be defined by leading professionals in the field but are a critical part of cultural tourism and can provide answers as well as sounding boards for the public. The next chapter will provide a case study of a current heritage center in Murfreesboro, Tennessee and the accomplishments and challenges it experienced in its creation. The hope is that a place like the one in Murfreesboro will help create an example for future centers to build on, duplicating successful practices and improving on them as well.

CHAPTER II: THE HERITAGE CENTER OF MURFREESBORO AND RUTHERFORD COUNTY: A CASE STUDY

Tucked away just off the historic Murfreesboro Public Square on an old stretch of the Dixie Highway, the Heritage Center of Murfreesboro and Rutherford County sits in a one-story brick building at the corner of West College and North Walnut Streets. Here, in this historic community founded over two hundred years ago, the Heritage Center attempts to combine interpretation and promotion to create a historical orientation center for Rutherford County. Inside the walls of 225 West College Street, the Heritage Center shares its space with the downtown revitalization program, Main Street Murfreesboro/Rutherford County, Inc. These two entities strive to create a sustainable and dynamic downtown atmosphere that attracts both community members and tourists. Their close proximity to the downtown district was no accident; in fact, the closeness of the square ensures that both the Heritage Center and Main Street can capitalize on the history of downtown Murfreesboro. Additionally, being located at the center of Rutherford County allows the organizations to become a place of common ground for all communities in the county.

Despite their proximity and common goals, these organizations utilize their location in different ways and have distinct mission statements. Main Street Murfreesboro focuses on attracting visitors to the downtown area in order to create economic opportunities for local businesses, which in turn helps maintain Murfreesboro's unique identity. The Heritage Center meanwhile concentrates on

attracting visitors to its locale for an introduction to the area's history and then sends them out to historic sites to create a viable heritage tourism industry for the county. By highlighting key portions of the county's history through exhibits, tours, and programs, the Heritage Center offers its visitors a partial story that can only be completed by exploring these heritage sites firsthand. Since it performs the functions of both a museum and a visitor's center, the Heritage Center of Murfreesboro and Rutherford County is an ideal case study for the establishment of future heritage centers. It not only employs first-rate practices and programs for students and visitors but also demonstrates some of the challenges heritage centers face as they try to compete with other modern tourist attractions. As such, the Heritage Center case study provided below will serve as a guide for the establishment of the Sumner County Music and Heritage Center. Using the successes and failures of the Heritage Center in Murfreesboro as a learning manual, the Heritage Center in Sumner County can take ideas that are feasible for its location to create a place that appropriately serves the local community and tourist population. The following description of the founding of the Heritage Center in Murfreesboro as well as the programs and exhibits it offers serves as a model for Sumner County as well as any other city, county, or region looking to establish a heritage center.

The Heritage Center in Murfreesboro began as an idea for an interpretive center for the Congressionally established Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area (TCWNHA). Prodded by the local Congressman, Tennessee's Bart Gordon, the Heritage Area looked for both a venue and a partner. At the

same time, Main Street Murfreesboro was attempting to raise its profile by establishing a permanent downtown headquarters. Part of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Center, Main Street Murfreesboro is a nonprofit organization "committed to maintaining, enhancing, and promoting" historic downtown Murfreesboro.⁵⁰ The National Trust established the Main Street Center program in 1980 to address the rising threat to historic downtown areas. Before World War II, these areas were energetic community centers with businesses, libraries, banks, movie palaces, and offices attracting a wide range of the population. Main Street was a place of constant commercial and social activity. However, the past forty years has seen sweeping changes in the way Americans shop, eat, work, and play. With the introduction of the interstate system and expanding suburban sprawl, the decades following World War II saw Americans moving farther away from downtown. Instead of troubling with the traffic, metered parking, and congestion of downtown areas, Americans sought entertainment and low prices at strip malls, multiplexes, and chain restaurants. Local businesses suffered dramatically during these years, as did the formerly vibrant downtown communities. Across the nation, "the story repeated itself" as downtown areas became filled with "neglected buildings, boarded-up storefronts and empty, trash-strewn streets."⁵¹ Gone were the days when people thronged

⁵⁰ Main Street Murfreesboro/Rutherford County, Inc., accessed April 18, 2013, <http://www.downtownmurfreesboro.com/>.

⁵¹ "What Happened to America's Main Streets?," National Trust for Historic Preservation, accessed April 18, 2013, <http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/about-main-street/getting-started/what-happened-to-main-street.html#.UXCrM3Cka9w>.

to the heart of downtown to interact with their neighbors in a unique community setting. Instead, suburbanites replaced their community centers with corporate chains and cookie cutter architecture.

The same story played out in Murfreesboro. It began with the urban renewal projects of the 1950s and the construction of Highway 70, which not only rerouted traffic away from downtown but also destroyed historic African American communities pushing them farther away from white neighborhoods and the public square. With the addition of Interstate 24 in the 1960s and the steady movement of white families to suburban homes, downtown Murfreesboro suffered a dramatic loss of business and gradually became rundown. Cracks in the sidewalk, deteriorating buildings, and empty storefronts led to a dilapidated downtown area in the 1970s. The antebellum courthouse even came under attack by those wanting something more functional and up-to-date, and the historical integrity of the public square diminished as storeowners put modern facades over their buildings. Murfreesboro, like many other cities and towns across the nation, seemed to have lost its connection to its community center.



Figure 4. "By the early 1980s downtown Murfreesboro was filled with visual clutter."⁵²



Figure 5. "Before the Public Improvement Project, streets and sidewalks were crumbling and dangerous."⁵³

⁵² "Main Street: Keeping the Heart of Murfreesboro and Rutherford County Strong," Main Street Murfreesboro/Rutherford County, Inc., Powerpoint, 2006.

⁵³ "Main Street," Powerpoint, 2006.



Figure 6. A look at the South Side of the square in the 1980s before the Main Street Program encouraged owners to return the buildings to their original appearance.⁵⁴

In 1985, Murfreesboro's new Main Street program sounded the alarm for a rebirth of the downtown area. All over America, Main Street programs popped up to remind their residents of the unique ability of a downtown center to bring people together. Led by the National Trust's four principles--organization, promotion, design, and economic restructuring--Main Street programs began an overhaul of the nation's downtowns.⁵⁵ In 1983 under the vision of Governor Lamar Alexander, Tennessee's Main Street Program was born, collaborating with the Tennessee Historical Commission and focusing on "historic preservation as a

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ "The Main Street Four-Point Approach," National Trust for Historic Preservation, accessed April 18, 2013, <http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/about-main-street/the-approach/#.UXCsFXCka9w>.

foundation for economic development.”⁵⁶ Although Tennessee’s program has undergone major challenges, even losing its funding entirely in the late 1990s, it now supports twenty-four Main Street Communities across the state and an additional twenty-two communities in its Tennessee Downtowns Program.⁵⁷ Meanwhile, in Murfreesboro under the guidance of the new Main Street program, major renovations and revitalization projects went into effect. The goal was to fix the cracked sidewalks, put power lines underground, return buildings to their original appearance, and give the place a brighter, more neighborhood-friendly atmosphere.

⁵⁶ Heather L. Bailey, "Tennessee Main Street Program," in *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, ed. Carroll Van West, accessed April 18, 2013, <http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=1693>.

⁵⁷ Ibid. Tennessee Downtowns Program is a training program for Downtown areas that want to learn more about the Main Street Approach before beginning a full-scale revitalization effort.



