

“YEA, THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF
DEATH;” MORTUARY AND MATERIAL CULTURE PATTERNING AT THE
DONELSON SLAVE CEMETERY (40DV106), DAVIDSON COUNTY, TENNESSEE

by

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in History

Middle Tennessee State University
2013

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ABSTRACT

“YEA, THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH;” MORTUARY AND MATERIAL CULTURE PATTERNING AT THE DONELSON SLAVE CEMETERY (40DV106), DAVIDSON COUNTY, TENNESSEE
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The Hermitage Springs Site (40DV551) was a prehistoric aboriginal aggregation site discovered in 2001 during grading for residential development in northeastern Davidson County, Tennessee. From 2004 to 2006, archaeologists relocated more than 300 prehistoric burials as well as over 400 non-mortuary features from the site. In addition to prehistoric archaeological deposits, archaeologists excavated sixty historic burials thought to be associated with a community of slaves from the western edge of the site.

This thesis presents historic archaeological research on those historic African-American burials, perhaps one of the earliest, excavated slave cemeteries in the Cumberland Region. By developing an environmental and historical context for the cemetery, combined with an analysis of its mortuary and material culture patterns, the author identified general patterns and date ranges for the burials, thus shedding new light on burial practices afforded marginalized slave populations in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Tennessee.

The author compared the archaeological data to other professional excavation projects in the region. As a result of the analysis, he determined that the cemetery is associated with a community of slaves held on the farm of Captain John Donelson and his heirs, generally between 1820 and 1870. These findings are further supported in comparison with the available data for the white Donelson cemetery which was relocated to nearby Hermitage Church in the late 1940s.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author thanks the many people who have helped in the production of this thesis. My advisor, Dr. Carroll Van West, and reader Dr. Mary Hoffschwelle, deserve special thanks for supporting my master's career and prodding me to finish this exercise. Above all, I thank God for His mercy and grace, my parents, and my children.

נודאה אנה חישמה ושי

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

The Hermitage Springs Site (40DV551) was a prehistoric aggregation site and cemetery discovered in 2001 during grading for residential development in northeastern Davidson County, Tennessee (Figure 1). Terminated for use as a cemetery by the Davidson County Chancery Court, archaeologists mechanically stripped the site to expose its subsurface contexts, archaeologically salvage it, and relocate its burials in 2005 and 2006. During that field work, archaeologists determined site 40DV551 to be multi-componential, containing features of a larger, adjacent historic archaeological site (40DV106), a late eighteenth and nineteenth farm known as Donelson's Station which was located adjacent (west) of Andrew Jackson's plantation, The Hermitage. The family of Jackson's wife, Rachel Donelson Jackson historically owned the land. It was the nucleus of a farm owned by Captain John Donelson.

During the late eighteenth century, the Donelson family migrated from Virginia and became a founding family of the middle Cumberland settlements. Descended from a Tidewater Virginia family, Colonel John Donelson started moving west as early as the 1750s following his marriage to Rachel Stockley, daughter of another Tidewater family. The couple first settled on the Banister River in south-central Virginia. A surveyor, Donelson was a member of the House of Burgesses where he served until the Revolution. In 1770, Virginia Colonial Governor Dunmore appointed Donelson to take part in successful negotiations with the Indian Nations at the Long Island of the Holston (present-day Kingsport, Tennessee) where they were induced to relinquish native rights to Kentucky.

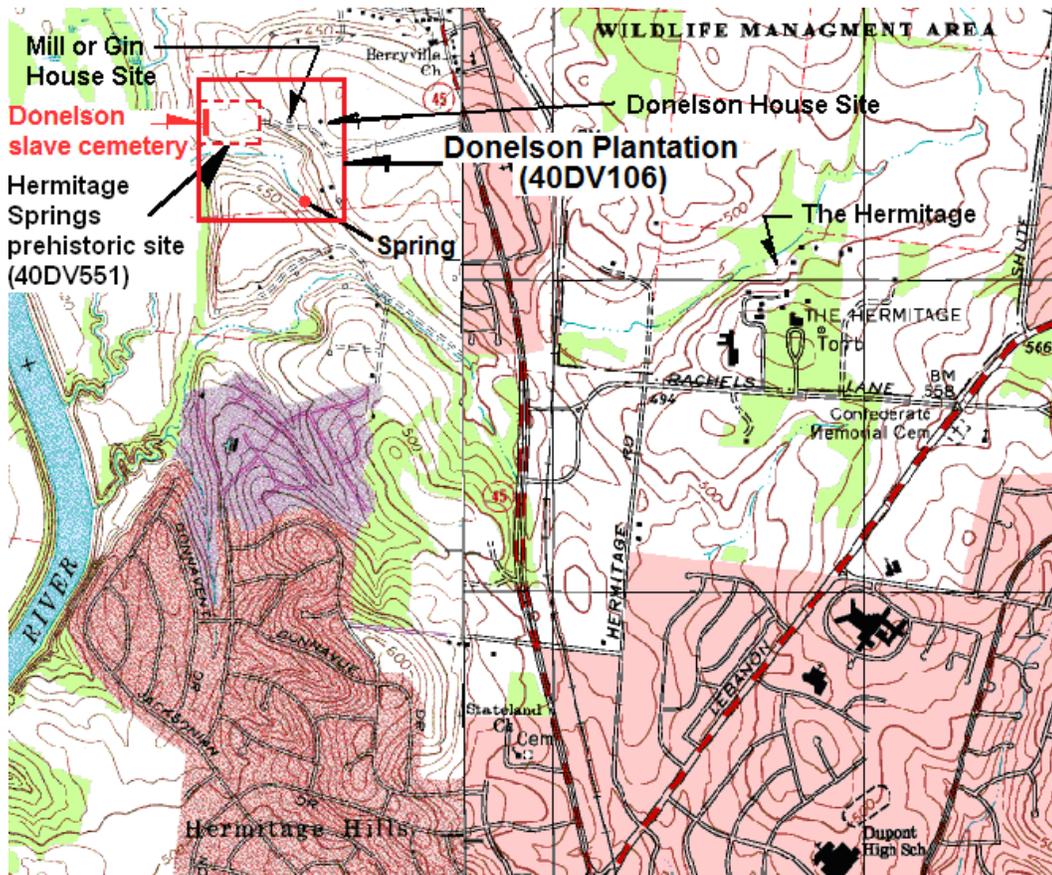


Figure 1. Archaeological Site 40DV106; Donelson Slave Cemetery (in red) on USGS 7.5 minute Nashville East, TN (311 NW) and Hermitage TN (311NE) quadrangle maps.

In 1772, he successfully surveyed two lines through what is now Kentucky and Tennessee, one of them commonly referred to as the “Donelson Line.” These early surveys first introduced Donelson to western lands. By 1779, Donelson joined with James Robertson and Colonel Richard Henderson, speculators successful in dealing with the Indians and very active in the Holston and Watauga settlements. As part of a plan between the three men to settle the rich Cumberland region, Colonel Donelson led a flotilla of flatboats containing nearly 200 persons including his family and a number of slaves from Fort Patrick Henry in the Watauga settlements to the Cumberland region during the winter of 1779. Arriving at

French Lick (later, Nashborough and Nashville) Donelson settled on a tract of land known as “Clover Bottom” on Cumberland River near the mouth of Stones River in open-faced cabins and planted corn and cotton. Due to flooding and native raids, Colonel Donelson removed his family abruptly in 1780 to Mansker’s Station, then on to Kentucky, but returned in 1783 to land previously selected in the region. While away on business in Virginia at the time of his family’s return to the Cumberland settlements, Donelson was murdered while returning from Kentucky under circumstances never definitively explained.¹

About 1790 a son of Colonel Donelson, Captain John Donelson (1755-1830) built the first of several Donelson homes along the Lebanon Pike in Davidson County. Known as Donelson’s Station, it is thought to be near, or to have formed the nucleus of Captain Donelson’s later home, the “Mansion” built between 1805 and 1810. The Mansion stood into the twentieth century on a knoll over a large spring. A two-story log dwelling, it was the home of Captain Donelson and wife Mary Purnell Donelson until his death in 1830. In 1822, Captain Donelson gave a tract of land adjoining his farm to a son, William Donelson. William built a clapboard house on it and named his farm “Ingleside” (Scottish for *fireside*). In 1827, another son, Stockley Donelson and wife Phila Ann Lawrence took up residence in the Mansion with his parents where they remained until the completion of Cleveland Hall north of the study area about 1840.²

¹ Paul H. Bergeron, Stephen V. Ash, and Jeanette Keith, *Tennesseans and Their History* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 21-33.

² Heather Fearnbach, “Stockley Donelson,” Carroll Van West, et al, eds., *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society, 1998), 256.

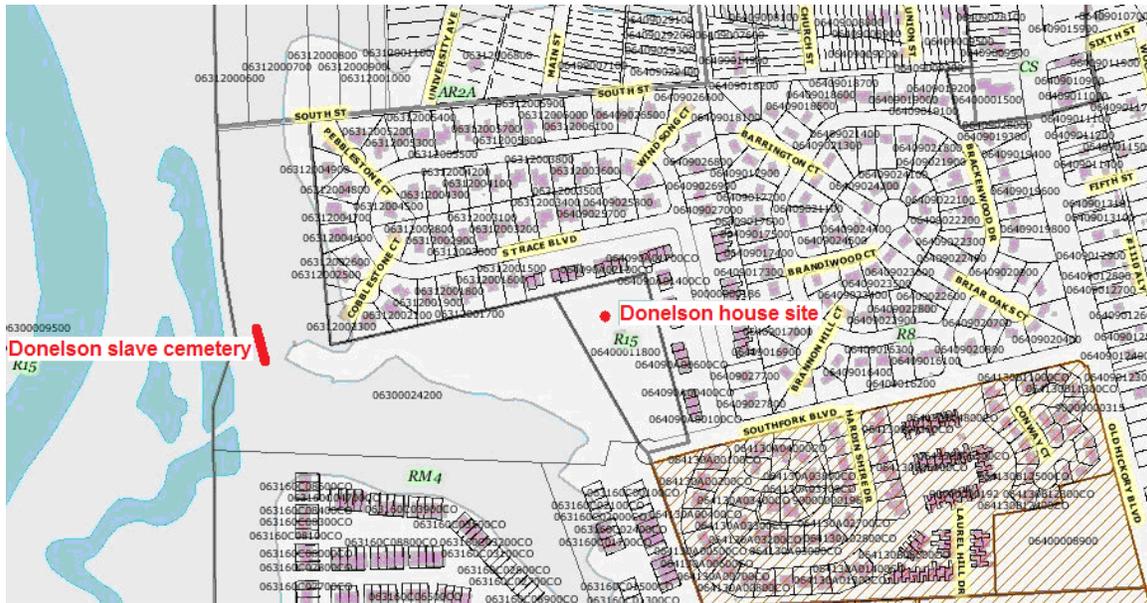


Figure 2. Davidson County Metro Planning Commission map, 4910 Southfork Boulevard, Parcel ID 064000118.00.



Figure 3. Donelson's Spring (view to southeast).

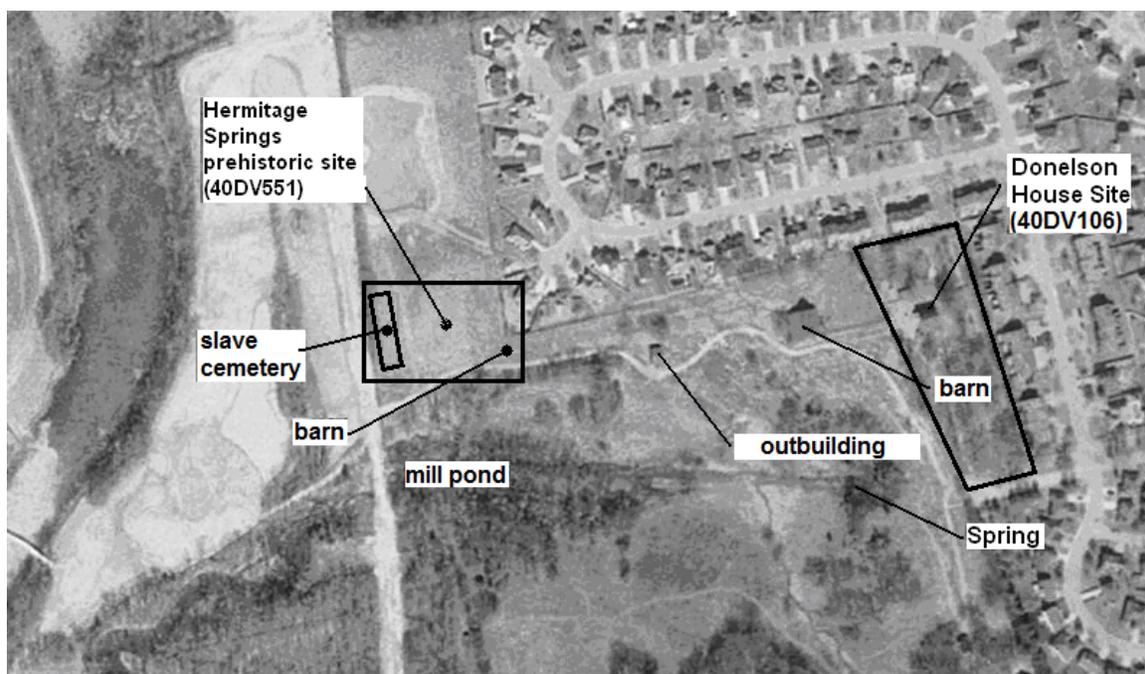


Figure 4. USGS aerial photograph of 40DV106 and 40DV551 showing the locations and spatial relationship of historic archaeological components in the study area including the slave cemetery.

About 1800, a significant community of enslaved African-Americans held by the Donelson family began using the study area as a burial ground. The Donelsons were slaveholders during the late frontier and antebellum periods. Following the Civil War and Emancipation, some of those slaves stayed on the farm as sharecroppers or paid laborers. During the twentieth century developers converted the Donelson farm's rich bottom lands to golf course and its uplands to residential neighborhoods. Developers subdivided and rezoned most of the last remaining section at the core of the Donelson plantation as residential property in 2001. While grading for that residential development prehistoric burials were disturbed on the site, forcing the developers to halt and hire a team of archaeologists.

Following a Davidson County Chancery Court decision to allow developers to contract for the archaeological relocation of the prehistoric human remains, Cumberland

Research Group, Inc. began in mid-October 2004 to salvage and sample the archaeological features, and to begin the analysis of the collected data. Cumberland Research Group, Inc. found over three hundred prehistoric burials including bundle burials and cremations, some containing stone tool caches and exhibiting evidence of warfare, and four hundred non-mortuary features. Its analysis of the archaeological data suggests the most intensive period of prehistoric occupation of the site occurred during the Middle and Late Archaic periods of regional prehistory (ca. 8000 – 3000 B.P.). There was also evidence of continued, although less intensive occupation of the site well into the Woodland Period (ca. 3000 - 1400 B.P.).

The study area appears to have remained relatively unoccupied during the late prehistoric and protohistoric periods until the late-eighteenth century when Captain Donelson established the farm on 640 acres granted to him by the State of North Carolina in 1788. In addition to the series of prehistoric burials excavated across the site, Cumberland Research Group, Inc. excavated sixty historic African-American burials thought to be associated with the Donelson slaves. Prior to rediscovery of the historic burials, archaeologists observed several other historic resources both on the surface and in excavations (Figure 4). For example, the firm observed the archaeological remains of two barns, one in excavations in the southeastern portion of prehistoric archaeological site 40DV551 and another east of the study area.

Donelson's Spring still strongly flows from the base of a limestone bluff at the head of a spring branch south of the study area (Figure 3). This spring was the primary reason for the Donelsons choosing this locale for their home and a critical source of freshwater for the farm. There was also an extant brick structure of undetermined function located east of the study area.

This thesis identifies patterns and assigns date ranges to the Donelson slave cemetery burials based upon the evidence synthesized from analysis of the historical evidence, especially mortuary and material culture patterning of the excavated contexts. These burials represent one of the earliest, completely excavated slave cemeteries in the Cumberland Region. The following chapters develop the story of this cemetery and explore its meaning for the region's African American and settlement history.

CHAPTER II. ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Located beyond the western end of Southfork Boulevard approximately one mile west of the Hermitage in eastern Davidson County, Tennessee (Figure 1), the Donelson slave cemetery was approximately .15 acres in size. It measured roughly 160 feet (north-northwest to south-southeast) by 40 feet (west-southwest to east-northeast), or about 6400 square feet. The cemetery is located in Davidson County in the Outer Central or Nashville Basin of the Interior Low Plateau physiographic province (Figure 5).³

Geographically, Davidson County is contained within two physiographic divisions known as the Nashville, or Central Basin, and the Highland Rim. The Donelson slave cemetery lies within the Central Basin section, the lowest part of the county. In general, terrain ranging from rolling to hilly with some nearly level areas, and meandering, low gradient streams characterize the Central Basin.⁴ Short valleys of relatively smooth land separated by steep hills and sharp, narrow-crested ridges characterize the topography.

³ N. M. Fenneman, *Physiography of the Eastern United States* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1938), 431.

⁴ Robert A. Miller, *The Geologic History of Tennessee* (Nashville, Tennessee: Department of Conservation, Division of Geology, Bulletin 74, 1974), 5.

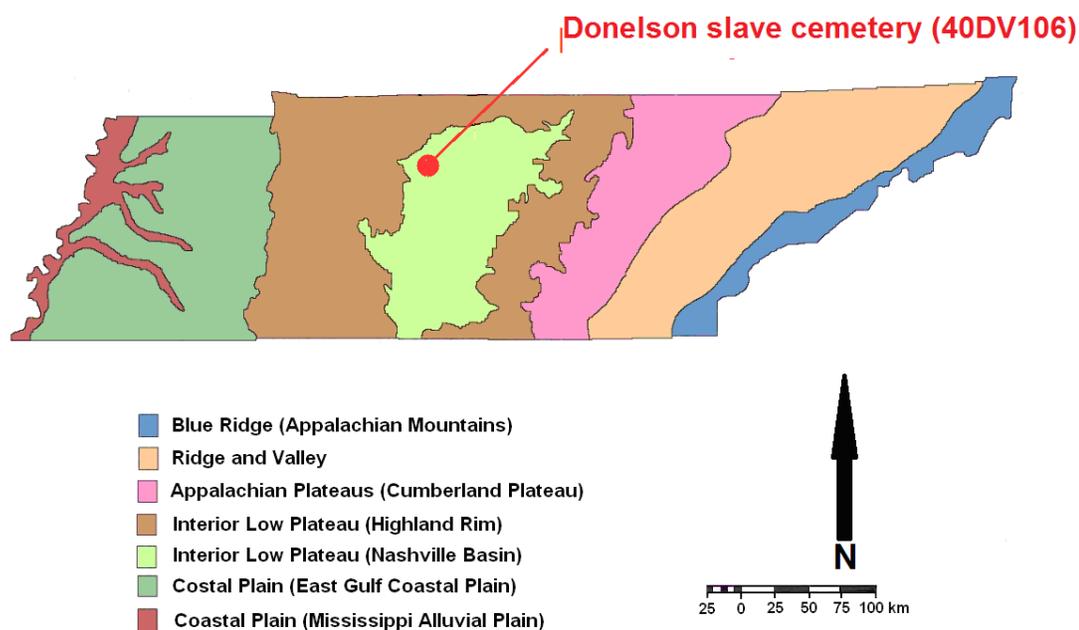


Figure 5. Physiographic provinces of Tennessee.

Geologically, sedimentary rocks, mostly Paleozoic limestones that include the Bangor, St. Louis, and Warsaw limestone formations underlay that portion of the Central Basin containing the cemetery. Below this is the Fort Payne chert formation. The thick limestones result from the collection of marine organisms in shallow water environs. Surface exposures within the inner Central Basin section of the county are Ordovician (upper and lower) in age. Cherts are common in all the formations and provided more than an adequate source of generally high quality raw material for prehistoric people in the area. The dominant chert type found in Davidson County is Fort Payne, which occurs near the interface of the Mississippian and Ordovician limestone formations. This chert and other types are found in abundance on the rocky hills in and near the study area.

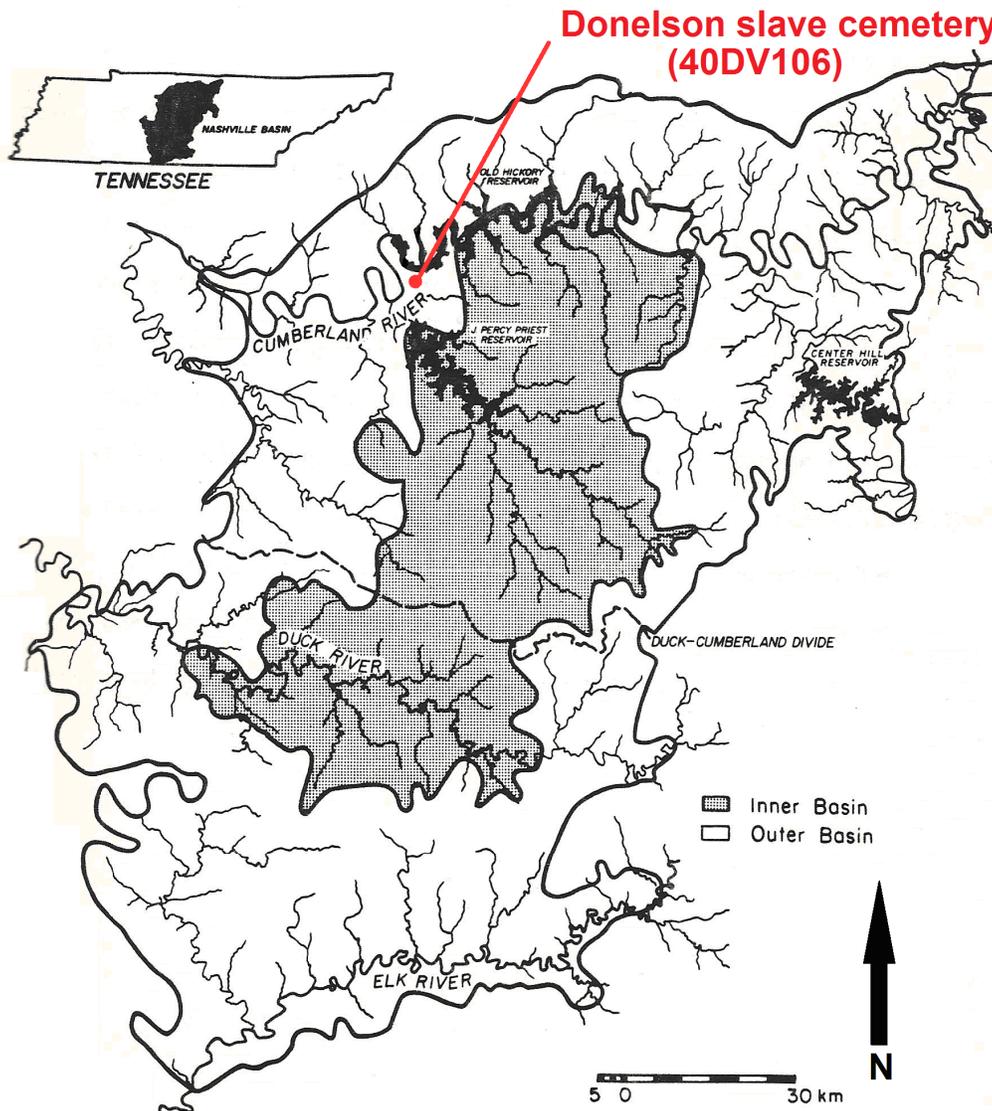


Figure 6. Physiographic location.

