

INTERPRETING GRASSMERE'S ENSLAVED COMMUNITY:
ARCHAEOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO PUBLIC HISTORY
AT THE NASHVILLE ZOO

by
Kate Sproul

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Thesis Committee:
Dr. Kathryn Sikes, Chair
Dr. Lisa Pruitt
Dr. Shannon Hodge

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the antebellum site of Grassmere, the house built in 1810 by people enslaved by the Dunn family on land currently housing the Nashville Zoo. It presents historical research into Grassmere's enslaved community gleaned from the wills, deeds, letters, and diaries of the Dunns and their descendants, and it compares this documentary evidence to previously existing data acquired from a separate 2014 archaeological excavation of a graveyard for the enslaved population. This project concludes by considering methods of interpreting slavery at other public sites to determine which are most suitable for this site.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

"Those of us who produce knowledge about other people hold a powerful and privileged position,"¹ states Archaeologist Janet D. Spector Her words apply equally to archaeologists, historians, and public historians who study, present, write about, and exhibit the past. Yet these scholars have a mixed record of presenting knowledge of other cultures, especially minorities, objectively. Like the Eastern Dakota tribe about whom Spector studied and wrote, enslaved African Americans left few of their own written records. They were underrepresented, and often described in a disparaging way, in the writings of Euro-Americans. Their representation in books and exhibits was shown from a Eurocentric point of view which had little understanding of or compassion for their lives or culture. Over the past several decades, archaeologists, historians, and public historians have been refining their research questions about the history of enslaved people, expanding their knowledge of the African Diaspora and the African traditions that survived in America, and writing about and interpreting the lives of enslaved African Americans in a new and more balanced way. While scholars may never agree on the best way to study, represent, and interpret the lives of enslaved people, this thesis examines the changes in these fields over the past several decades and applies them to interpretation at southern plantation museums and historic properties, including the antebellum site of Grassmere in Nashville, Tennessee.

¹ Janet D. Spector, *What This Awe Means: Feminist Archaeology at a Wahpeton Dakota Village* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1993), 13.

Public historians doing research on southern plantations have traditionally relied on historical documents to tell the stories of the white residents who used to live there, while ignoring the lives of the enslaved people who did the work that made the lives of the white residents possible.² Since the late 1980s, public historians at many historic sites have been working to enhance the interpretation of free and enslaved Africans and African Americans. They have done this by improving exhibit graphics, making general tours more inclusive, and by conducting tours devoted to African American life at that site.³ There are few written records about antebellum black lives, family relationships, or jobs as compared with those of the white families. As Patricia Samford notes, “Because only a handful of the millions of enslaved African Americans were able to put their stories on paper, the narratives of the rest have to be gleaned from other sources.”⁴ Archaeological findings of historical archaeologists add to the data that historians do find in the written record.⁵ Bringing the information from these sources together and adding it

² Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small, as well as James Horton and Lois Horton, each discuss this in their respective books. Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small, *Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2002); James Horton and Lois Horton, editors, *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* (NY: The New Press, 2006).

³ David Amsden, "Building the First Slavery Museum in America," *The New York Times Magazine* (February 26, 2015): 1-14; Mark D. Bograd and Theresa A. Singleton, "The Interpretation of Slavery: Mount Vernon, Monticello, and Colonial Williamsburg," in *Presenting Archaeology to the Public: Digging for Truths*, ed. by John H. Jameson, Jr. (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1997), 192-204; Courtney Hobson, Exhibit Review of *The Choice: Risking Your Life for Freedom, Sotterley Plantation, Maryland*, by Jeanne Pirtle, *The Public Historian* 35, no. 3 (August, 2013): 122-126; Barbara J. Heath, "Archaeology and Interpretation at Monticello and Poplar Forest," in *Presenting Archaeology to the Public: Digging for Truths*, ed. by John H. Jameson, Jr. (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1997), 177-191; Larry McKee, "The Archaeological Study of Slavery and Plantation Life in Tennessee," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (fall 2000): 188-203; James C. Rees, "Looking Back, Moving Forward: The Changing Interpretation of Slave Life on the Mount Vernon Estate," in *Slavery at the Home of George Washington* ed by Philip J. Schwarz (Mount Vernon, VA: The Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, 2001), 158-179.

⁴ Patricia Samford, *Subfloor Pits and the Archaeology of Slavery in Colonial Virginia* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007), 1.

⁵ Theresa A. Singleton, "The Archaeology of the Plantation South: A Review of Approaches and Goals," *Historical Archaeology* 24, no. 4 (1990): 70; Leland Ferguson, *Uncommon Ground: Archaeology and Early African America, 1650-1880*, (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 1992); Barbara J. Heath,

to the interpretation at historic sites presents a broader picture of all of the people who lived there. Recent excavations of an African American burial ground at historic Grassmere are allowing public historians to combine archaeological evidence with that found in the historical documents to present a more complete picture of the people who were enslaved there.

Grassmere is a historic house on the grounds of the Nashville Zoo, built in 1810 by enslaved laborers owned by Michael and Elizabeth Dunn. While most of the zoo's staff focuses on taking care of the animals, Historic Site Manager Tori Mason and Education Director Chad Fifer are determined to enhance their interpretation of the enslaved African Americans who used to live and work there. By combining information from an archaeological excavation of a graveyard for Grassmere's enslaved population with details gleaned from the primary historical record, they can provide a more complete interpretation than they can by using either line of evidence independently. Public records examined for this thesis demonstrate that from 1812-1860 the enslaved population fluctuated between nine and thirty-three people.⁶ It is possible that Michael Dunn brought

Hidden Lives: The Archaeology of Slave Life at Thomas Jefferson's Poplar Forest, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999); Barbara J. Little, *Historical Archaeology: Why the Past Matters*, (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2007); Patricia M. Samford, *Subfloor Pits and the Archaeology of Slavery in Colonial Virginia* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2007); Brian W. Thomas, "Power and Community: The Archaeology of Slavery at the Hermitage Plantation," *American Antiquity* 63, no. 4 (Oct., 1998): 531-551; Laurie A. Wilkie, *Creating Freedom: Material Culture and African American Identity at Oakley Plantation, Louisiana, 1840-1950*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).