Figure 7. “The Public Improvement Project buried electric lines, renovated sidewalks and streets, and added period lighting and landscaping.”⁵⁸



Figure 8. The South Side of the Square – after the buildings were restored to a historic appearance⁵⁹

⁵⁸ “Main Street,” Powerpoint, 2006.

Main Street's initiatives did not stop at historic preservation efforts. They instituted new slogans, campaigns, and events to attract more and more residents back to the square. Touting that Downtown Murfreesboro is "Where Hip Meets Historic" and promoting "experience shopping" where visitors interact with neighbors and support local entrepreneurs, Main Street sparked renewed community interest in Downtown Murfreesboro. The introduction of annual events also proved extremely popular as well as beneficial for local businesses. Music festivals like JazzFest and the Friday Night Live Concert Series crowd the courthouse lawns with swarms of music fans and provide venues for local artists; holiday events like Trick-or-Treating on the Square, Carriage Rides, and Pictures with Santa provide family-fun entertainment that leads to connections between consumers and business owners; and the Main Street Saturday Market has become a summertime attraction that supports local farmers.⁶⁰ Main Street has turned the downtown area around, giving new life to the square and inviting people to return to their historic community center.

⁵⁹ "Main Street," Powerpoint, 2006.

⁶⁰ Main Street Murfreesboro/Rutherford County, Inc., accessed April 18, 2013, <http://www.downtownmurfreesboro.com/>.



Figure 9. "The Annual Main Street JazzFest, a free festival, brings thousands of people to the square each year."⁶¹



Figure 10. Annual Christmas Tree Lighting with Santa Claus⁶²

⁶¹ "Main Street," Powerpoint, 2006.

⁶² Ibid.

With the overwhelming amount of revitalization going on in the downtown area and the increasing number of tourists traveling to Murfreesboro, the National Heritage Area saw the need for a place near the historic square that could act as an orientation center for visitors and residents alike. The idea for the Downtown Murfreesboro Heritage Center developed out of the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation's Heritage Communities Development Initiative (HCIDI). This program was designed to create economic opportunities through cultural development at the local level. Through years of experience, the Center had found that community-based projects have the largest success rates because they grow at a grassroots level that gives them sustainability only available through local support. They had tested this concept repeatedly in communities across the nation at one-day workshops designed to highlight viable opportunities for local, regional, and national partnerships to create economic and cultural benefits.⁶³ These successful workshops resulted in an International Heritage Development Conference in Nashville in June 2005. Heritage development leaders from across the nation and even outside the United States attended the conference and left impressed and inspired by these multi-level partnership projects in neighborhoods and communities across the Middle Tennessee region. The highlight of the conference was "Workshop Tuesday" where participants were sent to thirteen different venues in the area to experience the success of these projects firsthand.

⁶³ Memorandum by Carroll Van West, "What We Can Achieve," December 2005, 1.

The impact of this conference was felt immediately. For Murfreesboro, which had hosted two Workshop Tuesday events, it meant the beginnings of a permanent institution for heritage development in the form of a downtown heritage center.⁶⁴ Designed to promote the heritage assets in and around the square, the idea behind the Heritage Center was to create a hybrid between the traditional museum and the visitor center that would cater to “tourism growth, community vitality, and heritage education.”⁶⁵ It was to be a place of community interaction as well as an orientation center for visitors, and most importantly it would be free and open to the public thereby creating a place accessible to everyone. This place would also serve as a learning lab for university students to acquire professional skills, gain experience with public programming, and receive training in museum practices and exhibit development.

As a testament to the many workshops already hosted by the Center for Historic Preservation, the Downtown Heritage Center came from many partnerships throughout the city, county, and state. The Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area, Main Street Murfreesboro, and the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation were all major partners within the creation of the center. However, organizers knew that additional support from the city and county would solidify the center’s presence. In a presentation to the city council in Fall 2006, Dr. Carroll Van West, Center for Historic Preservation Executive Director and MTSU professor, presented examples of the major benefits provided by a

⁶⁴ Memorandum by West, “What We Can Achieve,” 2.

⁶⁵ Ron Taylor and Janelee Wise to Tommy Bragg, July 10, 2006, The Heritage Center of Murfreesboro & Rutherford County, Murfreesboro, TN.

downtown heritage center. The center would help make Murfreesboro a year-round destination; create an accessible downtown orientation center; partner together public and private entities in the goal of heritage development; provide programming and education for adults and children to explore local heritage; emphasize businesses, museums, and organizations already in existence; and economically benefit the city and county.⁶⁶ The Downtown Heritage Center would ultimately become a community asset that would encompass everything the Center for Historic Preservation's workshops had attempted to do.

The National Heritage Area, Main Street, and the city chose the location at 225 West College Street because of its close proximity to the downtown square, its appropriate size, sufficient on-site parking, handicap accessibility, and location on the old Dixie Highway.⁶⁷ First, the easy walking distance to the square meant that the Heritage Center staff would be able to offer walking tours to visitors and recommend a variety of places to shop and eat. Second, the building's 6,700-square-foot space allowed enough room for exhibits, office space, and meeting areas. Third, the on-site parking was crucial because it gave visitors the ability to park just outside the Heritage Center without worrying about the two-hour time limit imposed on the square. Fourth, the handicap accessibility meant that everyone could utilize the facility no matter his or her physical limitations. And finally, the location on the old Dixie Highway was a historical bonus. West College Street was formerly known as Gasoline Alley on the Dixie Highway and

⁶⁶ Carroll Van West, "Murfreesboro's Downtown Heritage Center: Benefits, Opportunities, Partnerships" (City Council Meeting, Murfreesboro, TN, Fall 2006).

⁶⁷ Taylor and Wise to Bragg.

was the major point of access to the square.⁶⁸ It seemed appropriate for an organization focused on promoting the community's heritage to be located on one of its historically important thoroughfares.

The 1960s brick building location had been home to numerous businesses before the interest by Main Street.⁶⁹ Previously, a hardware store, children's clothing store, and the Rutherford County Realtors Association had utilized this building. The occupant at the time of Main Street's inquiries was The Bangkok Café, a Thai restaurant whose owner had installed ornate hardwood floors throughout.⁷⁰ The city and Main Street combined their resources to meet the \$700,000 price tag. Additional funds for startup came from a one-time donation by State Farm Insurance Company. Main Street and the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area (TCWNHA) as well as the Center for Historic Preservation would provide staffing, equipment and supplies, exhibit and display materials, as well as funding for daily management.⁷¹

On October 30, 2006, The Heritage Center opened its doors for the first time and began working to fulfill its mission statement "to tell the stories of Murfreesboro and Rutherford County to residents and visitors through exhibits and public programs, and to serve as an orientation center directing them to

⁶⁸ The Firestone Company next door to the new Heritage Center building has been in operation since 1926, a remnant of the Dixie Highway heydays.

⁶⁹ Libby Green to Kimberly F. Nyberg, "Letter of Intent Draft," February 27, 2007, Heritage Center of Murfreesboro & Rutherford County, Murfreesboro, TN.

⁷⁰ Jennifer Butt, interview by Sara Beth Gideon, Heritage Center of Murfreesboro and Rutherford County Murfreesboro, TN, February 6, 2013.

⁷¹ Taylor and Wise to Bragg.

historic and cultural sites, resources, and events throughout the county.”⁷²

Although still a work-in-progress at this point, the Heritage Center greeted its first visitors with window banners, two temporary exhibits, as well as brochures, posters, and fliers for area sites and events. Since that opening in 2006, the Heritage Center’s impact can be seen in the growing visitation numbers, the popularity of its walking and driving tour brochures, and the continued success of educational and cultural programs.