The cemetery is situated on the dissected edge of the property in the transition zone between the uplands on the eastern edge of the Cumberland River valley and its floodplain. It is on a prominent knoll on the northern side of an unnamed spring drainage flowing from Donelson's spring. A dry-stacked limestone dam, probably associated with a mill impounds the spring branch. All groundwater in the study area generally drains toward south and west.

The spring branch generally meanders west to a confluence with an older channel of the Cumberland River about 1000 feet to the southwest of the cemetery. Overflow from the river still inundates that older channel at times. The main channel of the Cumberland River presently lies about 2000 feet west of the Donelson slave cemetery. The study area is located within the Lower Cumberland-Sycamore watershed.

The climate classification of the Davidson County area is the mesothermal (Cfa) hot summer.⁵ The general air movement for the region is from the south resulting in strong convection currents and locally intense thunderstorms. The average annual temperature is 60 degrees Fahrenheit. Winters are moderate, with short periods of frigid weather being common. Thirty-five degrees Fahrenheit approximates the average temperature extreme between summer and winter. Although heavy thunderstorms are frequent, the maximum rainfall occurs in the winter and spring months. Total average annual precipitation averages 48 inches.⁶

The Donelson slave cemetery is located within the Western Mesophytic Forest, which is a diversified deciduous forest. There is a broad array of fauna in the region. The cemetery is located within the Carolinian biotic province. Over 300 vertebrate species have been identified as endemic in the province. Of these, most may have served as potential food sources to prehistoric aboriginal cultures and European settlers. A diversity of species of mollusk and gastropod were present in the Cumberland River and its major tributaries during

⁵ Clarence Eugene Koeppe and G. C. deLong, *Weather and Climate* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1958), 247-54.

⁶ Olin L. North, Ted E. Cox, Hershel D. Dollar, William G. Hall, Robert B. Hinton, Carlie McGowan, and Charles E. McCroskey, *Soil Survey of Davidson County, Tennessee* (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service, 1981), 2.

prehistory. Elk, mountain lion, black bear, gray wolf, and bison were also present in the area prehistorically and during the early historic period.

In the Duck River system located further south in the Central Basin near the escarpment of the Highland Rim, Faulkner and McCollough suggest that despite the abundant fauna available to aboriginal and early Historic Period occupants of this area, species regularly used were relatively few in number and primarily included animals seasonally available in large numbers (e.g. migrating fowl, mollusks) or generally available in less concentrated numbers but providing a relatively high yield of meat (e.g. deer, bear).⁷ It is not unreasonable to assume that subsistence followed similar patterns during prehistory and early historic settlement in the Cumberland River and its tributaries.

Generally, the soils in the area of the Donelson slave cemetery are predominantly of the Maury-Urban Land-Armour association, meaning they are undulating to rolling, well-drained soils and urban land. The specific soil types found at the Donelson slave cemetery are Armour silt loam 2 to 5% slopes, and Hampshire silt loam 12 to 20% slopes.⁸ These soil units are found on uplands, toe slopes, and stream terraces of the Cumberland and Stones River, and their tributaries. Most of the acreage in this area has been in agriculture a long time and is developed, with slopes ranging from 0 to 3%.

Armour series soils, particularly Armour silt loam 2 to 5% slopes, consists of deep, gently sloping, well-drained soils on terraces and toe slopes along the Cumberland and Harpeth rivers. The surface layer, about eight inches thick, is dark brown silt loam. The

⁷ Charles H. Faulkner and Major C.R. McCollough, *Introductory Report of The Normandy Reservoir Salvage Project: Environmental Setting, Typology, and Survey, Normandy Archaeological Project, Volume 1* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, Department of Anthropology, Report of Investigations No.11., 1973), 34-35.

⁸ North et al, Map 23, Map Symbols AmB and HmD.

upper part of the subsoil to a depth of about sixty-six inches is friable silty clay loam. The upper part is strong brown and yellowish-red, and strong brown in the lower part. This soil is medium to strongly acid throughout except in surface layers that have been limed.

Permeability is moderate, available water capacity high, and content of phosphorous is medium to high. Agriculturally, this soil is highly valued as cropland and among the most productive in Davidson County.⁹

Hampshire series soils, particularly Hampshire silt loam 12 to 20% slopes, are deep, moderately steep, well-drained soil on uplands in the outer part of the Nashville Basin. Typically, the surface layer is brown silt loam about five inches thick. Subsoil extends to a depth of 45 inches and limestone bedrock is encountered at about 53 inches below surface. The upper part of the subsoil is strong brown, friable silt clay loam, the lower part is strong brown and yellowish brown, firm clay. The underlying material is loam weathered from phosphatic limestone. These soils have low potential for agriculture except hay crops or pasture.¹⁰

Historical events over the last 200 years have shaped the present-day environment of the Donelson slave cemetery site. At the time of European settlement, much of Davidson County was covered with extensive forests. The river and larger secondary stream bottoms had thick growths of river cane that made land movement along them difficult. The Cumberland River and its larger tributaries such as the Stone's River were often used instead of land routes during early settlement of the county. Settlers cut the cane to open up the stream bottom fields for cultivation. They cleared the forests in both the bottomlands and

⁹ Ibid., 9.

¹⁰ Ibid., 16.

uplands for agricultural purposes, fuel, and building materials. The study area remained under intensive agriculture for all of the nineteenth century and well into the first half of the twentieth century.

During the mid-twentieth century, residential development encroached rapidly on the Donelson farm following improvements to Old Hickory Boulevard and the addition of roads to support residential subdivisions in the 1940s. This encroachment became such a concern to a chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) that they relocated the white Donelson cemetery to nearby Hermitage Church in the late 1940s. On the west, developers took the bottomlands of the Cumberland River floodplain once occupied by the Donelson's cotton fields and made the Hermitage golf course. By the end of the century either golf course or residential neighborhoods surrounded the Donelson farm site.

CHAPTER III. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The following sections provide general historical context for the Middle Cumberland Region from its earliest historic period (1600 – 1780) and early contact with aboriginal populations through the Chickamauga War (1776-1794), permanent settlement (1780 – 1800), and the development of Davidson County, specifically within the study area.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Europeans began trading within the interior of the southeastern United States: the French in Illinois and the Spanish in Florida and the Louisiana Territory. During this period, European disease greatly reduced aboriginal populations over much of North America. Later, recurring epidemics and intertribal warfare south of the Ohio River during the last decades of the 1500s into the mid-1600s led to a general depopulation of the area as well. The French and Iroquois, or Beaver Wars, were a sporadic series of conflicts fought in the late seventeenth century in eastern North America, in which the Iroquois sought to expand their territory and take control of the fur trade between the French and the tribes of the west. The Iroquois Confederacy overwhelmed lesser tribes where they encountered them in lands south of the Ohio, killing them or driving them out.¹

During the early eighteenth century the region experienced modest resettling of the central Cumberland River Valley by Shawnee displaced by the Iroquois Confederacy. The earliest reports document Shawnee trading at a French post at French Lick, the present site of Nashville. The earliest recorded European entered the region in 1692 when a deserter from

¹ John R. Finger, *Tennessee Frontiers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 28.

LaSalle's expedition to the Chickasaw Bluffs (Memphis) named Martin Chartier was reportedly living on the Cumberland River with his Shawnee wife in her village. Shortly afterward, another Frenchman, Jean de Charleville traded with the Shawnee at French Lick in present-day north Nashville for several years until forced out with the Shawnee by Cherokee and Chickasaw in 1714.² The Shawnee village must have remained abandoned as it was described in 1768 by Thomas Hutchins as "an old Shawanoe town which was picketed in as appears by some of them still to be seen."³ In the 1760s, the trading post at French Lick consisted of a cluster of cabins surrounded by a stockade. The Treaty of Paris of 1763 formally transferred control of the Cumberland River area from France to England. Despite the transfer of power, French traders carried on commerce at the French Lick.

As early as 1768 and 1769, a representative of a Philadelphia trading company, Joseph Hollingshead, operated in the Cumberland River Valley. He supervised the hunting and packing of game and the shipment of such to New Orleans and Fort des Chartes in Illinois. In 1770, Kasper Mansker and a party of hunters took a load of furs downstream from French Lick to Spanish-controlled Natchez. In 1774, Jacob Sandusky transported a cargo of furs and tallow from the Cumberland River to New Orleans.⁴ Beginning in 1769, Timothy Demonbreun (Jacques-Timothé de Montbrun) traded for furs at French Lick for several years following a triangular trade route from his home in Kaskaskia (Illinois) to

² Anita S. Goodstein, "French Lick," Carroll Van West, et al, eds., *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society, 1998), 343-44.

³ Samuel C. Williams, *Early Travels in the Tennessee Country 1540-1800* (Johnson City, Tennessee: Watauga Press, 1928), 225.

⁴ Captain John Carr, *Early Times in Middle Tennessee* (Nashville, Tennessee: Parthenon Press, 1958), 28; Walter D. Durham, "Kasper Mansker: Cumberland Frontiersman," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 30 (1971): 156-157.

French Lick and New Orleans. He would then travel back up the Mississippi to Kaskaskia. Demonbreun continued this practice until 1790 when he relocated his family to Nashville and opened a tavern.⁵

British subjects living on the western fringes of the colonies of Virginia and North Carolina also began to exploit the region as hunters. Some of these long hunters included men who would later be counted among the first settlers to the Cumberland River region. In 1771, several long hunters visited the region on fur hunting excursions before finally moving their families into the Cumberland River Valley at the end of the decade.⁶ While independence from Britain was being contested during the American Revolution, Virginia and North Carolina were extending their boundaries west to the Mississippi River.

In the late eighteenth century, the Cherokees claimed all of Tennessee west to the Tennessee River, and the Choctaws and Chickasaws, as well as the Creeks claimed the rest.⁷ The Chickamauga Wars (1776–1794) were a series of raids, campaigns, ambushes, minor skirmishes, and several full-scale frontier battles which were a continuation of the Cherokee struggle during and after the American Revolutionary War. It was a war against encroachment by American frontiersmen from the former British colonies. Until the end of the Revolution, the Cherokee fought in part as British allies. After 1786, some Cherokee also

⁵ Kenneth Fieth, “Demonbreun, Timothy,” Carroll Van West, et al, eds., *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society, 1998), 243.

⁶ Durham, 157.

⁷ Wirt Armistead Cate, “Timothy Demonbreun” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 16 (1957): 214-5, 218-9; Robert Ewing Corlew, *Tennessee: A Short History* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 16-29; Walter D. Durham, *Before Tennessee: The Southwest Territory 1790-1796* (Johnson City, Tennessee: Overmountain Press, 1990), 217; Howard H. Peckham, *The Colonial Wars, 1689-1762* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 202-4.

fought as members of the Western Confederacy, organized by the Shawnee chief Tecumseh to repulse white settlers from west of the Appalachian Mountains.

Describing the Chickamaugas, historian Fred Rolater suggests they were “a diverse group of Cherokees, Creeks, dissatisfied whites, and African Americans who stymied white settlement in Tennessee for approximately nineteen years.”⁸ In 1775, land speculator Richard Henderson signed a private treaty with a faction of the Cherokee led by Attakullakulla, or “Little Carpenter” ceding large portions of central Kentucky and northern Middle Tennessee to Henderson and effectively opening the areas to white settlement. The loss of these lands enraged an opposing faction led by Little Carpenter's son, Dragging Canoe, who warned the whites that they were buying a “dark and bloody ground.”⁹

In 1776, Shawnee chief Cornstalk persuaded Dragging Canoe and the most anti-white Cherokees to ally with the British to resist American settlement west of the Appalachian Mountains. Cherokee warriors attacked the East Tennessee settlements and in retaliation troops from the Carolinas and Virginia destroyed Cherokee towns east of the Appalachians.¹⁰ As a result of the destruction of these towns, Rolater suggests “the most anti-white Cherokees moved into several abandoned Creek towns along Chickamauga Creek and began calling themselves Chickamaugas, meaning river of death.”¹¹

⁸ Fred S. Rolater, “Chickamaugas,” Carroll Van West, et al, eds., *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society, 1998), 150.

⁹ Mary French Caldwell, *Tennessee: the Dangerous Example; Watauga to 1849* (Nashville: private, 1974), 35.

¹⁰ Patricia B. Ezzell, “Dragging Canoe,” Carroll Van West, et al, eds., *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society, 1998), 259.

¹¹ Rolater, 150.

In 1777, in exchange for protection a majority of the Cherokees signed treaties, but the agreements failed to halt attacks on Indians by frontiersmen west of the Appalachians, nor did they hamper white settler encroachment onto Cherokee lands. The British supplied the Chickamaugas in 1779, urging them to attack the white settlements, but Virginia and North Carolina troops descending the Tennessee River burned the villages and seized the provisions. By this time, Dragging Canoe's followers included many "Upper Creeks, Shawnee, Frenchmen boatmen, some blacks, and Scots traders" whom he moved to more defensible towns west of Lookout Mountain.¹²

Early in the settlement history of the middle Cumberland region the Donelson party fought the Chickamaugas while travelling the Tennessee River at the "Suck" near present-day Chattanooga where several members of their party were killed. In 1780, the Chickamauga destroyed Mansker's Station and attacked Fort Nashborough in the Cumberland settlements. In 1792, they attacked Buchanan's Station, six miles south of Donelson's Station. The attacks reached such a level of frequency and atrocity that the Cumberland settlements remained effectively isolated through most of the 1780s as travelers to Middle Tennessee were forced to use northern routes and deaths continued to occur.¹³

The end of the Chickamauga War came in 1794 when a Southwest Territory militia unit destroyed the towns along Chickamauga Creek west of Lookout Mountain. The remaining warriors rejoined the more peaceful Cherokee faction or aligned themselves with the Upper Creeks to the south and continued resistance. Although less frequent, raids and limited warfare continued in Middle Tennessee into the early 1800s. The Chickamauga

¹² Rolater, 151; Ezzell, 259.

¹³ Ibid.

movement finally ended with Andrew Jackson's victories over the Red Stick Creeks in the 1813-14 Alabama campaign.¹⁴

The pattern of initial settlement in Middle Tennessee was one in which fertile river valleys were settled first with the population expanding into arable land areas supported by springs. While some reports of earlier attempts at settlement exist, all the “standard” histories of the region suggest the earliest permanent white settlers entered the Cumberland region in the winter of 1779-1780 and settled at French Lick, where they built cabins and a fort later called Nashborough. They came in three groups, consisting of approximately seventy families. The largest group, led by John Donelson, contained the women and children with some men. This group came by flat boat down the Tennessee River, up a short stretch of the Ohio River, and then ascended the Cumberland River.¹⁵

Another group of men drove cattle and horses overland along a path followed by the long hunters of the early 1770s. This group was led by James Robertson and Kasper Mansker. A third party of men were surveyors, extending the line between Virginia and North Carolina west to the Tennessee River. Their intentions were to acquire and cultivate the land, build homes, and develop agriculture. Due to the Chickamauga War, expansion was slow.¹⁶

By the spring of 1780, there were two to three hundred settlers scattered among several forts or stations within the bounds of Washington County, North Carolina, but

¹⁴ Rolater, 151.

¹⁵ Paul H. Bergeron, Stephen V. Ash, and Jeanette Keith. *Tennesseans and Their History* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 21-33.

¹⁶ Anne-Leslie Owens, “John Donelson,” Carroll Van West, et al, eds., *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society, 1998), 255-56.

separated from the county seat by more than two hundred miles of wilderness.¹⁷ The Cumberland settlers organized a temporary government under the Cumberland Compact which established twelve judges among eight stations and a land office where the settlers could register their purchases from Judge Richard Henderson's Transylvania Company. Raids by Native Americans forced the abandonment of most of the outlying stations and the settlers concentrated within two or three of the strongest forts. Fearing for the safety of their families, many settlers departed for safer country and the government was suspended for some time. In 1785, the settlers at Clarksville, at the mouth of the Red River, signed a similar agreement.¹⁸

The government was resumed under the Cumberland Compact in 1783. In response to a petition from the Cumberland Association presented in April of that year, the North Carolina legislature created Davidson County. It was taken from a portion of Greene County and included all North Carolina land west of Washington and Sullivan counties. That same year, legislation was passed setting aside a tract 55 miles wide and more than 100 miles in length, known as the "Military Reservation." Preemption rights of pioneers on the Cumberland were to be respected, but veterans were given the remainder. Not long after creating the Military Reservation, North Carolina legislators opened the Tennessee Region south of the French Broad and east of the Tennessee River to the citizenry at large.¹⁹

¹⁷ Stanley J. Folmsbee,, Robert E. Corlew, and Enoch L. Mitchell, *Tennessee: A Short History* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1969), 75.

¹⁸ Thomas Perkins Abernethy, *From Frontier to Plantation in Tennessee* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1932), 30-32; Folmsbee et al, 76.

¹⁹ Robert Ewing Corlew, *Tennessee: A Short History* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 155.

In 1784, residents changed the name of the settlement of Nashborough to Nashville. The county's population increased due to the construction of roads, the protection offered by the stations, and the Continental Congress's decision to offer land grants to Revolutionary War soldiers from lands ceded by the states to the national government. Grants ranged in size from 640 acres (one square mile) for a Private, to 12,000 acres for a Brigadier General.

Other early immigrants came to escape perceived unreasonable tax burdens by the North Carolina Assembly and the gentry class's domination of the best land along the southern coastal areas.²⁰ As early as the 1780s, other farmers and planters began the process of abandoning the exhausted soils of their eastern farms for western land. This outward migration resulted in an estimated 200,000 people leaving North Carolina between 1790 and 1816 alone.²¹ Many of these new emigrants founded large farms or plantations within the region.

Violent conflicts between Middle Tennessee settlers with the Chickasaws and Chickamaugas to the south slowed settlement between 1781 and 1783. In response, the settlers built outlying strongholds called "stations" in the form of fortified farms. These stations soon expanded southward from Nashville.²²

²⁰ Abernethy, 34; Norbert F. Riedl, Donald B. Ball, and Anthony Cavendar, *A Survey of Traditional Architecture and Related Material Folk Culture Patterns in the Normandy Reservoir, Coffee County, Tennessee* (Knoxville: Department of Anthropology, University of Tennessee, 1976), 7.

²¹ Cornelius O. Cathey, *Agriculture in North Carolina Before the Civil War* (Raleigh, North Carolina: State Department of Archives and History, 1966), 17-18.

²² Walter Durham, "Frontier Stations," Carroll Van West, et al, eds., *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society, 1998), 345.

The fortified stations were usually named for the families who built them, or in the case of joint effort named after the predominant individual. Several of these fortified stations are described in the literature. The basic form of the stations was the same. One such description is conveyed by Spencer Records who wrote in 1842:

In the first place the ground is cleared off, the size they intended to build the fort, which was an oblong square. Then a ditch was dug three feet deep, the dirt being thrown out on the inside of the fort. Logs twelve to fifteen inches in diameter and fifteen feet long, were cut and split open. The ends sharpened, the butts set in the ditch with the flat sides all in, and the cracks broke with the flat sides of others. The dirt was thrown into the ditch and well rammed down. Port holes were made high enough that if a ball should be shot in, it would pass overhead. The cabins were built far enough from the stockade to have plenty of room to load and shoot. Two bastions were constructed at opposite corners with port holes about eighteen inches from the ground. The use of the bastions was to rake the two sides of the fort should the Indians get close to stockade so that they could not shoot them from the portholes on the sides. Two gateways were made fronting each other with strong gates and bars so that they could not be forced open. Some forts had a bastion at each corner. Some forts, sometimes called stations, were cabins all set close together, half-faced or the roof sloping one way, with the high side out, raised eight feet high and overlaid with split logs. The upper story was over-jutted two feet, and raised high enough to have plenty of room to load and shoot, with port holes both above and below.”²³

²³ Lyman Draper, *Spencer Records Narrative* (Draper Manuscript Collection, 23CC95-96); Steven T. Rogers, *1977 Historic Site Survey* (Nashville: Tennessee Division of Archaeology, 1978), 2-3.

