

THE OLD SOUTHWEST PASSAGE:
EXPLORING THE FIRST ROAD INTO MIDDLE TENNESSEE

by

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This is for my dad, Dr. Loren Hoffman

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ABSTRACT

The Avery Trace is one of several names given to the early road from Southwest Point to Nashville. Blazed on existing hunting and buffalo trails and opened officially in 1788, it was the primary land route by which Tennessee was settled as a new state. The road itself is gone, long since covered over or incorporated into modern roads and highways. Along the ghost of its trail is a collection of landmarks that comprises an historic landscape reflective of early Tennessee. This thesis project takes inventory of these landmarks and proposes further study of this landscape as its own historic corridor and a part of Tennessee's network of heritage tourism.

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CHAPTER ONE: THE AVERY TRACE AND EARLY TENNESSEE TRANSPORTATION

In 1787 the North Carolina Assembly ordered that a new road be cut along existing Cherokee trails to the Cumberland Settlements in its western territory as far as Fort Nashborough, the current location of Nashville. The Assembly commissioned an experienced woodsman and veteran of the Revolutionary War, Peter Avery, to direct the trailblazing effort. The 300-mile path of the Trace passed numerous “stations,” small protected settlements, and larger forts. Tens of thousands of settlers followed its path into Middle Tennessee at a vital period of the state’s nascence.

Although other historic roads in the South are better known, the Avery Trace was a primary avenue for settlers into the territory and new state of Tennessee. The trace, however, rarely appears in historical accounts, and has become a largely forgotten thoroughfare. A quick search of online sources first reveals the name of Avery Trace Middle School in Cookeville. Only when one scrolls past a bluegrass band of the same name are there entries for the history of the road. The Natchez Trace has its own parkway and a fully-developed historiography devoted to it. The Dixie Highway, which connected Chicago to Miami in the 1920s, has a rabid following among preservationists. The Avery Trace thus far lacks this sort of academic or popular attention.

Many accounts of life in the early history of Tennessee exist, but few refer to the Avery Trace by name. The theme of these records is the difficulty of the journey, with illness and casualties from clashes with Indian parties making up the bulk of text. There is a collected body of histories unashamedly biased in favor of the pioneers of this period

that refer to the “red man” lurking around every maple tree, and praise the settlers who endured the privations of frontier living. In the past few decades historians have addressed with greater sensitivity the changing nature of the frontier as whites moved westward and negotiations left Native Americans increasingly homeless. The early history of Tennessee is a microcosm of the settlement of America. It is a story that began less than fifty years after the first recorded European landing in the New World.

The first evidence of European exploration of what is now Tennessee appears in records of the party of Hernando De Soto, whom historians credit as the first European to explore the area.¹ Local historians have claimed that he discovered the Mississippi River at the Chickasaw Bluff in what is now Memphis in 1540 or 1541, but this is debatable, and Mississippi scholars argue it was in their state. The debate is likely to continue ad infinitum since accounts of De Soto’s travels in the area are too vague to confirm the precise location. His expedition is remarkable in the historiography of the Southern states, as it marks the beginning of its recorded history.² The records of the Spaniards’ party also are the first in what would become a theme of Southern history—the hardship of the voyage. In his narrative compiled years later from accounts of survivors of the journey, Garcilasso de la Vega relates the difficulty inherent in early American travel:

On leaving the province of Chisca the troops again marched up the river. They made, in four days, only twelve leagues on account of the sick, and arrived at a place where they could cross the river, because it was easy to approach it; and elsewhere, on both sides, the river was bordered with a very thick forest, and the banks so steep that they could neither ascend nor descend them. They remained

¹ Michael Toomey, “Explorations, Early,” in *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History & Culture*, ed. Carroll Van West (Nashville, TN: Rutledge Hill Press, 1998), 295.

² Samuel Cole Williams, *Early Travels in the Tennessee Country: 1540-1800* (1970; repr., Nashville: Franklin Book Reprints, 1970), 3-4. Chisca is generally accepted as the current site of Memphis, but this too is a matter of debate. See J.G.M. Ramsey, *The Annals of Tennessee to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (1853; repr., Knoxville: East Tennessee Historical Society, 1967), 29-30.

to make boats at this place, where at their arrival, there appeared on the other side of the river about six thousand Indians, well armed ... to dispute the passage of it.³

De Soto died of fever and wounds in 1542 after wandering through present-day Arkansas. The survivors of his party buried him in the Mississippi River “lest the Indians mutilate the body of their abuser,” prior to making their own way to Mexico.⁴

In the two centuries after De Soto’s exploration, further groups of Europeans ventured into the Tennessee country; these too were exploratory in nature, and settlement was limited in both number and duration until the 1760s. By the time settlers began to put down roots in Middle Tennessee in earnest, French explorers were already familiar with the area. In 1673 a French expedition led by Jesuit missionary Father Jacques Marquette and fur trader Louis Joliet traveled past Memphis on the Mississippi River.⁵ In 1682 Robert Cavelier de la Salle’s expedition continued to explore the Mississippi and established a fort at the mouth of the Hatchie River, effectively the “foot in the door” for trading interests into the frontier:

La Salle’s explorations paved the way for the French to extend their trading network into the interior of the continent. By 1692 French traders had established posts along the Cumberland River near a salt springs, a site which later became know (sic) as the French Lick, and in 1780 served as the nucleus for the Nashville settlements.⁶

³ Ibid., 11-12.

⁴ Brenda C. Calloway, *America’s First Western Frontier: East Tennessee – A story of the early settlers and Indians of East Tennessee* (Johnson City, TN: Overmountain Press, 1989), 23.

⁵ Toomey, “Explorations, Early,” in West, 295.

⁶ Ibid.

A Frenchman named Martin Chartier deserted La Salle's exploring party around 1680 and lived among the Shawnee at the French Lick. The French gave the Cumberland River its first European name: *Chaouanon*, their name for the Shawnee people.⁷ Timothy Demonbreun, a French fur trader and veteran of the French and Indian War, migrated to French Lick (also known as French Salt Springs or Big Salt Lick) in the 1760s and was one of the first recorded settlers. Jean du Charleville, a young boy when he moved to the area around 1710, helped run a trading post in the company of the Shawnee there. Another Tennessee pioneer, James Robertson, met Charleville in 1779, when the Frenchman was 84 years old.⁸ During that epic trip, Robertson and his party selected the site on the Cumberland River for a new settlement, which would become Nashborough and later Nashville, named in honor of Robertson's friend and fellow Revolutionary War veteran Frances Nash. Several parties traveled through Middle Tennessee during the 1760s. The Wallen party of 1763 was the first to make camp in the area for any prolonged time.⁹

In the 1763 Treaty of Paris, France ceded its territory east of the Mississippi to the British, beginning a new chapter in the history of the region. The so-called Long Hunters were hardy woodsmen from Virginia and North Carolina who hunted and trapped all across the territory. Their number included Middle Tennessee pioneers Kasper Mansker, a Dutchman, and Isaac Bledsoe, a Virginian. These explorers were in the Nashville area

⁷ James A. Crutchfield, *Early Times in the Cumberland Valley* (Nashville: First American National Bank, 1976), 42.

⁸ John Haywood, *Natural and Aboriginal History of Tennessee: Up to the First Settlements therein by the White People in the Year 1768* (1823; repr., Kingsport, TN: F.M. Hill Books, 1973), 207.

⁹ Crutchfield, *Early Times*, 49.

as early as 1769, following the northern land route through the Cumberland Gap. Their observations of the natural richness of the land and the abundance of game attracted interest when they returned to the east. Upon discovering the massive salt lick near the Cumberland River (north of current downtown Nashville, in what is now Germantown) Mansker described the land as being covered with buffalo. Bledsoe found the buffalo so numerous during the same trip that “he was fearful of being run over and trampled to death by them,” even though he was relatively safe on horseback.¹⁰ The Long Hunters made another trip to the area in the fall of 1771, camping along the road leading south to the French Lick at a spot that would be known as Station-Camp. The group made many discoveries of creeks and licks during this time whose names remain part of local geography. Mansker’s Lick, Bledsoe’s Creek, and Stoner’s Bend are all part of the legacy of this group of early pioneers. The enthusiasm about the wealth of natural resources they brought back east no doubt excited the imaginations of their audiences and hastened the development of the Middle Cumberland. The Long Hunters, writes Michael Toomey, “represented the first essential steps in the settlement process. They located the best access routes into the trans-Appalachian West and the most suitable land for settlement. They identified springs for water and sources of salt, traveled through valleys and mountain passes, and trapped along countless rivers and streams.”¹¹

The Watauga community in East Tennessee became an important launching-point for the future population of Middle Tennessee in the 1770s. James Robertson, John Sevier, and several other settlers began the settlement of Watauga in East Tennessee in

¹⁰ Carr, 28-29.

¹¹ Toomey, “Explorations, Early,” in West, 296.

1768. These families made the trip from North Carolina to take advantage of a rich agricultural area along the Watauga River known as the Watauga Old Fields. Within a few years, however, the British government determined that the community of settlers violated the Treaty of Hard Labor, an agreement between British and Cherokee representatives that established a line west of which white settlers were not to go. British authorities ordered the settlers back from Watauga. Not to be deterred, Robertson made his own agreement with the natives to lease the lands, and the community continued to prosper in spite of its outlaw status.

To organize the region administratively, in 1772 the Watauga leadership agreed to the Articles of Association at Sycamore Shoals, considered one of the earliest democratic agreements in America. Novel among its provisions were articles for suffrage for all free men over the age of twenty-one and for election of militia officers. The British voiced disapproval of this democratic effort but did not have the wherewithal to intervene, as they had other problems on the horizon and could not be bothered with policing a small outpost across the border of Indian lands.¹² The court remained for four years, “regulating affairs of the Watauga community.”¹³ The Watauga Association considered itself an independent community and in fact appealed as a colony to the legislature of Virginia for protection from a renewed campaign of violence from the Cherokee.