As part of its identity as an orientation center, the Heritage Center offers a wide range of brochures and rack cards for all of the area sites as well as several walking and driving tours. A few of the most popular brochures include:

- *In the Footsteps of Notable Women*, which takes visitors to sites relating to prominent women from Rutherford County like former First Lady Sarah Childress Polk and Mary Kate Patterson, a Confederate spy
- *Place Names of Rutherford County*, which discusses the origins of the different community names in Rutherford County and encourages tourists to visit these unique areas
- *Visit the Site: A Guide to Rutherford County’s Civil War Sites*, which lists all of the major Civil War sites in the county from Murfreesboro, Smyrna, and the Battle of Stones River

⁷² Heritage Center of Murfreesboro and Rutherford County, accessed April 18, 2013, <http://www.hcmrc.org/>.

- *Explore Historic Murfreesboro!*, which provides information for a self-guided walking tour that includes a larger portion of the city's historic district than is offered on the guided walking tour at the Heritage Center.

Additionally, over the years the Heritage Center has offered a wide variety of permanent, temporary, and visiting exhibits. The principal, permanent exhibit at the Heritage Center entitled *The Time that Changed Everything* debuted in Fall 2007. Two graduate assistants from MTSU created and installed the exhibit, which features panels and exhibits designed to discuss the war, home life, and Reconstruction. The exhibit also includes several interactive elements to assist children's understanding of this topic.⁷³ These elements include a reproduction diary by a teenage girl who witnessed Forrest's raid on the Murfreesboro square, a tent illustrating a soldier's life outside of the battlefield, and a set of school benches with reproductions of Reconstruction era textbooks.⁷⁴ The importance of the Civil War exhibit arises from the large number of Civil War sites in the county including Oakland's Mansion, the Sam Davis Home, and, of course, the Stones River National Battlefield. Additionally the widespread interest in the Civil War among the American population means that not only is the Civil War exhibit a key feature within the Heritage Center, it is also a prominent story included in the walking tour.

Another popular permanent exhibit is *Entering the Modern Era:*

Murfreesboro's Jazz Age, an exhibit discussing Murfreesboro's coming of age in

⁷³ "Helping Communities and Citizens Preserve the Best of the Past," *Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area News*, Winter 2008, 6.

⁷⁴ Heritage Center of Murfreesboro and Rutherford County.

the early twentieth century. The exhibit focuses on downtown life, local industry, Jim Crow laws, and many other aspects of life around the turn of the century.⁷⁵ Many of the artifacts or pictures featured in this exhibit are expanded upon in the walking tour, and visitors often enjoy seeing the exhibit come to life in front of them as they explore the square. The exhibit also introduces the popular Uncle Dave Macon Days festival and its importance to the community. Uncle Dave Macon was a legendary banjo player and Grand Ole Opry member, and the three-day festival held in July at the Cannonsburgh Village in Murfreesboro celebrates the unique culture of Americana Music and Dance.⁷⁶ The last permanent exhibit at the Heritage Center is the *Place Names of Rutherford County*, an extremely popular exhibit among local residents, who usually express great interest in learning new information about the origins of their community's names.⁷⁷

The Heritage Center also displays temporary or rotating exhibits. The two exhibits displayed at the opening of the Heritage Center in 2006 are the current rotating exhibits. The first is *From the Nation's Capital to Neighborhood*

⁷⁵ "Heritage Center sets grand opening for expanded Jazz Age exhibit," *The Murfreesboro Post* (Murfreesboro, TN), August 25, 2008, accessed October 2, 2013, <http://www.murfreesboropost.com/heritage-center-sets-grand-opening-for-expanded-jazz-age-exhibit-cms-12651>.

⁷⁶ "Uncle Dave Macon Days," Tennessee Vacation, accessed April 18, 2013, <https://www.tnvacation.com/vendors/uncle-dave-macon-days/>.

⁷⁷ "What's in a name? Exhibit explores stories behind county's names," *The Murfreesboro Post* (Murfreesboro, TN), July 22, 2008, accessed October 2, 2013, <http://www.murfreesboropost.com/whats-in-a-name-exhibit-explores-stories-behind-countys-names-cms-11989>. The creators of this exhibit designed the previously mentioned driving brochure of the same name after the positive public reception of the exhibit.

Classrooms: Rutherford County Women, Past and Present, which highlights the contributions of ten local women.⁷⁸ The second is *The Occupied City*, a look at Murfreesboro during the Civil War and its occupation by Federal troops.⁷⁹ In addition to these rotating exhibits, the Heritage Center has also displayed several student exhibits including a look at the World War II Tennessee Maneuvers in Rutherford County; a feature on historic photographs of Murfreesboro taken by local business Shacklett's Photography; an exploration of the community partnerships that make Murfreesboro a tournament town; a glimpse of Murfreesboro's past through historic postcards; and a focus on MTSU's Murphy Center and the world-renowned artists that have performed there.⁸⁰ Finally the Heritage Center has also had the opportunity to host several visiting exhibits

⁷⁸ "New exhibit features local women who have made history," *The Murfreesboro Post* (Murfreesboro, TN), accessed October 2, 2013, <http://www.murfreesboropost.com/new-exhibit-features-local-women-who-have-made-history-cms-2361>.

⁷⁹ "Heritage Center Opens Its Doors," *Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area*, Fall 2006, 1.

⁸⁰ Gordon Belt, "World War II exhibit opens in Murfreesboro..." *The Posterity Project* (blog), entry posted May 1, 2010, accessed October 2, 2013, <http://posterityproject.blogspot.com/2010/05/world-war-ii-exhibit-opens-in.html>. Amy Gregory, "Photo Exhibit Tells of Murfreesboro's Past," *The Murfreesboro Pulse*, May 28, 2009, accessed October 1, 2013, <http://boropulse.com/2009/05/photo-exhibit-tells-of-murfreesboros-past/>. Catherine Liewen, "One on One: College Student Sara Beth Gideon Chronicles Sports History," *Athletic Business*, February 2011, accessed October 2, 2013, <http://www.athleticbusiness.com/articles/article.aspx?articleid=3706&zoneid=8>. "Through 10/12 - Historic Postcards of Murfreesboro Exhibit," MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, last modified March 27, 2012, accessed October 2, 2013, <http://www.mtsuhistpres.org/calendar/2012/03/27/through-1012-historic-postcards-of-murfreesboro-exhibit.321168>. "When Murphy Center was KING exhibit to open," *The Murfreesboro Post*, September 10, 2009, accessed October 2, 2013, <http://www.murfreesboropost.com/when-murphy-center-was-king-exhibit-to-open-cms-19150>.

including features on John Work, a prominent figure in African American music, and Abraham Lincoln, on loan from the New York Historical Society as well as two travelling Tennessee exhibits, one from the Scenic Tennessee Photography Contest and the other a study of Tennessee Samplers.⁸¹ Future plans for exhibits at the Heritage Center include two additional Civil War exhibits designed to attract additional visitors during the final years of the war's sesquicentennial commemoration.⁸²

As seen through the variety of exhibits listed above, the Heritage Center displays and interprets a large story that centers on Murfreesboro and Rutherford County and also provides a larger context to understand these places and events on a national level. This approach allows local residents to see how their community reflects larger national trends and allows out-of-town visitors to relate