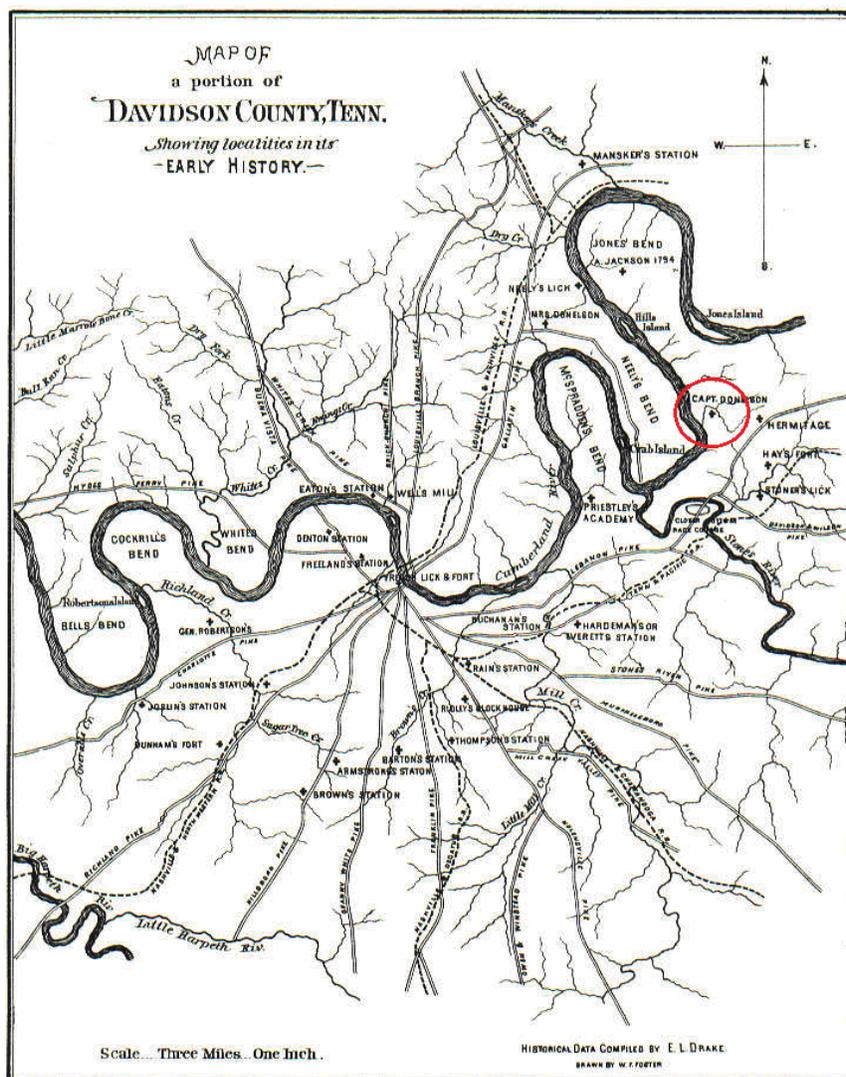


Figure 7. General locations of Davidson County stations in relationship to Donelson's Station and farm [in red (adapted from Foster and Drake, N.D.)].

Pioneer families in outlying and less defensible stations would seek the safety of the more heavily fortified and larger stations during periods of intensified Indian hostilities. The establishment of eight stations in the 1780s was fundamental to the development of government in Middle Tennessee. These eight stations were Nashboro, Mansker, Bledsoe, Ascher, Freelands, Eaton, Armstrong, and Fort Union.

Although precise locations of all are not known, by the 1790s settlers had established additional stations east of the frontier settlement at Nashboro between the Cumberland and Stones rivers including the stations or blockhouses of Captain John Donelson, Captain Samuel Hays, and later, Andrew Jackson (Figure 7). Captain Samuel Hays, whose station was located one mile east of Andrew Jackson's station at the early Hermitage, died during an Indian attack near the door of John Donelson's residence about one mile west of Jackson's in 1793.²⁴

In the 1790s, the Cumberland settlements were included within the limits of the newly-created Southwest Territory and came under the jurisdiction of the Federal government, protected by military posts and organized militias. During the territorial days of Tennessee, Governor William Blount and Secretary of War, Henry Knox, stressed the necessity of fortifications and militia for patrolling the frontier. In 1792, Governor Blount wrote the Cherokees that he was building strongly garrisoned forts. The southern-most post was built by Militia Captain William Nash near Beech Grove in 1791. The station stood at a point near the intersection of the present-day Rutherford, Bedford, and Coffee county boundaries on uplands known as the Tennessee Ridge and overlooked Norton's Creek (Jernigan's Branch) of Garrison Fork, a tributary of the Duck River.²⁵ The protection provided by the garrison at Fort Nash further eased expansion into the outlying areas of Davidson and surrounding counties.

²⁴ Albigeance Waldo Putnam, *History of Middle Tennessee: Or, Life and Times of Gen. James Robertson* (Nashville; Private, 1859), 414.

²⁵ J. G. M. Ramsey, *The Annals of Tennessee to the End of the 18th Century*. (Charleston: Walker and James Press, 1853), 146; King Wells Jamison, *Ghost of the Garrison: A Topographical Approach to Old Fort Nash* (Murfreesboro: private, 1977); V. H. Jernigan, "Fort Nash – Outpost of the 1790s," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 29 (1976): 130-8.

In 1794 Middle Tennessee settlers took the offensive against the Indians in their own towns.²⁶ General James Robertson led devastating expeditions against the Indian towns of Nickajack and Running Water, effectively forcing an end to native resistance in the region. By the time of statehood in 1796, settlement pressure into outlying areas increased as the government surveyed Middle Tennessee land, granted it to veterans, or sold it as public lands for the development of agriculture and rural industry.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, Middle Tennessee experienced rapid growth and development as an economic and political center. Most of the immediate region became dependent upon an agrarian-based economy and Nashville served as access to markets in the east and north. Industrial development slowly increased as technology was transferred from the more industrialized cities.²⁷

The Donelson family played a significant role in this transformation of Middle Tennessee between 1770 and 1850. Colonel John Donelson (ca. 1725-1785) was born in Maryland between 1718 and 1725, the exact year unknown. A surveyor, he married Rachel Stockley, daughter of Alexander Stockley, a prominent Virginia landowner and member of the House of Burgesses, and the couple had eleven children all born in

²⁶ Ramsey, 465; Rogers, 7.

²⁷ Anita S. Goodstein, *Nashville, 1780-1860: From Frontier to City* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1989) explores this transformation fully.

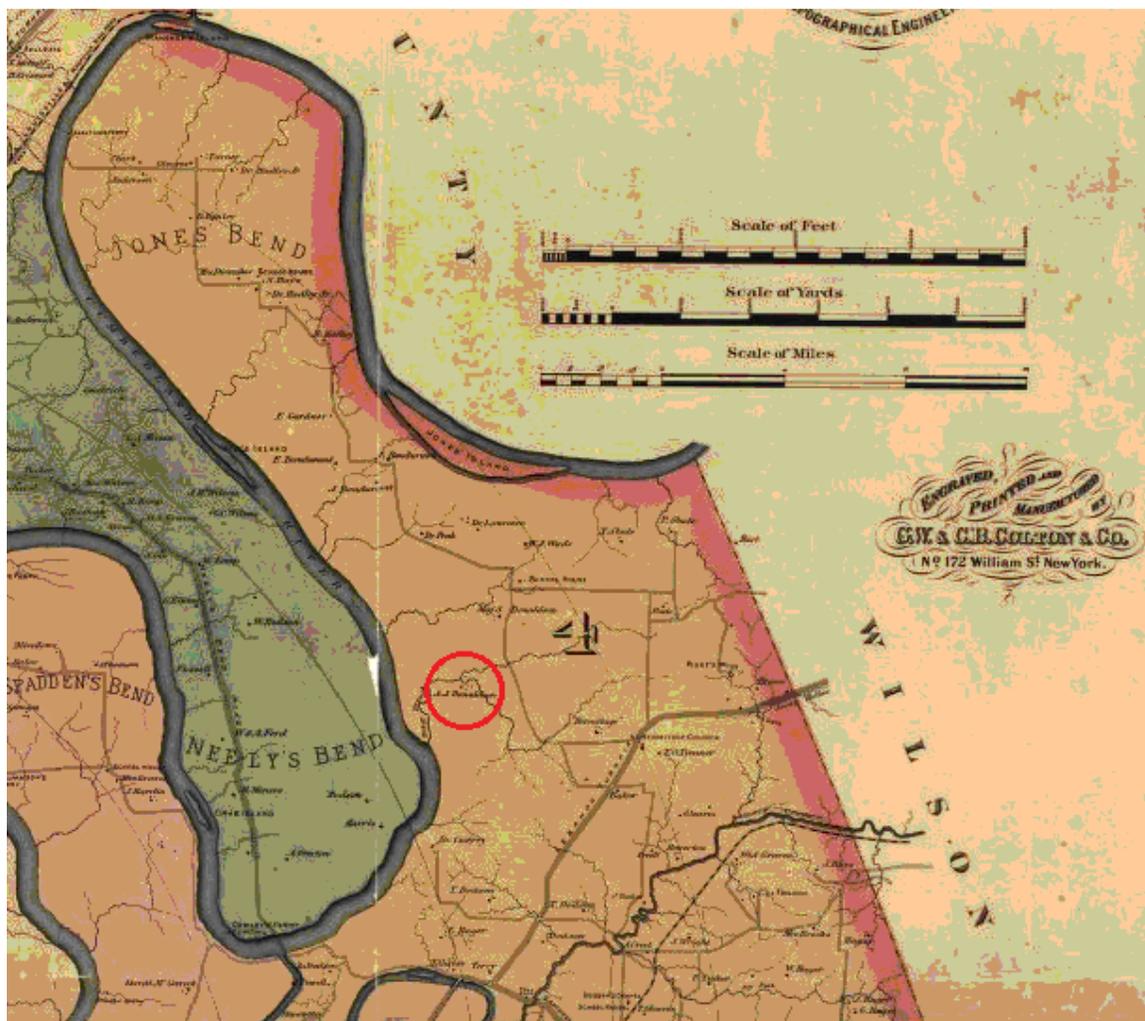


Figure 8. Project Location (in red) adapted from Davidson County survey map by Wilbur Foster (1871).

Virginia.²⁸ Upon his death ca. 1763, Alexander left to his daughter, Rachel Stockley Donelson, wife of John Donelson, all the Negroes and personal estate in their possession.²⁹

Some of these slaves and their descendents were probably among the earliest enslaved African Americans brought to the Cumberland Region. Among the passengers

²⁸ George de Rouhac Hill, "Nashville's First Family: The Donelson's of Tennessee" in *Nashville, a Family Town; Lecture Series 1975-76 Number 5* (Nashville Public Library, 1978), 4.

²⁹ Pauline Wilcox Burke, *Emily Donelson of Tennessee, Volume II* (Richmond: Garrett and Massie, Inc., 1941), 163; Hill, 5.

aboard Donelson's personal flatboats were about 55 persons including all but one of their children (a son, William accompanied the Robertson overland party) as well as some thirty "blacks" held by the family.³⁰ Also among the passengers were Captain John Donelson (1756-1830), son of Colonel John and Rachel, and his sixteen year-old bride, Mary Purnell (1763-1848); the couple married in Virginia on August 17, 1779.

Colonel Donelson's *Journal of A Voyage*, a narrative of that infamous trip³¹ survives and purports to be a firsthand account of this journey, but historian Paul Clements has called the authenticity of the account into question. Although the diary prominently displays the words, "the original" on the front, Clement believes that the author of the journal is not John Donelson himself, but rather, his son, John Donelson, Jr.³² Arriving in the Cumberland region on April 24, 1780, Colonel John Donelson settled his family and slaves some ten miles further up the Cumberland River on rich farmland. According to historian A. W. Putnam, Donelson:

passed up the west bank of the Cumberland to the mouth of Stones River, thence up that stream until he came upon a beautiful body of bottom land, and rich uplands gently descending toward it. In a number of open spots there were discovered a luxuriant growth of native white clover; but the low and uplands were mostly covered with timber and cane. This place he called "Clover Bottom." Here Colonel Donelson determined to make his location. He selected a gentle eminence, which was about 150 yards northwest of the bridge across Stone's River.³³

³⁰ Hill, 8.

³¹ Williams, 231- 42; Putnam, 69-76.

³² Paul Clements, "Tennessee Notes: An Analysis of 'The Original' Donelson Journal and Associated Accounts of the Donelson Party Voyage," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 64 (2005):338-349.

³³ Putnam, 621.

Donelson cleared some land; planted corn and cotton. He erected half-faced timber structures for his family but an unexpected flood forced the Donelsons to relocate to Mansker's Station in July 1780. Due to the flooding and fearing hostile Native Americans, the Donelson's abandoned this early settlement rather quickly, briefly staying at Masker's Station before relocating to Kentucky near Harrodsburg by November 1780.³⁴

In 1783, the Governor of Virginia commissioned Colonel John Donelson and Colonel Joseph Martin to treat with the Cherokees and Chickasaws at either French Lick or Nashborough.³⁵ While awaiting the arrival of the Indian chiefs and head men, Colonel Donelson visited his first encampment at Clover Bottom and examined the choice body of lands around the area that would become the Hermitage. Here he made entries of some of the best lands in Tennessee and commenced the erection of his blockhouse. The site of this new station was near a large spring, a mile west of the Hermitage "being the spot now occupied by his grandson, William Donelson, Esq."³⁶

During this period of treaty negotiations, Colonel Donelson planned the return of his family to the Cumberland region as he acquired "some lands in the vicinity of what later became the site of the Hermitage, and commenced the building of a blockhouse near a large spring."³⁷ He wanted to relocate at Clover Bottom, but on land less likely to flood and sited this station near the spring. Reputedly, his station was fortified and had at least a single

³⁴ Rogers, 30.

³⁵ Burke, vol. 1, 13; Hill, 9.

³⁶ Putnam, 633.

³⁷ Ibid

blockhouse.³⁸ There is conjecture that this might have become the location, if not the nucleus of the Mansion, a two-storied log home to be built in the early 1800s by Captain John Donelson on “land inherited from his father”³⁹ Colonel Donelson’s intent to return to the Cumberland region is expressed in a letter dated September 4, 1785 to his son, Captain John, wherein he writes “If you find it convenient to remove to Cumberland before my return, if my family can remove at the same time, I shall have no objection.”⁴⁰

Historian Pauline Wilcox Burke suggests this communication to be the last letter received of Colonel Donelson. While returning from Kentucky to rejoin his family at Mansker’s Station, he was waylaid near Barren River and killed under mysterious circumstances, and his body was buried where he died. The news of the Colonel’s death reached the family at Mansker’s Station.⁴¹ His widow, Rachel Stockley Donelson, established herself in her own blockhouse some ten miles north of Nashville near the Kentucky Road, at what is now the intersection of Rivergate Parkway and Gallatin Road. There were a number of outbuildings including cabins for boarding guests and the widow’s blockhouse became a gathering place of importance through her death circa 1801.

Like his father, Captain John Donelson (1755-1830), was a key individual in the development of Davidson County. After the family returned to the Cumberland in 1785, Captain Donelson and his wife, Mary Purnell Donelson located some distance from his mother’s blockhouse, near the old Clover Bottom camp. Here, according to historian Pauline

³⁸ Rogers, 30.

³⁹ Burke, vol. 1, 13-36; Hill, 10.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ W. Woodford Clayton, *History of Davidson County, Tennessee, with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of Its Prominent Men and Pioneers* (Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis, 1880), 135.

Wilcox Burke, "his daughter, Tabitha, had a narrow escape while fetching water from the spring, when an Indian arrow whizzed past her, narrowly missing its mark."⁴² Historian A. W. Putnam describes the station of Captain John Donelson as picketed in or stockaded, and "near the Spring, by the residence of Esquire Wm. Donelson, about one mile from the Hermitage."⁴³

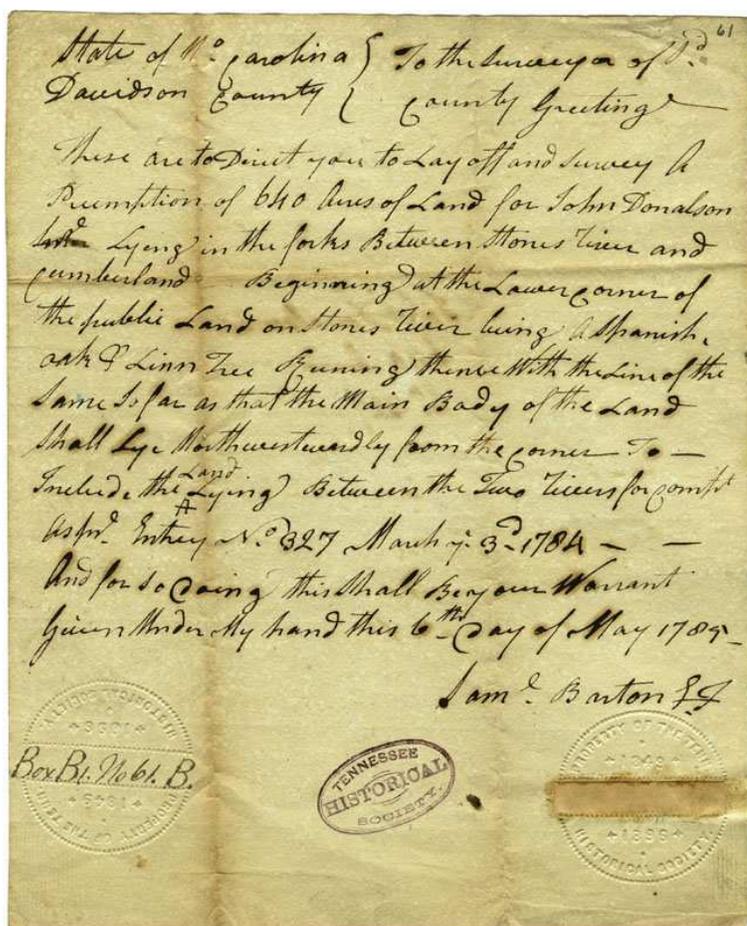


Figure 9. Survey of 640 acres of land, Davidson County, North Carolina, for John Donelson (sic) by Samuel Barton, dated 1785. It describes the land holding of John Donelson as lying between the Stones River and the Cumberland River. Tennessee Historical Society Miscellaneous Files, 1688-1951.

⁴² Burke, vol. 1, 15.

⁴³ Putnam, 490-97.

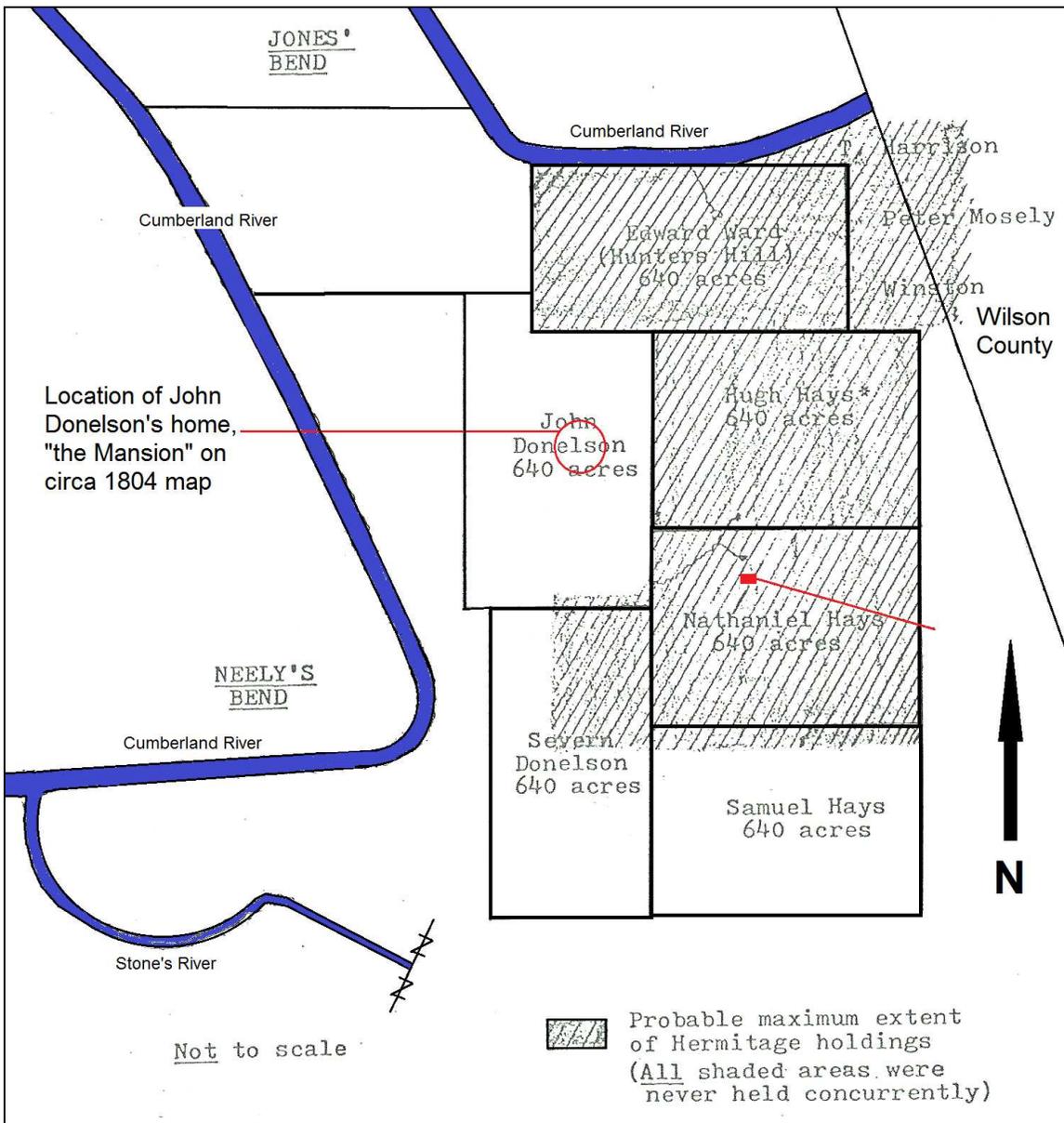


Figure 10. Sketch showing the relationship of tracts in Hermitage land transactions adapted from an 1804 map of the Donelson lands reportedly in possession of Mrs. W. Ross Stephens, descendant of Captain John Donelson (adapted from Samuel D. Smith, *An Archaeological and Historical Assessment of the First Hermitage* (Nashville, Tennessee: Tennessee Department of Conservation, Division of Archaeology, Research Series No. 2 (1976): 63).

Captain Donelson was a surveyor and copartner in a store with Andrew Jackson and John Coffee. His slaves successfully produced livestock, corn, cotton, wheat, and fruit. From a narrative by Emily Donelson Walton, daughter of Stockley and Phila Ann Donelson, Emily Burke describes his residence, known as the “Mansion,”

as a rambling log house of two stories – “the rooms large with low beamed ceilings, big open fireplaces, over which were mantel pieces. An enclosed staircase in each room lead to the room above. The upstairs rooms were not connected. There was a large rock chimney at each end of the house and a porch on each side. The house was situated on an elevation above a spring and facing a country lane. Close by were the clustered log cabins occupied by the slaves.”⁴⁴

It was one of the largest homes of its kind on the Cumberland. The exact date of its construction is not known, but Donelson made an entry in his surveyor’s fee book for carpenter’s work for hewing and sawing joists and shingles dated October 1804, presumably for the Mansion. A history of Cleveland Hall, later home of Donelson’s son Stockley, suggests that the Mansion remained standing until destroyed by fire just after World War I.⁴⁵

In 1822, Captain John gave his son, William Donelson, a tract of land adjoining the Mansion property upon which he built a fine “clapboard” house.⁴⁶ Upon the death of Captain John Donelson in 1830, the rest of the farm passed to Captain Donelson’s son, Stockley, who had moved into the Mansion upon his marriage to Phila Ann Lawrence in 1827. Stockley’s holdings of about 2000 acres adjoined those of William and extended

⁴⁴ Burke, vol. 1, 36.