The Treaty of Sycamore Shoals, a private treaty negotiated in March 1775 with the Cherokee by Judge Richard Henderson, was illegal under both British and later American law. It was also the most influential to date. It transferred to the Transylvania

¹² Crutchfield, *Early Times*, 50-51.

¹³ W. Calvin Dickinson, “Watauga Association,” in West, 1039.

Land Company all the area between the Ohio River and the tributaries of the Kentucky and Cumberland rivers for 10,000 pounds of trading goods. As a result of the treaty, Henderson opened the Cumberland settlements¹⁴ Following Sycamore Shoals, a renegade faction of the Cherokee Nation stepped up resistance to white encroachment under the leadership of Dragging Canoe, a warrior who split from the Nation's leadership and carried out his own offensive against the whites. When Virginia rejected the Wataugans' plea, they petitioned North Carolina on July 5, 1776 for protection:

We shall now submit the whole to your candid and impartial judgment. We pray your mature and deliberate consideration in our behalf, that you may annex us to your Province, (whether as county, district or other division,) in such manner as may enable us to share in the glorious cause of Liberty... That you may strictly examine every part of this our Petition, and delay no time in annexing us to your Province, in such a manner as your wisdom shall direct, is the hearty prayer of those who, for themselves and constituents, as in duty bound, shall ever pray.¹⁵

North Carolina did in fact annex the settlement in 1777 and thereafter referred to it as the District of Washington.¹⁶ It was about this time that Robertson and others decided to remove themselves once again to the west for the prospect of more land and the opportunity to found another new government.

The famous James Robertson and John Donelson journeys of 1779-1780 mark the beginning of settlement of Middle Tennessee but the legendary Thomas Sharp Spencer is considered the first white settler of the area. From 1776 to 1779, he staked out land and planted crops. A colossus of a man, he spent one winter living alone in a giant sycamore

¹⁴ Fred S. Rolater, "Treaties," in West, 990.

¹⁵ Eric R. Lacy, *Antebellum Tennessee: A Documentary History* (Johnson City, TN: Overmountain Press, 1980), 26-27.

¹⁶ Thomas Perkins Abernethy, *From Frontier to Plantation in Tennessee: A Study in Frontier Democracy* (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1967), 11.

tree at Bledsoe's Lick.¹⁷ By the time the Robertson and Donelson parties arrived in Nashville, Spencer's community in Castalian Springs had harvested crops for three seasons.¹⁸

Colonel Richard Henderson's land speculation provided Robertson and Donelson the incentive to depart Watauga and settle the Middle Cumberland. In 1775 Henderson, founder of the Transylvania Company, purchased most of present-day Kentucky and Middle Tennessee from the Cherokee Nation. Three years later the Virginia legislature declared that the exchange of the Kentucky lands was illegal, so Henderson concentrated his efforts on the southern parcel of the purchase and offered Donelson and Robertson the opportunity to lead settlers into the area. Robertson planned a trip overland through Kentucky from the Watauga settlement in East Tennessee, and Donelson organized a waterborne route. Robertson's party reached its destination on Christmas Day, 1779 and began to build cabins and a stockade. Donelson's boat, the *Adventure*, and about thirty smaller craft left Fort Patrick Henry (the present Kingsport, Tennessee) the same month, traveled more than 1,000 miles on the Clinch, Holston, Tennessee, Ohio and Cumberland rivers and arrived in Nashborough on April 24, 1780.¹⁹ Donelson's journal demonstrates the peril of their voyage:

Friday [March] 10th—This morning about 4 o'clock we were surprised by the cries of "help poor Jennings," at some distance in the rear. He...came up in the most wretched condition. He states, that as soon as the Indians discovered his situation they turned their whole attention to him, and kept up a most galling fire at his boat. He ordered [his family] to throw all their goods into the river...Upon

¹⁷ Walter Durham, "Spencer, Thomas Sharp," in West, 874.

¹⁸ Crutchfield, 49.

¹⁹ Crutchfield, 52-56; Terry Weeks, "Robertson, James," in West, 802-03.

examination, he appears to have made a wonderful escape, for his boat is pierced in numberless places with bullets.²⁰

Finding an easier route to Middle Tennessee was critical to its early settlers and was a goal for their leader Robertson.

Within a year, settlers built four “stations” on the Cumberland River in the vicinity of Nashville. These were collections of cabins fortified by a stockade, generally interchangeable with the term “fort.”²¹ The first built were Nashborough, Mansker’s, Asher’s and Eaton’s. Many more followed with access to rivers and trails, and the station became a crucial landmark for travel through Tennessee, figuring prominently in the settlement and defense of the region. Voyagers invariably established an itinerary based on their stops at stations along the way. The journal of French botanist and diplomat Andre Michaux shows stops at “Captain Camel’s [Campbell’s]”, “Mansko’s [Mansker’s]” and Bledsoe’s stations on his voyage.²²

On May 1, 1780, the new settlers of the Cumberland established their own government with another democratic document called the Cumberland Compact. Among its articles, the Compact provided for the free election of twelve representatives from among the stations in the area and declared them to be “a proper court or jurisdiction for the recovery of any debt or damages.”²³ Like Watauga, the Cumberland effort at self-government was short-lived. In 1783, the state of North Carolina asserted its authority

²⁰ J.G.M. Ramsey, *Annals of Tennessee to the end of the Eighteenth Century* (1853; repr. Knoxville: East Tennessee Historical Society, 1967), 197-202.

²¹ Walter T. Durham, “Frontier Stations,” in West, 345.

²² Williams, 334-35.

²³ Lacy, 41.

and again annexed Robertson's community, this time as Davidson County.²⁴ In June of 1784, North Carolina ceded its western lands to Congress. Settlers in East Tennessee gathered in the town of Jonesborough and optimistically created the State of Franklin, in hopes of imminent statehood. North Carolina left the new state to wither on the vine as the state assembly repealed its cession later that year. Congress was loathe to intervene in the ensuing fracas between the mother state and the separatists in the west. In December of 1789, North Carolina again and finally transferred its western lands to the federal government. The region was to be called "The Territory of the United States South of the River Ohio," known in short as the Southwest Territory.

It was in the context of unstoppable westward expansion, rapidly-growing settlement of the western territories, and impending statehood that James Robertson addressed the necessity for a permanent and improved road west. He petitioned the North Carolina House of Commons in 1784 asking for authorization to raise troops to blaze a wagon road from Clinch Mountain in East Tennessee to the Cumberland settlements. Not until 1786 did the North Carolina legislature pass such an act. The following year it authorized a lottery to raise funds for the road's construction. In August of 1786, Peter Avery, an experienced long hunter and veteran of the 1780 Battle of King's Mountain, began marking the trail. His work force included two companies of infantry commanded by Captains William Martin and Joshua Hadley and a cavalry company commanded by Captain John Hunter.

²⁴ Robert B. Jones, "Government," in West, 374.

After marking the route, the soldiers felled trees in a ten-foot wide path and carried out some leveling of the road.²⁵ The road to Nashville was based on preexisting traces blazed by the natives, which themselves were based on ancient buffalo trails. “Early traders, hunters, and settlers would sometimes blaze trees along a path so seasonal changes could not confuse them if they decided to make the return journey by that route and guide others outbound.”²⁶

Kasper Mansker led troops protecting the first group of travelers of around a hundred people late in 1787, almost a year before its official opening.²⁷ James Robertson placed a notice in the 28 November, 1788 edition of the *State Gazette of North Carolina* announcing the road’s completion:

The new road from Campbell’s Station to Nashville, was opened on the 25th September, and the guard had attended at that time, to escort such persons as were ready to proceed to Nashville; that about sixty families had gone on, amongst whom were the widow and family of the late General Davidson, and John McNairy, Judge of the Superior Court, and that on the first day of October next, the guard would attend at the same place for the same purpose.²⁸

At this point, the road from Southwest Point to Nashville enabled entire families to migrate overland into Middle Tennessee. Previous trails along the same route were suitable only for individual hunters with perhaps a pack horse. John Dawson Boniol describes the Avery Trace at its construction:

This road was known by several names including the “North Carolina Road,” “Avery’s Trace,” or the “Old North Carolina Trace.” From the south end of

²⁵ John Dawson Boniol, Jr., “The Walton Road,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 30 (Winter 1971), 402-03.

²⁶ Calloway, 23.

²⁷ Harriette Simpson Arnow, *Flowering of the Cumberland* (1963; repr., Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1984), 377.

²⁸ Quoted in Ramsey, 505-06.

Clinch Mountain the road crossed the Clinch River near the present site of Kingston and proceeded west by way of Poplar Creek, Crooked Fork, Emory River, and entered the Cumberland Mountains through Emory Gap, near the present site of Harriman. From there it continued up Crab Orchard Mountain across the Obed River near the present site of Crossville, to Flat Rock and then on to Standing Stone, now known as Monterey. From there it proceeded down the mountain to Fort Blount, about seventy miles up the Cumberland River from Nashville. Then it crossed the river and proceeded by way of Dixon Springs, Bledsoe's Lick, Winchester's Station (the present site of Gallatin), and Kasper Mansker's Station to Nashville.²⁹

In August 1788 the North Carolina assembly formed the district of Mero out of the Cumberland settlements, a tribute to Esteban Rodriguez Miro, the Spanish governor of New Orleans. James Robertson hoped the tribute would flatter the governor and win favor from him in the form of commercial privileges and military protection. At the same time the legislature elected John McNairy as Superior Court judge for the district. McNairy in turn appointed the post of public prosecutor to a young lawyer named Andrew Jackson.³⁰ McNairy and the twenty-one-year-old Jackson were among the first to travel the new road, migrating to Nashville for the first time in 1788,

Along the Wilderness Trace that stretched over the Allegheny Mountains. Besides a horse and a gun and a few personal belongings, they each carried letters of introduction from distinguished citizens of the old community to the settlers of the new. As it turned out, they would all play a significant role in the development of Tennessee.³¹

The trip westward was fraught with slow progress, illness, and complex, challenging, and frequently violent relations with natives. Examples of the last could be playful and relatively innocuous, evidenced by the natives' fascination with travelers they encountered on the trail and their propensity for stealing horses and baggage from

²⁹ Boniol, *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, 403-04.