⁸¹ "MTSU offers many lecture opportunities," *The Murfreesboro Post*, March 4, 2009, accessed October 2, 2013, <http://www.murfreesboropost.com/mtsu-offers-many-lecture-opportunities-cms-15702>. "Through Dec 14 – NYHS 'Lincoln and New York' Exhibit," MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, last modified 10/19/2012, accessed October 2, 2013, <http://www.mtsuhistpres.org/calendar/2012/10/19/thru-dec-14-nyhs-lincoln-and-new-york-exhibit.503422>. Lisa L. Rollins, "Free fun: Murfreesboro's Heritage Center features Tennessee-themed photo exhibit now through Aug. 31," *examiner.com*, July 12, 2010, accessed October 2, 2013, <http://www.examiner.com/article/free-fun-murfreesboro-s-heritage-center-features-tennessee-themed-photo-exhibit-now-through-aug-31>. Jennifer, "Exhibit Opening and Lecture: The Heritage Center of Murfreesboro and Rutherford County," *Tennessee Sampler Survey* (blog), entry posted October 2, 2011, accessed October 2, 2013, <http://tennesseesamplers.blogspot.com/2011/10/exhibit-opening-and-lecture-heritage.html>.

⁸² "Heritage Center Expands Civil War Exhibit with New Panels and Artifacts," MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, last modified November 7, 2012, accessed on October 2, 2013, <http://www.mtsuhistpres.org/news/2012/11/07/heritage-center-expands-civil-war-exhibit-with-new-panels-and-artifacts.515444>.

to the stories and sites they are hearing and experiencing. However, the exhibits are not there to tell the whole story. The purpose of the Heritage Center is to get people out into the community exploring these sights and sounds firsthand, and as part of this mission, the Heritage Center offers walking tours throughout the day that take visitors around the historic public square and introduce them to the city's vibrant history. These walking tours not only give visitors the opportunity to experience history personally but also allow the staff to promote local businesses and restaurants in a very interactive way. Guides can recommend restaurants and boutiques as they pass them, and they can discuss the events and festivals held right there on the square. The tour not only teaches its visitors about the history of the square but also actively promotes present-day economic initiatives.

The tour itself begins as the group steps outside the Heritage Center doors and faces the historic Dixie Highway, one of the earliest roads in the nation that stretched from Ontario, Canada to Miami, Florida. This topic starts the tour on a level that is accessible to the entire audience: the older generations remember the Dixie Highway or what life was like before the interstate system; the younger generations learn about roads and travel before the era of rapid transit; and all generations appreciate the idea of a family road trip and Murfreesboro as a roadside attraction. For visitors who have come to Murfreesboro to learn its history, the Dixie Highway connects them to the past and the previous tourists that stopped here. From this point, the tour moves on to discuss two major themes: Murfreesboro's structural, economic, and cultural growth and historic preservation efforts to revitalize and restore the square.

Within these two themes are a multitude of topics including the following: the origins of Murfreesboro and Rutherford County, Civil War events, the African American presence in Murfreesboro, transportation advancements, Main Street renovations, historic businesses, lost buildings, adaptive reuse, disasters, and the present-day public square. Although the tour is not presented topically but instead follows the natural flow of the square, these themes give an idea of the significant variation that ensures that visitors will be able to relate to some aspect of the city or county's history. Whether they are interested in hearing about the Morgan-Ready wedding that took place in December of 1863 just before the Battle of Stones River, or the tornado that ripped through the square in 1913, individuals from a broad range of backgrounds and interests can find something that connects them to the story and with the square.⁸³

While the walking tour is a popular attraction for Heritage Center visitors, staffers also spend time preparing for and hosting educational programs for grades K-12. Several area schools as well as other groups like the Boy Scouts or summer camps visit the Heritage Center to teach their students the importance of local history. Activities offered by the staff include a guided exhibit tour, a walking tour, and several activities and handouts that can be performed at the Heritage Center or back in the classroom with the teacher. The Heritage Center website contains links to most of the handouts and teacher's guides offered on Civil War history, but scavenger hunts also exist for each exhibit the

⁸³ Jennifer Butt, "Downtown Murfreesboro Walking Tour" (lecture, Murfreesboro Public Square, September 2011).

Heritage Center hosts.⁸⁴ Additionally the Heritage Center encourages schools to participate in the Library of Congress Teaching With Primary Sources network, where students can learn history as well as reading comprehension skills through primary source documents. It is worth noting that the Heritage Center does not perform a significant amount of education outreach beyond hosting events at the Heritage Center. Not only is too costly but also the Heritage Center gives that opportunity to the historic sites around the county so they can continue to be relevant and attract the attention of the younger generations.

Beyond school groups, the Heritage Center also hosts educational and cultural events for adults. Local professionals hold lectures and workshops throughout the year on topics ranging from the Civil War and women's history to historic preservation and tourism initiatives. Other special events hosted at the Heritage Center include conferences as well as classes from MTSU. The large meeting areas, podiums, projectors, screens, and sufficient seating allows for the Heritage Center to be used for a variety of presentations and discussions. Professional groups that have utilized the Heritage Center facility over the years include the Middle Tennessee Tourism Council, Humanities Tennessee, Tennessee Main Street, Tennessee Preservation Trust (TPT), the American Association of State and Local History (AASLH), Tennessee Department of Tourist Development, as well as regularly scheduled meetings like the Downtown Business Alliance, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Murfreesboro

⁸⁴ Heritage Center of Murfreesboro and Rutherford County.

Bar Association, and the Stones River Civil War Roundtable book discussion group.

By hosting school groups, workshops, conferences, and other events, the Heritage Center becomes a common ground for visitors of all ages and interests. It is no longer just a stopping point on a sightseeing trip; it is also a community center, a place where the appreciation of tradition creates a unique bond among the populace. This additional role as a meeting place takes the Heritage Center's mission further than storytelling and promotion and also makes it a mediator between the past and present. Local heritage stories and contemporary cultural events combine to create the perfect place to study historical traditions while participating in their legacy in the present. This intersection of time also instigates discussion between different segments of the community divided along lines of age, race, gender, and educational levels. The Heritage Center provides a neutral location for visitors to examine controversial stories and to discover the scars, meanings, and relics these stories have left behind. The Heritage Center is place of cultural collision that benefits the county and city in more ways than one.

It is worth mentioning again the prime location of the Heritage Center not only because of its proximity to the square but also because of its centrality within the county and its co-habitation with Main Street. It is easily accessible to all of the county's communities, and its major partner in revitalization and marketing is next door. Additionally the numerous partnerships the Heritage Center has with the university, the Center for Historic Preservation, the city, the

county, the Chamber of Commerce, and many others grants access to wide range of resources. The Heritage Center uses students from the university, revitalization and preservation efforts from Main Street and the Center for Historic Preservation, funding and accommodations from the city and county, marketing from the Chamber of Commerce, and numerous other benefits from the multitude of people and businesses that support the Heritage Center's mission. These partners realize that if the Heritage Center succeeds in increasing heritage tourism throughout the county, everyone wins. Heritage tourists stay longer and spend more money than other tourists, and the Heritage Center can help the area capitalize on these visitors' interest in local history. They can also utilize the Heritage Center facility for events and attract a wide range of the local community.