⁴⁵ “Cleveland Hall Farm,” Tennessee Century Farms files, Center for Historic Preservation, Middle Tennessee State University.

⁴⁶ Burke, vol. 1, 67.

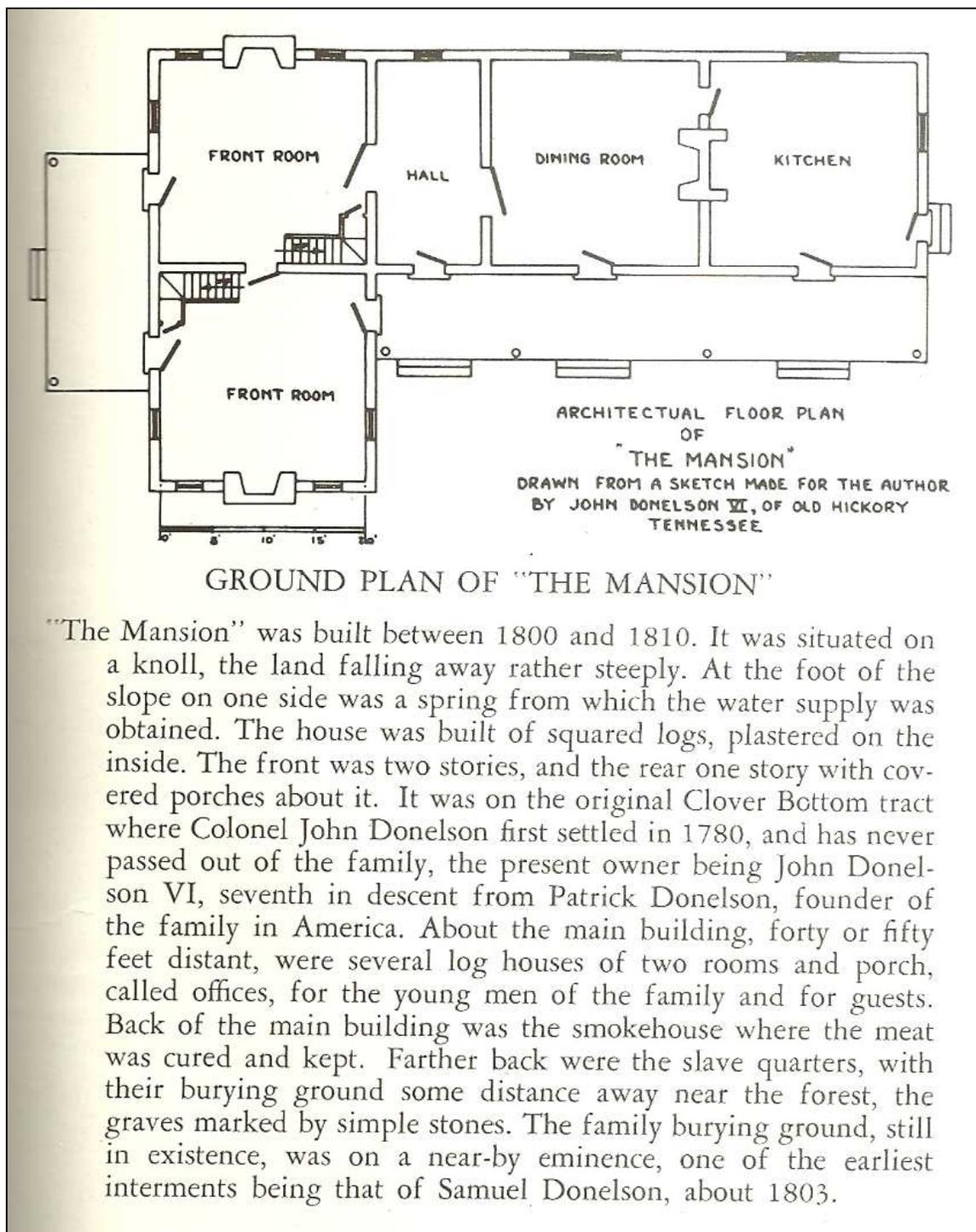


Figure 11. Ground Plan of the Mansion (adapted from Burke, vol. 1, 43).

to present-day Lakewood. Andrew Jackson later purchased part of the land for the Hermitage. Stockley and Phila Ann Donelson occupied the Mansion until Cleveland Hall was built in the late 1830s.

Stockley Donelson (1805-1888) was an early Nashville builder and one of thirteen children born to Captain John Donelson and Mary Purnell Donelson.⁴⁷ He grew up on the family plantation and continued to live with his parents in the Mansion after his 1827 marriage to Phila Ann Lawrence (1809-1850) of Nashville. Five of their children were born in the Mansion and in 1830, Stockley inherited his portion of the farm. Known for his building skills as well, he supervised the reconstruction of Andrew Jackson's Hermitage following a fire in 1834, and built Poplar, or Tulip Grove, home of Andrew Jackson Donelson, between 1834 and 1836.

Stockley Donelson built his family a new brick home north of the study area between 1835 and 1839. Known as Cleveland Hall, the site was only a short distance away (north) from the 1810 Donelson homestead, the Mansion.⁴⁸ Cleveland Hall is included in the Tennessee Century Farms program as one of the region's oldest family farms. Recent development in Davidson County has also surrounded that farm with highways, residential subdivisions, and commercial areas.

Coming from two well-established Tidewater families, Colonel John Donelson and his wife, Rachel Stockley were certainly no strangers to slavery or to large scale agriculture. The Donelsons brought about thirty enslaved African-Americans with them on their flatboat "Adventure" during their infamous journey from Fort Patrick Henry to

⁴⁷ Heather Fearnbach, "Stockley Donelson" Carroll Van West, et al, eds., *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society, 1998), 256.

⁴⁸ Hill, 16.

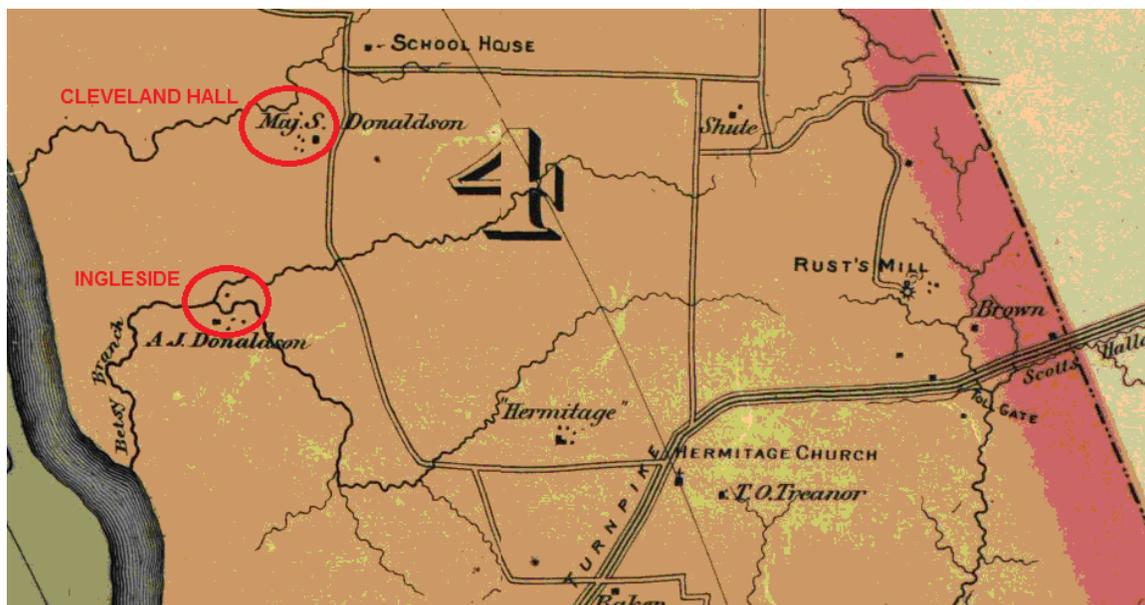


Figure 12. Davidson County map dated 1871; William Donelson’s plantation, “Ingleside” and Stockley Donelson’s plantation, “Cleveland Hall” in red.

French Lick on the Cumberland in 1779. Unfortunately, no early narratives of slaves in the region exist and limited primary information is available from tax and census records, slave deeds, and will and estate records. Secondary sources of information available concerning the Donelson slaves are the narratives of Donelson family members. The recollections of Mary Purnell Donelson in March 1844 when describing her flatboat journey with her in-laws and husband later to Lyman C. Draper relates “there were about 30 boats in all – all flats, as was Colonel Donelson’s, one part of it was roofed; his and Captain Blackmore’s were the two largest. In Colonel Donelson’s and John Donelson Jr.’s were about 15 whites and 30 blacks.”⁴⁹ These slaves were probably all born and acquired in the native colonies of the Donelsons, either Maryland or Virginia, and

⁴⁹ Lyman Draper, *Mary Purnell Donelson Narrative* (Draper Manuscript Collection, S32), 299-312; Samuel Gordon Heiskell, *Andrew Jackson and Early Tennessee History* (Nashville: Ambrose Printing Company, 1918), 102; Burke, vol. 2, 166.

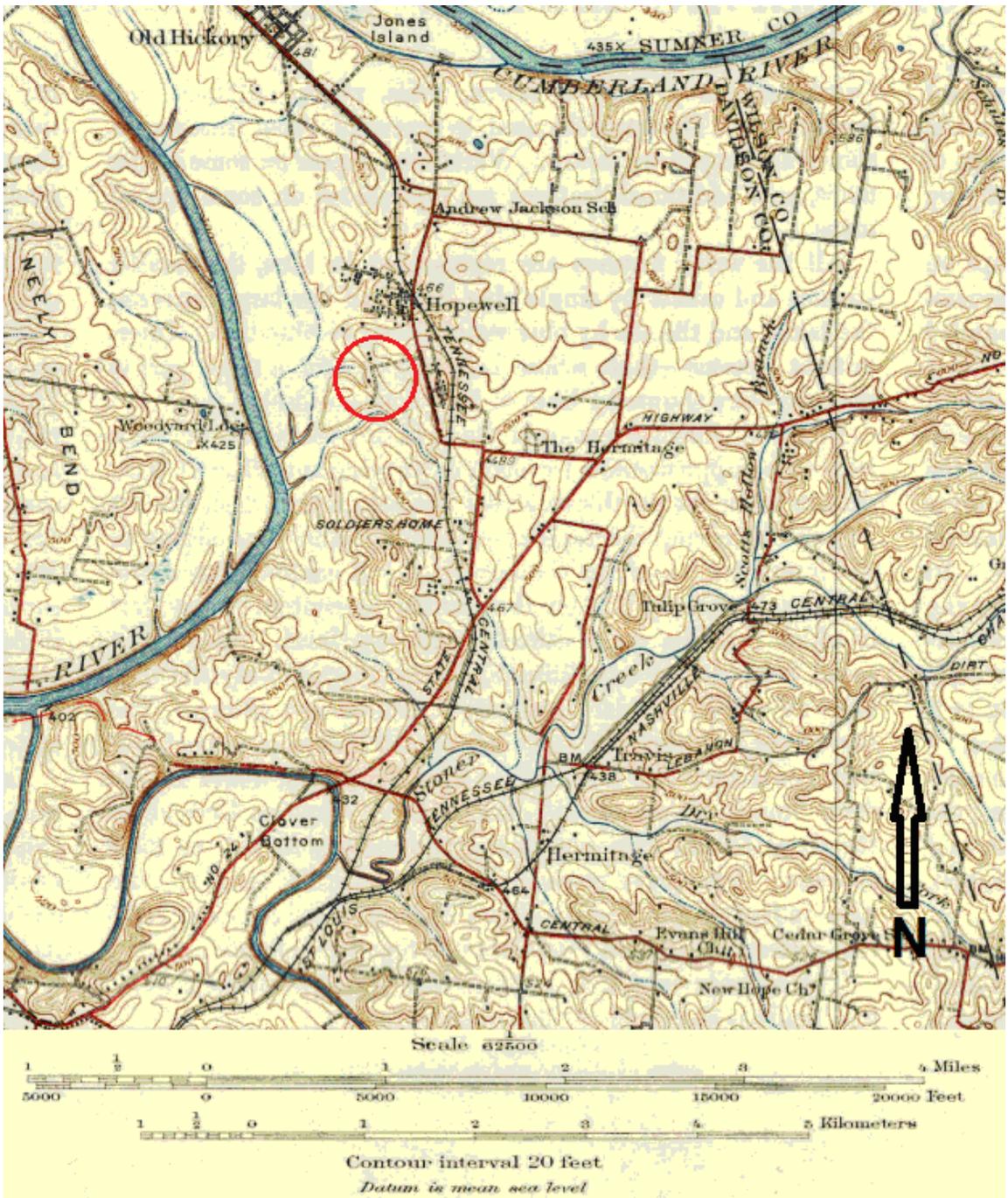


Figure 13. USGS Hermitage topographical quadrangle map dated 1932; core of the Donelson plantation in red.

acquired as gifts, or through inheritance, purchase, or as the natural offspring of slave communities.

Though the Cumberland region had not been settled as long as the eastern counties, land there was easily adapted to large scale farming. As a result, the slave population rose rapidly. By the late 1780s, there were probably as many slaves in the Cumberland settlements as in the older settlements. In 1791, territorial governor William Blount ordered a census taken in the Southwest Territory which found that slaves comprised slightly more than 25% of the total population in Davidson County in that year.⁵⁰

Almost assuredly, slavery permeated every aspect of living on the Donelson farms. Perhaps the best examples of this permeation and the most descriptive accounts of African-American life on the Donelson farm can be found in the narrative of Emily Donelson Walton (1837-1936), a daughter of Stockley and Phila Anne Donelson, who was born in the Mansion on the Donelson farm and a historical biography of Emily Donelson Jackson written by Pauline Wilcox Burke (1941). In describing the details of her birth at the Mansion, Mrs. Walton related that in every rich white household in those days there was a “black mammy” who looked after the little ones and the lady of the house as well, the other servants standing in awe of her. She was an institution, “always looked upon as a member of the family and treated with love and respect.”⁵¹ The name of the mammy at the Mansion is lost to history but Burke speculates that Mary Purnell brought her from her Virginia home. When Mary

⁵⁰ Lester C. Lamon, *Blacks in Tennessee, 1791-1970* (Knoxville, Tennessee: The University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 11.

⁵¹ Emily Donelson Walton, *Autobiography of Emily Donelson Walton* (Nashville, Tennessee: private, 1932), 7.

Selby Purnell died in 1772, she left her granddaughter, Mary Purnell Donelson a slave called “Dinah” and Dinah may have fulfilled this role at the Mansion.⁵²

In describing the Mansion, Emily Donelson Walton stated:

“it was built between 1800 and 1810. It was situated on a knoll, the land falling away rather steeply. At the foot of the slope on one side was a spring from which the water supply was obtained. The house was built of squared logs, plastered on the inside. The front was two stories, and the rear one story with covered porches about it.....about the main building, forty or fifty feet distant, were several log houses of two rooms and porch called offices, for the young men of the family and for guests. Back of the main building was the smokehouse where the meat was cured and kept. Farther back were the slave quarters, with their burying ground some distance away near the forest, the graves marked by simple stones. The family burying ground, still in existence, was on a near-by eminence, one of the earliest interments being that of Samuel Donelson, about 1803.⁵³

The Mansion was a beehive of industry and several narratives document the types of activities slaves performed on the farm. With little exception, everything needed was produced on the farm. Many slaves worked in the field and the home. Housekeeping was to a large extent left to the slave women under the supervision of the mistress of the home, who taught them preserving, pickling, cooking, and other household arts. Spinning and weaving were principal occupations as slave clothing was produced on the farm. A plantation cobbler tanned hides and made many of the shoes worn by the family and slaves.⁵⁴ All kinds of vegetables were put away in earth banks lined with straw to keep through winter; vegetables, potatoes, apples, and other fruits were carefully stored in a large cellar. There was a mill run by horse power where slaves ground corn for meal and wheat for flour. Slaves bolted the

⁵² Burke, vol. 1, 37.

⁵³ Burke vol. 1, 43; Burke vol. 2, 173.

⁵⁴ On page 10 of her 1932 autobiography, Emily Donelson Walton writes proudly of shoes made for her by “noted” slave, Summerset Donelson, and states that he walked with a limp caused by a needle having broken off in his knee while making shoes.

flour and used the bran to make starch with which they stiffened clothes. Slaves tapped sugar maples on the farm to provide sap from which sugar was rendered and beehives produced honey and wax for candles. Farm animals included riding and work horses, cows, pigs, turkeys, chickens, ducks, geese, and pea fowl. Slaves brought water from the spring to the house several times daily for drinking and household use. In the winter, a house slave kept fires going in every room and in summer he stood by the dining table and fanned flies away with a fan of peacock feathers.⁵⁵

Emily Donelson Walton named several of the slaves held during the 1830s and 1840s by Stockley and William Donelson. The first slave referred to by name in her narrative is Crecy, midwife and nurse who attended to Phila Anne (Lawrence) Donelson during Emily's birth in 1837 at the Mansion.⁵⁶ In addition to Crecy, there were other slave women who served as nurses to the Donelson children at the Mansion including Frances, Nellie, and Lina, a midwife who belonged to William Donelson.⁵⁷ Sallie, a maid belonging to Mary Purnell Donelson, was given to Emily and became her maid and "mammy" to her children. After spending her life with Emily and following her marriage, Sallie returned to Tennessee where she settled with other former slaves at Briersville after emancipation. When she died, Sallie was buried in a plot reserved for black people in Spring Hill Cemetery with her face covered by the little long dress of Emily's first baby, which she had saved for that purpose.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Walton, 11; Burke vol.1, 38-9.

⁵⁶ Walton, 5.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

Walton also identified Ben, a house slave in the 1840s and Guinea George, whose teeth had been sharpened and who claimed to have been a cannibal while living in Africa. She also named Summerset, a cobbler and noted slave belonging to Colonel John Donelson. Summerset accompanied the family in 1779 on the flatboat journey from the Watauga settlements. One of the slave children born on the plantation was given to Emily and named Queen Victoria, or Tora for short. Tora was born with six fingers on each hand, the extra fingers removed at birth, and grew up to be a good cook.⁵⁹ Cooks for the family named in the narrative after the move to Cleveland Hall include Lina and Candice. Housemaids included Eliza and Aunt Eliza.⁶⁰ Ben was the carriage driver.⁶¹

In 1850, the 4th Civil District of Davidson County was in the east central portion of Davidson County, an area bordered by the Cumberland and Stones Rivers, and the Wilson County line. The district was agrarian, particularly suited for the cultivation of cotton. The total free population was 977. There were two free blacks and twenty-five free mulattoes living in four households. Of 107 property owners, only two were black. The enslaved population of the district totaled 913 including 418 male and 488 females held by 55 residents, nearly half the district's total enslaved population. The average slave owner held 17 slaves; approximately half held 7 or fewer slaves. The largest slaveholders were Andrew Jackson, Jr. (137), his cousins, William (71) and Stokely (sic)

⁵⁹ Ibid., 10.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 4.

⁶¹ Ibid., 26.

Table 1. 1850 Slave Schedule – 4th Civil District, Davidson County, Tennessee.

Wm. Donelson (n=71)	age	gender	Stockley Donelson (n=95)	age	gender	age	gender
	75	M		46	F	25	M
	65	M		47	F	23	M
	42	M		44	F	21	M
	37	M		44	F	21	M
	37	M		32	F	40	M
	42	M		24	F	35	M
	42	M		24	F	25	M
	38	M		19	F	18	M
	34	M		20	F	18	M
	29	M		18	F	21	M
	26	M		19	F	21	M
	26	M		20	F	30	M
	21	M		26	F	20	M
	16	M		25	F	17	M
	14	M		17	F	12	M
	13	M		15	F	12	M
	11	M		1	F	11	M
	15	M		6	F	10	M
	10	M		6	F	10	M
	10	M		9	F	11	M
	9	M		6	F	12	M
	7	M		4	F	10	M
	7	M		7	F	15	M
	6	M		5	F	12	M
	6	M		1	F	8	M
	6	M		6	F	5	M
	7	M		9	F	3	M
	6	M		4	F	6	M
	4	M		2	F	4	M
	4	M		40	F	2	M
	4	M		6	F	3	M
	3	M		60	M	7	M
	3	M		60	M	4	M
	2	M		75	M	1	M
	2	M		80	M	8	M
	1	M		60	M	8	M
	2	M		45	M	60	F
	65	M		30	M	60	F
	65	F		25	M	18	F
	65	F		30	M	16	F
				?	M	1	F
				?	?	1	F

Donelson (66); John L. Hadley (51); Timothy Dodson (40); and P. C. Shute (34).

According to the slave schedule of the 1850 Federal census of the 4th Civil District, Davidson County, Tennessee enumerated by Charles M. Hays on September 19, 1850, brothers Stockley and William Donelson held 95 and 71 slaves respectively, Stockley lived at Cleveland Hall and William lived at Ingleside (Table 1).⁶²

During the course of this thesis research, the author discovered no extant slave narratives or memoirs from Donelson slaves. However, the 1920 memoir of John McCline, enslaved on a neighboring farm, the Clover Bottom plantation owned by Dr. James Hoggatt, provides an unusual perspective on slave death and burial in the region. According to McCline, burial occurred rather quickly on the farm, usually within a day of death, and was attended by all members of the slave community. In remembering the murder of a slave named Jordan on Clover Bottom plantation, McCline recounts that Jordan was found beaten and stabbed to death, and “The men came and the body was taken to his cabin and prepared for burial. Later in the afternoon, the remains of Jordan were placed in a new cedar coffin, then put in a cart ... and followed by every soul on the place, we laid him to rest.”⁶³

Later, remembering the murder of another slave, Austin, killed by Hoggatt’s overseer, Phillips, McCline stated “the remains of poor Austin were placed in a wagon and hauled to his cabin...the next day was an extremely sad one, as we followed the remains of poor Austin to his final resting place.”⁶⁴

⁶² United States Census, Slave Schedule (Davidson County, Tennessee: 1850), 509-11.