³⁰ Robert V. Remini, *The Life of Andrew Jackson* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 12.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

travelers. William C. Davis describes “petty theft [as] a game, a source of some pride and jest when successful and little or no shame when caught.”³²

More often as travelers and settlers encroached on Indian lands with impunity, contact became conflict. John Carr, who helped pioneer Middle Tennessee, refers to the constant danger from Indian attack in the early days of settlement, and notably to the settlers’ early desire to return to the safety of the east:

1782 was commenced with violent attacks upon the settlers. They were so harassed that they could not plant their corn nor hunt game without exposing themselves to the danger of being waylaid and killed by the savages. The colony, though their number had been increased during the past year by the arrival of a few more emigrants, became discouraged, and...determined to leave the country. Such a step, however, was violently opposed by Capt. Robertson. He told them it was impossible to get away ... [and] reminded them of the hardships already endured by them, and pointed to the beautiful county of which they had thus obtained possession.³³

Tennessee legend Davy Crockett described the brutal nature of warfare with the natives in an account of a battle with the Creek at Tallushatchee in 1813. “We shot them like dogs,” he wrote years afterward. “I recollect seeing a boy who was shot down near the house. His arm and thigh was broken, and he was so near the burning house that the grease was stewing out of him.”³⁴ The killing of men, women and children without remorse became the rule of frontier warfare for both natives and settlers alike.

³² William C. Davis, *A Way Through the Wilderness: The Natchez Trace and the Civilization of the Southern Frontier* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), 18.

³³ John Carr, *Early Travels in the Tennessee Country* (1857; repr., Nashville: Parthenon Press, 1958), 15.

³⁴ David Crockett, *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett of the State of Tennessee* (1834; repr., Knoxville, TN, 1973), 88-89.

An incident during Jackson's first trip to Nashville is further evidence of the danger inherent in travel to the frontier, even in a large group with an armed guard. One night while the group camped not far from Nashville, Jackson marveled at the proliferation of owls in the woods. When the sounds of hooting became louder and closer to the camp, he became suspicious and was certain they were in fact the sounds of Indians approaching. He grabbed his rifle and alerted his friend Bennett Searcy. The group of about a hundred broke camp quietly and continued toward Nashville. Later that night a white hunting party found the abandoned camp and decided to rest there. Just before dawn Indians attacked them. Only one escaped.

Once the group arrived in Nashville, Jackson went straight to work in his new post.³⁵ By 1794, he had taken part in 476 court cases, which required him to travel the road between Nashville and Knoxville frequently.³⁶ Besides his immediate success in law, he became known as a legendary and feared Indian fighter.

Although treacherous, travel improved over time with the passage of several treaties and subsequent development of the territory. The Treaty of Holston of 1791 was a "Treaty of Peace and Friendship" between the United States and the Cherokee. Territorial Governor William Blount renegotiated boundaries between U.S. territory and the Cherokee Nation, and specified "free and unmolested use of a road from Washington District to Mero District."³⁷ That same year Blount chose White's Fort, a small settlement overlooking the Holston River as the capital of the Southwest Territory and

³⁵ H.W. Brands, *Andrew Jackson: His Life and Times* (New York: Doubleday, 2005), 54-55. Remini, Robert V. *Andrew Jackson and his Indian Wars* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2001), 24-25.

³⁶ Andrew Burstein, *The Passions of Andrew Jackson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 26.

³⁷ Lacy, 70.

renamed it Knoxville in honor of Secretary of War Henry Knox. Safety of travelers embarking on the road improved with the construction of a fort at Southwest Point in 1792. This location became an important hub with the further development of the road to Nashville, as leading north from the site leased from the Cherokee was a good road into Kentucky.³⁸

The Avery Trace was the most expedient route from East to Middle Tennessee, but tenuous relations with the Cherokee, through whose lands the road passed, kept travel perilous. Some travelers continued to follow the traditional route via the Cumberland Gap through Kentucky, even though the Trace cut the mileage from Knoxville to Nashville in half.³⁹ Thomas Pinckney's negotiations in 1795 with the Spanish government in Madrid defined the boundaries of the United States with the Spanish colonies and ensured American navigation of the Mississippi River. As important to hopeful Tennesseans was that the treaty included Chickasaw lands in U.S. territory, establishing authority over them, and ended Spanish incitement of native hostilities.⁴⁰ At this point travelers were able to use the road without predation between the two extremes of the territory. The journal of the Duke of Orleans, later King of France, notes the increase in the number of migrants into Middle Tennessee during his visit in 1796: "At the Clinch ferry they had heard much of the remarkable migration into that region which had followed the treaty of peace with the Indians; twenty-four thousand whites and four

³⁸ Arnow, 378.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ G.L. Rives, "Spain and the United States in 1795," *American Historical Review* 4, no. 1 (October 1898), <http://www.jstor.com> {accessed November 25, 2007}.

thousand blacks, they learned, had crossed the ferry for the Cumberland Valley the year before.”⁴¹

Predictably, the volume of traffic westward increased along the Avery Trace as the road was improved and once the Treaty of Madrid guaranteed the safety of travelers. In 1795 Andre Michaux made the trek from Virginia to Nashville along the trail, carrying out his dual missions of science and diplomacy. Michaux and his son Francois Andre traveled Europe, the Middle East, and America for botanical specimens. Learning of his intent to travel the wilds of America, the French minister to the United States gave him an additional task to make contacts in the west in hopes of inciting unrest in Louisiana so France could wrest the territory from Spain. His trip from Southwest Point took a mere eleven days, vastly improved from the months required prior to the road’s construction.⁴²

The journal of Wesleyan missionary Bishop Francis Asbury records no less than eight trips from North Carolina and Virginia into Tennessee, but it was not until 1800 that he was able to make the journey to Nashville. He preached at several landmarks along the way including Bledsoe’s Station, Mansker’s Station, and Station Camp with “great emotions of tenderness among the people.”⁴³

Louis Philippe, Duke of Orleans, traveled to America in 1796, having been exiled from France for seditious plans against the new Republic. The future King of France, accompanied by his two brothers and a servant, Baudoin, met President George Washington in Philadelphia, visited with him at Mount Vernon, and then began a journey westward into the newest states, Kentucky and Tennessee. With an itinerary and route

⁴¹ Williams, 439.

⁴² Ibid., 327, 334-35.

⁴³ Ibid., 309-310.

handwritten on a map by the President, the party of four rode the new trail from Knoxville to Nashville, the western limit of their journey. In Nashville the old French fur trapper Timothy Demonbreun was so touched by the visit that “he could not keep his hands, his feet or his tongue still.”⁴⁴

By 1795 the Southwest Territory had enough settlers to merit statehood, and Territorial Governor Blount called for a constitutional convention in November. After debate in both House and Senate chambers, Congress admitted Tennessee to the Union on June 1, 1796 as the sixteenth state. A few years before statehood, Blount authorized a lottery to improve the road to Nashville from the east. In 1794 territorial militia built the post later known as Fort Blount in Jackson County where the Avery Trace crossed the Cumberland.⁴⁵ With all the concerns facing the new state it was not until 1799 that the legislature could address making improvements to its roads with an act authorizing Captain William Walton, William Martin, and Robert Koyle to construct a new road from Southwest Point to Nashville.

Captain Walton had earlier secured permission from Governor Blount to build a road from the confluence of the Cumberland and Caney Fork Rivers (soon to be the town of Carthage) to a point on the Avery Trace. Thus began the Walton Road, built over a hundred-mile long stretch of the existing Trace and named for Walton, the leading surveyor and supervisor of the project. At the point where the existing road turned northwest toward Fort Blount (near present-day Monterey), the Walton Road continued westward to the new town of Carthage, built on fifty acres donated by Walton from his

⁴⁴ Ibid., 439.

⁴⁵ Benjamin C. Nance, “Fort Blount,” in West, 323.

land grant for military service during the Revolution. Construction began in 1799 and finished in the fall of 1802. “The new road was fifteen feet wide and free of stumps. It was to be leveled on the sides of hills and have bridges or causeways built over streams. Mile markers blazed on trees or signs appeared every three miles.”⁴⁶ Walton operated a ferry across the Cumberland at Carthage as well as a tavern; it is reputed that refreshments he provided there during the heated contest of 1804 between proponents of Bledsoesborough and Carthage secured a victory for the latter town as county seat.⁴⁷ Andre Michaux traveled Walton’s Road in 1802 and found it as “broad and commodious as those in the environs of Philadelphia.”⁴⁸

Governor Willie Blount reaffirmed the significance of the Avery Trace in his address to the state legislature in September of 1811:

Which authorized the erection of a turnpike gate on the road leading from East to West Tennessee, passing the Clinch river near Southwest Point for a term of years, has, or soon will have expired. The importance of that road in relation to future population and as a leading post route, together with the want of a sufficient population residing therein to keep it in repair, and the necessity which exists for its being in good order to facilitate intercourse between the inhabitants of the eastern and western ends of the state, renders it an object worthy of legislative attention.⁴⁹

As the population of the nascent state grew, so did requirements to supply its settlers, and Tennessee’s network of roads and river transportation expanded dramatically. Having the advantage of year-round navigation, the Cumberland and

⁴⁶ W. Calvin Dickinson, “Walton Road,” in West, 1031.

⁴⁷ Sue W. Maggart, “Smith County,” in West, 855-56.