⁶ *Early Tax Lists of Tennessee, 1783-1895*, Davidson County, microfilm roll #3, 12 rolls, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN; "1829 Tax List, Davidson County, TN," *Early Tax Lists of Tennessee, 1783-1895*, microfilm, 12 rolls, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN; United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Fifth Census of the United States, 1830*, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1830, M19, 201 rolls; United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Sixth Census of the United States, 1840*, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1840, M704, 580 rolls; United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Seventh Census of the United States, 1850*, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1850, M432,

some of these enslaved people with him when he moved from Wytheville, VA to Nashville in the early 1800s.⁷ His grandson William Dickson Shute may have brought some enslaved people with him from Sumner County when he took ownership of Grassmere circa 1856, although the Nashville slave market was well established by then and he may have purchased people locally.⁸ I cannot determine if the African American Morton family, who worked at Grassmere through much of the 1900s, were descendants of people who had been enslaved at Grassmere. Michael Dunn's descendants lived in the house until 1985.⁹ Between the death of Michael Dunn's great-great-granddaughter Elise Croft in 1985 and the relocation of the Nashville Zoo to the site in 1997, it was the site of Grassmere Wildlife Park, which was owned and operated by the Cumberland Science Museum.¹⁰

In 1989, archaeologists from the Division of Archaeology, who were evaluating the property for its archaeological resources, discovered an unmarked cemetery fairly close to Grassmere's entrance off of Nolensville Road. When the zoo started construction

1009 rolls; United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860*, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1860, M653, 1438 rolls.

⁷ "Died," *Nashville Whig and Banner*, August 31, 1853.

⁸ William Dickson Shute obituary, undated clipping, Grassmere Shute file; Bobby Lovett, *The African-American History of Nashville, Tennessee, 1780-1930: Elites and Dilemmas* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1999), 18.

⁹ Janet Byron, "Grassmere: 'The House Where my Daddy Lived,'" *The Tennessean* July 8, 1990; Elise Croft's Journals, Grassmere Collection, Box 31, folders 1-6, Box 23, folders 1-3, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN; Davidson County Will Book #150, page 815, probated April 30, 1985, Metro Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN.

¹⁰ Davidson County, TN Deed Book # 9, page 196-197, recorded November 7, 1846, Metro Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN; Davidson County, TN Deed Book #29, page 415, recorded July 2, 1859, Metro Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN; Davidson County, TN Death Records, 1908-1959, Roll #46, Certificate #138 (William Dickson Shute), Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN; Will of Leila Shute Tigert, September 18, 1948, Grassmere Collection, Box 4, folder 55, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN; Davidson County, TN, Deed Book #3765, page 248-254, May 21, 1964, Metro Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN; Davidson County Will Book #150, page 815, probated April 30, 1985, Metro Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN; Michael Cass, "Old Graves at Nashville Zoo May Present Dilemma," *Nashville Tennessean* January 25, 2014, accessed September 2, 2015, <http://www.tennessean.com/story/news/2014/01/15/who-were-the-people-in-the-graves-/4905827>.

in 1997, per state law they did not build on top of this graveyard, as this would be considered “desecration of a place of burial.”¹¹ In 2013, after several years of record-breaking zoo attendance, a new entry plaza was needed. Zoo president Rick Schwartz discussed the issue with Tennessee’s State Archaeologist and the Nashville Metropolitan Historical Commission and then successfully petitioned the chancery court for permission to expand the ticket booth into that area. The plan to exhume the bodies and move the remains to a site near the historic house was made public record for four weeks to give any members of the descendant community the opportunity to contact zoo employees if they believed that their ancestors were buried there. No one from the descendant community came forward, and archaeological excavation began in early 2014.¹²

Travelers Research Corporation (TRC) Environmental Corporation, Nashville, a firm with a great deal of experience excavating cemeteries, was called in to respectfully exhume and reinter the remains of the twenty enslaved people in the abandoned graveyard. Their archaeological expertise provided date ranges for when the individuals were buried. Dr. Shannon Hodge, Associate Professor of anthropology at Middle Tennessee State University specializing in bioarchaeology, was responsible for studying the human remains to gather data on each individual’s age, sex, ancestry, nutritional status, and health. Dr. Tiffiny Tung, a bioarchaeologist and Associate Professor of anthropology at Vanderbilt University, is currently conducting a stable isotope analysis

¹¹ “Historic Cemeteries in the State of Tennessee: General Information, Laws, and Guidelines,” U.S. Gen Net, accessed March 9, 2017,

http://www.usgenet.org/usa/tn/county/union2/documents/tn_gov_environment_historiccemeteries.pdf

¹² Michael Cass, “Old Graves at Nashville Zoo May Present Dilemma,” Tennessee Department of Conservation, Division of Archaeology, “A Historical, Architectural, and Archaeological Assessment of the Grassmere Property, Nashville, Tennessee,” by Veronica A. Riegel (Nashville, TN), 1989.

on the remains, a technique that allows archaeologists to assess the probable region of the world where each interred individual grew up.¹³

As of this writing, the public interpretation of enslaved people at Grassmere is extremely limited. The white Dunn and Shute families left few records pertaining to their enslaved workers, and we have found no records at all from the enslaved community. When the house first opened for tours in the early 1990s, only a few southern historic houses had started interpreting the enslaved population along with the white family. The writers of the tour for Grassmere followed the common emphasis of interpretation by focusing on the slaveholding minority. The goal of this project is to use information gleaned from historical documents and data from the exhumed burials of twenty formerly enslaved people to provide Grassmere with the tools they need to make their interpretation inclusive of the majority black population who used to live there. In addition, this thesis will present comparative research into best practices in interpreting the lives of enslaved people from a variety of case studies in public history in order to propose specific recommendations for Grassmere management to consider.

My research will attempt to answer several questions: What were the names of the enslaved people who lived here? What were their family relations? Did their family members live at Grassmere, or on nearby farms, or a great distance away? Did Grassmere slaveholders try to keep families together or did they sell people with thought only to

¹³ Michael Cass, "Nashville Zoo Graves Turn up More Than Expected," *Nashville Tennessean* (May 4, 2014), accessed September 2, 2015, <http://www.tennessean.com/story/news/2014/05/04/zoo-graves-turn-anyone-expected/8705721>; Larry McKee and Hannah Guidry, "Excavation of a Mid-Nineteenth Century Cemetery at the Nashville Zoo," 30 Days of Tennessee Archaeology, Day 18, September 17, 2014, accessed September 2, 2015, <https://tennesseearchaeologycouncil.wordpress.com>; Melissa Wylie, "Historic Nashville Proud to Help Fund DNA Research of Unmarked Cemetery at Nashville Zoo," *Historic Nashville Inc. Newsletter*, June 2014, 1-2.

their economic value and not the lives of the enslaved people themselves? What job did each enslaved person hold? What was life like in the enslaved community? Did they provide some of their own food through gardening or hunting? What was their religious life like? Did they attend religious services or engage in other spiritual activities? Did they read and write? Did they get enough to eat? Did they get medical care? If so, was it provided by the slaveholding family or by a member of the enslaved community? What were their relationships like with the slaveholding family? Finally, how can the public historians at the Nashville Zoo use the answers to these questions to improve the interpretation of the lives of the enslaved people who used to live at Grassmere?