⁶³ Jan Furman, ed., *John McCline’s Narrative of His Life During Slavery and the Civil War* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998), 32.

⁶⁴ Furman, 38.

In regards to slave religion, McCline remembers a slave, Grandmother Hanna, as a strict member of the church, and the oldest one on the Hoggatt place. As a rule, she held weekly prayer meetings on Friday nights at her cabin. In describing a slave named Aron, about forty years of age and epileptic, McCline discloses a very interesting custom when he states that Aron “had been attending the meetings regularly of late and declared he had experienced religion. As proof that he had the “Great Gift”, he stated that he had gone to the grave yard, and all the most lonely and dismal places on the darkest of nights, knelt and prayed, according to custom.”⁶⁵ McCline’s narrative also suggested that despite Christian religion on Clover Bottom, more traditional African religious expressions also existed.⁶⁶ While the names of senior slaves maintaining this type of social order over the slave community at the Donelson plantation are not definitively known, it is not unreasonable to assume that similar patterns of Christian and traditional control existed on the Donelson farm. Emily Donelson Walton makes note of one such slave on the Donelson plantation, Guinea George, who claimed to have been a cannibal and that “his teeth had been sharpened so he could chew better.” Walton described George as a law unto himself. Most of the slaves and children were afraid of him.⁶⁷

It is very likely that the Donelson slaves had access to church membership with the Donelson family. The Hermitage Church was built in 1823 by Andrew Jackson for his wife, Rachel Donelson. The church began in a log house in 1817 a short distance east of the extant church. Dedicated in 1824 by Rev. Andrew Hodge as “Ephesus” Church, it was

⁶⁵ Ibid., 33.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 39.

⁶⁷ Walton, 9.

interdenominational. The church roll for the years 1824 to 1839 included Mrs. Rachel Jackson, Mrs. Mary Donelson, Mrs. Phila Ann Donelson, and Mrs. Elizabeth Donelson. Principal supporters of the church included Andrew Jackson, Captain John Donelson, Andrew Jackson Donelson, Stockley Donelson, and William Donelson. ⁶⁸

About 1832, the church was taken in to the Nashville Presbytery and about 1839, its name changed to Hermitage Church. In describing church membership during 1845, historian Leona Aiken suggests that rows of seats across the back of the church were reserved for Negroes. That same year during an extended revival meeting, Andrew Jackson Jr. joined the church eventually becoming an elder and clerk, and church records indicate twenty-four persons converted and joined during the revival, four of them “women of colour,” slaves of the Jacksons. ⁶⁹

McCline also recorded slave marriages at Clover Bottom. He stated: “There was no objection by the masters to their slaves marrying on adjoining plantations. The rule was – and being generally accepted – that if there were offspring from such a union, the children would belong to the master owning the mother.” ⁷⁰ It is not unreasonable to assume that slave religion and marriage followed similar patterns at the Donelson and neighboring plantations.

⁶⁸ Leona Taylor Aiken, *Donelson, Tennessee; Its History and Landmarks* (Nashville: private, 1968), 288-92.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 292.

⁷⁰ Walton, 34.

CHAPTER IV. MORTUARY AND MATERIAL CULTURE PATTERNING

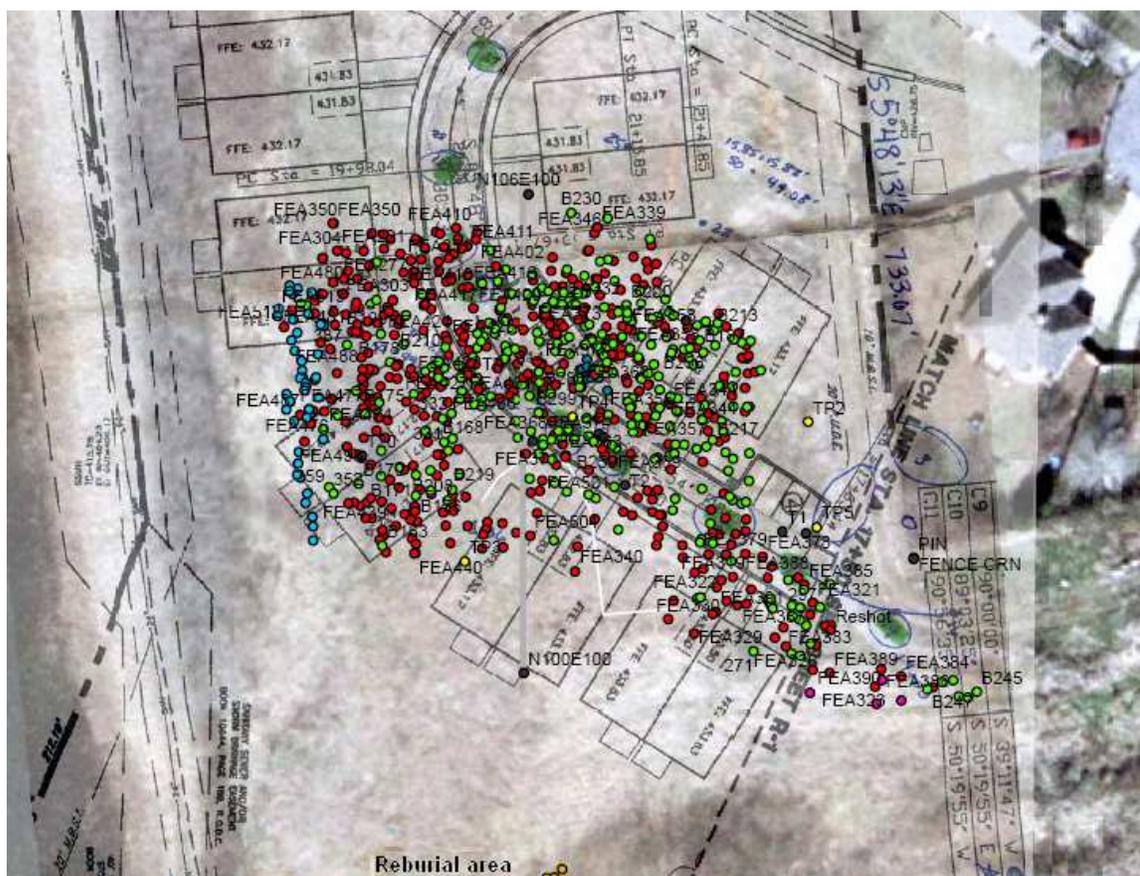


Figure 14. Site 40DV551 feature locations on an aerial photograph overlying a development plan (historic burial locations in blue, prehistoric burial locations in green, and prehistoric feature locations in red).

The archaeological study of slave life in the United States began in the 1970s and archaeology in Tennessee has played a prominent role in the development of this research since its inception. During the last quarter of the twentieth century, historical archaeology emerged as a way of studying the lives of African Americans in Tennessee.¹ Regionally, historical archaeologists recognize archaeological deposits associated with slavery as primary evidence, powerful in circumventing documentary silences and ambiguities. The central

¹ Larry McKee, "The Archaeological Study of Slavery and Plantation Life in Tennessee," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 59 (2000):188.

focus of archaeological research is on material culture, the study of human behavior through tangible items left as the residuum of everyday life. Things left in the ground can provide mute testimony to just about everything from clothing to spirituality, especially in the context of death, burial, and the grave.

The Hermitage Springs Site (40DV551) included more than 300 prehistoric burials as well as over 400 prehistoric non-mortuary features. In addition to the prehistoric archaeological deposits, a series of 60 historic burials were excavated from the extreme western edge of the property (Figure 14). In addition to producing significant information regarding the mortuary patterns and material culture of enslaved African Americans in Middle Tennessee, the excavations shed new light on racism and poverty within the context of a rural slave plantation burial ground.

Analysis of the biological remains of the Donelson slave cemetery was a collaborative process. Dr. Shannon Hodge, Associate Professor with the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Middle Tennessee State University, directed the analysis of skeletal material.² As presented in Table 2, skeletal preservation was sufficient in 53 of the burials to estimate age and gender. Skeletal preservation was poor to nonexistent in seven burials, Numbers 404 through 408, and 412-413, and neither age nor gender could be assigned to those burials other than relative age derived from material

² Shannon Chappell Hodge, "Hermitage Springs Age-Sex Spreadsheet" (Murfreesboro, Tennessee: Undergraduate Research Laboratory of Anthropology, Middle Tennessee State University, 2008).

Table 2. Osteological data (* no skeletal remains present, general age based upon coffin size)

Burial	Sub Adult Age	Adult Age	Adult Sex- Pelvic	Adult Sex- Cranial
B341	4-5 years ±16 months			
B342	3 years ± 12 months			
B343	Birth ± 2 months			
B344		30-50 years	Female	Probable female
B345		20-35 years	Probable female	Probable female
B346	9-12 months ±3-4 months			
B347		35-50 years	Male	probable male
B348		15-20	Indeterminate	Probable female
B350	b-5 years			
B351		48-60+ years	Male	Probable Male
B353	Birth-1 year			
B354	Birth - 2 years			
B355	9months ± 3 months			
B356		50+ years	Probable Male	Probable Male
B358		20-35 years	Male	Probable Male
B360	Birth ± 2 months			
B361	Birth ± 2 months			
B362	Birth to 6 months ± 2-3 months			
B363	4 years ± 12 months			
B364		35-50 years	Indeterminate	Indeterminate
B365	Birth ± 2 months			
B366	6 months ± 3 months			
B367	Birth ± 2 months			
B368		45-60	Male	Male
B369	9 months ± 3 months			
B370	9 months - 1 year ± 3 months			
B371	9 months ± 3 months			
B372	Birth ± 2 months			
B373	12 months ± 4 months			
B374		15-25 years	Probable female	Indeterminate
B375	9 months ± 3 months			
B376	Birth to 7 months ± 2 months			
B379	9 months ± 3 months			
B380	Birth ± 2 months			
B381	9 months ± 3 months			
B382		50+ years	Female	Female
B383		15-23 years	Probable Male	Indeterminate
B384		40-50 years	Probable Male	Male
B385		20-35 years	Female	Female
B386		35-50 years	Indeterminate	Probable Male
B391	6 months ± 3 months			
B392	7-8 years ± 24 months			
B394	7 months in utero ± 2 months			
B395	6 years ± 24 months			
B396	4 years ± 12 months			
B399	10 years ± 30 months			
B400		35-39 years	Female	Female
B403	1 year ± 4 months			
B404	*child			
B405	*infant			
B406	*child	Unobservable	Unobservable	Probable Female
B407	*infant/child			
B408	*child			
B409	4 years ± 12 months			
B410	2 years ± 8 months			
B411		30-40 years	Unobservable	Probable Male
B412	*infant			
B413	*adult			
B414		18-21 years	Unobservable	Unobservable
B416	Fragmented remains	20-35 years	Unobservable	Indeterminate

Table 3. Donelson slave cemetery; relative age at death and coffin shape.

no skeletal remains	0-1 year	1-10 years	10 - 25 years	25 - 35 years	35-50 years	50+ years	Hexagonal	Rectangular
6	22	12	4	5	6	4	35	24

inclusions, grave, or coffin size. Gender determination is often difficult to assign for individuals under the age of about 14 years.

One historical description of the slave cemetery exists. Emily Donelson's biography noted that "farther back were the slave quarters, with their burying ground some distance away near the forest, the graves marked by simple stones."³ Based upon this historical description, the burials were probably simply marked at the head and foot in a traditional style of the region, a bedstead of roughly-dressed, un-inscribed tabular slabs of local limestone taken from the surrounding hillsides and placed at the head and the foot of the grave.

The burials are oriented toward the sunrise in the traditional Christian burial pattern of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries reflecting an eschatological Christian belief in the Rapture, an event accompanying the return of Jesus Christ to Jerusalem during the end times. The resurrection of the dead believers in Christ and the rising of the living believers to join them is known as the Rapture. The traditional Christian method of positioning the coffin or body in the grave was to place the body

³ Pauline Wilcox Burke, *Emily Donelson of Tennessee, Volume II* (Richmond: Garrett and Massie, Inc., 1941), 43.

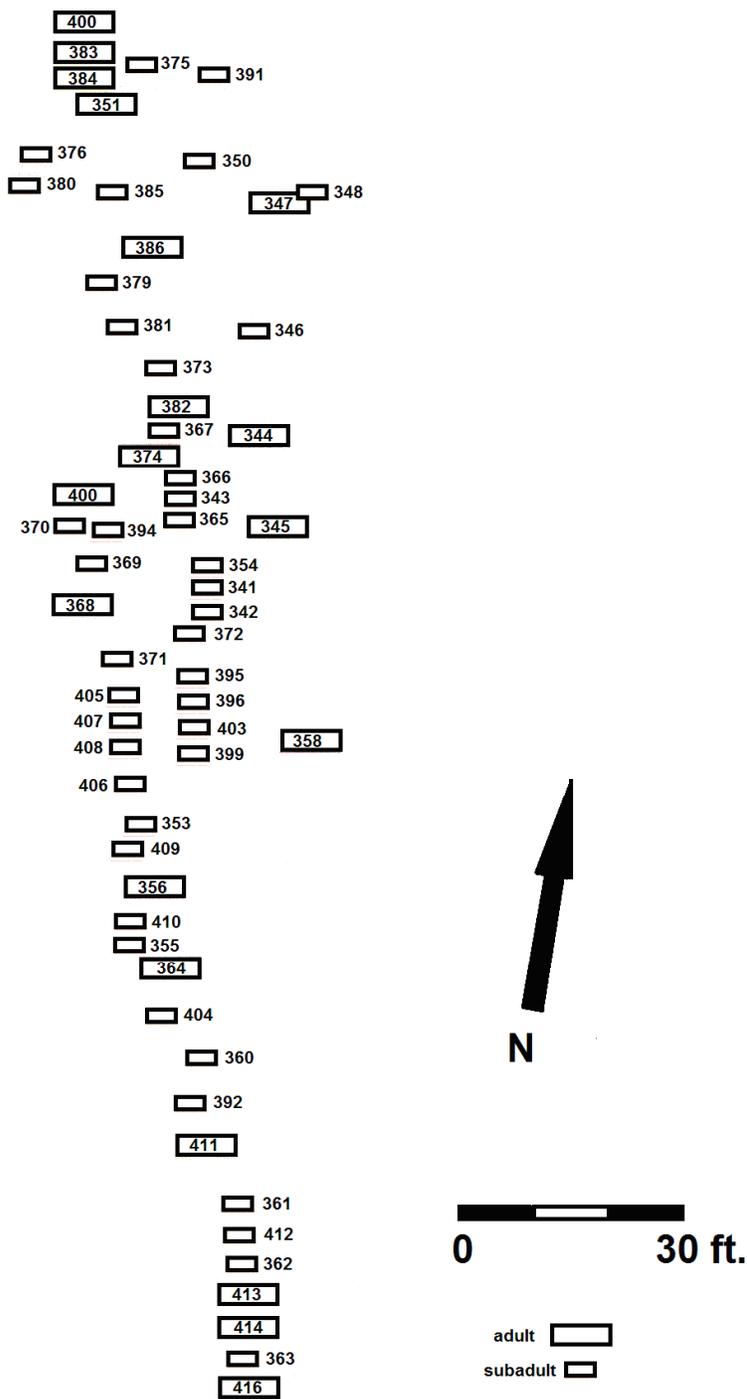


Figure 15. Donelson slave cemetery plan view.

supine, head to the west and feet to the east. For believers, positioning the body in reference to the east during burial will allow them to see the return of Christ during the Rapture.

Burials in this pattern rarely align with magnetic east. This variance in alignment results from using the position of the sun on the horizon as a reference for direction rather than magnetic alignment. The popularity of the Christian idea of the Rapture profoundly affected general burial patterning in Tennessee and the southeastern United States. It became prevalent in both Euro-American and African-American cemeteries, and remained the dominant burial pattern well into the twentieth century.

The burials within the Donelson slave cemetery were arranged in three loosely-defined rows (Figure 15). The burials exhibit some clustering; adult males are clustered at the northern and southern ends, while adult females are clustered near the center. The 31 sub-adult, or child burials represent the largest proportion of the skeletal population and were concentrated in rows in the central portion of the cemetery as well as radial to adult burials (Figure 16). Adult burials, numbering 19, represent about one-third of the burials, a significantly smaller proportion of the identified cemetery burials. Table 3 shows the age range of the burials. The high percentage of fetal/ infant and child burials reflect an extreme degree of mortality between birth and childhood, leveling off between adolescence and mature adulthood. If individuals survived infancy and childhood they probably stood a good chance of surviving into adulthood and maturity.

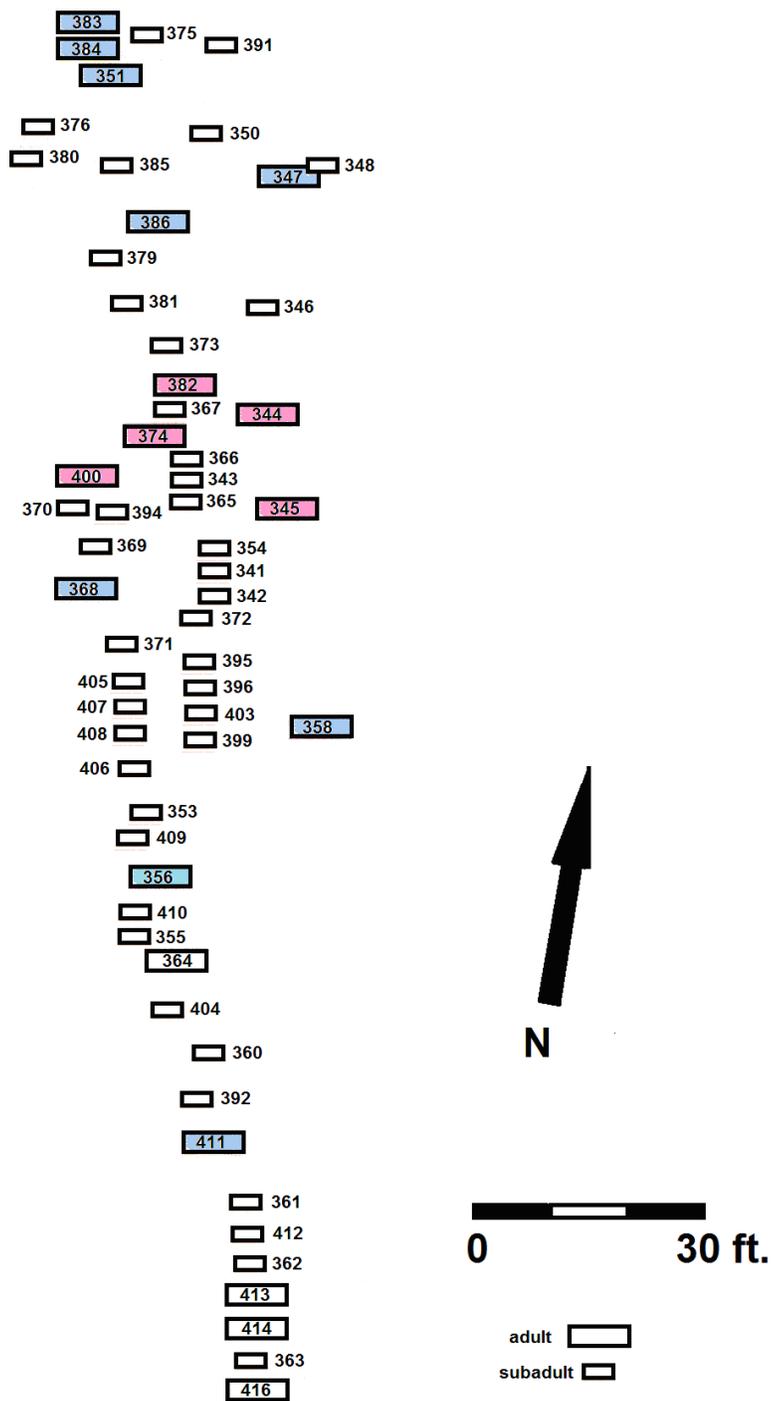


Figure 16. Adult gender [female (pink), male (blue), unknown (white)].



Figure 17. Donelson slave cemetery; adult Burial 358 (view north).



Figure 18. Donelson slave cemetery; child burial 373 (view north)

The material culture of the burials document the paucity of material possessions in slave life (Figure 17 and 18). First consider the “coffin” or “casket.” Often used interchangeably, the terms actually have very different historical meanings. Coffins are generally hexagonal in shape and caskets are rectangular. Gradually replacing the use of a simple burial shroud, coffins became the typical burial receptacle during the eighteenth century and practically universal among Americans by the 1790s. Local cabinetmakers, carpenters, or family members typically produced coffins.⁴ Hexagonal in form and typically made of planked wood, coffins continued to be used throughout the nineteenth century. Usually lacking exterior decoration and constructed with simple fasteners such as nails or screws, hexagonal coffins were common until the late 1850s, although found infrequently with burials from as late as the 1920s.

Caskets were first introduced in 1849 and are thought to represent a shift toward concern for the display of the deceased. Rectangular coffins have been used since at least 1830, although they did not become popular until the last half of the nineteenth century. Caskets could be purchased pre-made and were stylistically more elaborate than the earlier hexagonal forms. The elaboration of rectangular coffins is generally contemporaneous with the “beautification of death” movement of the Victorian Period. As part of the change, early caskets were vaguely anthropomorphic in form, often having a glass viewing plate over the face of the deceased. Gradually the shape became rectangular, replacing the earlier hexagonal forms.⁵

⁴ R. W. Habenstein and W. M. Lamers, *History of American Funeral Directing* (Milwaukee: National Funeral Directors Association of the United States, 1955), 171.

⁵ Alexandra Bybee, “Bioanthropological Investigations of Historic Cemeteries: What Can We Learn From Biological, Cultural, and Mortuary Remains?” Unpublished manuscript presented at the 5th Annual Council for West Virginia Archeology Spring Workshop (2006).