⁴⁸ Andre Michaux, *Travels 1802*. Quoted in Arnow, 381.

⁴⁹ Robert H. White, *Messages of the Governors of Tennessee 1796-1821* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, 1952), 317.

Tennessee Rivers saw increasing trade and travel into the steamboat era, more than any road to Nashville, as keelboats and barges carried tobacco, cotton and other commodities from Nashville to New Orleans. The Cumberland River remained the most significant means of commercial transportation until the railroad connected the city in 1860. The Avery Trace was never closed down or abandoned, but rather incorporated into other roads, like the Walton Road.

Steamboatin' on the Cumberland by Byrd Douglas describes the rise of travel and commerce on Tennessee's rivers in the period when river travel became safe enough to overtake the land routes. He refers to the period 1840 to 1850 as "The Golden Age of Steamboatin'" in which the waterways of the Mississippi, Ohio, Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers were the vital link to delivering the raw materials for building commerce and industry as the frontier pushed westward. Douglas asserts "the Cumberland and the packets by 1840 had made the difference between a people still struggling against frontier life and a people who were able to capitalize on progress under the most favorable circumstances."⁵⁰ He goes on to explain the paucity of turnpikes and accessibility of waterways led to the rivers dominating traffic in the area. By this time the Avery Trace had been incorporated into other roadways and surpassed as the main route into Middle Tennessee.

⁵⁰ Byrd Douglas, *Steamboatin' on the Cumberland* (Nashville: Tennessee Book Company, 1961),49.

CHAPTER TWO: THE SETTLEMENT LANDSCAPE OF THE AVERY TRACE

This chapter reviews the existing historic landscape of the Avery Trace. Included in this portion are landmarks that would have existed during the most active time period of the Trace. Other traditional names of the Avery Trace include the North Carolina Military Trace, Wilderness Road, Holston Road, Marchbank's Turnpike, and Officer's Turnpike. Today its path includes dozens of road names. The scope of this project is not intended to follow the precise path of the original road. It is rather to document the visual historic landscape of the active time period when the Avery Trace was the major transportation artery into the area.¹

Abraham Steiner and Frederick de Schweinitz were Moravian missionaries who traveled from Salem, North Carolina to Nashville in the fall of 1799 to present Christianity to the Cherokees in Tennessee.² The journal Schweinitz kept is a detailed account of the journey. This tour of the modern Avery Trace will follow Schweinitz's and other period descriptions of its major landmarks.

The 28 November, 1788 edition of the *State Gazette of North Carolina* announced the opening of the new avenue westward to the Mero District: "The new road from Campbell's Station to Nashville, was opened on the 25th September, and the guard had attended at that time, to escort such persons as were ready to proceed to Nashville."³

¹ Thanks to Dr. Carroll Van West's *Tennessee's Historic Landscapes: A Traveler's Guide* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995) for the model of a tour through the historic landscape.

² W. Calvin Dickinson, *The Walton Road: A Nineteenth Century Wilderness Highway in Tennessee* (Cookeville: W. Calvin Dickinson, 2007), 35.

³ Quoted in Ramsey, 505-06.

Campbell's Station (sometimes simply Campbell Station) is at the intersection of U.S. Highways 11 and 70 in Farragut, Knox County, the first recorded marshalling point of the Avery Trace. The state historical marker reads, "The house marks the site of the station established in 1787 by Col. David Campbell as a frontier fort for protection against Indian attacks. On the main highway to the west it was an important trading post and stopping place for travelers and stock drovers."⁴ Campbell Station Park nearby provides a contemplative setting for modern-day travelers to explore the beginning of the old road.

Fifteen miles west on U.S. 70 and south on state highway 58, at the confluence of the Clinch and Tennessee Rivers is Southwest Point, the traditional starting point of the Avery Trace. The U.S. Army garrisoned this river crossing as early as 1792.⁵ By 1797 soldiers had built a permanent fort built. Schweinitz describes Fort Southwest Point at the beginning of their journey:

Half a mile from here, on a point of land at the inflow of the Clinch into the Tennessee, lies Fort Southwest Point. The garrison consists of 800 men, infantry, and a company of light cavalry. The commander is Major Peters, a native of New York, for whom we had a letter of introduction from Capt. Butler. As we thought, however, that we should be detained too long by this gentleman and as we were obliged to avail ourselves of the fine weather for our journey through the wilderness, we delivered this letter to the local inn-keeper, who promised to forward it and, at the same time, extend our compliments to Major Peters.⁶

Unknown thousands of travelers began the trip to Middle Tennessee here. By 1811 the fort was no longer garrisoned.

⁴ Tennessee Historical Commission, *Tennessee Historical Markers* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, 1996), 18.

⁵ *Ibid*, 19.

⁶ Dickinson, 38-39.

Fort Southwest Point today is a reconstructed historic site with a visitor center. The city of Kingston rebuilt the fort on its original foundation. Completed sections to date include a barracks, a blockhouse and 250 feet of palisade walls. Archaeological research by the Tennessee Division of Archaeology over the last three decades has collected nearly 59,000 items, and uncovered portions of the foundation and the location of thirteen buildings, offering direction for the reconstruction and interpretation of Fort Southwest Point.⁷

On the west side of the river the appropriately named Walton Road continues to Old Rockwood Highway, offering a clue to the path of the Avery Trace. For the next 200 miles, road names from the past are sometimes the only indication that the Trace has left. At this same location on November 23, 1799, Schweinitz describes the river crossing from Southwest Point:

On this side of the river begins the so-called [Cumberland Plateau] wilderness, a stretch of country entirely uninhabited, belonging to the Indians and used by them only for hunting. This wilderness lies between the Tennessee and the Cumberland settlements; and one is obliged to travel eighty miles before coming to the first house.⁸

The next two days of the missionaries' journal describe the difficulty of traversing the plateau's rugged terrain. They encounter a few fellow travelers but no settlements until they reach what is currently Putnam County, when the road branched off to Carthage to the south and across the Cumberland at Fort Blount to the west.

⁷ Samuel D. Smith, "Military Sites Archaeology in Tennessee," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 147; Fort Southwest Point, "Fort Southwest Point: 1797-1811," <http://www.southwestpoint.com/index.html> [accessed February 11, 2012].

⁸ Dickinson, 39.

In 1794, the territorial government established Fort Blount at the crossing of the Avery Trace over the Cumberland River. Territorial militia built the fort and named it for Territorial Governor William Blount. South Carolina native Sampson Williams was instrumental in the establishment of the post. In 1791 he received permission to operate the ferry crossing. The next year, Governor Blount authorized Williams to raise men to be stationed there. In 1794 Blount received authorization to enlarge the post. The earliest known use of the title is in a letter of July 13, 1795 from Blount to Robertson in which the governor instructs Robertson to reduce the number of troops stationed at the fort. Williams also owned a tavern at Fort Blount. In March 1796, his brother Oliver Williams served as its militia captain. When Tennessee gained statehood, officials transferred the fort to federal troops of the 3rd Infantry Regiment under Captain William Rickard. The federal presence lasted into 1798 when it was deemed no longer necessary to man it.⁹ On November 26th of 1799, Schweinitz observes as much as they cross the river at Fort Blount:

At noon we came to the Cumberland River, in Sumner County [now Jackson County]. It has rocky banks but is not broad. We were taken across it at Fort Blount, where during the last Indian war there had been a garrison; now there remains a roomy house [of Sampson Williams]. From here we continued steadily westward a new but very muddy road and turned in, early in the evening, on account of the bad road, at a good-sized plantation belonging to the Widow Young, not far from the river.¹⁰

Located in Smith Bend of the Cumberland River midway between Gainesboro and Carthage, the site of Fort Blount is woods and fields today. Standing at the site of Fort Blount offers one of the most authentic ways to experience the Avery Trace of the

⁹ Benjamin Nance, "Fort Blount," in West, 323.

¹⁰ Dickinson, 43.

eighteenth century. In fact it was undoubtedly more clamorous at that time. Today there is only the sound of wind, cattle shuffling around and perhaps some farm machinery operating nearby. The site is on private property.

The Avery Trace continues to the west through the communities of Gladdice, Difficult, Defeated and Pleasant Shade. The Walton Road creates a sort of loop in the Trace route heading south and west to Carthage on the Cumberland River. Captain William Walton was a North Carolina native born in 1760. He served in the North Carolina militia and moved to middle Tennessee in 1785 with his brother Isaac following the route via Watauga, Cumberland Gap and central Kentucky. Here he located his family at Mansker's Station. In 1786 Walton and Captain Tillman Dixon ascended the Cumberland River in a canoe to locate and select land awarded them by the state of North Carolina for their military service.¹¹ Dixon located his cabin at Dixon's Springs. Walton made his home at the confluence of the Cumberland and the Caney Fork. Walton was a successful promoter for travel through Smith County, and secured permission from the governor to construct a secondary road from the Avery Trace to the aforementioned river juncture. Walton completed his road in the autumn of 1795, and shortly received a license to operate his ferry at the junction of the rivers. He shrewdly donated fifty acres which became the city of Carthage, awarded county seat in 1804.¹²

On November 25th, 1799, Schweinitz mentioned the fork in the road: "On the last mountain there is the parting of the ways. The road to the left goes to Caney Fork and the one to the right to Fort Blount. We took the latter. The mountain down which we had to

¹¹ Ibid, 1-2.

¹² Ibid, 35.

go is at once so steep that we had to lead our horses. We had nine miles more to the first house.”¹³

Except for appearances of short stretches called “Walton Road” in Kingston and “Old Walton Road” in Cookeville, the Walton Road does not exist as it did in the early nineteenth century. Like the Avery Trace, it exists as a legacy of early migration and commerce into middle Tennessee. The Walton Road, officially named the Cumberland Turnpike, was a significant thoroughfare of its time, reflecting a vital artery for the population of the new state as well as the vision of its namesake. Its hundred miles stretched from Southwest Point to Carthage, essentially putting the latter city on the map.