Despite being a substantial asset to the county, the Heritage Center does have weaknesses that affect its performance. Most of the issues relate to two problems: limited funding and staffing. These two challenges are the four-letter words of heritage sites. They are the plagues that infect small museums every year and cause many to succumb to death and close their doors. The Heritage Center has managed to succeed in many areas despite funding limitations, but this has reduced the areas into which the Heritage Center can expand. For instance, the Heritage Center cannot seek greater educational outreach programs, and it stays closed on the weekends missing the opportunity to capitalize on the Saturday farmer's market and other events that attract heritage tourists. Additionally, the Heritage Center cannot pursue an aggressive

advertisement campaign because they do not have the staff to handle large crowds or a high demand for walking tours. In light of the Heritage Center's achievements, these problems are relatively small, but they are part of the greater issue of attracting people to heritage sites in this fast-paced, technologically obsessed modern world. Tourists today want exciting and flashy attractions like theme parks, adventure trips, and dark tourism centered on death and disasters. Places like the Heritage Center must compete with sites that have more money and more staff to create bigger and better exhibits. This competition for tourist dollars is a major challenge for smaller more heritage-inclined sites, but taking into account the rising prices of admission tickets, the Heritage Center retains the advantage of being completely free and thus able to attract a wider audience.

As a successful tourism and community site, the Heritage Center offers an example of what can be achieved on a small budget through the collaboration of multiple partners in a culturally-rich region. Without the support of so many organizations, the Heritage Center may never have existed, and the county would be without a vital heritage tourism link. Heritage centers, in general, perform a crucial function for heritage tourism because they acclimate visitors to the area, attract locals to their own history, and encourage both to explore history firsthand. It is proven that experiencing history in a different setting using hands-on, interactive presentations allows visitors to create personal and lasting connections to that history. Heritage centers promote these connections as well as economic growth, historic preservation, and sustainability. They are the link

between the guidebook and the historical sites; they are the precursor to heritage tourism.

The Heritage Center of Murfreesboro & Rutherford County represents an ideal case study that can serve as a model for future heritage centers including the Sumner County Music and Heritage Center at the offices of the Convention & Visitor's Bureau. The Heritage Center in Murfreesboro acts as a community and tourist center, promotes local sites and businesses, and works closely with established organizations within the county. It also faces challenges that plague small historic sites around the nation and leaves open opportunities for improvement or changes in Sumner County. No two heritage centers experience the same situations or challenges because the communities surrounding them are unique. This difference is part of the charm of heritage centers; no two are exactly alike. They promote the distinct culture of their region, doing so in different ways and through different means. However, the Heritage Center of Murfreesboro and Rutherford County provides a successful and inclusive template that other heritage centers can follow.

CHAPTER III: PROPOSAL FOR THE SUMNER COUNTRY MUSIC AND HERITAGE CENTER

The Sumner County Music and Heritage Center sits on U.S. Highway 31E halfway between Hendersonville and Gallatin in the old Comer House. The building acts partly as office space for the Sumner County Convention and Visitors Bureau and partly as exhibit space for the heritage center. The exhibits are rather sparse—a glass-topped table sits in the center of the main room displaying old record albums of artists who have lived in Sumner County. Some of the albums still have the price stickers on them. A couple of exhibit cases stand in the corners of the room. They are filled with outstanding artifacts like Civil War weaponry and historic instruments loaned by the Sumner County Museum, but without any interpretation, they sit listlessly gathering dust. A few old maps in the secondary room offer little to the untrained historian, and a beautiful piano from a local historic home haunts another corner.

The house is a beautiful white Greek Revival sitting in the middle of what was formerly Wilson Farms, a legacy of the horse racing culture that once flourished in Sumner County. An old barn, formerly a horse stable, sits vacant and decaying in the field next door. As with many organizations, the CVB is under-staffed and overworked trying to bring in tourism dollars to the county while also maintaining a heritage center. They do not have the resources at the moment to dedicate to their heritage center; however, they are in a prime position to take on such a project with additional support from community partners. The

CVB has a unique opportunity to create a heritage center that also serves as headquarters for the county's primary tourism organization. Their role in promoting county sites and attracting tours and conventions makes them the perfect entity to control and staff the center. They know the county's annual events and major attractions better than anyone and can use this knowledge in their event scheduling and exhibit displays at the Comer House.

Sumner County History

Sumner County has a rich history that dates back to occupation by Paleo-Indian, Archaic, Woodland, and Mississippian societies that were drawn to the springs and salt lick in the eastern parts of the county. The first white long hunters ventured into the area in 1765 and by 1783 had built three forts for protection from wild animals and Indian attacks. The North Carolina General Assembly officially created the county in 1786, and frontiersmen like Daniel Smith and Anthony Bledsoe quickly took up permanent residences there. The proximity of the county to the Cumberland River as well as to the Nashville settlement paved the way for rapid growth in the nineteenth century. This growth led to major advancements in transportation and manufacturing, which increased traffic to the area and job opportunities for residents. With the arrival of the Civil War, Sumner County sided with the Confederacy and sent over 3000 soldiers into service, but Union forces gained control of the county at an early point in the war. This occupation limited Sumner County's role in the war, but its effects were still felt, specifically by the thousands of African Americans who received their freedom. After the war these freedmen gained a strong foothold in the

county organizing an annual agricultural fair, establishing schools, and starting businesses. The liberation from slavery ignited a strong fire for success within the black community, and they continued to build a strong presence within the county into the 1900s.

The twentieth century brought with it a prosperous agricultural industry as well as the creation of Old Hickory Lake by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) in the 1950s. These developments sparked a population boom within the county attracting new residents to lakeside homes as well as new workers to the jobs with the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers.⁸⁵ Sumner County continued its trend of steady growth and successful economic sectors into the twenty-first century and now stands as a thriving community built upon a delicate balance between modern advancements and cultural heritage.

Sumner County's abundant history is documented through its archaeological sites, historic homes, museums, and buildings. Archaeological sites dot the county's landscape providing evidence of the native tribes and early settlers that lived there, while historic house museums can be found in every community. Many of these homes are dedicated to the white men who helped develop the county like Rock Castle, Trousdale Place, Rose Mont, and Cragfont. However there are several African American sites as well including Rosenwald Schools, churches, community centers, and cemeteries. Additionally, black

⁸⁵ Dee Gee Lester, "Sumner County," in *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, ed. Carroll Van West (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2013), accessed October 2, 2013, <http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=1284>.

history is closely tied with the historic house museums since most if not all of these sites utilized slave labor for agricultural production or household work. Other important historic sites and places can be found throughout the county like the museums in Gallatin and Portland or the Downtown Gallatin Square.

Sumner County also has close ties to the Nashville music industry. Although many people think that stars like Johnny Cash and Conway Twitty started the music culture in places like Hendersonville, the music tradition actually predates these mega-stars. Randy Wood, a graduate of Middle Tennessee State University and World War II veteran, opened a small appliance store in Gallatin in 1944 selling a handful of R&B records on the side. Little did Wood know that by 1950 his small sales would grow into a full-blown mail order business that sold 500,000 records a year. Wood advertised his business on Nashville's WLAC-AM radio station and invested in a daytime station himself that he used for recording sessions at night in his shop. His small recording studio would eventually lead him to establish his own music label, Dot Records, where he recorded hits like Pat Boone's "Ain't That a Shame."⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Douglas Martin, "Randy Wood, Founder of Dot Records, Dies at 94," *The New York Times*, April 14, 2011, accessed October 2, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/15/business/media/15wood.html?_r=0.



Figure 11. Randy's Record Shop in Gallatin, TN.⁸⁷



Figure 12. Randy Wood, owner and operator of Randy's Record Shop and Dot Records.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Martin, "Randy Wood."