Coffin shape must be tempered when used as a dating tool for historic burials. Once thought to have considerable temporal importance, archaeologists now recognize that the use of older coffin forms was extended in rural areas and was influenced by tradition, and the coffin maker's skill and preference. Generally, archaeologists today suggest that rectangular coffins were introduced about 1850 although the use of hexagonal forms continued until about the turn of the century.⁶

There were no caskets found within the burials at the Donelson slave cemetery; rather the burials were in hexagonal or rectangular wooden coffins which were probably made locally on the farm. All the burials within the cemetery were observed to be interred within two primary shapes of wooden coffin. There was no evidence of elaborate hardware assemblages or outer packing crates. Thirty-five burials were interred within hexagonal coffins and the balance within rectangular coffins (Figure 19). Of the 35 hexagonal coffins, 16 contained the remains of adults and 19 of children.

Of the 25 rectangular coffins, 19 contained fetal or infant burials, three contained burials of children, and three contained adult burials. In this particular cemetery, coffin shape appears to be more indicative of age at death rather than time of burial. With the exception of three adult burials, the great majority of the rectangular coffins contained fetal, infant, or child remains. Based upon coffin shape, the three adult burials in

⁶ Robert L. Blakely and Lane A. Beck, "Bioarchaeology in Urban Context," *Archaeology of Urban America; The Search for Pattern and Process*, (ed.) Dickens, Roy S. Jr., (New York: Academic Press, 1982), 188; W. Dean Wood, K. R. Burns, and S. R. Lee, *The Mt. Gilead Cemetery Study: An Example of Biocultural Analysis from Western Georgia* (Athens, GA.: Southeastern Archaeological Services, Inc., 1986), 79; C. Andrew Buchner, Emanuel Breitburg, Charles Williams, and Elizabeth A. Williams, *At Rest, Again: The Ridley Graveyard (40WM208) Archaeological Relocation Project, Williamson County, Tennessee* (Memphis: Panamerican Consultants, Inc., 1999), 140.

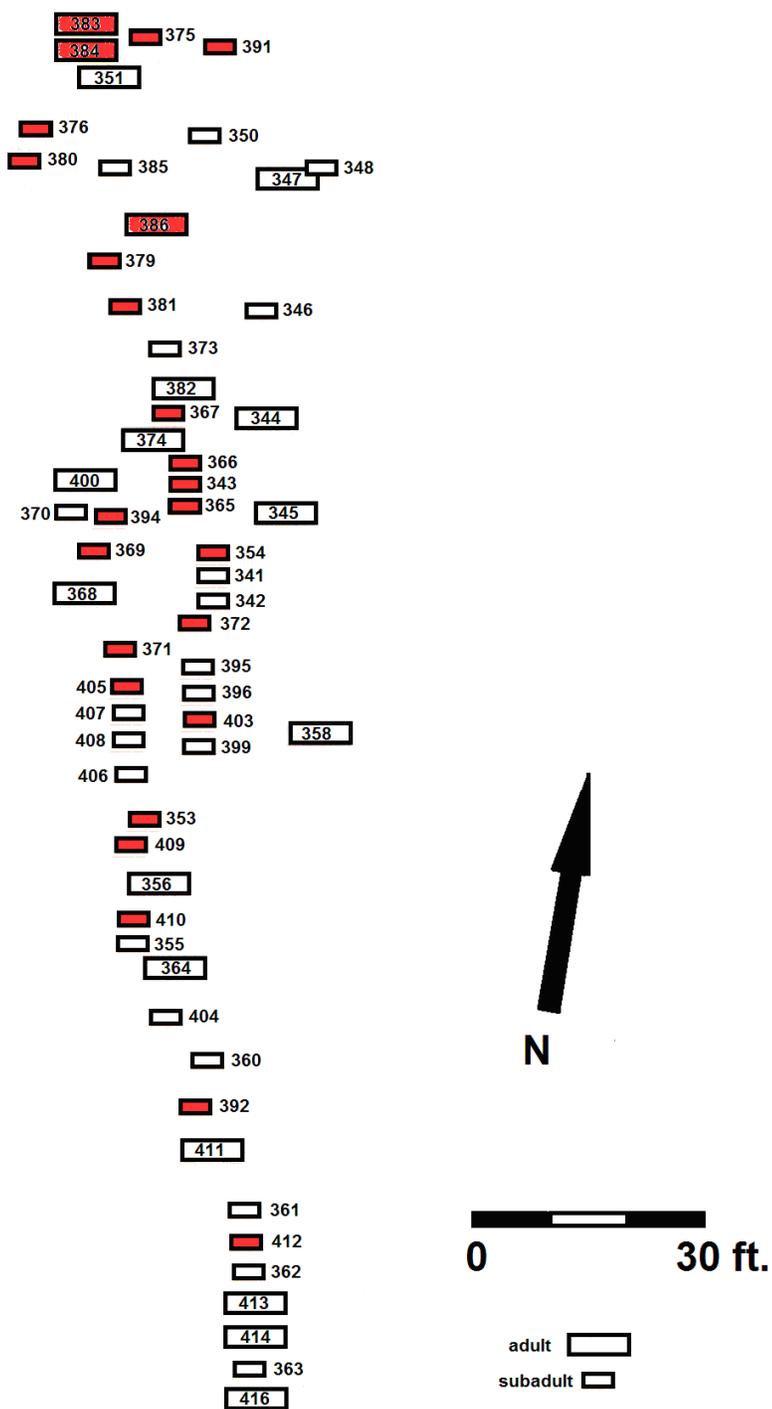


Figure 19. Coffin shape (rectangular in red).

rectangular coffins were perhaps among the last burials within the Donelson slave cemetery.

For a number of reasons, artifacts recovered from mortuary contexts present special problems when used as an aid in dating burials. Mortuary artifacts generally represent a single major activity: the preparation of the deceased for burial and are normally associated with three functional categories; architectural, clothing, and personal items.

While it may be possible on stylistic grounds to synthesize generalized date ranges for coffin hardware and material inclusions, it is difficult if not impossible to determine the effects of prevailing cultural and economic factors on the use of hardware. In rural, as opposed to urban areas there may be a cultural or stylistic lag in adopting new styles or materials. The retail practices of purchasing items for resale in volume and stockpiling inventory contribute to this cultural lag. It was not uncommon for retailers to purchase out-of-style or out-dated coffins and hardware in quantity at discounted prices. Out-dated hardware could sit on shelves for indeterminate periods and availability in rural areas is hard to determine.

Analysis of the material culture included with the burials in the Donelson slave cemetery closely followed typologies currently recognized by archaeologists on comparable sites in the region. The author relied on a system of functional classification first proposed by historical archaeologist Stanley South.⁷ Archaeologists have adapted South's typology in research associated with slavery and plantations at similar properties such as the first

⁷ Stanley South, *Method and Theory in Historical Archaeology* (New York: Academic Press, Inc., 1977), 92-102.

Table 4. Donelson slave cemetery; Artifact frequency and distribution (*no skeletal preservation, general age based upon grave shaft size).

Burial #	Age/Gender	Coffin Shape	Buckles	Bone buttons	Metal buttons	Porcelain/glass buttons	Shell buttons	Ceramics	Straight pins	Safety pins	Beads	Jewelry	Cut Nails	Lid screws	ornamental tacks
341	child	hexagonal		4				2			25	1			38
342	child	hexagonal						4							37
343	fetal/infant	rectangular		3				9							27
344	mature female	hexagonal					1								70
345	adult female	hexagonal		5				5				3			39
346	child	hexagonal		1				6							30
347	adult male	hexagonal	2	23						9	1				100
348	adult female	hexagonal	1	16				2				1			49
350	child	hexagonal						1							30
351	adult male	hexagonal	2	9	2			1						76	5
353	fetal/infant	rectangular			2			2							12
354	fetal/infant	rectangular						3							23
355	infant	hexagonal						4							18
356	adult male	hexagonal	8	1	2										27
358	adult male	hexagonal	1	17	2	7		4							61
360	fetal/infant	hexagonal						2							24
361	fetal/infant	hexagonal	1					4	1						39
362	fetal/infant	hexagonal													41
363	child	hexagonal				6									35
364	adult	hexagonal		13	2										35
365	fetal/infant	rectangular						5							16
366	infant	rectangular						2							28
367	fetal/infant	rectangular						4							24
368	mature male	hexagonal	1	2	7			1							75
369	infant	rectangular						1							17
370	infant	hexagonal			3			2							20
371	infant	rectangular				1									27
372	fetal/infant	rectangular						4							16
373	infant	hexagonal						7							26
374	adult female	hexagonal		13		4									27
375	infant	rectangular						1							5
376	fetal/infant	rectangular						11							21
379	infant	rectangular						2							27
380	fetal/infant	rectangular				5		7							13
381	infant	rectangular						4							18
382	adult female	hexagonal			3			2							38
383	adult male	rectangular		16		6		2							
384	mature male	rectangular		12											29
385	adult female	hexagonal						4				1			61
386	adult male	rectangular						1							34
391	infant	rectangular									26				
392	child	rectangular		7	6										
394	fetal	rectangular													26
395	child	hexagonal		1				4							39
396	child	hexagonal			7	2		9			345				78
399	child	hexagonal	1		8	4		1							4
400	adult female	hexagonal				2		1							45
403	infant	rectangular						8							34
404	*child	hexagonal	1	11		3									35
405	*infant	rectangular						3							16
406	*child	hexagonal		1	1			2							46
407	*infant/child	hexagonal													22
408	*child	hexagonal													22
409	child	rectangular		1	9			3							25
410	child	rectangular						3							34
411	adult male	hexagonal			4			6				4			66
412	*infant	rectangular													23
413	*adult	hexagonal						2		41	3				52
414	adult	hexagonal			1	2								13	4
416	adult	hexagonal						2						102	11
416	adult	hexagonal												8	8
totals	2931		6	104	76	62	27	1	154	1	446	14	2011	20	20

Hermitage (1976), Hunters Hill (1987), and Gowen Farmstead (1993).⁸ In general, early to middle nineteenth century artifacts were recovered from the burial contexts in the Donelson slave cemetery, dating the deposits predominantly to the first half of that century.

The author used functional criteria to identify and classify the various types of artifacts recovered during the investigation and their dates of invention or initial manufacture (known to archaeologists as *terminus post quem*s). The archaeological team collected 2931 singular artifacts. In the field, the archaeologists gave a unique catalog number to bags containing artifacts from each specific location were given a unique cataloging number to ensure the protection of provenience information. Following excavation, the team transported the artifacts to the lab facilities of Cumberland Research Group, Inc. in Murfreesboro, Tennessee for processing, photography, and analysis. The analytical process began with the washing, drying, and sorting of materials. The author then identified and tabulated the artifacts based upon functional classification. The functional categories represented in the Donelson slave cemetery assemblage include the Kitchen, Architectural, Clothing, and Personal groups.

Using an expanded version of South's model during this research, the author defined groups of artifacts that are indicative of a particular activity, in this case funerary behavior, and changes in the various funerary artifacts which take place over time. The following descriptive section includes only those types of artifacts recovered during excavation of the Donelson slave cemetery.

⁸ Samuel D. Smith, *An Archaeological and Historical Assessment of the First Hermitage*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Tennessee Department of Conservation, Division of Archaeology, Research Series No. 2, 1976); Jeffrey W. Gardner, *The Hunter's Hill Project; Historical and Archaeological Research at the Schute-Turner Farm, Davidson County, Tennessee* (Hermitage, Tennessee: The Ladies Hermitage Association, 1987); Guy G. Weaver, et al., *The Gowen Farmstead: Archaeological Date Recovery at Site 40DV401 (Area D), Davidson County, Tennessee* (Memphis, Tennessee: Garrow & Associates, Inc. 1993).

The Kitchen Group includes artifacts that were functional for food preparation, storage, or presentation. In practical terms, this is mostly broken dishes, crockery, and container glass such as jars and bottles. Tablewares include predominantly refined earthenwares and fragments. Ceramics are one of the most important classes of artifact commonly found on historic sites because vessel form, paste, glaze, and decorative changes have been well recorded through time. Because of their durable yet fragile nature, the presence of historic ceramics in an assemblage provides valuable temporal and socioeconomic data. For these reasons, ceramics are commonly used as diagnostic artifacts on historic sites. Mean ceramic dates provide an important tool for deriving chronological models for the archaeological deposits sampled on historic sites of Tennessee. A general temporal range for the manufacture of the various ceramic types closely follows a typology proposed by South and adapted by Smith, and others for use in Tennessee.⁹

Most refined tablewares are a type of earthenware such as creamware, pearlware, or whiteware. The earliest forms of refined earthenware typically found in the Cumberland region include creamwares and pearlwares, which were in popular use prior to the 1830s. Whitewares first appeared in the 1820s, and by the late 1830s were ubiquitous in American households. Whiteware glazes contained lead for most of the nineteenth century, but the lead was gradually replaced with a clear felspathic glaze that is still in use.¹⁰ Historical archaeologists have long attempted to find an easy way to distinguish late pearlware from

⁹ Smith, *First Hermitage*, 161.

¹⁰ George L. Miller, "A Revised Set of CC Index Values for Classification and Economic Scaling of English Ceramics from 1787 to 1880" *Historical Archaeology* 25 (1991): 1-25.



Figure 20. Donelson slave cemetery (Burial 344); Hand-painted polychrome pearlware bowl.

early whiteware.¹¹ The most common method is to look for blue puddling of the glaze combined with a refined thinness of the ceramic body and the use of certain colors for underglaze enameling.¹² Unfortunately, this method can produce erroneous results. The slow whitening of pearlware and the vestigial bluing of whiteware, combined with the various manufacturers' use of the term "pearl" to refer to their ware long after the disappearance of what archaeologists call pearlware, combine to make a critical determination of ware type in some cases almost impossible for the years between 1820 and 1835.

¹¹ Ivor Noël-Hume, *A Guide to Artifacts of Colonial America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970); Cynthia R. Price, *Nineteenth Century Ceramics in the Eastern Ozark Border Region* (Springfield: Center for Archaeological Research, Monograph Series No. 1, 1979).

¹² *Ibid.*, 14-15.

A single refined earthenware bowl was excavated from Burial 344, a mature female buried in a hexagonal coffin near the eastern center of the Donelson slave cemetery (Figure 20). Decorated in an underglaze painted floral pattern, the vessel was placed right-side-up between and just below the knees of the deceased, and is a type of broad line, hand-painted polychrome pearlware. Similar artifacts were documented in excavation contexts at the First Hermitage excavations generally dating between 1795 to about 1840 with a mean date of 1818.¹³

Three principal folk explanations exist about the reason for including ceramic vessels in burials.¹⁴ The three explanations are: placing a bowl of salt on the stomach of the corpse until it is buried would keep out evil spirits; the salt would keep the body from bloating; or burying the vessel last used during illness would keep the spirit from returning.

The Architectural Group of artifacts includes items used not only for building structures, but sometimes also for building cabinets and furniture, and by extension constructing burial receptacles or coffins. There are four major classifications within this group usually encountered during excavation of historic cemeteries including the flat glass used as viewing ports; construction fasteners such as nails, spikes, screws, and staples; hardware such as handles, cap lifters, hinges, latches, lid screws, escutcheons; and coffins, caskets, and packing crates often reused as vaults.

¹³ Smith, *First Hermitage*, 161.

¹⁴ Jerome C. Rose, ed., "Gone To A Better Land," *Arkansas Archaeological Survey Research Series No. 25* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: Arkansas Archaeological Survey, 1985), 96; Michael G. Shogren et al, "Elko Switch Cemetery: An Archaeological Perspective," *Division of Archaeology Report of Investigations 58* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: Alabama State Museum of Natural History, 1989), 183; Andrew Buchner et al, *At Rest Again: The Ridley Graveyard (40WM208) Archaeological Relocation Project, Williamson County, Tennessee*. (Nashville: Tennessee Department of Transportation, 1999), 188.

A general chronological arrangement for the evolution of coffin fasteners includes (in chronological order) wrought nails, cut nails, wire nails, slotted-head lid screws, thumbscrews, thumbscrews/escutcheon combinations, and cap lifter/escutcheon combinations. Fasteners present in the Donelson slave cemetery included machine-headed cut nails, iron wood screws, and slotted head lid screws.

Nails comprised the largest artifact class. Nails are one of the most important classes of artifacts found on historic sites because changes in nail form and manufacturing technology have been well documented through time. The American nail-making process was perfected ca. 1789 and nails were probably being made in the Holston settlements of East Tennessee by 1799, when the Moravian missionary de Schweinitz saw wagons from Watauga hauling iron and nails across the mountains to the Cumberland settlements. Not long after 1800, one of the Embree brothers was operating a "nail manufactury" in Washington County utilizing "ingenious waterworks and nail-making machinery." Cut nails were advertised in Nashville's *Tennessee Gazette* on June 17, 1801, and on June 23, 1812, David Irwin and Company of Pittsburg, announced the opening of a nail manufacture in the *Nashville Clarion*.¹⁵ Wrought nails were common before the onset of manufactured cut nails and remained in use for certain applications into the period of early cut nail usage. Wrought nails continued to be used where nails were "clinched" such as in door and shutter applications.

The assemblage includes a total of 2011 cut nails or fragments. Cut nails were recovered from all but four of the burials (Table 4). Nails recovered during the project were exclusively a single basic type based upon Lee H. Nelson's typology; machine-headed, cut

¹⁵ James Patrick, *Architecture in Tennessee* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), 26.

nails, cut from flat sheets and featuring two tapering and two parallel edges. Nelson differentiated cut nails between early machine-cut and later machine-cut types. Early cut nails were usually hand-headed, while later cut nails exhibit machine-formed heads.¹⁶ Commonly cited sources used by archaeologists provide a general chronology for nails in the Cumberland Region, which includes *terminus post quem* dates as early as 1815 for machine-headed, cut nails.¹⁷ Cut nails were first manufactured in 1786, were popular by the 1820s, and became the most common form by the 1830s.¹⁸ Except in certain applications, the use of cut nails significantly decreased when wire nails became effectively manufactured in North America during the 1880s.¹⁹ All but four of the Donelson slave burials contained evidence of early machine-headed cut nails, representing a date range generally between about 1815 to about 1860.²⁰ Some coffin makers used simple iron screws to fasten coffin lids and sometimes combined them with cut nails. Post-1846 machine-pointed screws²¹ were found in Burial 351 and Burial 416.

¹⁶ Lee H. Nelson, "Nail Chronology as an Aid to Dating Old Buildings," *History News* 24, (November 1968): 11.

¹⁷ William Hampton Adams, "Machine Cut Nails and Wire Nails: American Production and Use for Dating 19th-Century and Early-20th-Century Sites," *Historical Archaeology Vol. 36* (2002): 66; William E. Pittman, *Laboratory Manual* (Williamsburg: Colonial Williamsburg; Department of Archaeological Research, 1990), 56-60; Linda F. Carnes-McNaughton, *Laboratory Manual* (Asheville: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1992), 34.

¹⁸ Weaver, Gowen Farmstead, 211.

¹⁹ Adams, 66.

²⁰ Charles E. Orser, Jr., Annette M. Nekola, and James L. Roark. *Exploring the Rustic Life: Multidisciplinary Research at Millwood Plantation, A Large Plantation in Abbeville County, South Carolina and Ebert County, Georgia* (Chicago: Mid-American Research Center, Loyola University, 1987), 549-58.

²¹ Henry C. Mercer, *Ancient Carpenter's Tools* (Doylestown, PA: Bucks County Historical Society, 1960), 254; Smith, *First Hermitage*, 216.



Figure 21. Donelson slave cemetery (Burial 399); Slot Headed coffin screw.



Figure 22. Donelson slave cemetery (Burial 399); ornamental rosette tacks.

Following simple iron screws, white metal, slotted-head lid screws are thought to be the forerunners of thumbscrews, and were initially used alone. They were later used in combination with escutcheons to achieve a more decorative effect.²² Eventually, makers added cap lifters to the combination, as coffin hardware changed in reaction to improvements in embalming techniques and the period of open-coffin viewing became extended. Four iron slot headed coffin lid screws with white metal heads were recovered at Burial 399, an adolescent buried within a hexagonal coffin (Figure 21). This type of white metal slot head screw has a rounded top and double flanges scalloping upward from the edges of the head. The head is made of a white metal which was probably plated. The edges of the flanges are knurled and encase the screw head.

Identical screws recovered from an adolescent burial context in the Elko Switch Cemetery in northern Alabama were given a general date range of 1880 + 10 years. Similar screws were also observed in a burial predating 1870 at Elko Switch Cemetery.²³ Given the much later, post Civil War period of usage for Elko Switch Cemetery, the earliest date for this type of artifact at the Donelson slave cemetery probably predates 1870. Based upon the presence of these screw types, this was potentially one of the later burials at the Donelson slave cemetery.

Ornamental tacks or studs are purely decorative and are constructed of thin, stamped, plate metal and often gilded. Small tacks for attachment to the exterior of the coffin are concealed behind the plate. The semi-intact examples observed at the Donelson slave cemetery are rosette in pattern (Figure 22). Similar examples of this type of artifact were

²² Shogren, et al, 178; Buchner, *At Rest Again*, 166.

²³ Shogren et al., 180.

found in three burial contexts at the Elko Switch Cemetery in northern Alabama.²⁴ Similar ornamental tacks are illustrated in the 1865 Russell and Erwin Manufacturing Company catalog.²⁵ Although still found in early twentieth century catalogs, their use began declining about 1890.²⁶

Ornamental tacks or their fragments were observed in Burial 399, Burial 414, and Burial 416. All three burials were in hexagonal coffins. With the exception of Burial 399, the examples were too fragmented and poorly preserved for analysis other than noting the presence of highly fragmented material within Burial 414 and Burial 416. The date range is probably between about 1860 and 1870, similar in range to that suggested for slotted head, white metal coffin screws.

Clothing artifacts are significant in that the information yielded by this type of artifact can often be used to determine the sexual orientation and gender of the deceased. This determination is especially helpful where the preservation of skeletal elements is poor. This category represents artifacts that are associated with the production, wear and use of clothing. Artifacts included in the group represent the remains of clothing-related items including beads, buckles, buttons, and other fasteners, such as straight pins. Each item usually has a general period of popular use and availability and closely follows the chronology of specific materials and method of manufacture. Two hundred and seventy-six items of clothing and clothing-related artifacts were observed in 55 of the burials at the Donelson slave cemetery.

²⁴ Ibid., 162.

²⁵ Russell and Erwin Manufacturing Company, *Illustrated catalogue of American Hardware of the Russell and Erwin Manufacturing Company: an unabridged reprint of the 1865 edition and a new introduction by Lee H. Nelson* (Ottawa: Association for Preservation Technology, 1980), 331.