In presenting Grassmere's primary sources in the context of recent archaeological excavations, this thesis will review the historiography of slavery as well as the archaeological literature pertaining to slavery to show how the perception of slavery and those who were enslaved has changed over the last few decades. I will also review the ways that public historians have presented slavery at historic sites in the last few decades and show how some methods have worked better than others. I conclude by considering best practices for interpreting slavery, always keeping in mind that there are many different definitions of "best practices." What is recommended to work best for Grassmere may differ from what works elsewhere.

CHAPTER TWO: HISTORIOGRAPHY OF SLAVERY

Any historical interpretation of Grassmere must be informed by a thorough reading of the historiography of slavery. This literature reveals the changing attitudes of both white and African American historians to Africans, African Americans, and slaveholders and how each group contributed to today's American culture, which includes traditions brought over from Africa. A reading of this historiography must also consider lived experiences of race, including outright racism. Heather Andrea Williams notes that "The sources speak, but what we hear is filtered through our own experiences, values, beliefs, expectations, and even desires."¹ Many historians were unaware of or ignored primary documents by or about African Americans for decades after those sources became available. Other writers, who were themselves African Americans, spent decades arguing for a better understanding of African culture. The race, background, and research interests of each writer affected his/her viewpoint and thus how s/he perceived slavery. The Civil Rights Movement and the establishment of African-American Studies departments in many universities helped to make the depiction of slavery and African American history more balanced.

As early as 1933, pioneering African American historian Carter G. Woodson, founder of the *Journal of Negro History*, urged teachers to teach all of their students that Africa had advanced civilizations and that African Americans made contributions to American culture. He described in detail how Eurocentric education in the United States encouraged whites to oppress African Americans and African Americans to accept

¹ Heather Andrea Williams, *Help Me to Find My People: The African American Search for Family Lost in Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 6.

oppression as their due. He stated that, "These rewriters of history fearlessly contend that slavery was a benevolent institution; that masters loved their slaves and treated them humanely...it was a mistake to make the Negro a citizen; and the Negro must live in this country in a state of recognized inferiority."² His perception of how African Americans were treated was not understood or accepted by white historians, although African American historians agreed with and built on his work.

African American historian and civil rights activist W.E.B. DuBois was the first African American to get a Ph.D. from Harvard University, and he was one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Sixty years after the Civil War ended, DuBois set out to use history to disprove harmful stereotypes that African Americans were lazy, dishonest, ignorant, and "responsible for bad government during Reconstruction."³ DuBois chastised historians for relying on secondary sources that were written by embittered whites who had lived through the Civil War and Reconstruction instead of looking at primary documents such as laws and minutes of government meetings. He stressed that these authors were driven by their emotions and not by facts. He admonished: "If history is going to be scientific, if the record of human action is going to be set down with that accuracy and faithfulness of detail which will allow its use as a measuring rod and guidepost for the future of nations, there must be set some standards of ethics in research and interpretation."⁴ DuBois first

² Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (1933, repr., Washington, D.C.: The Associated Press, 2000), 85-86.

³ W.E.B. DuBois, "The Propaganda of History" in *W.E.B. DuBois: A Reader* ed. by David Levering Lewis (NY: Henry Holt and Company, 1995), 202.

⁴ W.E.B. DuBois, 204.

published this essay in 1935 but his work was ignored by many white historians, just as the autobiographies and narratives of formerly enslaved people would be ignored.

Anthropologist Melville Herskovits, of Eastern European descent, taught at Northwestern University and established the program of African Studies there. Instead of focusing his research on written records as DuBois urged, he looked at artifacts, folk traditions, and other aspects of African and African American society. In 1941 he wrote *The Myth of the Negro Past* to show that African culture was not lost during the Middle Passage, but rather that enslaved people brought some African traditions with them to America. Echoing W.E.B. DuBois, he chided historians for looking only at secondary sources that continued to perpetuate this myth of cultural erasure instead of going back to primary sources and studying African culture. He wanted his work to help alleviate the problem of racism in the United States. In his 1958 preface to his revised work, he stated that he had no idea that his book would be so badly received in 1941 or that events in subsequent years would lead others to study African culture, leading to a better reception of his work.⁵

As Herskovitz was revising *The Myth of the Negro Past*, white historian Kenneth M. Stampp was researching and teaching the late antebellum period, slavery, and Reconstruction at the University of California at Berkeley. He also noted that racism was prevalent in 1958 when he wrote *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South*. He stated that he had “found no convincing evidence that there are any significant differences between the innate emotional traits and intellectual capacities of Negroes and

⁵ Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past*, rev. ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), xiii-xxviii, 1-2, 292.

whites.”⁶ This statement sounds obvious today, as it has been proven by several sociological and anthropological studies,⁷ but was it was contrary to what many white historians were writing at that time when the Civil Rights Act was still a few year in the future.⁸ Like Herskovits, he set out to disprove myths about African American slavery: that whites could not perform hard labor in the fields but that Africans were uniquely suited to it, and that Africans were barbarians who needed to be enslaved by whites for their own good.⁹ He did use slave narratives as primary sources in his work, but he relied more often on the words of the white slaveholders. He also referred to slaveholders as “tragic figures,” as in his view they were caught in the system of slavery and did not know how to free themselves while maintaining their own style of living.¹⁰ Woodson and DuBois would have disagreed with this view; even though Stamppp had used some primary sources from African Americans and presented them in a slightly more positive way than many other white historians, his work showed that he had a long way to go before he began to think that that they were equal to whites. Significantly, when Stamppp renewed his copyright of the book in 1984 he did not update it to reflect how attitudes and laws had changed in the intervening twenty-six years, as Herskovits had updated his own work. Since African Americans had made great strides in gaining their civil rights during those twenty-six years this is a stunning omission.

⁶ Kenneth M. Stamppp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (1956; reprint, NY: Vintage Books, 1989), vii.

⁷ Paul A. Shackel, *New Philadelphia: An Archaeology of Race in the Heartland* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011), 78-81; Audrey Smedley, *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2007).

⁸ "Civil Rights Act," National Park Service, accessed February 4, 2017. <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/civilrights/1964-civil-rights-act.htm>

⁹ *Ibid.*, 7-11.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 424.