⁸⁸ Martin, "Randy Wood."

In addition to this successful record business, more than a few music legends have called Sumner County home including Johnny Cash, William Lee Golden from the Oak Ridge Boys, Kelly Clarkson, Reba McEntyre, and Taylor Swift. There is a scattering of sites related to these stars with the biggest attractions being the burned out remains of Johnny Cash's home, Johnny and June's gravesite, and the former Twitty City, now Trinity Music City. While these stars could have chosen to live closer to Nashville, the major draw for them as well as many other, non-famous residents is Old Hickory Lake. The scenic beauty of the lake as well as the city parks surrounding it creates a picturesque living environment. Additionally, it is a major attraction for recreational tourists seeking opportunities to fish, swim, and boat. Fishing festivals are held throughout the year; marinas cater to local boat owners; and the Old Hickory Lake Visitors Center provides exhibits and information about the lake and the Corp of Engineers.⁸⁹

Although the lake draws thousands of tourists each year, Sumner County also has a large number of sites dedicated to agritourism. Local farms have always prospered in the county's fertile soil, and they continue to do so in the twenty-first century. Indeed Portland has become renowned for its strawberry farms and has held an annual Strawberry Festival for the last seventy-two

⁸⁹ "Old Hickory Lake," Sumner County Tennessee, accessed October 2, 2013, http://sumnercvb.com/Things_to_Do/Scenic/.

years.⁹⁰ Attendance numbers in the thousands every year. The CVB also does its part to promote local agriculture by hosting Farm to Table dinners at the Comer House.⁹¹ Growers also enjoy the success of local farmers' markets, and there is also a budding winery business in Sumner County including Sumner Crest in Portland and Long Hollow in Goodlettsville.⁹² The agritourism industry is a recent addition to heritage tourism as part of the cultural shift that has refocused people's attention on where their food comes from. Sumner County is fortunate to have the necessary growing conditions to support this type of tourism.

Sumner County Convention and Visitors Bureau

This ample amount of history and tourism opportunities within Sumner County makes the CVB's job of developing exhibits and promoting sites a somewhat easy task. They have plenty of material to work with; however, they also must find a way to interpret and promote all of these places without excluding anyone or prioritizing one site over another. The Sumner County Convention and Visitors Bureau is a product of the United Chambers of Commerce, which created the organization in the 1980s and restructured it in 2004 as a destination-marketing agency. The CVB's mission is "to market

⁹⁰ "Strawberry Festival," Portland, Tennessee, accessed October 2, 2013, http://www.portlandtn.com/strawberry_festival.htm.

⁹¹ "Farm to Table Event to Feature Fresh Produce from Local Farms," *Visit Sumner County* (blog), accessed October 2, 2013, <http://sumnercvb.com/Blog/September-2013/Farm-to-Table-Event-to-Feature-Fresh-Produce-from/>.

⁹² Sumner Crest Winery, accessed October 2, 2013, <http://www.sumnercrestwinery.com/>. Long Hollow Winery & Vineyard, accessed October 2, 2013, <http://longhollowwinery.net/>.

Sumner County as a year-round destination for leisure, business, group, and individual travel.”⁹³ Their location in the Comer House between Sumner County’s two biggest cities allows it to service the majority of the population in a central location that still offers easy access for the surrounding communities. Since their role is to promote the attractions of the entire county, the CVB must make sure their website, brochures, and other promotional materials do not favor the larger cities or more affluent communities. Fortunately one of the benefits of the heritage center is the ability to tell the story of the entire county, something that other sites cannot accomplish. The importance of this complete story is that it provides a cohesive vision to the visitor, introduces them to all of the county sites, and then allows them to choose their next destination. It also fosters a shared sense of ownership in the community because everyone’s story is represented. This shared ownership allows community members to feel that the heritage center is a common ground for them, somewhere that is neutral and promotes the entire county, not just the more prosperous sectors.

The CVB also has the added benefit of its location within the Comer House. The house itself acts as a natural draw for visitors; however, the home’s appearance misleads many of its visitors into thinking it belongs to the elite category of nineteenth century Sumner County homes. Actually the home only

⁹³ "About Sumner County," Sumner County Tennessee, accessed October 2, 2013, http://sumnercvb.com/About_Us/. The United Chambers of Commerce of Sumner County consists of six different Chambers of Commerce from Gallatin, Goodlettsville, Hendersonville, Portland, Westmoreland, and White House. Additionally they serve the populations of Castalian Springs, Cottontown, Millersville, and Mitchellville.

dates to 1949 when Guy Comer demolished the previous federal style house and constructed a more typical Southern mansion with modern conveniences.⁹⁴

While the home may not be historic, it still provides the CVB with ample space to create exhibits, conduct receptions, and even host outdoor events.



Figure 13. The Comer House



Figure 14. The foyer of the Comer House

⁹⁴ Sumner County CVB, "Wilson Farm(s)" (working paper, n.d.), 1.

The property is not without a history entirely though. When Guy Comer purchased the property at the beginning of the twentieth century from its previous owner T.B. Wilson, he set out to build himself a horse-breeding empire.⁹⁵ Almost since statehood, Tennessee has held a strong position in the world of horses both in breeding and racing. Andrew Jackson was an avid horse racer, even entering a duel over the outcome of a race, and plantations across Middle Tennessee became famous for their horses including Fairview, Belle Meade, and Travellers Rest. After the government outlawed gambling in 1906, horseracing lost traction in Tennessee, and attention turned to steeplechases and breeding. In Sumner County, a land company undertook a major project to develop a steeplechase, polo, and breeding complex called the Grasslands Hunt and Racing Foundation. The endeavor was ill-timed though, and the stock market crash of 1929 bankrupted the company.⁹⁶

Tennesseans were not dissuaded though, and breeding efforts continued, particularly in the development of the prized Tennessee Walking Horse. Comer was a passionate breeder of this horse and built a one-and-a-half story show barn with limestone walls and chestnut woodwork to house his stock.

⁹⁵ Sumner County CVB, "Wilson Farm(s)," 1.

⁹⁶ Andra Kowalczyk, "Purebred Breeding and Racing Horses," in *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, ed. Carroll Van West (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2013), accessed October 2, 2013, <http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=1645>.



Figure 15. The former Wilson Farms show barn.

By 1942, Comer was a major breeder, so much so that in a two-day auction at his show barn, he sold 113 Tennessee Walking Horses.⁹⁷ Although the horse culture in Sumner County eventually slowed and moved elsewhere, the legacy that it left is something that the heritage center can honor at its current location.

The Heritage Center Proposal

The CVB desperately needs new exhibits developed not only to fulfill its role as a heritage center but also to properly honor Sumner County's abundant history. As described above, the current exhibits are lackluster with little or no interpretation.

⁹⁷ Sumner County CVB, "Wilson Farm(s)," 2-3.



Figure 16. The glass-topped table acts as the centerpiece of the Heritage Center exhibit space. Underneath the glass are albums from artists who have lived in Sumner County.



Figure 17. A corner exhibit that contains unique artifacts loaned from the Sumner County Museum; however, there is no interpretation.

A possible title for new exhibits is “Celebrate the Sounds, Explore the Sights: The Heritage of Sumner County.”⁹⁸ By highlighting key music icons that have lived in Sumner County as well as the other historic sites that make the county a heritage treasure, the heritage center can create exhibits that appeal to the local community members as well as tourists of all kinds. The point of these exhibits would be to create a place for tourists to stop by and make their own decisions about where they want to go. The twenty-first century tourist wants more freedom to choose the stops along their trip, and the heritage center gives them the opportunity to do that. The exhibits can be split into two sections: music and history. This division will allow the heritage center to give proper focus on the big selling music industry and the county’s traditional history sites.