²⁶ Debi Hacker-Norton and Michael Trinkley, *Remember Thou Art Dust: Coffin Hardware of the Early Twentieth Century* (Columbia: Chicora Foundation Inc., 1984), 47; Shogren, et al., 162.

Only five burials of children (Burials 362, 394, 407, 408, 412) contained no artifacts from this category.

Most recently beads, especially blue beads, have been examined in African-American burial contexts as symbols of magic such as amulets and charms, or for their curative properties.²⁷ Some anthropologists also suggest that beads were curated through generations and handed down from one generation to the next. Others maintain that the cultural significance attributed to bead symbolism is a creation of archaeologists with little significance to African Americans in the past other than as clothing or personal artifacts.²⁸

As mapped in Figure 23, a total of 446 beads were observed in four of the burials in the Donelson slave cemetery. While this sample seems excessive, it actually reflects the large number of glass seed beads (345) observed in Burial 396; a child buried in a hexagonal coffin.

The author observed glass or paste beads in four burials. He found globular barrel-shaped beads of very thin blown glass or paste in Burial 341, a child burial. Unfortunately, this particular type of bead was not very durable and most examples were highly fragmented before excavation (Figure 24). He observed early nineteenth century examples of round, opaque black and brown glass beads in an adult male burial (Burial 347). The beads were of simple, mandrel-wound construction (Figure 25). He found faceted, extruded, white and blue beads, and spun amber, and blue globular beads in Burial 391 (Figure 26). These bead types

²⁷ Linda France Stine, Melanie A. Cabak, and Mark D. Groover, "Blue Beads as African-American Cultural Symbols," *Historical Archaeology* 30 (1996): 49-75; Aaron E. Russell, "Material Culture and African-American Spirituality at the Hermitage," *Historical Archaeology* 31 (1997): 63-80.

²⁸ Thomas R. Wheaton, *Archaeological Testing of Willow Hall and Walnut Grove Plantations, Francis Marion National Forest* (Stone Mountain, GA: New South Associates, 1993), 80.

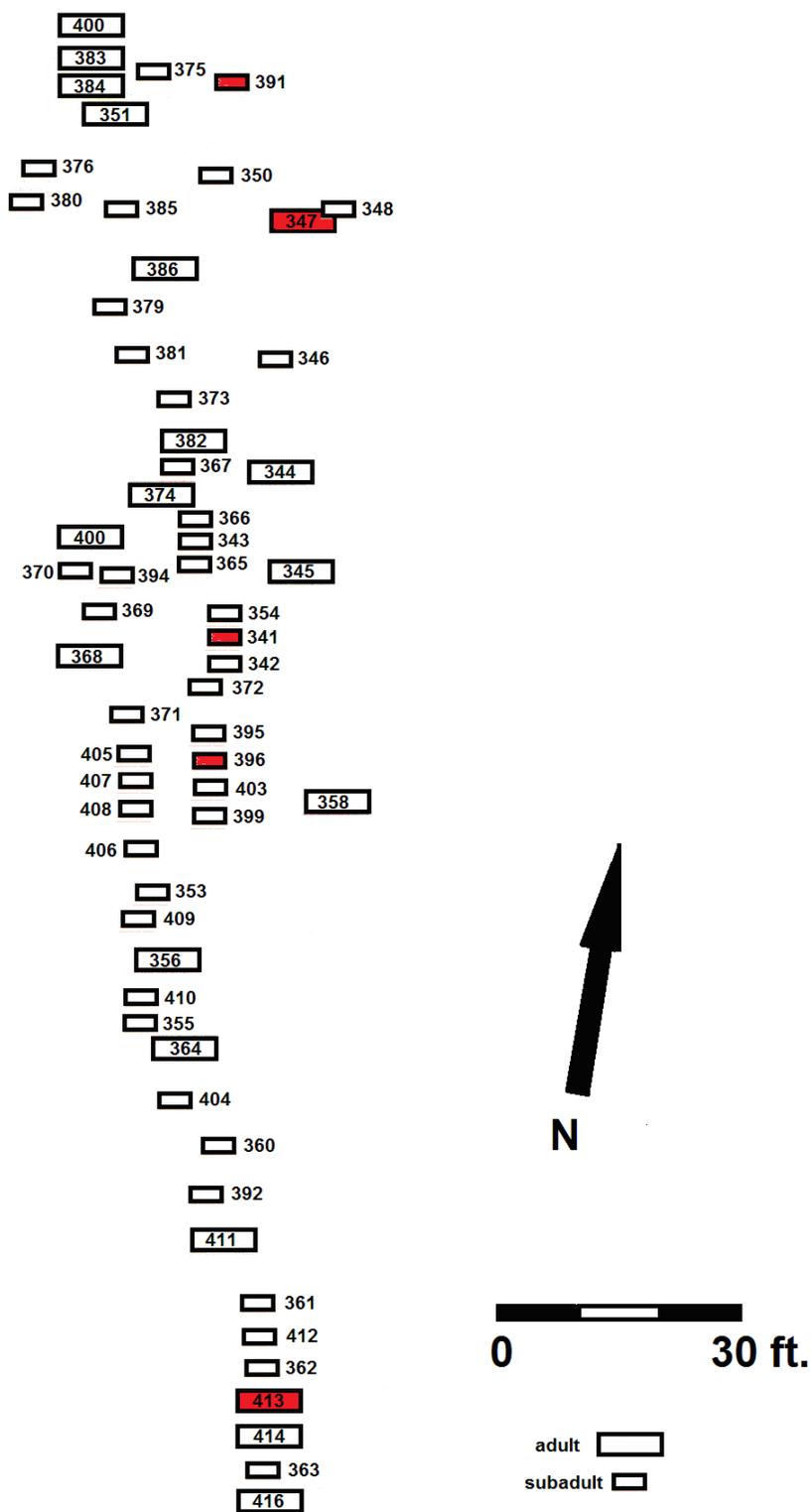


Figure 23. Donelson slave cemetery; bead distribution



Figure 24. Donelson slave cemetery (Burial 341); thin glass or paste beads.



Figure 25. Donelson slave cemetery (Burial 347); mandrel wound glass beads.



Figure 26. Donelson slave cemetery (Burial 391); faceted and globular glass beads.



Figure 27. Donelson slave cemetery (Burial 396); glass seed beads.

have been found at other sites in Middle Tennessee including Gowen Farmstead and are generally assigned a date between 1790 and 1830.²⁹ In Burial 396, the archaeologists observed a total of 345 glass, doughnut-shaped seed beads including clear, white, red, and blue varieties within a child burial in the same context as four-hole porcelain Prosser buttons and a three-hole shell button dating this context to after 1840 (Figure 27).

The First Hermitage artifact collection provides a good comparable sample of early to mid nineteenth century glass beads.³⁰ Smith noted the consistent presence of glass beads on slave dwelling sites and implied that certain bead types, especially royal-blue faceted beads, could be expected in association with the archaeological deposition of slaves. Later studies at the Hermitage associated with slave dwellings confirmed Smith's implication to the point that anyone studying slave sites now expects to find such beads. Published studies exploring the meaning of blue beads have suggested a variety of explanations from clothing and body adornment to use as identifying markers on sewing equipment to being an expression of African religious tradition.³¹

²⁹ Weaver et al. 260; Richard L. Alvey, *1995 Excavations on the Historic Component at the Drennon Site, 40DV447* (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Transportation Center, 1996).

³⁰ Smith, *First Hermitage*, 196-201.

³¹ McKee, 202.

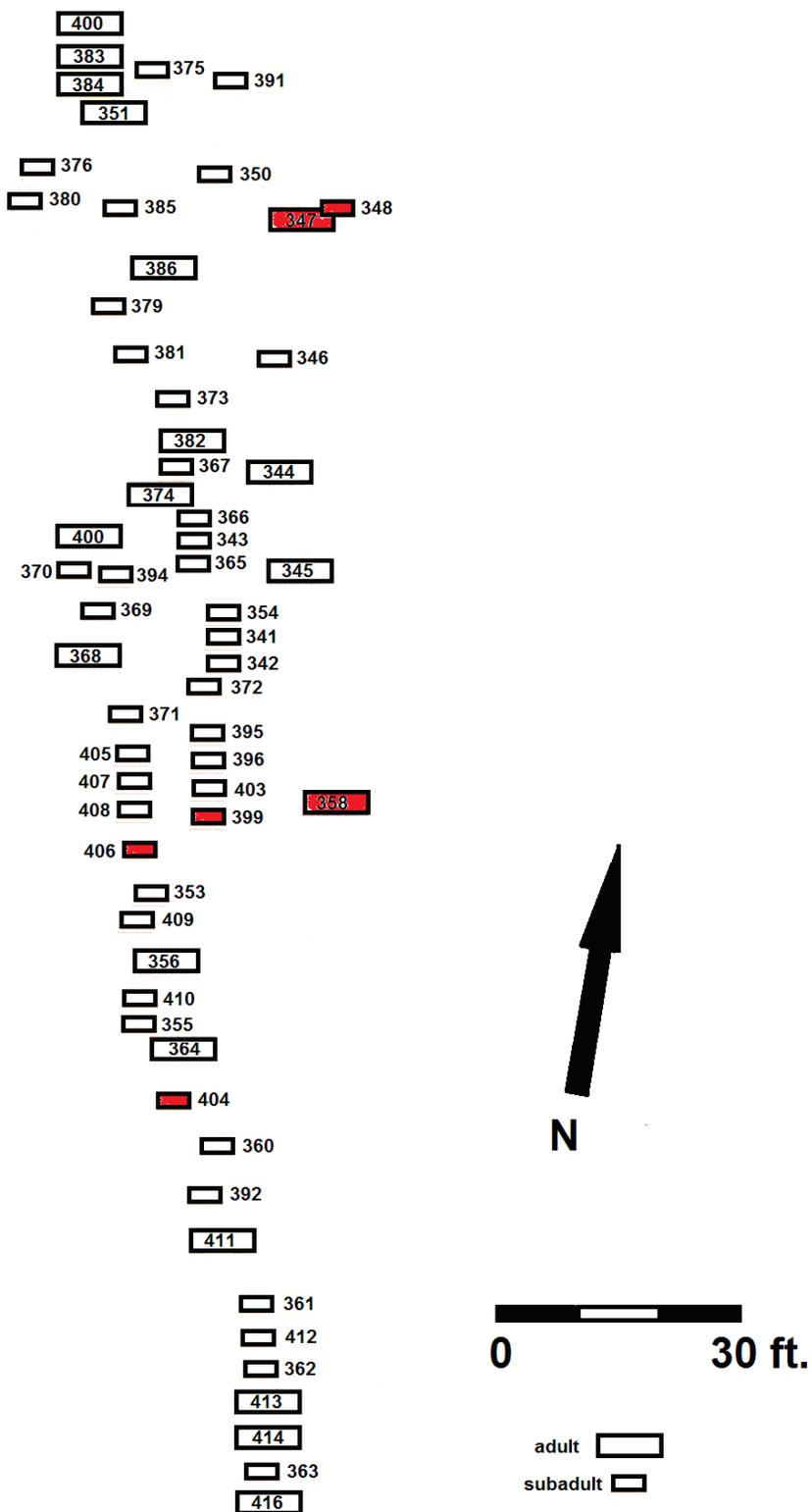


Figure 28; Donelson slave cemetery; buckle distribution.

While the history of suspenders or braces in the region is not very well developed, buckles very similar to those observed in the Donelson slave cemetery burials were found in excavations at the first Hermitage and at Gowen Farmstead.³² These buckles were designed to catch fabric on a double-toothed section as part of a pair of suspenders or braces. In 1822, Albert Thurston of London invented the modern type of suspender or brace. The buckle became almost universal during the mid nineteenth century due to the high cut of trousers, making waist belts impractical. In 1871, Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) received the first of three patents for suspenders.

The suggested date range for buckles from the First Hermitage is no earlier than about 1805 to after the Civil War. Three similar brass toothed buckles excavated at Gowen Farmstead bore patent stamps; 1855, 1860, and 1862.³³ The author found six buckles in five of the burials at the Donelson slave cemetery. These included brass types (Figure 29 and 31) and iron types (Figure 30). The date range is probably no earlier than the 1850s until about 1870. Only a single burial (Burial 347) contained two of these buckles and five contained only a single buckle.

³² Smith, *First Hermitage*, 203, Figure 38d; Weaver, et al, 242, Figure 69b.

³³ Weaver, et al, 247.



Figure 29. Donelson slave cemetery (Burial 347); Sponder or brace buckle.



Figure 30. Donelson slave cemetery (Burial 348); Sponder or brace buckle.



Figure 31. Donelson slave cemetery (Burial 358); Suspendor or brace buckle.

Buttons were observed in 31 of the 60 excavated burials (Figure 32) at the Donelson slave cemetery. They included 105 punched/drilled four and five hole bone buttons, 76 metal four-hole buttons, 59 porcelain or glass “Prosser” buttons, and 27 punched/drilled shell buttons. Bone buttons from the burials included single-hole, four-hole, and five-hole types generally varying in diameter from $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch (Figures 34, 35, 38). Metal buttons were exclusively an iron four-hole type (Figure 33, 38). Porcelain buttons included two, three, and four-hole types varying from $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ inch in diameter (Figures 33-35, 38). The shell buttons include two, three, and four-hole types varying in diameter from $\frac{1}{4}$ to 1.0 inch (Figures 35, 36, 38). Most of the contexts included more than one type of button and at least one adolescent burial (Burial 404) contained a series of bone buttons and three highly decorative porcelain and metal eyed buttons (Figure 37).

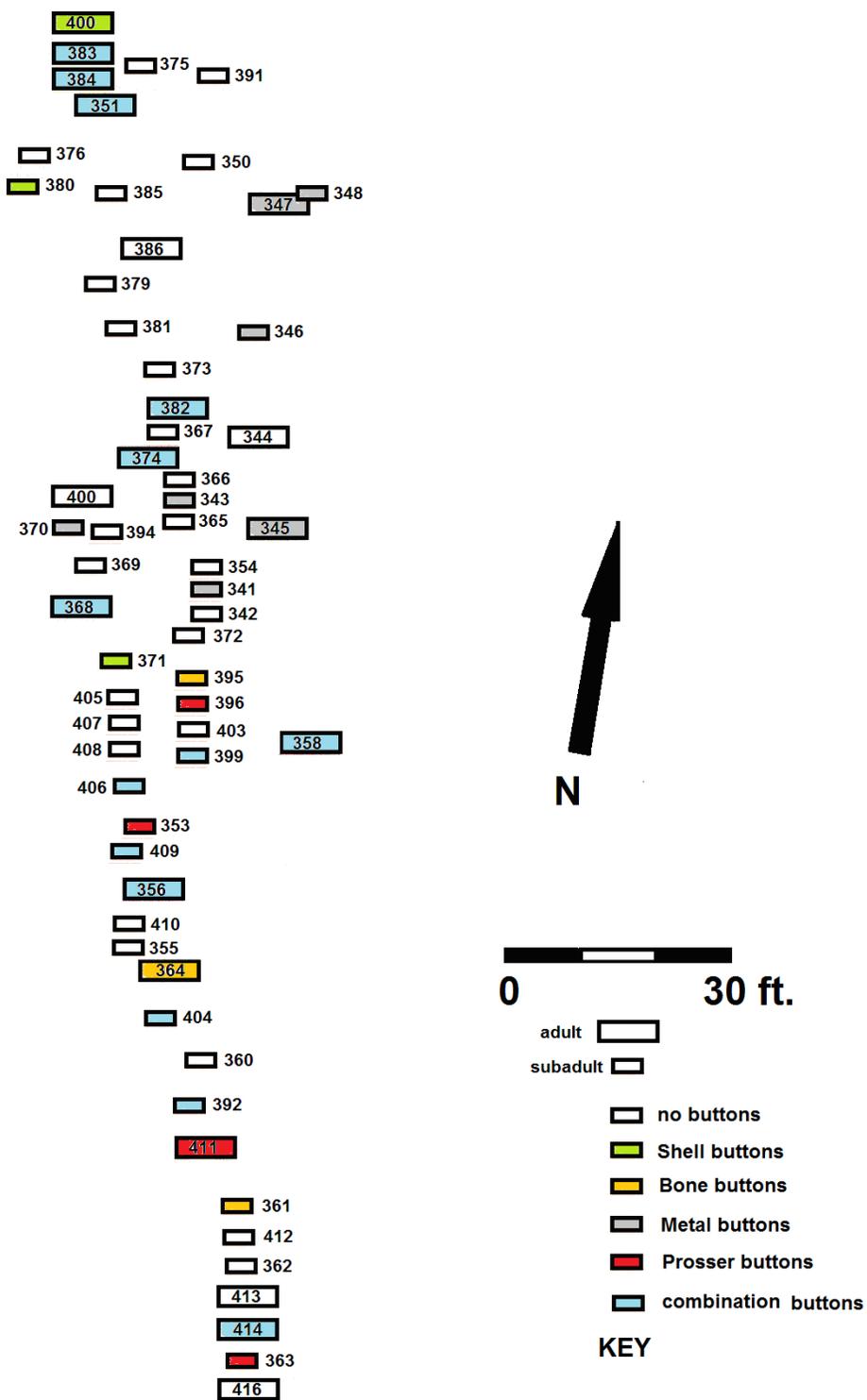


Figure 32. Donelson slave cemetery button distribution.

The author found combinations of two or three button types in fourteen of the burial contexts. The earliest, combinations of bone and shell types found in two burials (Burial 374 and 383) predate 1840. The author observed Prosser buttons in combination with either bone or shell (Burials 364, 392, 396, 404, 406, 409), or metal (Burials 399, 414) buttons postdating 1840 in eight burial contexts. Four burials contained combinations of three button types; either bone, metal, and Prosser types (Burials 351, 356, 368) or bone, shell, and Prosser buttons (Burial 358) all postdating 1840. For the most part, the buttons are comparable to types found at the First Hermitage and at Gowen Farmstead.³⁴

The author observed 94 bone buttons in 14 of the burials. The bone button types were consistent through the site, so much so that upon close inspection, all the bone and shell buttons appear to be made from the same tooling (Figures 34, 35, 38). The button types excavated from the burial contexts are very similar, and quite comparable to Types 1, 2, and 3 described from excavations at the First Hermitage, and Types 1, 5, and 7 at Gowen Farmstead.³⁵ The bone buttons date to the period of about 1800 to 1865.

The author found 27 shell buttons were observed in seven of the burials. The shell button types are also consistent, so much so that all the bone and shell buttons appear to be made from the same tooling (Figures 34 through 38). The button types excavated from the burial contexts are very similar, and quite comparable to Types 7, 8, and 9 described from excavations at the first Hermitage and Gowen Farmstead. The obvious similarity in style and tooling between the bone and shell button types observed in the Donelson slave cemetery

³⁴ Smith, *First Hermitage*, 196-201; Weaver, et al, 225-239.

³⁵ Smith, *First Hermitage*, 197; Weaver, et al, 229.

assemblage places them in a date range to comparable first Hermitage types within the period of about 1800 to 1865.

White porcelain or glass Prosser buttons were invented in England in the 1840s. They are circular with a recessed center giving them a saucer shape. This type of button was used well into the twentieth century.³⁶ Four-holed, white glass Prosser buttons were the most common button type with 59 examples (Figures 34-36, 39). The porcelain buttons exhibit stippling on their backs suggesting they are true Prosser types dating from no earlier than the 1840s and commonly available in the 1850s. This particular artifact is important because its presence indicates that a deposit generally occurred no earlier than the 1840s.

Metal buttons found within the Donelson slave burial contexts were corroded and poorly preserved examples of four hole iron buttons similar to Smith's Type 21 found at the First Hermitage site.³⁷ This type of button is generally associated with early to mid nineteenth century contexts.

³⁶ Ruth Beatrice Lamm, Lester Lora, and Helen W. Schuler, *Guidelines for Collecting China Buttons* (Eastwood, Kentucky: The National Button Society of America, 1970), 4-7.

³⁷ Smith, *First Hermitage*, 199.



Figure 33. Donelson slave cemetery (Burial 356); bone buttons (right) four-hole iron button (center), four hole porcelain/glass Prosser buttons (left).



Figure 34. Donelson slave cemetery (Burial 364); bone button backs (right), bone buttons (center), four hole porcelain/glass Prosser buttons (left).

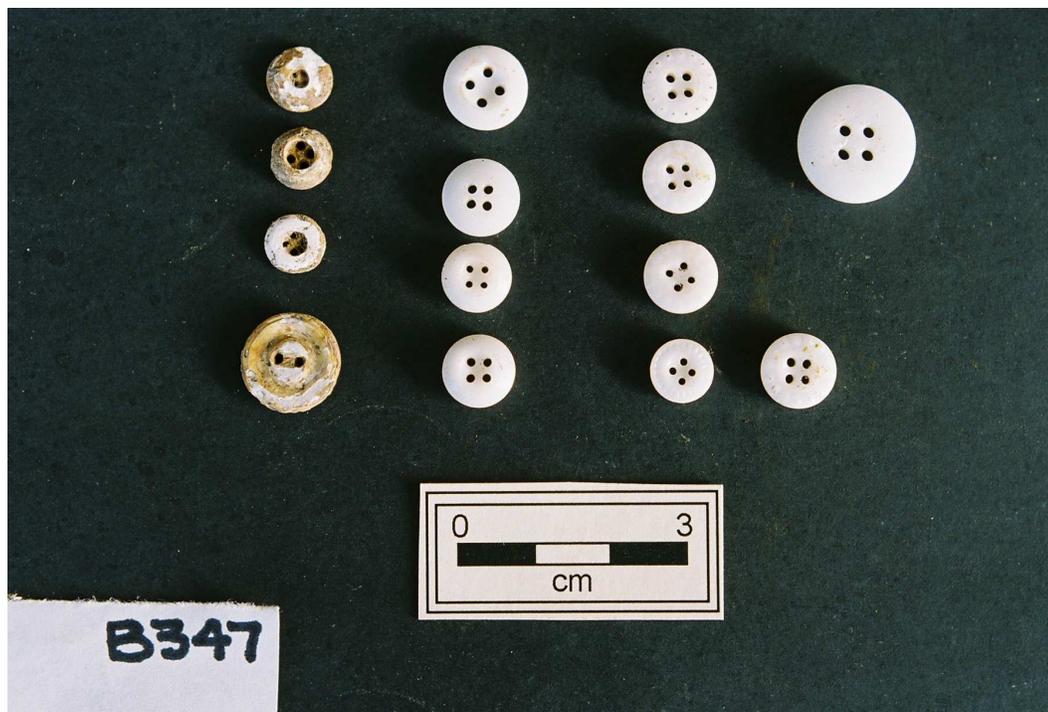


Figure 35. Donelson slave cemetery (Burial 347); porcelain/glass Prosser buttons (right and center), shell buttons (left).