As Steiner and Schweinitz continue their trek to the west of Fort Blount, their journal reads:

The night was cold and the morning of the 27th so very cold that a bucket of water newly filled was frozen over in a very few minutes; therefore, we were very glad for the good night’s lodging, though we were obliged to pay well for it. Five miles further on we came to a well located plantation, called Dickson’s Spring, where the Caney Fork Road again unites with the Fort Blount Road. An abundant spring flows forth from under a rock shelf and forms at once a beautiful creek that drives mills not far from here.¹⁴

North and west of Carthage about ten miles, Tennessee Highway 25 rejoins the Avery Trace at Dixon Springs. In the early part of 1787 Tilman Dixon staked out his land grant in the company of William Walton. On his estate of 3,840 acres Dixon built a substantial log house of eight rooms, outhouses, barns and quarters. The county court of Smith County convened for the first time at this house in 1799. The Dixon home was a favorite stopping place for friends and travelers. Louis Philippe, Duke of Orleans and

¹³ Ibid, 42.

¹⁴ Dickinson, 43.

later King of France, visited Dixon's home in 1797. The Duke mentions in his diary that they had, "at Major Dixon's the luxury of coffee, and two beds for four." (reference?) Dixon's original log home was augmented with brick Italianate wings in the nineteenth century and remains one of the most interesting architectural examples of this landscape.¹⁵

Highway 25 carries on west of Dixon Springs, closely following Fort Blount Ferry Road to the north through Hartsville, approaching the richest collection of period landmarks along the Avery Trace. Later on November 27th, 1799, Schweinitz writes:

In the afternoon our road took us through the well known Bledsoe's Lock [Lick], located in an open place, somewhat depressed in the middle. Here at various places black water gushes forth, smelling strongly of gunpowder. It is very rich in sulphur. The first settlers of Cumberland saw here great herds of buffalo that licked the water and the sulphur which settled on old stumps. The cattle of this whole region gather about these springs in the summer-time. Nearby there is a large plantation with an inn [Wynnewood]"¹⁶

Just off Highway 25 in Castalian Springs is Bledsoe's Station, an important landmark along the Trace at Bledsoe's Lick, a mineral spring and salt lick. Legendary long hunter Thomas Sharp Spencer was known for his size and strength as well as spending the winter of 1779 in the hollow of a giant sycamore tree at the lick. Spencer is considered the earliest white settler in Middle Tennessee. At least seven households occupied the station from 1784 through 1795. During Indian hostilities, no less than a hundred people would take shelter within its walls. Settlers appear to have set up permanent residence at

¹⁵ Carroll Van West, *Tennessee's Historic Landscapes* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 311.

¹⁶ Dickinson, 44.

the station by 1783.¹⁷ Archaeological work in 1990 pinpointed the location of the fortifications. Research to date suggests that Bledsoe's Station consisted of about 1.5 acres, including more than fifteen structures connected or enclosed by segments of hastily constructed fortifications. Kevin Smith describes the station as "a more eclectic and haphazard development of structures and fortifications."¹⁸

Bledsoe's Station is now a park featuring a model airplane field, Hugh Rogan's stone cottage, Nathaniel Parker's log house, and an archaeological interpretation of the fort. Visitors here can walk a short stretch of the Avery Trace itself, preserved at the edge of the park. The cemetery on site features an obelisk erected in 1908 for the Bledsoe brothers. The Rogan stone house and the Parker house have been moved to the park at Bledsoe's Station from their original location in the community of Rogana.

The first Rogan House is one of the Trace's most compelling artifacts. Its builder was Hugh Rogan, born in 1747 in Glentown, Ireland, on the border of Counties Donegal and Tyrone where he made his living as a weaver. Fearing either arrest for his staunch Catholicism or conscription into the Royal Army, he left his home in 1775 and found passage on a ship to Philadelphia. Hugh made his way south through the Cumberland Gap. Sources indicate that he joined in the American struggle against the British and he was included in the Militia List for Henry County, Virginia in 1779.¹⁹ That same year, he joined the guard for the survey team lead by Thomas Walker and General Daniel Smith,

¹⁷ Kevin E. Smith, "Bledsoe Station: Archaeology, History, and the Interpretation of the Middle Tennessee Frontier, 1770-1820" in *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (Fall 2000), 177.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 180.

¹⁹ Caneta Skelley Hankins, "The Rogans of Sumner County, Tennessee and County Tyrone, Northern Ireland," Middle Tennessee State University, <http://frank.mtsu.edu/~chankins/rogan/America.html> (accessed March 4, 2012).

who were surveying the state lines for Virginia and North Carolina.²⁰ Rogan returned to middle Tennessee in 1780 on John Donelson's legendary and treacherous river journey. Awarded 640 acres for his services and an additional 320 "corn" acres,²¹ Rogan and his family worked a prosperous farm that remained active into the twentieth century.



Figure 1. Hugh Rogan's stone cottage (Photograph by author)

²⁰ Caneta Skelley Hankins, "Hugh Rogan of Counties Donegal and Sumner: Irish Acculturation in Frontier Tennessee," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (Winter 1996), 310-11.

²¹ Doug Drake, Jack Masters and Bill Puryear, *Founding of the Cumberland Settlements: The First Atlas 1779-1804* (Gallatin, TN: Warioto Press, 2009), C12, D12.

Hugh Rogan's stone cottage "Rogana," derives directly from the traditional folk architecture of his native Ireland. It is an example of vernacular American architecture based on the design of an Irish farmhouse.²² Built between 1795 and 1798 on a hillside above Bledsoe's Creek, Rogana is a limestone cottage with a two-room linear floor plan. Rogan scholar Caneta Hankins writes, "The entrances to the Rogan home, following Irish tradition, open directly into the room of the family. This arrangement immediately welcomed the visitor to the hearth as opposed to a central passage off which rooms opened for privacy and formality."²³ Homes similar to this traditional and vernacular style are visible in Ulster today.



Figure 2. A traditional Irish cottage in Derryveigh, County Donegal, Ireland (Photograph by Tom Sweeney)

²² Caneta Hankins, "An Irish Cottage in Sumner County," Middle Tennessee State University, <http://frank.mtsu.edu/~chankins/rogan/IrishCottage.html> (accessed February 29, 2012).

²³ Hankins, *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, 317.

Hugh Rogan died at his home in 1813. Rogana became the center of a small community that adopted its name. The stone house was moved to the park at Bledsoe's Station in 1998. The brick home was left to ruin in the middle of pasture until its renaissance a decade later. The Francis Rogan house is a two-story hall and parlor brick home of grander scale than the modest Rogana, probably built by 1830.²⁴ In 2009, the Ulster-American Folk Park purchased the house for removal and reconstruction at its facility in Northern Ireland. From 2009 into 2010 contractors including the author carefully took the house apart for its new role at the folk park. They labeled its bricks with their exact location on each elevation and packed them onto shipping pallets. They removed the remaining wood components, purlins, rafters, braces, floorboards and some decorative pieces were and reused in the new iteration of the house. The Francis Rogan house will open to the public in 2012 as the newest part of the museum's New World experience.²⁵

²⁴ Building date of the brick home is unknown. Hankins estimates 1825-1830. Similarities in the details of its construction may indicate a timeframe closer to the construction of Hawthorne Hill, circa 1810.

²⁵ National Museums Northern Ireland, "Ulster-American Folk Park," <http://www.nmni.com/uafp> (accessed February 29, 2012)



Figure 3. The Rogan brick home on its original site above Bledsoe's Creek in 2009
(Photograph by author)

Although both Rogan homes are now in different locations for their interpretation, the original site is authentic, one imagines, to the time when Hugh Rogan and his family planted and harvested corn or wheat. Cattle graze nearby, the surrounding fields are quiet until the few days in August and September when workers swarm the tobacco patches and load the nearby barns with their crop. This location overlooking Bledsoe Creek is on private property.



Figure 4. The Rogan brick home in its new location at the Ulster-American Folk Park, Omagh, Northern Ireland (Photograph by Monica Winters)

Just below Bledsoe's Station, across Highway 25 is the log inn of Wynnewood, overlooking the sulfur springs at Bledsoe's Lick in Castalian Springs. Alfred Wynne, Stephen Roberts and William Cage built the inn in 1828 for travelers. The sprawling house of both single and two stories is 142 feet long with a dog-trot. It is comprised of oak, walnut and ash logs, some measuring 32 feet in length.²⁶ When the spa failed to receive the patronage they had imagined, Alfred Wynne purchased his partners' interests in 1834. The Wynnes purchased the interest of the others and made their home there

²⁶ Walter T. Durham, *Old Sumner: A History of Sumner County Tennessee from 1805 to 1861*. (Gallatin: Sumner County Public Library Board, 1972), 38.

until 1971, when the state acquired it for preservation as an historic site.²⁷ The house was damaged by tornadoes in 2008. The state has worked at its restoration work since that time, and Wynnewood will open to the public in the summer of 2012.