Eugene Genovese was an Italian American historian who, like Stamp, made some progress in seeing African Americans as contributors to society, but his biases were still evident. He argued that African Americans not only enriched American culture with the traditions that they brought with them from Africa but that they formed their own African culture in America as well. He did look at slave narratives, something that more and more historians began to do in the 1960s and 1970s, but he was still heavily biased toward the idea of paternalistic slaveholders. He did note that enslaved people learned to work within the system of paternalism and even resist it, which was ground-breaking at the time.¹¹ Interestingly, when he and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese wrote *Fatal Self-Deception: Slaveholding Paternalism in the Old South* in 2011, they still relied heavily on the primary documents of the white slaveholders, but this time they used these sources to show how the slaveholders were deceiving themselves instead of using their words to support the theory of paternalism.¹²

In the preface of the 1972 edition of *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, African American historian John W. Blassingame noted that historians like Genovese had relied on the primary documents of white slaveholders but ignored the records of the enslaved people themselves.¹³ Blassingame, former chairman of the African American studies program at Yale, was one of the first historians to make extensive use of slave narratives and the autobiographies of enslaved people to tell the story of enslaved peoples' lives. He discussed how enslaved people adopted some white

¹¹ Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (1972, reprint, NY: Vintage Books, 1976), xv, 658.

¹² Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Fatal Self-Deception: Slaveholding Paternalism in the Old South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

¹³ John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, rev. ed. (NY: Oxford University Press, 1979), xi.

cultural practices but kept some of their own, while slaveholders adopted some ideas from their enslaved people.¹⁴

Blassingame disagreed with white historian Stanley Elkins' theory that enslaved people reacted the way some prisoners of Nazi concentration camps did and became completely docile, as in the stereotype of "Sambo."¹⁵ He described many personality types that enslaved people had.¹⁶ In the preface to the 1979 edition, Blassingame noted how much he had to change due to sources that came to light in the preceding seven years, showing how enslaved people were much more assertive than previously thought and that they had held onto aspects of African culture. He added that he had several spirited discussions with other historians who wrote about African Americans. Among these were Eugene Genovese, Herbert Gutman, a professor of history who taught at the City University of New York and was the son of Jewish immigrants, African American historian Leslie Howard Owens, who wrote *This Species of Property: Slave Life and Culture in the Old South*, and John Henrik Clarke, the African American founding chairman of Black and Puerto Rican Studies at the Hunter College of the City University of New York.¹⁷ This sharing of ideas between scholars of different races is not something that Woodson or DuBois experienced, and it exemplifies how some historians were beginning to work together regardless of race. Their debates and Blassingame's further research also showed that many historians are going back to primary documents of enslaved people instead of relying solely on the words of slaveholders.

¹⁴ Ibid., 49-104.

¹⁵ Ibid., 320.

¹⁶ Ibid., 284-322.

¹⁷ Ibid., vii-x.

Herbert G. Gutman used slave narratives as well as Freedman's Bureau and census records to discuss *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (1976). He may have been encouraged to use these records during the discussions he had with other historians. He set out to refute white politician and sociologist Daniel P. Moynihan's 1965 report "The Negro Family in America: The Case for National Action" in which Moynihan stated that slavery had destroyed the African American family, and that it would never recover—an idea that had been accepted as fact by historians and laypeople alike.¹⁸ Gutman's book was a seminal work that many other authors still reference today. He changed the way historians think about the African American family. The sources he used had been available for decades, but many historians simply had not referred to them before.

White historian and professor Leon F. Litwack put slave narratives and autobiographies to good use in *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (1980) by juxtaposing the words of formerly enslaved people with those of slaveholders, showing how the two different groups of people lived on the same plantations at the same time, yet had completely different experiences and points of view about life, especially in their perceptions of the events leading up to, during, and immediately following the Civil War. It is a powerful book that describes the early years of African American freedom and the backlash they encountered from their angry former owners.¹⁹ Even though he and other historians were beginning to use primary sources from African Americans more

¹⁸ Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (NY: Pantheon Books, 1976), xvii.

¹⁹ Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (NY: Vintage Books, 1980), xii-xiv.

often in their work, African and African American history were still not being taught as though they were equal to European history.

A decade later Molefi Kete Asante did not find this educational dilemma much improved. In 1991 Asante, an African American professor of history in the African American Studies Department at Temple University, built on the work Carter G. Woodson had started almost sixty years before. Asante advocated an Afrocentric education in which students would learn everything from an African perspective. He argued that teaching slavery, the Middle Passage, segregation, Jim Crow laws, the Civil Rights Movement, and Supreme Court cases from the African American point of view showed their agency and resistance as well as what they survived, endured, and overcame. He also stated that using primary documents of African Americans would let their voices be heard.²⁰ Even though historians had begun using African American primary documents regularly by this time, this habit had not filtered down to educators, and the historians who were looking at these documents were only looking for the male experience and perspective.

The male historians who are cited above focus on the male experience of slavery, treating women perfunctorily if at all. In 1985 African American Deborah Gray White, a professor of history at Rutgers University, broke new ground with *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* by concentrating on the lives of enslaved women. She destroys the myths of Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire that were concocted by whites to obscure the real lives of enslaved women: Mammy, the capable and trustworthy

²⁰ Molefi Kete Asante, "The Afrocentric Idea in Education," *The Journal of Negro Education* 60, no. 2 (spring, 1991): 170-180.

enslaved woman who took care of the children, ran the household, and did all of the domestic work; Jezebel, who was sexually promiscuous and wanted to have sexual relations with white men; and Sapphire, whose domineering personality emasculated white men. White also emphasizes that women were more likely to be sexually exploited or abused than men, and when they resisted their slaveholders they had to be very careful how they did so to avoid being raped. Women were less likely to be allowed to leave the plantation, meaning that they had fewer contacts in the surrounding community and less knowledge of the local area, making women less likely than men to run away. Women who were pregnant or had to nurse and care for their young children were even less likely to run away. White shows that enslaved women simply had different experiences than enslaved men did.²¹ Darlene Clark Hine comments that “Deborah Gray White’s work invigorated the study of slavery and influenced and helped to shape much of the new scholarship of the present generation.”²² She goes on to note many female historians who were influenced by this innovative book.

Stephanie Camp, who was also African American and was a professor of history at the University of Washington until her death in 2014, is one of the female historians who builds on White’s work. In *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (1998) she describes in greater detail how women used the area around the plantation for their own uses, not just the ways their owners wanted them to. They also reclaimed their bodies and their domestic spaces from their

²¹ Deborah Gray White, *Ar’n’t I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, rev ed. (1999; NY: W.W. Norton & Company), 29-61, 70-76, 86, 176.

²² Darlene Clark Hine, “Ar’n’t I a Woman Female Slaves in the Plantation South—Twenty Years After,” *The Journal of African American History* 92, no 1 (winter 2007): 13.

slaveholders through acts of resistance.²³ She was one of many historians who expanded our knowledge of slavery of African American women. Each of these women uses slave narratives and other documents that have been available for decades, but now they are asking different questions.