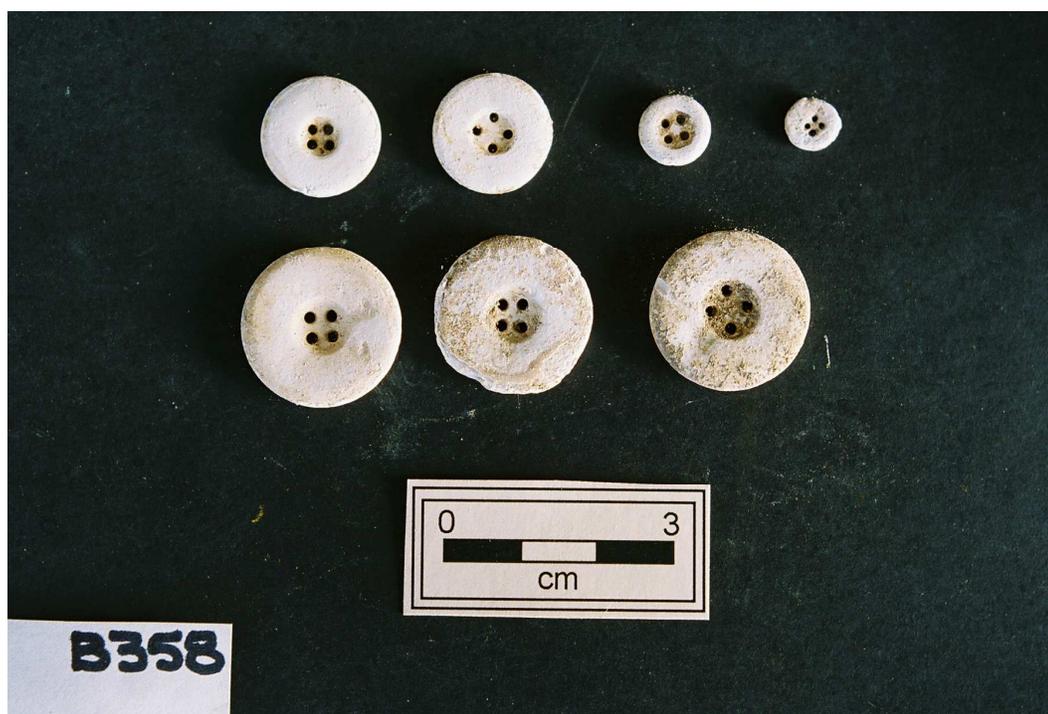


Figure 36. Donelson slave cemetery (Burial 364); shell buttons.

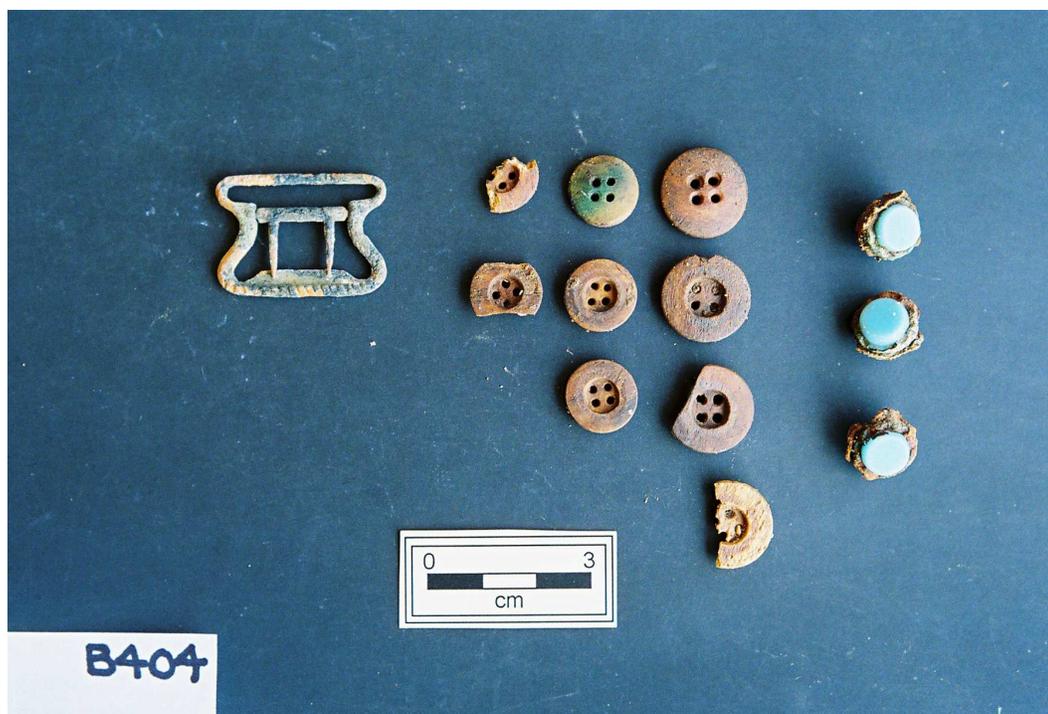


Figure 37. Donelson slave cemetery (Burial 364); buckle (left), bone buttons (center), metal/glass buttons (right).



Figure 38. Donelson slave cemetery (Burial 351); glass/porcelain Prosser buttons (left), four-hole metal buttons (center), shell buttons and solid head pin (right).

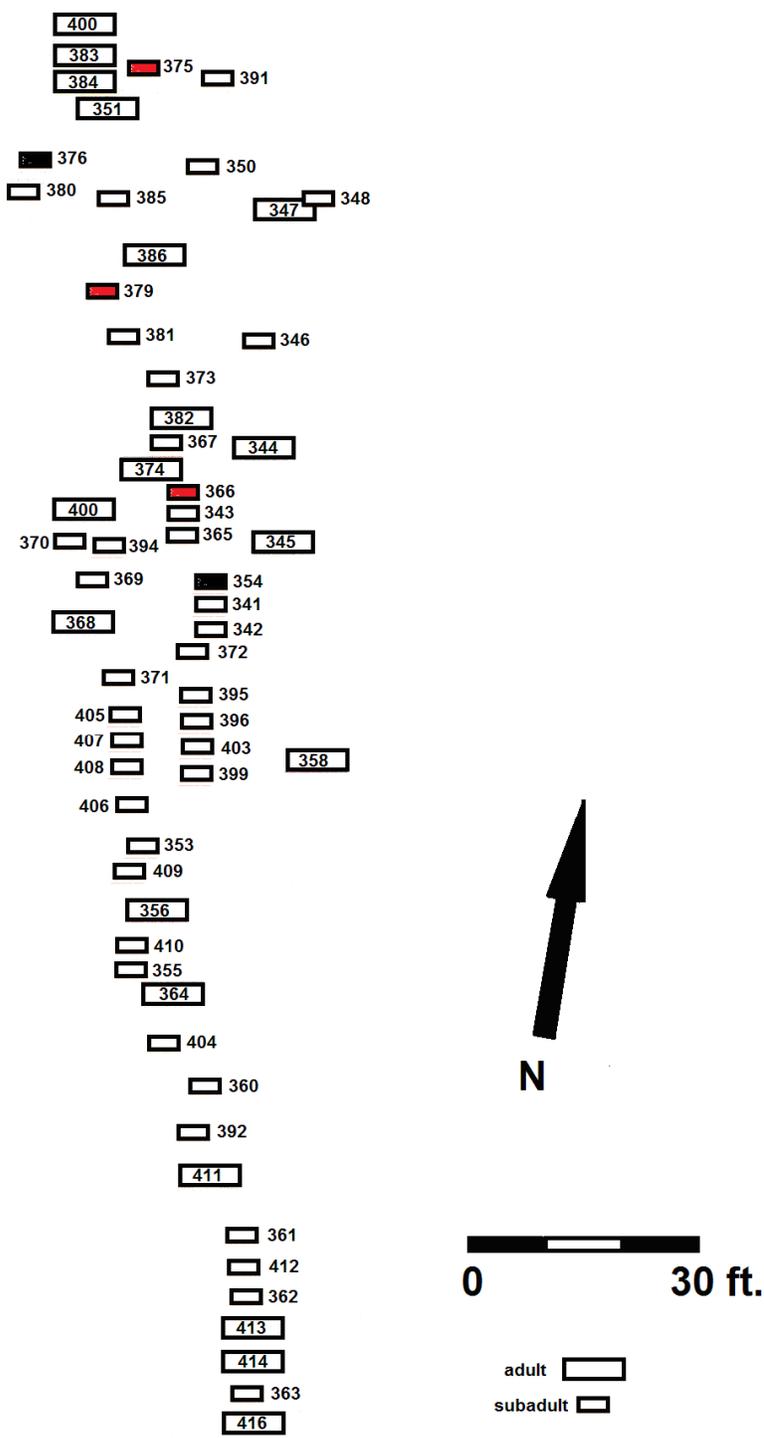


Figure 39. Donelson slave cemetery spun or wound head straight pin distribution (in red) and spun wound in combination with solid head straight pins (in black).



Figure 40. Donelson slave cemetery; wound or spun straight pins.



Figure 41. Donelson slave cemetery; solid head straight pins.

The history of straight pins in North America begins during the colonial period although one could argue that aboriginal Americans certainly utilized straight pins of bone and perhaps copper. Straight pins are not a durable artifact class generally but when well-preserved can provide a general understanding of proposed dates of interment within the cemetery. Wound or spun head pins were in use from the seventeenth until the early nineteenth century, when a patent to make solid head pins was granted in 1824.³⁸ The transition between spun or wound heads and solid heads on straight pins is generally thought to have occurred between 1830 and 1835. Given this relatively tight date range, archaeologists suggest that given the chronological sensitivity of the two manufacturing methods, straight pins provide an independent method of dating archaeological deposits.

The author observed 154 straight pins in 43 of the burials at the Donelson slave cemetery (Table 4; Figures 40 and 41). All pins were of brass, probably once coated. Straight pins collected from the burial contexts and the Donelson slave cemetery include both spun or wound, and solid head pin types, as well as many undifferentiated fragments. Only three burials contained exclusively wound/ spun head straight pins. Two burials contained a mixture of both spun head and solid head types. Thirty-eight burials contained post-1824 straight pins of the later, solid head type. Suggested date ranges for the burial contexts at the Donelson slave cemetery containing exclusively wound head pins probably occurred prior to 1835. Burial contexts containing combinations of spun and solid head pins probably occurred close to 1830-1835 or slightly after 1835. Those containing solid head pins definitively occurred after about 1835.

³⁸ Weaver et al, 245; Noel Hume, 254.

A single burial contained a highly fragmented example of a safety pin. Burial 361 was an infant burial within a small hexagonal coffin. The fragments appeared to have been part of a single strand of brass wire, twisted into shape and plated. The fragments appeared consistent with safety pin types found at the First Hermitage. This type of pin was not invented until around 1857.³⁹

Artifacts associated with the personal group usually represent both functional and ornamental items such as pocket knives, musical instruments, jewelry, watches, coins, keys, and eyeglasses. The author collected 14 items from seven burials. These items are not very diagnostic and include very thin and poorly preserved brass or alloy rings, as well as at least one cloth-covered ring. Missing most of its shank, an unusual brass or copper pin in the form of a fly came from an adult male grave, Burial 348 (Figure 42).



Figure 42. Donelson slave cemetery (Burial 348); fly pin.

³⁹ Smith, *First Hermitage*, 209; Noel-Hume, 255.

Table 5. Donelson slave cemetery; TPQ/TAQ date ranges synthesized from material culture analysis.

Burial #	Age/Gender	TPQ	TAQ		Burial #	Age/Gender	TPQ	TAQ	
341	child	1835*	1860	solid head pins*	375	infant	1820	1835*	spun pins*
342	child	1835*	1860	solid head pins*	376	fetal/infant	1835*	1860	spun and solid pins*
343	fetal/infant	1835*	1860	solid head pins*	379	infant	1820	1835*	spun pins*
344	mature female	1820*	1830	pearlware bowl*	380	fetal/infant	1835*	1860	solid head pins*
345	adult female	1835*	1860	solid head pins*	381	infant	1835*	1860	solid head pins*
346	child	1835*	1860	solid head pins*	382	adult female	1840*	1860	Prosser buttons*
347	adult male	1820	1860	cut nails	383	adult male	1835*	1860	solid head pins*
348	adult female	1835*	1860	solid head pins*	384	mature male	1820	1860	cut nails
350	child	1820	1860	cut nails	385	adult female	1835*	1860	solid head pins*
351	adult male	1840*	1860	Prosser buttons*	386	adult male	1820	1860	cut nails
353	fetal/infant	1840*	1860	Prosser buttons*	391	infant	1820	1860	cut nails / faceted glass beads*
354	fetal/infant	1835*	1860	spun and solid pins*	392	child	1840*	1860	Prosser buttons*
355	infant	1835*	1860	solid head pins*	394	fetal	1820	1860	cut nails
356	adult male	1840*	1860	Prosser buttons*	395	child	1835*	1860	solid head pins*
358	adult male	1840*	1860	Prosser buttons*	396	child	1840*	1860	Prosser buttons*
360	fetal/infant	1820	1860	cut nails	399	child	1860*	1880	white metal lid screws*
361	fetal/infant	1857*	1860	safety pin*	400	adult female	1820	1860	cut nails
362	fetal/infant	1820	1860	cut nails	403	infant	1835*	1860	solid head pins*
363	child	1840*	1860	Prosser buttons*	404	*child	1820	1860	cut nails
364	adult	1840*	1860	Prosser buttons*	405	*infant	1835*	1860	solid head pins*
365	fetal/infant	1835*	1860	solid head pins*	406	*child	1840*	1860	Prosser buttons*
366	infant	1820	1835*	spun pins*	407	*infant/child	1820	1860	cut nails
367	fetal/infant	1835*	1860	solid head pins*	408	*child	1820	1860	cut nails
368	mature male	1840*	1860	Prosser buttons*	409	child	1840*	1860	Prosser buttons*
369	infant	1820	1860	cut nails	410	child	1820	1860	cut nails
370	infant	1820	1860	cut nails	411	adult male	1840*	1860	Prosser buttons*
371	infant	1820	1860	cut nails	412	*infant	1820	1860	cut nails
372	fetal/infant	1835*	1860	solid head pins*	413	*adult	1820	1860	cut nails
373	infant	1835*	1860	solid head pins*	414	adult	1860*	1880	rosettes*
374	adult female	1820	1860	cut nails	416	adult	1860*	1880	rosettes*

As documented in the preceding material culture analysis, examining the material culture contents of the African-American burials in the Donelson slave cemetery in comparison with archaeological assemblages collected from other professionally excavated historic sites in the region allowed the author to identify a general date range of about 1820 to as late as 1870 for the burials. No evidence was found to indicate that any burial occurred prior to about 1815 or after about 1870. The few older items observed within the contexts that could date to the late eighteenth century were probably heir-loomed as they were found in combination with other items dating no earlier than the 1820s. The absence or presence of three primary types of diagnostic items (nails, straight pins, and buttons) in the burial contexts also allowed the author to further define three significant periods of burial within that broader date range; early nineteenth century (ca. 1815-1835), mid-nineteenth century (ca. 1835-1860), and late nineteenth century (ca. 1860 – 1870), each period inferred by distinctive patterns of diagnostic material culture inclusions.

CHAPTER V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Historical archaeological investigations at the Donelson slave cemetery produced significant information regarding the mortuary and material culture patterning of enslaved African-Americans generally dating from about ca. 1820 or slightly earlier to as late as the 1870s. The Donelson slave cemetery is typical of a rural plantation burial ground and its patterning should prove invaluable in comparison with other early rural plantation cemeteries of the region.

Diachronically, analysis of the mortuary and material culture patterning from the Donelson slave cemetery reveal some clear temporal trends (Table 5). The patterns within the cemetery generally represent approximately 50 years of use between about 1820 and 1870, the majority under slavery. The burials represent the archaeological expression of social and economic trends associated with an enslaved African American community on a cotton plantation of the early to mid nineteenth century. The mortuary patterning should prove typical of cemeteries used by rural black enslaved populations before emancipation.

Poor health and high infant mortality were rampant among the slaves. Other than architectural items associated with coffin construction, clothing, or personal items, little material investment was made in the deceased. The dominant functional artifact classes were nails (n=2011), buttons (n=269), straight pins (n=154), and beads (n=446) accounting for 98% of the assemblage (2880 of 2931 artifacts). It is very clear that little material investment was included in the graves beyond their coffins and burial clothes.

The biological and archaeological evidence suggests the excavated burials contained the skeletal remains of enslaved persons of African ancestry, some with identifiers suggesting Native American admixture. The mortality patterns indicate the group obviously suffered from elevated infant and child mortality rates as the majority were between the ages of birth to ten years old. Four died between ten and twenty-five years old, an indication that if an individual survived childhood they were likely to survive into later years. Only fifteen were adults beyond 25 years old; five of these were between 25 and 35 years of age, six between 35 and 50 years of age, and four were of individuals beyond 50 years, what could be considered old age.

Simply based upon the absence of wrought nails and the presence of machine headed cut nails in all but four of the burials, a general range of use proposed for the Donelson slave cemetery is between about 1815 and 1870. The absence of wrought nails, the absence of wire nails, and ornate coffin hardware assemblages support this range. If previous research by Weaver (1993) and by Orser (1987) is correct, indicating that sites containing exclusively cut nails will predate 1855, it is not unreasonable to propose a similar range for this type of artifact in the burial contexts at the Donelson slave cemetery.¹

Other diagnostic materials analyzed in the assemblage from the Donelson slave burials provide evidence for several specific significant periods of use: early nineteenth century (ca. 1815-1835), mid-nineteenth century (ca. 1835-1860), and late nineteenth century

¹ Guy G. Weaver, Jeffrey L. Holland, Patrick H. Garrow, and Martin B. Reinbold, *The Gowen Farmstead: Archaeological Data Recovery at Site 40DV401 (Area D), Davidson County, Tennessee* (Memphis: Garrow & Associates Inc., 1993), 211; Charles E. Orser Jr., Annette M. Nekola, and James L. Roark. *Exploring the Rustic Life: Multidisciplinary Research at Millwood Plantation, A Large Plantation in Abbeville County, South Carolina and Ebert County, Georgia* (Chicago: Mid-American Research Center, Loyola University, 1987), 549-58.

(ca. 1860 – 1870), each of these periods inferred by distinctive patterns of diagnostic material culture inclusions.

The earliest nineteenth century mortuary patterns are associated with a small cluster of sub-adult burials in the northern end of the cemetery. These burials contained exclusively spun head straight pins generally dating to the period between about 1820 and 1835 in combination with machine headed cut nails. This range may be earlier depending upon the actual availability of this nail type in the region. An adult female burial in a hexagonal coffin (Burial 344) also belongs to this period. It contained a hand -painted underglaze pearlware bowl in combination with machine headed cut nails. A child buried in a rectangular coffin (Burial 391) contained materials from this period in the form of faceted glass beads diagnostic of the 1790s to about 1830. Unfortunately, no preservation of the fastener types used in this burial was observed although it is not unreasonable to assume they were similar to those found with the majority of the other burials. The last burials of this period contained combinations of spun and solid head straight pins, and machine headed cut nails generally dating after about 1835.

The mid-nineteenth century period was the heaviest use of the Donelson slave cemetery, represented by burials containing exclusively solid head straight pins in combination with machine headed cut nails and Prosser buttons, generally dating between about 1840 and 1870.

The last period of use for the cemetery was a time of dwindling usage as represented by the presence of white metal lid screws and/or rosettes in only four burials (Burial 351, 399, 414, and 416). These burials contained knurled, slotted-head coffin lid screw types generally thought to originate as early as the 1860s and in popular use by the 1870s. In

addition, two burials contained fragmented rosettes, foil-thin decorations used to enhance the exterior of the wooden coffin.

Although four burials contained no nails, virtually all of the graves contained machine headed, cut nails, generally representing the period of about 1820 to 1860. None of the excavated burials contained wrought nails which would have indicated pre-1820 burial dates for the burials. Neither did the excavated burials contain ornate coffin hardware assemblages, additional evidence to support early to mid-nineteenth century burial dates. Only two burial contexts contained coffin hardware other than nails, indicating the cemetery probably fell quickly into disuse following Emancipation. The evidence suggests that the cemetery was abandoned rather quickly by the 1870s.

The material culture analysis supports evidence that the Donelson slave burials were most likely associated with slaves at the Mansion, the Donelson farm occupied between about 1810 and 1837 by Captain John Donelson and subdivided before his death in 1830 to provide adjoining farms for sons, William and Stockley Donelson. Although it is currently unclear how Donelson divided his property in slaves between his heirs, use of the cemetery by the enslaved community continued after the subdivision of the farm, most likely by the slaves of both William and Stockley.

During the early settlement period of the region, the frontier conditions imposed upon the family and slaves during Native American hostilities would have precluded any attempt at developing a separate slave quarter isolated from the comparative safety of Donelson's fortified station. The ranges of use represented by the diagnostic materials included with the Donelson slave burials suggest the cemetery and associated slave quarter were probably developed at about the same time as the Mansion, the first Donelson home built after Captain

Donelson's station. There is little evidence that any of the excavated burials occurred any earlier than about 1810, the construction date generally given for construction of the Mansion. The absence of wrought nails and other earlier diagnostic artifacts within the burial assemblage support this conclusion.

Historically, the Donelson slave cemetery generally mirrors the period of use for the white Donelson Cemetery relocated to Hermitage Church from the Donelson farm in the 1940s. The earliest reputed burial in that cemetery was about 1803, although the earliest dated gravemarker from that cemetery was of Severn Donelson dated 1818.

In conclusion, the mortuary patterns documented at the Donelson slave cemetery are regionally significant when viewed as a model for understanding the formation, use, and abandonment of slave cemeteries on early nineteenth century farms and plantations of Middle Tennessee. Similar mortuary patterns can be predicted on other plantations and large farms within the region. It is hoped that the comparative patterns discussed in this thesis can be used to help historians and archaeologists in future studies of slavery and its associated burial practices in the Cumberland region.

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