Figure 5. Newly-restored Wynnewood, 2012 (Photograph by author)

Nearby on the old highway loop is Hawthorne Hill, or the Bate House. This is a two-story Federal style brick home of hall and parlor plan. Built by John Bearden around 1800, the house is three bays wide with two rooms on each floor. The brick work on three sides is Flemish bond, while the northern façade is common bond. The front façade of Hawthorne Hill displays simple symmetry, with two four-over-four double-hung

²⁷ Walter T. Durham, "Wynnewood," in West, 1087.

windows flanking wood paneled entry doors and three six-over-six double-hung windows on the second story. Both east and west elevations feature an exterior brick chimney. A shed roof porch dating to the 1950s detracts from the Federal simplicity of the house. The house is situated on 10.45 of the original 208 acres owned by Bearden.²⁸



Figure 6. Hawthorne Hill (Photograph by author)

A short distance north of Highway 25 on Greenfield Lane is the Parker-Bryson Historic District, made up of four buildings. The main house, a simple brick Federal residence of Flemish bond with brick chimneys at both gable ends, was built around 1794

²⁸ Jessica Lauren White, Michael T. Gavin and the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area, *Hawthorne Hill Sumner County Tennessee History Conditions Assessment, & Maintenance Recommendations Report*, (Murfreesboro: Center for Historic Preservation, Fall 2011), 7.

for Nathaniel Parker overlooking a tributary of Bledsoe Creek. Parker was a Virginian who made several trips to middle Tennessee in the 1780s. In typical settlement pattern, Parker lived in a log house while his more substantial brick home was being built. The historic district includes a blacksmith shop, a school, and a smokehouse. The Nathaniel Parker house itself was likely hall and parlor when built; a single story ell was added to the west elevation late in the nineteenth century.²⁹

Continuing west on State Highway 25 one finds the landmark of Cragfont, one of the best-preserved architectural examples along the Trace. Built between 1798 and 1802 by pioneer James Winchester, this limestone mansion presents the appearance of a frontier castle and was the grandest home in Tennessee at the time of its construction. Winchester came to Tennessee in 1785 and acquired several land holdings. He became a brigadier general of the Mero District in 1795, and was Speaker of the first Tennessee Senate. With Andrew Jackson, John Overton and William Vaulx, he helped found the city of Memphis. Winchester died at Cragfont in 1826.³⁰ James Patrick writes “Cragfont . . . represents the conquest of the Cumberland frontier by style . . . James Winchester’s elegant stone house a rare Tennessee example of the ‘T’ plan of Virginia and Maryland.”³¹ On the evening of November 27th, Schweinitz writes:

Farther on we came to a place called Carag Font. Here there are great mills built of stone along a creek, now not very full but at times running so deep and broad that it becomes impassable. Late in the evening we came to the house of a Mr.

²⁹ Tennessee Historical Commission, “Parker-Bryson Historic District,” (Nashville: Nomination to National Register of Historic Places, 1987), section 7, pg 2.

³⁰ Thomas B. Brumbaugh, ed., *Architecture of Middle Tennessee: The Historic American Buildings Survey* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1974), 110.

³¹ James Patrick, *Architecture in Tennessee 1768-1897* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 71-75.

McKnight and remained there for the night. It began to rain and to snow; hence, many people stopped here.³²

Cragfont is a two-story, T-shaped home of Late Georgian design with a five bay design and central-hall plan. Its rear section, the stem of the T, was a single story until the second was added around 1810 for a ballroom.³³ The structure is rough-finished limestone quarried locally. Ornamentation on the exterior is seven iron stars on the front façade, which anchor supporting rods which run through the structure. Its double entrance door, centered in the south wall, is balanced by two large windows on either side on both first and second floors. The first floor includes the parlor and hall, dining room, kitchen and a smokehouse. Upstairs are bedrooms, a hallway and a card room. A Winchester grandchild described the grounds stocked with beds of flowers and a pond stocked with perch, silversides and catfish.³⁴

³² Dickinson, 44.

³³ Durham, "Cragfont," in West, 216.

³⁴ Ward Allen, "Cragfont: Grandeur on the Tennessee Frontier," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 23, no.2, 2.



Figure 7. Cragfont, Castalian Springs (Photograph by Carroll Van West)

The excellent craftsmanship of Cragfont is evident everywhere in the home. The most distinctive architectural millwork is in the entrance hall and parlor. The floors are ash, the doors leading from the hall are set in deep reveals with molded architraves. Tongue and groove construction is of fine craft. The parlor is considered the finest room in the house. The parlor mantel is delicate, with a gently tapering column at each end. Centered in the windowless west wall is a large fireplace set with dark marble. Looking into the attic offers a view of the rafter system, featuring a system of king post trusses joining queen posts on both sides with a finely-crafted series of notches, fittings and

wood pins.³⁵ The lumber used in framing and finishing the house was likely produced in Winchester's own sawmill. French botanist Francois Andre Michaux stayed with the Winchesters in 1802. He writes that General Winchester was "engaged in finishing a stone house, very elegant for the country, it contains four large rooms on the ground floor, a first floor and an attic story. The carpenters had been fetched from Baltimore, a distance of near 700 miles."³⁶

In 1964, a few years following the rescue of Cragfont from dilapidation, historian Ward Allen wrote:

As it stands today, Cragfont is largely unchanged and little troubled by the world around. Dirt roads still ravel the countryside, but the paved highway from Gallatin carries speeding traffic just out of earshot. Bledsoe's Creek, where the Winchester boys fished, still winds below the house, but it soon joins the Cumberland River and is lost in the modern complex of the Gallatin steam plant and holiday activities on Old Hickory Lake. In this setting Cragfont, still withstanding the ravages of time, holds to its frontier grandeur and the spirit of its name: a fortress and a fount.³⁷

The Tennessee Historical Commission acquired Cragfont in 1958. It is open to the public.

Continuing south and west on Highway 31E and reaching Hendersonville, a turn to the south down Indian Lake Road leads to Rock Castle, the earliest example of Federal architecture in the area, located on the bank of Old Hickory Lake. General Daniel Smith began construction on this home by the Cumberland River in 1784, but Indian attacks delayed its completion until 1791. A native Virginian, Smith commanded militia forces against Indian forces allied with the British during the Revolution. He became

³⁵ Veronica Riegel, *A Summary Report on the 1989 Excavations at the Cragfont Historic House Site* (Nashville: State of Tennessee Department of Conservation, Division of Archaeology), 9.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Allen, *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, 18.

acquainted with the Tennessee country in the winter of 1779-1780 on a surveying expedition with Dr. Thomas Walker. In 1784 he settled his family on a tract of 3,140 acres at Drake's Creek and the Cumberland River.³⁸ He became prominent in the early formation of Tennessee, appointed Secretary of the Territory South of the River Ohio in 1790, and later chairman of the committee to draft the state's constitution. In 1798 he succeeded Andrew Jackson as United States Senator. He died in Rock Castle in 1818.



Figure 8. Rock Castle, Hendersonville (Photograph by Carroll Van West)

Rock Castle is a two-story federal style home built of limestone quarried on site. It is in an ell shape with a central-hall plan containing four rooms on the ground floor, a

³⁸ Walter T. Durham, "Daniel Smith," in West, 856.

parlor, hall, family living room and dining room. On the second floor are three bedrooms. Like Cragfont, Rock Castle presents “a degree of architectural mastery rarely found on the Tennessee frontier.”³⁹ A two-story Greek Revival type portico was added to the front façade in the 1850s and curiously is left of center, skewing the home’s Georgian symmetry like a broken nose.⁴⁰ A stone chimney stands at both ends of the house, with another in the ell. The earlier roof was wood shingle, since replaced with slate. From a window on the home’s north side, General Smith’s fifteen year old daughter Polly climbed down a ladder held by Andrew Jackson to elope with Jackson’s law partner Samuel Donelson.⁴¹

The damming of the Cumberland to form Old Hickory Lake in the 1950s threatened the entire property, but the house, smokehouse and family cemetery were saved. The remainder of the property is submerged or has been developed into suburban homes.⁴² The state purchased the home in 1969. Like Cragfont, Rock Castle is an outstanding landmark on the tour of the Avery Trace. It is “a splendid early example of frontier transitional Federal architecture in Tennessee.”⁴³ James Patrick writes of these buildings, “Stony Point, Daniel Smith’s Rock Castle, and Cragfont are eighteenth-century manors whose builders had not forgotten the faintly baroque neoclassicism of the 1760s, but after 1790 fashionable design took on a more delicate, deliberately classical

³⁹ Arlene F. Young, “Rock Castle,” in West, 803.

⁴⁰ Tennessee Historical Commission, “Rock Castle,” National Register Nomination, 1987.

⁴¹ *Nashville Tennessean*, April 21, 1968, 3-B.

⁴² West, *Tennessee’s Historic Landscapes*, 320.

⁴³ Arlene Young, “Rock Castle,” in West, 804.

character.”⁴⁴ Rock Castle is open to the public and has a visitor center with an exhibit about Smith’s life and career.

Driving west and south down Highway 31E one passes “Walton Ferry Road” approaching Hadley Bend of the Cumberland River. About a mile north of the highway in Goodlettsville is the Bowen-Campbell House marked “Bowen Plantation House” at Moss-Wright Park. The two-story dwelling is among the oldest brick houses in middle Tennessee. Captain William Bowen built his original residence in 1787. The brick house probably dates circa 1800. The house shows Federal style but its features reflect something naïve and unformed. It appears to have been laid out for five bays, but that design was never executed. Two doorways mirror the center of the house and two windows are placed above each other at the east and west ends of the front façade. The home has two stories, Flemish bond with a gabled roof with a projecting chimney at either gable end. Captain William Bowen built a double log cabin for his family on the bank of the creek in 1784. In 1787 he built the extant brick home.⁴⁵ Immediately to the west is a softball field.

Across Moss-Wright Park is the recreated site of Mansker’s Station, the second location established by early settler Kasper Mansker. Kasper first encountered Middle Tennessee on a hunting trip to the area in 1769. He returned in 1772, during which time his group of hunters set up a station camp at a location since known as Station Camp Creek.⁴⁶ He established his own station in 1780 convenient to a salt lick and creek

⁴⁴ Patrick, 75.

⁴⁵ Douglas M. Slater, “Bowen-Campbell House,” in West, 80.