White historian Walter Johnson, a professor of history in the African and African American Studies Department at Harvard University, also utilizes old sources in a new way. He shows how racism allowed whites to commodify African Americans in *Soul by Soul: Life inside the Antebellum Slave Market*. In a remarkable book, he shows the slave market from the differing perspectives of the enslaved people, the white buyers, and the white slave traders and how their views about the same transactions and events differed in startling ways. His use of slave narratives, autobiographies of formerly enslaved people, the letters and diaries of white slaveholders, the business records of the traders, and the court cases regarding slave sales give voices to these disparate people, especially enslaved people. Although all of these records had been available for decades, Johnson is the first author to combine them to show the multiple perspectives of those at the slave market. While much credit must be given to him, his work also exemplifies how much the attitude of historians and society toward the history of enslaved people and African Americans had changed over the previous decades.²⁴ Historians were writing about slavery in a way that Woodson and DuBois rarely saw in their own time.

²³ Stephanie M. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 2-9.

²⁴ Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999), 1-19.

By 2005, African American historian James Oliver Horton and his wife, white historian Lois E. Horton, were able to assert “African slaves were not simply passive laborers. They brought many new cultures to America, and their religion, music, language, values, and skills helped shape America and its unique blended culture.”²⁵ This was no longer a new idea that needed to be proven to American society but one that many historians had studied, developed, thought about, and written about for decades. These two professors of history go on to note that Alex Haley’s 1976 book and 1977 TV series “Roots” inspired many African Americans who were not historians to go out and research their own family histories.²⁶ Dorothy Spruill Redford, now the curator of Somerset Plantation where her ancestors were enslaved, was one of the people inspired by Haley. She was a social worker at the time she saw the program and had no idea where her research in archives, or her travels in life, would take her.²⁷ African American history and genealogy, including the ordeal of slavery, became something that many African Americans became increasingly interested in.

Slavery in Tennessee

The nature of slavery in Tennessee depended greatly on the geography. East Tennessee has poor soil, and people there tended to have small farms. Few of them owned enslaved people, and those who did typically owned only five or less.

²⁵ James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *Slavery and the Making of America* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 7.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 10.

²⁷ Dorothy Spruill Redford, with Michael D’Orso, *Somerset Homecoming: Recovering a Lost Heritage* (NY: Doubleday, 1988), 32.

EuroAmericans and African Americans in this region tended to work side by side, eat together, and often shared the same lodging. West Tennessee most closely approximated the lower South, with its fertile flat land. The few large cotton plantations in the state were located here, and plantation owners also owned large numbers of enslaved people. The slaveholders who owned the greatest number of people each lived in this part of the state.²⁸

Middle Tennessee, where Nashville and Grassmere are located, has fertile land but a climate that is not conducive to large cotton plantations. Most slaveholders here owned between five and twenty people. Enslaved communities here grew a mix of crops which included cotton, tobacco, corn, wheat, oats, timothy, clover, and rye. They cared for a large number of beef cattle, dairy cattle, horses, donkeys, mules, and hogs as well. As an unidentified man formerly enslaved in Nashville describes it, “We used to raise oats, corn, things like that. Get up at daybreak, went out to feed the stock, and come in, eat breakfast, and then out to the field.” Middle Tennessee exported a good deal of the food that they raised to the large monocrop plantations in the lower South.²⁹

There was a greater number of slaveholders here than in any other part of the state. Despite this, no one owned as many people as the plantation owners in West Tennessee and there were many people in Middle Tennessee who did not own enslaved people at all. In contrast to East Tennessee, enslaved people who lived on the larger

²⁸ Stephen V. Ash, *Middle Tennessee Society Transformed 1860-1870: War and Peace in the Upper South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 9, 53; Wilma Dykeman, *Tennessee: A History* (Newport, TN: Wakestone Books, 1993), 78-80; Chase C. Mooney, *Slavery in Tennessee* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1957), 87-88.

²⁹ Ash, 1-2, 9-10, 15-16, 18; Name unknown, “I Expect I am the Oldest Man in Nashville,” in *Mighty Rough Times, I Tell You*, ed. Andrea Sutcliffe (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, 2000), 45.

farms of Middle Tennessee or the plantations of West Tennessee worked, ate, and lived separately from their slaveholders. Laws dictated the behavior of enslaved people as well as that of their owners in myriad situations.³⁰

Many laws regulated the rights and responsibilities of enslaved people and their slaveholders. These laws came from both North Carolina, out of which Tennessee was created, and from the Tennessee government itself. As sheriff of Davidson County ca. 1808-1817, Michael Dunn was responsible for enforcing these laws.³¹ The laws changed over time, becoming more restrictive as the region changed from a frontier to a settled area and as fears of an uprising of enslaved people increased. Enslaved people in Tennessee did have more rights than enslaved people in some states in the lower South. For example, Tennessee was one of only five states in which enslaved people were entitled to trial by jury. They could be called on to give testimony if an enslaved person was on trial, although they could not testify against a white person. As many enslaved people were unable to write, court records are one source historians can search to find an enslaved person's own words. An accused enslaved person was allowed to get out on bail as long as s/he was not charged with a capital offense. This last law also applied to white people. The slaveholder was responsible for providing his enslaved people with food, clothing, and shelter, although the exact nature of these was not specified. The law did not prohibit enslaved people from receiving an education and there were some schools for African Americans, including enslaved people, in Nashville. Each individual slaveholder decided which—if any—of his enslaved people he would allow to attend

³⁰ Ash, 15-16, 53-54, 56; Dykeman, 79; Mooney, 87-88.

³¹ "Sheriffs of Davison County," last updated August 22, 2005, accessed December 7, 2006, <http://www.nashville-sheriffs-.net/sheriffs-chron.htm>

school or be taught at home. Some enslaved people learned how to read and write without their slaveholder's permission, showing their desire for a better life and their commitment to achieving it. Enslaved people who pursued an education in defiance of their slaveholders knew that literacy was a form of power that could be used to record their experiences, as well as to learn the law and how to defend their rights.³² Some enslaved people felt that getting an education was worth the risk of getting caught.

Any act of defiance, and sometimes no reason at all, could result in an enslaved person being punished by a slaveholder. The laws regarding punishment were written from the viewpoint of the slaveholder. For example, the slaveholder was not allowed to kill or maim any of his enslaved people while physically punishing them. If an enslaved person was resisting or rebelling and the slaveholder killed him, however, the death was not considered to be a crime. If someone else killed one of his enslaved people he was entitled to be paid for the value of that person, but this was considered to be a property crime rather than a murder. Because slaveholders thought of enslaved people as property, stealing an enslaved person or even transporting him or her out of town without a pass was punishable by jail time and a fine.³³ None of these laws take into account the fact that the enslaved people in these situations were the ones who were beaten, maimed, killed, or taken—their legal status as property replaced their status as people protected by law. Patrollers were also created to protect property, in this case property that might be planning to run away.

³² Mooney 8, 17-18, 22-23, 94-96.