Although a large portion of the history exhibits will have to be dedicated to the many historic house museums in Sumner County, these exhibits will also provide an opportunity to highlight two relatively unexplored areas of Sumner County heritage: women’s history and African American sites. Recognizing women’s contributions to the county’s history and how their roles in society have evolved is important for a number of reasons. First, women’s history is woefully absent in the historical narrative in Sumner County. Historic house museums are dedicated to the history of their white, male owners, and they ignore the major contributions made by the women who helped shape this county, even if it was behind the scenes. There are also several prominent public officials and

⁹⁸ See Appendix A for draft layouts of the exhibit “Celebrate the Sounds, Explore the Sights: The Heritage of Sumner County.”

business owners who are women, and they would appreciate the added effort to include women's history as well as to create opportunities for temporary exhibits and lectures for National Women's History Month.

Additionally, while there is an entire book devoted to African American life in Sumner County, the African American heritage sites are largely ignored.⁹⁹ The heritage center can change this entirely by providing a visitor's center that not only talks about African American history but also actively promotes their contribution to the county's heritage. This new focus allows African American community members and tourists to feel included in the heritage center's mission. Additionally, the exhibits provide a new means of advertisement for all of the African American sites. The heritage center also becomes a facilitator of conversations about the controversial past in Sumner County. Instead of shrinking away from this role, the heritage center should embrace it and host lecture series and visiting exhibits that discuss the history of slavery and its impact on the African American community. By telling the story of the controversial past, the heritage center can open the discussion for the present day situation and create a neutral space where community members can come together to consider solutions.

Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small in *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums* argue that many of the sites they explored in their research tell a white-centric story that all but erases the

⁹⁹ For additional information see Velma Howell Brinkley and Mary Huddleston Malone, *African-American Life in Sumner County* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 1998).

contributions of African Americans.¹⁰⁰ “Enslaved African Americans are almost always depersonalized and dehumanized—we are rarely given their names or told of their hopes, aspirations, emotions, or experiences in any detail whatsoever, and we almost never hear anything about them as human agents struggling to secure their own destiny.”¹⁰¹ Eichstedt and Small argue that museums and historic houses must move beyond the awkward slave acknowledgement conversation and openly discuss the role of slavery and its effects on African Americans. Robert Archibald continues this theme of finding common ground because, he contends, without a shared story the present is isolated from the past and the future, and people are isolated from one another.¹⁰² Therefore, public historians should treat historical controversy as the livelihood of their organizations and create exhibits that embrace hot topics. These exhibits will inspire conversations that will eventually lead people towards resolution and progress.¹⁰³

Other heritage exhibit highlights that could attract more diverse audiences include agritourism sites like farms and markets as well as wineries and distilleries. Sumner County has a large population of strawberry farms, particularly in Portland, where the annual Middle Tennessee Strawberry Festival is held. This community event attracts a large portion of the local population, and

¹⁰⁰ Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small, *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002), 4.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁰² Robert R. Archibald, *A Place to Remember: Using History to Build Community* (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 1999), 93.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 94.

by including it in the exhibits, the heritage center expands its audience to another area of the county. Additionally, research shows that people make a distinct link between food and place and that offering visitors a chance to experience authentic foods can help enhance their memories of a place. Furthermore, the link between food and place creates sustainable tourism that attracts new visitors, encourages local agriculture, conserves traditional farming practices, and supports the economy.¹⁰⁴

The heritage center also has the opportunity to introduce the history of horseracing in Sumner County. This area of history is largely un-interpreted at present even though at one point the county held the most prominent racing ground in Middle Tennessee. The CVB's own headquarters at the Comer House includes horseracing history, and by interpreting this information, the heritage center could promote new interest and possible preservation efforts for their show barn. These exhibits could also lead to a new crop of tourists interested in Tennessee's equestrian history and bring more tourism dollars to the county. Additionally, the history of the New Deal era and the formation of Old Hickory Lake should be emphasized much more than it is currently. Old Hickory Lake is a defining feature of the tourist industry in Sumner County attracting families and tourists from all over the state and region as well as music stars and wealthier families looking for lakeside homes. By exhibiting the history of Old Hickory

¹⁰⁴ Rebecca Sims, "Food, place and authenticity: local food and the sustainable tourism experience," *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 17, no. 3 (May 2009): 334.

Lake, the heritage center caters to a more modern tourist as well as promotes local lake activities for sport and adventure tourists.

This list of exhibits already mentioned is enough to fill an entire museum; therefore, it must be said that while these exhibits are meant to include everyone, they are not meant to include everything. They are merely appetizers for surrounding attractions, and by giving people a small taste of what the county has to offer, the heritage center can wet the visitors' appetites for more information. They will then seek out that information on their own terms.

In addition to the history sites already listed, Sumner County has a large music heritage as well. Within the music exhibits, the heritage center has the ability to expand its audience even further including a new minority as well as Christian music artists and modern day music lovers. Since music is a cross-cultural characteristic, the heritage center has the opportunity to reach out to the African American and Hispanic populations to include their music heritage types in the story of Sumner County. Since the Hispanic presence is still relatively new, it may not be possible to include them in the history exhibits; however, by including their culture in the music exhibits, they can still feel like a contributing member of the community. Additionally, the presence of Trinity Music City at the home of country music legend Conway Twitty, allows the heritage center to promote the Christian music industry that is so popular in the Bible Belt.¹⁰⁵

Country music is the obvious draw to Nashville and Middle Tennessee's music sites, and Sumner County is fortunate to have homes, gravesites,

¹⁰⁵ Trinity Music City, accessed October 2, 2013, <http://trinitymusiccity.com/>.

museums, and restaurants that promote the major impact of country music on the community. Stars like Taylor Swift, Johnny Cash, and Kelly Clarkson have international followings, and by creating exhibits, driving tours, and programs that highlight these artists, the heritage center can attract people from across the globe and introduce them to new music genres and sites in the county. These new sites include the former location of Randy's Record Shop as well as local music venues like The Whippoorwill, Long Hollow Jamboree, and Barefoot Charlie's.¹⁰⁶ Thus the heritage center is no longer just a promoter of the past but also a supporter of the present and future success of the county.

By combining the abovementioned exhibits with active promotion on the Sumner County CVB website and brochures, the Sumner County Music and Heritage Center has the ability to reach a very diverse audience all within its historical record. The heritage center does not have to create stories to include a wider audience; all it needs to do is interpret more of its history and include more people in its interpretations. People bring their cultural identities with them when they enter a museum; they do not suddenly become unbiased evaluators. If anything, museums spark a further connection to their heritage, and they want to see it expressed in a way that pays respect while also raising issues.¹⁰⁷ By

¹⁰⁶ The Whippoorwill, accessed October 2, 2013, <http://www.thewhippoorwillgallatin.com/>. "Long Hollow Jamboree," TN Vacation, accessed October 2, 2013, http://www.tnvacation.com/vendors/long_hollow_jamboree/. Barefoot Charlie's Restaurant, accessed October 2, 2013, <http://www.barefootcharlies.net/>.