⁴⁶ Walter T. Durham, “Kasper Mansker: Cumberland Frontiersman,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (Summer 1971): 158.

known thereafter as Mansker Creek. In 1781 settlers abandoned the first station due to repeated Indian raids. The Indians later burned the abandoned buildings. In 1782-1783 Mansker built a new station on the east bank of the creek about a mile away.⁴⁷ The second Mansker Station remained, and became an important landmark for the early formation of Nashville, frequently mentioned in travel accounts.⁴⁸ Historian Walter Durham mentions Mansker's contribution to the Avery Trace in the area:

In April, 1785, Mansker with his brother George, Edward Hogan, Isaac Bledsoe, Ephraim Peyton, and Captain Blackmore, were authorized by the Davidson County Quarterly Court to "clear out" a road from Dry Creek at Edenwold to Bledsoe's Lick. The project was the most ambitious road building yet undertaken in Davidson County. The work probably consisted of widening and improving the existing buffalo trail that connected the sulphur licks at Mansker's and Bledsoe's through the present site of Gallatin.⁴⁹

Andre Michaux visited the fort on February 25, 1795, on his way east to North Carolina. His encounter with Mansker was less than friendly:

The 25th started to return to Carolina and slept 10 miles away at the house of Colonel Mansker, a declared enemy of the French because, he said, they have killed their king. Although I had not dined I would not accept his supper believing a Republican should not be under obligations to a fanatical partisan of Royalty. I was greatly mortified that the night and the rain should compel me to remain in his house. But I slept on my deerskin and paid for the maize he supplied me with to cross the wilderness.⁵⁰

Kasper Mansker lived at the station bearing his name until his death in 1821. Today a reconstructed interpretation of the fort at Mansker's Station is open to the public.

⁴⁷ Carroll Van West and Betty Freudenthal, "Kasper Mansker," in West, *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, 569.

⁴⁸ Durham in "Kasper Mansker," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, 164-65.

⁴⁹ Durham, 167. Edenwold is a community near Goodlettsville in what is now Rivergate.

⁵⁰ Michaux, 94, quoted in Durham, 173-74.

The endpoint for most travelers of the Avery Trace was Nashville. Earlier known as French Lick thanks to early settlers Charleville and Demonbreun, by the 1770s the settlement was called Nashborough in honor of General Francis Nash of North Carolina. In 1784 it was changed to Nashville, likely in the wake of anti-British sentiment of the Revolutionary War.⁵¹ On the afternoon of November 28, 1799, Steiner and Schweinitz arrived in Nashville. Their journal reads:

The city of Nashville is located in Davidson County, near the Cumberland River on high hills and is the most attractive place in Cumberland. The city is regularly laid out, has a number of fine buildings and consists of about fifty houses. There is, also, a large stone Presbyterian Church where services are conducted once every four week; other religious denominations conduct no services here. . . . From this point considerable trade is carried on by the Cumberland River which is safer for large boats of from ten to twelve tons burden than the Ohio or the Mississippi. There merchants receive their goods from Pittsburg, whence they are taken down the Ohio and transshipped up the Cumberland River. The easy freightage by water is cause for the fact that European goods, the long distance from the seaports notwithstanding, are to be had here at cheap rates.⁵²

At Riverfront Park in downtown Nashville is the western terminus of the Avery Trace. Fort Nashborough is a reconstructed log fort interpretation of the stockade where 250 men of the new settlement signed the Cumberland Compact in 1780. In the shadow of the commercial strip of 2nd Avenue the fort offers a glimpse of the frontier city at its nascence. Fort Nashborough is free and open to the public. Besides this rebuilt stockade, what remains of the eighteenth century in Nashville is historic markers and place names. Areas called Hermitage, Old Hickory, and Donelson, road names like Demonbreun, Robertson and Lafayette, and geographical labels like Two Rivers, Pennington Bend and Clover Bottom are the only remaining homage to the city's frontier legacy.

⁵¹ Ophelia Paine and John Connelly, "Nashville," in West, 669.

⁵² Dickinson, 44-45.

CHAPTER THREE

THE AVERY TRACE AND HERITAGE TOURISM IN TENNESSEE

The original path of the Avery Trace is largely lost. It runs through farms, businesses, local roads, railroads, Tennessee highways 53, 85, 84, 24, 25, U.S. highways 31E and 70N, and U.S. Interstate Highway 40. The name and legacy remain in cities, small towns and forgotten corners of Middle Tennessee.¹ The opportunity may already have passed for Tennessee to memorialize the Avery Trace as it has the Natchez Trace but the name still carries importance to the early history of the state.



Figure 9. A portion of the Avery Trace marked at Bledsoe's Station (Photograph by author)

¹ Occurrences include Avery Trace Road in Defeated Creek, Fort Blount Ferry Road in Gainesboro, Old Walton Road in both Kingston and Cookeville, and Avery Trace Circle in Hendersonville

In 1931, members of the Old Walton Road Association asked the state to commemorate the Old Walton Road officially, which it did with a series of signs along Tennessee State Highway 24 from Carthage to Kingston.² Tennessee State Historical Marker number 2-D-11 remembers it on a sign on the highway west of Cookeville:

Completed 1801, this road ran from Southwest to the junction of Caney Fork with Cumberland River, connecting East Tennessee with the Cumberland Settlements. Its engineer was Capt. William Walton, who had a Revolutionary grant near its northwestern terminus. It followed the general course of this highway hereabouts.³

The irony of fate is evident at the site of William Walton's former home on the north bank of the Cumberland, as a new Wal-Mart retail store is under construction there. The corporation built by the late Sam Walton purchased the site and has built a new store only two miles from an existing store on the north side of Carthage. Captain Walton, his wife Sarah, and other early settlers of the area remain on the property in the Walton family cemetery.

The famed Natchez Trace developed at approximately the same time as the Avery Trace. Known at the time as the "Path to the Choctaw Nation" and the "Chickasaw Trace," this route from Natchez, Mississippi to Nashville connected the Cumberland, Tennessee, and Mississippi Rivers and became a vital trade and migration route in the eighteenth century. Boatmen delivering commodities and manufactured goods to Natchez sold their barges there and returned to Kentucky and Tennessee on foot.⁴

² Boniol, 412.

³ Tennessee Historical Commission, *Tennessee Historical Markers* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, 1996), 34.

⁴ David Devoss, "End of the Road," *Smithsonian*, May 2008, 71-72.

Governor Winthrop Sargent of the Mississippi Territory was the first to call for improvement of this route in 1798. President Thomas Jefferson ordered a postal road built and in January 1800, mail service between the two towns began along the improved Natchez Trace.⁵ In 1820, Andrew Jackson's Military Road from Nashville to New Orleans was completed. This wider and better-engineered road which ran roughly parallel to the east cut 220 miles off the Natchez Trace and signaled its end as the major thoroughfare from Tennessee to the Mississippi Delta. In 1933 Mississippi Congressman Thomas Jefferson Busby conceived the idea of memorializing the old road, and in 1934 the U.S. Congress approved the project:

To provide a recreational parkway from Nashville, Tennessee, to Natchez, Mississippi, following the Old Natchez Trace. This roadway, generally following the historic Trace for 450 miles, will ensure a continuously unfolding inspirational interpretation of an important transportation route and its related regional resources which opened the way to expansion of the United States into the Old Southwest. At the same time, it will link the many outdoor recreation and historic sites developed for the enjoyment of the parkway visitor.⁶

Federal public works agencies began construction on the Natchez Trace Parkway in 1935, but progress slowed after the New Deal, and its northernmost section was not completed until 1996. Today, the National Park Service invites visitors to “experience this National Scenic Byway and All-American Road through driving, hiking, biking, horseback riding, and camping.”⁷

⁵ James A. Crutchfield, *The Natchez Trace: A Pictorial History* (Nashville: Rutledge Hill Press, 1985), 90.

⁶ Quoted in Crutchfield, 7.

⁷ National Park Service, “What is the Natchez Trace Parkway?” National Park Service, <http://www.nps.gov/natr/> [accessed December 12, 2007].



Figure 10. The northern terminus of the Natchez Trace Parkway, Nashville (Photograph by author)

The Trail of Tears National Historic Trail is another example of an historic route interpreted for visitors. The National Park Service created a network of roadway signs for the Trail of Tears, the forced removal of the Cherokee people from their homeland in Georgia, Alabama and Tennessee in 1838-1839. Signs, interpretive kiosks, visitor centers and online presence all help visitors find sites along the thoroughfare. The National Park Service has effectively branded the route a National Historic Trail to help visitors pursue the heritage of the Trail of Tears. Its website offers a process for

partnership with the NPS to add further signage and commemorative sites, even using Google Earth to create a sign plan for a particular area of the trail.⁸

The Center for Historic Preservation (CHP) at Middle Tennessee State University has produced research and educational materials on the subject of heritage trails. One example is *Tennessee Iron Furnace Trail: A Guide to Resources on the Western Highland Rim*. This guide introduces the history of the state's nineteenth-century iron industry and identifies existing sites to assist the counties within its reach to preserve and tell the stories of these places.⁹ The tour of the iron industry highlights significant landmarks, furnace stacks, buildings and cemeteries in sixteen counties. The CHP contributed to a successful historic trail project with the Mississippi Blues Commission, the Mississippi Blues Heritage Trail. This path relates the history of the state's blues-playing men and women with markers in disparate locations as fields, cemeteries, clubs and streets.¹⁰

In 2004 the Center for Historic Preservation produced a feasibility study to develop the idea of developing an historic interpretive site based on Fort Blount and its role in the history of the Avery Trace. The report explores several topics germane to potential tourism efforts. Possibilities the study suggests include an accurate reconstruction of Fort Blount, a museum about the history of the Upper Cumberland Frontier, a visitor center for travelers exploring the Avery Trace heritage corridor, a

⁸ National Park Service, "How to Create Your Sign Plan," National Park Service, <http://www.nps.gov/trte/parkmgmt/how-to-create-your-sign-plan.htm> [accessed April 11, 2012].

⁹ Center for Historic Preservation at Middle Tennessee State University, *Tennessee Iron Furnace Trail: A Guide to Resources on the Western Highland Rim*, (Murfreesboro: MTSU, 2006), i.