³³ Mooney 7-9, 17-18, 22; Anita Shafer Goodstein, *Nashville 1780-1860: From Frontier to City* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1989), 71.

Patrollers were groups of men who were appointed by magistrates or militia captains to break up groups of enslaved people whom they felt looked suspicious. The Nashville government established Patrollers in 1837. Later that same year a new law decreed that no groups of enslaved people could gather together unless they had been given express permission to hold a religious meeting and they were under white supervision; thus a group gathered for any other purpose would face the wrath of the patrollers.³⁴ A formerly enslaved woman recalls that patrollers did not want even a few enslaved men to stand around and chat for fear that they were planning to escape. Enslaved people were justly afraid of the patrollers, although some of them learned how to outsmart them. Formerly enslaved person Mr. Chapman relates a story of a group of enslaved people who stretched grapevine across the road to trip the patrollers who were chasing them.³⁵ Although legislation was meant to be obeyed by enslaved people and enforced by patrollers, some enslaved people did defy these laws.

Enslaved people who ran away inspired much legislation over the years. The reward for returning a runaway rose from “98 ¾ C” (sic) in 1813 to \$25.00 in 1852. Twenty-five dollars was soon determined to be too great a temptation, as sheriffs and patrollers began to capture enslaved people who were out on legitimate business and then demand a reward. The law was quickly changed to allow enslaved people to freely roam the town of their slaveholder.³⁶ Some enslaved people helped runaways: “I would prize

³⁴ Mooney, 12.

³⁵ Name unknown, “They Were Saving Me for a Breeding Woman,” in *Mighty Rough Times, I Tell You*, ed. Andrea Sutcliffe (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, 2000), 63; Mr. and Mrs. Chapman, “We Didn’t Know Nothing Else but Slavery,” in *Mighty Rough Times, I Tell You*, ed. Andrea Sutcliffe (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, 2000), 32.

³⁶ Mooney, 9-10.

the log on the springhouse open, and when the white folks would come down to the springhouse to get butter and stuff, they would be taken out, and we would have gotten it and given it to the runaway Negroes.” Mr. Reed reiterates this act of resistance: “Some colored people wouldn’t be whipped by their master. They would run away and hide in the woods, come home at night, and get something to eat, and out he would go again.”³⁷ Both running away and feeding runaways were acts of defiance against slaveholders and their laws.

If an enslaved person had a pass from his slaveholder to be away from his slaveholder’s residence, and could therefore prove that he was not running away, the patrollers had to send him on his way. Any person who forged a pass for an enslaved person was subject to punishment. Formerly enslaved woman Cecilia Chapel relates, “If’n we wanted to go anyplace, we had to have a pass with our master’s name on it, and if you didn’t have it you got tore to pieces, and then your master tore you up when you got home.”³⁸ Determining who would be allowed to have a pass, and for what purpose, was one more method slaveholders had for controlling enslaved people.

Events that showed a lack of control over enslaved people inspired whites to toughen old laws. After the Nat Turner rebellion in 1831, and with the rise of abolitionist literature in the early 1830s, the penalties for inciting enslaved people to rebel increased. Stephen Ash notes that in 1832 “antislavery advocates departed or were silenced, and no

³⁷ Name unknown, “My Father and Abe Lincoln Was First Cousins,” in *Mighty Rough Times, I Tell You*, ed. Andrea Sutcliffe (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, 2000), 53-54; Mr. Reed, “A Negro Has Got No Name,” in *Mighty Rough Times, I Tell You*, ed. Andrea Sutcliffe (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, 2000), 22.

³⁸ Mooney, 12-13; Cecilia Chapel, “Sometime She Would Lock Us Up in a Dark Closet,” in *Mighty Rough Times, I Tell You*, ed. Andrea Sutcliffe (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, 2000), 111.

more was heard of emancipation in the heartland.” Lovett adds that in Nashville “abolitionists constituted a small minority, mainly because outright opposition to slavery could be suicidal in Nashville.” In 1858, the law decreed that any enslaved person who incited insurrection would be put to death.³⁹ Whites were always afraid that free African Americans, simply by being free, would inspire enslaved people to rebel.

Laws were enacted to control free African Americans as well.

In 1806, a new law required that every free African American in the state be registered, and that the registration show that s/he was born a free African American or record the person in authority who set him or her free. Free African Americans were prohibited from moving to Tennessee beginning in 1831. At this time it also became illegal to emancipate enslaved people unless they left Tennessee immediately afterwards. James Thomas was an exception to this rule. He was emancipated on March 6, 1851 by his owner Ephraim H. Foster. Foster had bought Thomas in 1834 at the urging of Thomas’s mother Sally. Foster had allowed Thomas to learn how to be a barber and then to open his own barber shop. Foster and Thomas asked the court to allow Thomas to stay in Nashville, as moving would force him to restart his business and rebuild a customer base among strangers. The judges assented. Thomas was allowed to stay in Nashville and keep his business even after a new law was enacted in 1854 stating that emancipated people must be transported to the western coast of Africa.⁴⁰

³⁹ Ash, 52; Lovett, 18; Mooney, 17.

⁴⁰ Mooney, 18-19, 24; John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *In Search of the Promised Land: A Slave Family in the Old South* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1-5, 117.

An enslaved person who engaged in trade without having a pass from his slaveholder, as well as the people who engaged in trade with him, were subject to punishment also. This prevented an enslaved person from earning money or obtaining goods without his owner's permission. Penalties for trading liquor, whether the enslaved person sold it or bought it, were much harsher. Still, the Davidson County court allowed an African American man named Robert Rentfro but known as "Black Bob" to sell liquor in Nashville both before and after he bought his freedom.⁴¹

After 1824, no enslaved person was allowed to earn money for his or her own use, and whites who paid enslaved people for services could be fined. This law was meant to prevent enslaved people from improving their lives or being able to buy their freedom, but it was not strictly enforced. A formerly enslaved woman known only as Cornelia by her Fisk interviewer said that "Master Jennings allowed his slaves to earn any money they could for their own use."⁴² This flouting of the law seems to have been especially prevalent in Nashville, and it is possible that some of the enslaved people of Grassmere may have been able to hire themselves out to earn their own money.

Enslaved people in Nashville were much more likely to live in rural rather than urban areas, and those who lived in urban areas were very likely to be hired out to other whites by their slaveholders. Because it was illegal, however, no statistics can be gathered on it.⁴³ A formerly enslaved woman identified only as Susanna relates that her grandfather was allowed to buy his own freedom, and then that of his wife and daughter,

⁴¹ Mooney, 14-15; Franklin and Schweningen, 14.

⁴² Mooney, 24; Cornelia, "My Mother Was the Smartest Black Woman in Eden," in *Mighty Rough Times, I Tell You*, ed. Andrea Sutcliffe (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, 2000), 13.