¹⁰⁷ Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine, eds., *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 3.

promoting the county's culturally diverse heritage through music and historic sites, the Sumner County Music and Heritage Center has the opportunity to become an ideal visitor orientation center that promotes the heritage of a diverse audience. They have the opportunity to increase visitation by throwing off the yoke of stagnation and becoming a site that promotes progress and conversation. Small museums and institutions have the power to affect the entire nation by promoting interaction and heritage awareness in small communities. As these communities grow and as people move away, they take the ideals instilled in them through exhibits and public programming to new places and spark new institutions that continue the trend.

The idea behind the heritage centers in Sumner County and Murfreesboro is to create places that focus on cultural and economic advancement that will eventually spread to the surrounding areas and promote progress as well as heritage appreciation. The CVB has the opportunity to do just that as they develop their heritage center with plenty of openings for expansion and community outreach. As demonstrated by Murfreesboro, partnerships are crucial for sustainability so connecting with city and county leaders is a necessary step to getting enough support. Additionally, creating common bonds in the community is essential for local residential support. Countywide projects could be a great way to promote involvement. An example could be an oral history project that results in a traveling exhibit throughout the county. The opportunities and ideas are endless, and the heritage center has a blank slate with which to write its mission and goals.

By using the Downtown Murfreesboro Heritage Center as a model, the Sumner County Music and Heritage Center already has an excellent example of how to start its project, who to turn to for support, and what to put inside it. The development of Sumner County's heritage center over the next few years will be a crucial step in continuing the slow launch of heritage centers in Tennessee and eventually the South. They will be launching points for tourists as well as sounding boards for communities, and with their success, community participation, awareness, and appreciation can grow. The heritage center has the ability to continue the evolution of heritage tourism into the rest of the twenty-first century.

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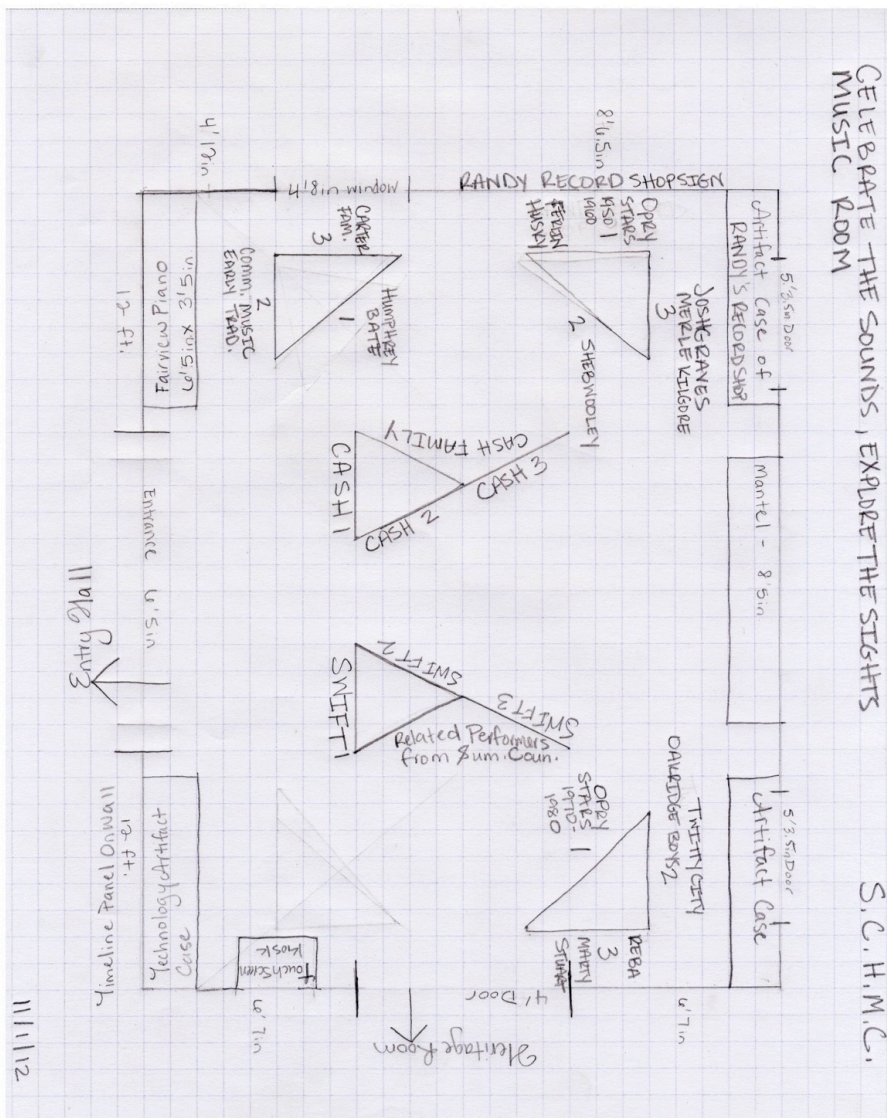
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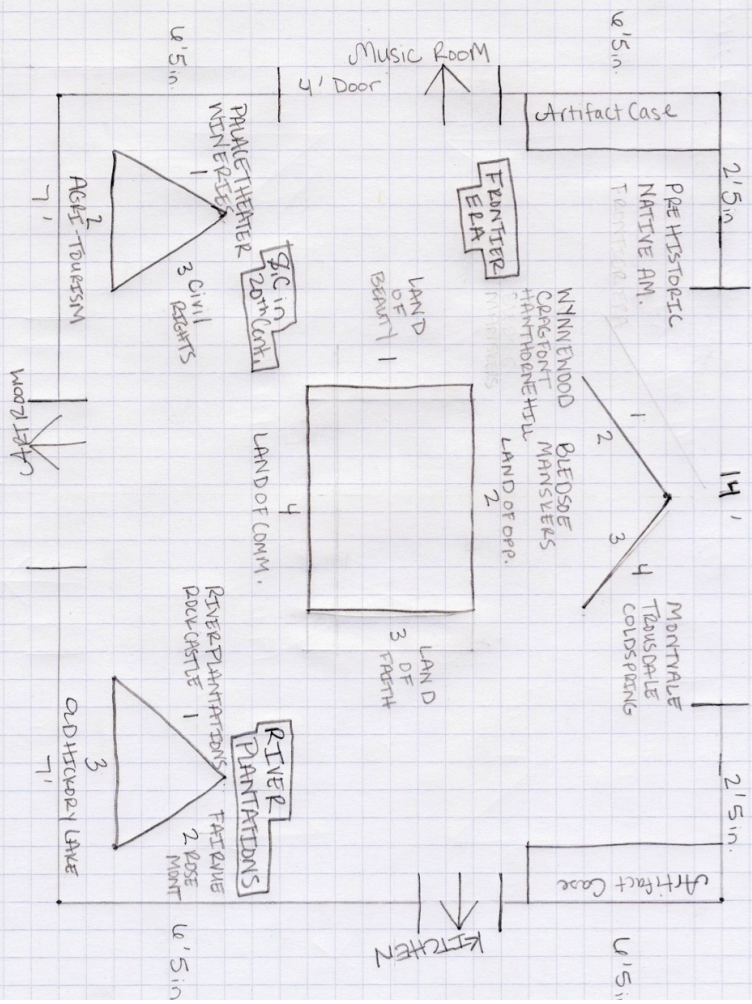
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APPENDIX A: "CELEBRATE THE SOUNDS, EXPLORE THE SIGHTS"

EXHIBIT PLAN



CELEBRATE THE SOUNDS, EXPLORE THE SIGHTS HERITAGE ROOM



11/1/12

S.C.H.