¹⁰ Mississippi Blues Trail, "Experience the Blues Where They Were Born," Mississippi Blues Commission, <http://www.msbluestrail.org/index.aspx> [Accessed April 15, 2012].

community and education meeting space, an operating ferry, and a campground. It offers four storylines for the most marketable retelling. These include interaction between natives and white settlers, life on the frontier, travel on the frontier, and the role of the fort itself in the growth of the United States.¹¹ The report summarizes the significance of Fort Blount:

The historical development of Ft. Blount as a militia outpost and local settlement on the Avery Trace directly reflects the military and political history of the United States and represents a lasting federal imprint on the landscape of the Upper Cumberland. As Tennessee experienced its many stages of development from contested Indian territory to statehood, the physical shape and function of Ft. Blount also changed to meet the evolving needs of government and the settlers who staked claims in the region. The Ft. Blount museum project can therefore interpret both the fort's physical development as a defensive complex and place it within the larger currents of history that created Tennessee.¹²

¹¹ Center for Historic Preservation at Middle Tennessee State University, *Creating a Shared Future From a Shared Past: Fort Blount, Avery Trace, and the Cumberland Frontier Museum* (Murfreesboro: MTSU, 2004), 9.

¹² *Ibid.*, 8.



Figure 11. The site of Fort Blount in 2011 (Photograph by author)

The report concludes that a potential historic interpretation based on Fort Blount would be an effective means of telling the story of frontier Tennessee, and a useful and effective stop for heritage tourism. It emphasizes the potential of interpreting the lives of Middle Tennessee settlers, the forces that drew them west, and the frontier conditions that shaped their lives once they arrived. The Fort Blount/Cumberland Frontier Museum project remains a project with potential.

There is no Avery Trace Parkway, nor even a Tennessee Historical Marker for the road itself. During the late 1980s, Sumner County's Avery Trace Association convinced the state to declare existing state highways as the Historic Avery Trace. On March 6, 1990, officials marked the route with brown signs from Nashville to Kingston.¹³ This route may approach the actual path of the historic road, but probably only for short stretches at a time.



Figure 12. The Avery Trace commemorated on Hartsville Pike in Gallatin (Photograph by author)

¹³ "Avery Trace economic boon: group," *The News Examiner*, March 11, 1991.

In spite of the lack of a concerted signage effort, a patient and attentive sightseer can make a reasonable tour of existing Avery Trace landmarks by following state historical markers. The publication lists no fewer than 24 markers relevant to the Avery Trace. From Fort Nashborough on 1st Avenue in downtown Nashville, one could follow its path north to the markers for Kasper Mansker and his stations¹⁴ to the markers for the William Bowen House, Rock Castle, Cragfont, Hugh Rogan and Bledsoe's Stations in an easy day of touring. A dedicated researcher has added the Walton Road, Dixon Springs and Fort Blount to this tour with a few more miles of driving. However, should it not be easier for the casual historian or enthusiast to access this collection of historic sites? Picking through *Tennessee Historical Markers* and finding their locations on a map or GPS is hardly a thrilling way to bring history to life. Given the ease with which one can locate and visit the locations of individual stops on the Mississippi Blues Trail or the Trail of Tears, it is a disappointment that the Avery Trace is so ill-presented.

By modern standards, the Avery Trace was barely more than a trail, a rudely-constructed wagon road that had a short lifespan in its original conception. But this humble road was the main overland ingress to the Middle Cumberland for settlers in the crucial years that led to the statehood of Tennessee. Over the past forty years, the state has conducted extensive archaeological work on Bledsoe's Station, Fort Blount, and Southwest Point. The western and eastern termini of the Trace, Fort Nashborough and Southwest Point, are open for visitors and feature period-dressed interpreters.

The Upper Cumberland Development District, which the path of the Trace bisects between Carthage and Crossville, notes that six counties along the route are economically

¹⁴ There are markers for both Mansker's first and second stations.

depressed.¹⁵ Historic sites along the Trace could provide a potent route for heritage tourism and bring economic development to the area. There are many organizations that promote the viability of economic development based on natural, historic or cultural resources. The National Trust for Historic Preservation touts the benefits of heritage tourism for a sustainable economy:

Cultural heritage tourism can have a tremendous economic impact on local economies. To economic benefits like new businesses, jobs and higher property values, tourism adds less tangible—but equally important—payoffs. A well-managed tourism program improves the quality of life as residents take advantage of the services and attractions tourism adds. It promotes community pride, which grows as people work together to develop a thriving tourist industry.¹⁶

Like an historic building a community its own character-defining features. The National Trust emphasizes these unique, irreplaceable features in helping an area to succeed economically. Fort Blount is one of the landmarks along the Avery Trace corridor that is a unique characteristic to Tennessee's historic landscape. The landmarks explored here merit inclusion in a heritage tourism plan. The National Trust stresses the advantages of heritage tourism:

When cultural heritage tourism development is done right, it also helps to protect our nation's natural and cultural treasures and improve the quality of life for residents and visitors alike. Linking tourism with heritage and culture can do more for local economies than promoting them separately. That's the core idea in cultural heritage tourism: save your heritage and your culture, share it with visitors, and reap the economic benefits of tourism.¹⁷

¹⁵ "Avery Trace economic boon: group," *The News Examiner*, March 11, 1991.

¹⁶ National Trust for Historic Preservation, "Cultural Heritage Tourism," <http://www.culturalheritagetourism.org/howToGetStarted.htm> [accessed April 11, 2012].

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

The ultimate line of this statement combines the ingredients for the realization of the historic landscape of the Avery Trace: Preserve the heritage and culture of the corridor, share with visitors, and enjoy a sustainable economic asset.

Tennessee Parks and Greenways Foundation coordinates landscape greenway projects such as the Mississippi River Natural and Recreational Corridor. It stresses the conservation and preservation of the state's natural resources "by linking parks together with greenways, corridors of protected land, [to] conserve Tennessee's bountiful natural environment."¹⁸ Its partnership for protecting wildlife and promoting recreation is called "Corridor Connections." Stressing the economic return of protecting and making our natural resources accessible to visitors, their model of partnership "will help conserve key destination parks which celebrate and protect the most significant natural treasures for recreation."¹⁹ Examples of their work include Tennessee landmarks Gateway to Mound Bottom, Black Mountain, Devilstep Hollow Cave and Head of Sequatchie Springs, and Randolph Bluff.

A new effort underway as of the summer of 2012 is the Walton Road Scenic Byway Project. This project is part of the National Scenic Byways Program, which recognizes certain roads based on one or more intrinsic qualities.²⁰ Tennessee's Upper Cumberland Development District describes the Walton Road project as "part of a

¹⁸ Tennessee Parks and Greenways Foundation, "About Us," Tennessee Parks and Greenways Foundation, <http://tenngreen.org/about-us/index.html> (accessed May 4, 2012).

¹⁹ Tennessee Parks and Greenways Foundation, "Tennessee Treasures and Corridor Connections," Tennessee Parks and Greenways Foundation, <http://tenngreen.org/about-us/tennessee-treasures/index.html>, (accessed May 2, 2012).

²⁰ America's Byways, "Learn About Byways," U.S. Department of Transportation, <http://byways.org/learn/> (accessed June 2, 2012).

regional, ongoing effort to preserve, promote, and protect the cultural and natural resources of the Upper Cumberland and Cumberland Plateau region, and to develop the area as an eco and heritage tourism destination.”²¹ The initiative includes Cumberland, Putnam, Roane and Smith counties. This is a positive example of a regional nonprofit involved in a collaborative effort to preserve, enhance and promote rural Tennessee landscapes.

Non-profit organization Cumberland Region Tomorrow stresses collaborative action for the smart growth and economic vitality of a region of ten counties. Its inception in 2000 emphasized participation from the private sector and grass-roots leadership to help the region grow with an eye on sustainability. It also includes in its mission statement to “support and encourage growth planning, with emphasis on land use, transportation, and preservation of the rural landscape and character of the region’s communities.”²²

The Tennessee Preservation Trust’s report “Banking on Tennessee’s History,” discusses the programs and activities that contribute to preservation economics. Tourism, the state’s second largest industry, generated \$10.3 billion in direct revenues in 2003.²³ Historic sites are the second most-visited tourist attractions in Tennessee. The report highlights the economic impact of heritage tourism with the data that the industry generated in the year 2001: \$1.2 billion in direct revenue; \$61 million in state tax

²¹ Upper Cumberland Development District, “Walton Road Scenic Byway,” Upper Cumberland Development District, <http://www.ucdd.org/working%20files/Walton%20Road%20Scenic%20Byway.pdf> (accessed June 2, 2012).

²² Cumberland Region Tomorrow, “About Us,” Cumberland Region Tomorrow. <http://www.cumberlandregiontomorrow.org/about-us/> (accessed May 2, 2012).

revenue; \$36.8 million in local tax revenue; \$324 million in wages and salaries; and 16,700 jobs. Clearly there is an existing network successful in promoting tourism of Tennessee's historic landscape.

The TPT report concludes that heritage tourism is a viable part of smart economic development:

Tennessee's abundant collection of historic sites makes the state a prominent leader in the national heritage tourism industry. These places create a competitive advantage in the national tourism industry by marketing the state's unique and authentic historic places to attract visitors.²⁴

Many Avery Trace properties are interpreted and open for visitors, creating a viable collection of landmarks is available for heritage tourism programs. All that remains is the wherewithal to confirm the commitment to the project at the local or state level to realize the potential of these resources.

²³ Tennessee Preservation Trust, *Banking on Tennessee's History: The Economic Value of Historic Preservation to the People of Tennessee*, (Nashville: Tennessee Preservation Trust, 2004), 12.

²⁴ Ibid.



Figure 13. The modern Avery Trace, Gallatin Road, approaching Nashville in Madison
(Photograph by author)

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