⁴³ Ash 23; Goodstein 81-83; Lovett 13-14.

“You see, the white folks—that is, his white folks—hired him to the Nashville Inn so he would pay for himself...he paid them about eight hundred dollars in all for himself...and the white folks made him pay the same for Grandma...they charged him for his own child. They charged him \$350.”⁴⁴ Again, in Nashville, both James Thomas and his mother Sally circumvented these rules with the knowing participation of the whites who paid for their barbering and laundering skills. Each saved as much money as they could in order to buy their freedom for themselves and for other family members.⁴⁵ Thus, not all laws were enforced exactly as they were written, and slavery was different in different parts of the state. Being allowed to hire oneself out “did make for a different kind of slavery. The presence of practically free people became a constant that all the agitation and legislation of the post-frontier decades could not eliminate.”⁴⁶ Quasi-free enslaved people, enslaved people, and free African Americans were able to mingle and create a larger African American community with their own beliefs and values within the constraints set by the white people around them.⁴⁷ Family, religion, and education were all therefore central to this community, although they had to fight to obtain and keep them.

While maintaining families was important to enslaved people, slaveholders tended to buy or rent people to perform the jobs that needed to be done rather than worrying about separating families. Sometimes the sellers needed to raise money or pay a debt, and they would choose whom to sell based on the amount of money that they thought they

⁴⁴ Susanna, “They Charged Him for His Own Child,” in *Mighty Rough Times, I Tell You*, ed. Andrea Sutcliffe (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, 2000), 144-145.

⁴⁴ Ash, 52.

⁴⁵ Franklin and Schweningen, 3, 15.

⁴⁶ Goodstein, 92.

⁴⁷ Lovett, 1.

could get. Most sales of enslaved people in Nashville were for only one person, which meant that families were broken apart.⁴⁸ One person rarely owned all of the members of a family. “The black slave family had to be flexible, always open to new adult members as well as children, always prepared for loss...The struggle to put together and keep together families was heroic.”⁴⁹ While enslaved people were usually completely at the mercy of their owners, those who were allowed to earn money and buy their freedom could sometimes buy some of their family members as well. Goodstein notes that, “Free black households often included slaves who were actually family members and whose purchase money was accumulated laboriously over the years.”⁵⁰

Goodstein emphasizes, “Except for the family, black churches were the most complete and enduring of all social institutions fashioned during slavery.” More enslaved people were allowed to go to church than were allowed to get an education.⁵¹ Slave narratives of enslaved people from Tennessee show differing experiences of religion: Mr. Reed remembers enslaved people holding their own religious services in defiance of their slaveholder.⁵² Precilla Gray’s slaveholder would allow her and the other enslaved people to go to church.⁵³ Another formerly enslaved person stated that the enslaved people had to go to their own church and not attend church with white people.⁵⁴ While it is not possible to generalize about how every slaveholder in Nashville felt about allowing his

⁴⁸ Goodstein 73-74, 82, 139.

⁴⁹ Goodstein, 82.

⁵⁰ Goodstein 90, 91.

⁵¹ Goodstein, 144-145.

⁵² Mr. Reed, “A Negro Has Got No Name,” in *Mighty Rough Times, I Tell You*, ed. Andrea Sutcliffe (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, 2000), 23.

⁵³ Gray, Precilla, “I Got Many a Whipping,” in *Mighty Rough Times, I Tell You*, ed. Andrea Sutcliffe (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, 2000), 35.

⁵⁴ Name unknown, “I Expect I am the Oldest Man in Nashville,” in *Mighty Rough Times, I Tell You*, ed. Andrea Sutcliffe (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, 2000), 46.

enslaved people to go to church or participate in any kind of religious activities, the Christian church definitely had a large presence and following among the free and enslaved African American population.

Goodstein states that, “Black churches were the most visible and the least vulnerable institution of the black community in Nashville.”⁵⁵ Both Methodists and Baptists in Nashville made a concerted effort to convert enslaved people to their religion. The church offered discipline and a measure of control over the black population as well as a way for African Americans to assume some leadership roles.⁵⁶ “The presence of black members in the early churches laid the basis for black church leadership and black congregations. Free people, practically free people, and slaves began to share something of a communal life of their own.”⁵⁷ Mechal Sobel writes about the African American mission of the First Baptist Church of Nashville, which allowed enslaved people almost full autonomy with only nominal supervision from white people. White congregations seemed to welcome the separation from African Americans, who were pleased to hold services that suited them. Church leaders were teaching their congregants to read by 1849. The congregation grew during the Civil War with an influx of free African Americans to Nashville. In September 1865, soon after the war ended, the African American mission asked for and received permission to start their own independent church. This antebellum mission and others like it paved the way for the many African American churches that were founded in Nashville in the late 1860s, just as antebellum

⁵⁵ Goodstein, 137.

⁵⁶ Goodstein, 84-86, 92, 137, 145-150.

⁵⁷ Goodstein, 92.

schools for both enslaved and free African Americans paved the way for established African American schools after the war.⁵⁸

White opposition to African American schools was much greater than it was for African American churches: schools taught enslaved people to read and think for themselves, while the churches often taught them to obey their masters. Still, schools in antebellum Nashville persevered under covert and overt hostility from whites, even though they had to change locations several times. For about thirty years before the Civil War, African Americans in Nashville were teaching other African Americans even when they knew that it could be dangerous. Elite blacks were given a little more leeway by whites as long as they were respectful and subservient to whites, as Sally Thomas was and taught all of her children to be.⁵⁹ Degregory states that, “Black educators before the Civil War sought to offer a generation of black students more than academic instruction; they sought to imbue them with self-esteem and racial pride. Those teachers and the generation of students they produced not only assumed influential positions in black communities including black Nashville, they popularized their black educational experiences.”⁶⁰ Due to their work several black colleges such as Fisk University, Meharry Medical College, Nashville Normal and Technological Institute (now known as Roger Williams University), and Central Tennessee College (now known as Walden University) were founded soon after the Civil War.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Mechal Sobel, “‘They Can Never Both Prosper Together’: Black and White Baptists in Antebellum Nashville, Tennessee,” in *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (fall 1979), 296, 303, 306-307.

⁵⁹ Franklin and Schwening, 26-27.

⁶⁰ Crystal A. Degregory, “We Built Black Athens: How Black Determination Secured Black Education in Antebellum Nashville,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 69, no. 2 (summer 2010): 126.

⁶¹ Degregory, 124-127; Franklin 27; Goodstein 150-151.

Slavery at Grassmere Historic Farm

While there are many letters and diaries that describe life at Grassmere from about 1916 through 1985, I have found no historical documents that describe slavery at Grassmere. Lucia Stanton's comment about the enslaved people at Monticello likely applies to enslaved people at Grassmere as well: "Flourishing unrecorded in the Monticello quarters were singular skills, a hunger for education, powerful bonds of family and community, and deep religious beliefs."⁶² From the agricultural census we know that there was not one dominant cash crop at Grassmere but that enslaved people grew corn, wheat, oats, potatoes, and sweet potatoes. They also took care of horses, mules, beef cattle, and dairy cattle and processed the milk from the cows to make butter.⁶³ In this way it was typical of many other farms in Middle Tennessee with its emphasis on mixed crops and livestock rather than the monocrop agriculture of West Tennessee. From 1812-1865, between nine and thirty-three enslaved people lived and worked at Grassmere. In 1860, there were thirty-two enslaved people living in three buildings.⁶⁴

⁶² Lucia Stanton, *Slavery at Monticello* (Charlottesville, VA: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, 2003), 38-39.

⁶³ Veronica A. Riegel, Tennessee Department of Conservation, Division of Archaeology, "A Historical, Architectural, and Archaeological Assessment of the Grassmere Property, Nashville, TN" (Nashville, TN, 1989), 8.

⁶⁴ *Early Tax Lists of Tennessee, 1783-1895*, Davidson County, microfilm roll #3, 12 rolls, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN; Davidson County, TN, "1829 Tax List, Davidson County, TN," *Early Tax Lists of Tennessee, 1783-1895*, microfilm, 12 rolls, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN; United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Fifth Census of the United States, 1830*, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1830, M19, 201 rolls; United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Sixth Census of the United States, 1840*, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1840, M704, 580 rolls; United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Seventh Census of the United States, 1850*, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1850, M432, 1009 rolls; United States of America, Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860*, Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1860, M653, 1438 rolls.

There are two extant cabins at Grassmere today that were constructed of cabins that used to house enslaved people, but over the past one hundred years or so they have been modified under the direction of William Dickson Shute, Grassmere Wildlife Park, and the Nashville Zoo at Grassmere. From family letters, we know that William Dickson Shute was remodeling the house, grounds, and outbuildings between 1876 and 1882. An 1877 letter from his aunt Mary Hardeman reads in part: “The cabins will look very well if you cut them and put in a line with kitchen and smokehouse as proposed—with only a small porch at each of the doors as a long gallery will look too much and clumsy.”⁶⁵ Anyone looking at the cabins today will notice that William Dickson Shute did not take her advice but did put a long porch in front of them and a common roof over them. A more detailed analysis done by historic preservation students from Middle Tennessee State University in 1984 revealed that the “two” cabins were actually pieces of three to five cabins put together, some of them dating from the first half of the nineteenth century. A casual observer will also notice that the cabins have been wired for electricity and that both windows have modern glass panes. At some point before Elise Croft died in 1985, the fireplaces were partially bricked in and a wood-burning stove was installed. Grassmere Wildlife Park and, later, the Nashville Zoo at Grassmere have done maintenance and safety work on the cabins, such as securing the window panes, replacing the porch when the wood rotted, and putting a railing around the porch. One cabin is currently set up to represent the way quarters for enslaved people may have looked in the antebellum era, and the floor in the other cabin is being repaired before a new exhibit on

⁶⁵ Mary Moore Murfree Hilliard Hardeman to William Dickson Shute, January 26, 1877, Columbia, TN. Box 13, folder 9. Grassmere Collection, 1786-1985, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN.

African American life at Grassmere is developed and installed. I cannot say that these extant cabins are the exact size or configuration as what the enslaved people lived in.⁶⁶

Enslaved people at many different sites often used the area around their quarters for cooking, socializing, and doing chores.⁶⁷

In 1988, archaeologists found the foundation of a 16 x 20 foot structure in the east yard of the main house. A good deal of the debris from the destruction of the building, as well as tableware, broken dishes, and pieces of bottle glass, were found in the remains of the foundation. The artifacts date from the late nineteenth century. Archaeologists believe that this was a two-story building with a kitchen on the bottom floor and quarters for enslaved people on the top floor. As William Dickson Shute built a summer kitchen between 1876 and 1882 when he was doing his other renovations, this building was probably torn down at that time. This building was not fully excavated, but it was marked and covered by the archaeologists. Further archaeological and historical research may yield more clues about the building and those who lived and worked there.⁶⁸

Slavery was different in each state, as well as in the different regions of Tennessee. It will be important for public historians at Grassmere to use these details as context when they interpret slavery at that site. In this chapter I have introduced some of the information that public historians at Grassmere have been able to find from historical

⁶⁶ Lauren Bowlin, Linda Center, James Draeger, John McGlone, Lise Retsch, Carol Roberts, and Jane Stephens, "A Public Service Research Project of the Historic Preservation Program Department of History, Middle Tennessee State University"(Murfreesboro, TN, May, 1984), 83-96.

⁶⁷ Barbara J. Heath, *Hidden Lives: The Archaeology of Slave Life at Thomas Jefferson' Poplar Forest* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 33.

⁶⁸ Kevin E. Smith, William R. Fowler, Jr., "1988 Vanderbilt Grassmere Project: A Preliminary Report" (Vanderbilt University, Department of Anthropology, November, 1988, Nashville, TN), 12.

documents and one archaeological excavation. In the next chapter I will go into greater detail about what historians can learn about slavery from archaeology.

CHAPTER THREE: ARCHAEOLOGY OF ENSLAVED PEOPLE

Introduction

In this chapter some of the developments and changes in plantation archaeology will be briefly reviewed, as they are important for Grassmere management to consider as they interpret former excavations and plan future excavations. The changes in archaeology mirror the changes in the historiography just discussed. Archaeologists are asking different questions and looking for different information in their excavations than they were a few decades ago as they try to find out more about the enslaved communities and their lives, the ways that they resisted slavery, and the traditions that they brought with them from Africa and continued in this country.

Some of the earliest and most famous plantation archaeology began in the early decades of the twentieth century at the homes of famous white men: Mount Vernon, the home of George Washington, Monticello, the home of Thomas Jefferson, and the Hermitage, the home of Andrew Jackson. Archaeologists at these sites in this time period focused on learning about the “great men” themselves and where they had placed their buildings and gardens. In the early 1960s, Ivor Noel Hume called historical archaeology “the handmaiden of history,” as the thought at that time was that historical archaeologists should only look for evidence of buildings and their floor plans in order to guide the reconstruction of those buildings.¹ Historical archaeologists gave little or no thought to the enslaved population who did the majority of the work on southern plantations, and

¹ Charles E. Orser, Jr., *Historical Archaeology* 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc., 2004), 35.

about whom little often survived in the written record. The Civil Rights Movement and the New Social History changed the focus of archaeologists to include more excavations of the quarters of enslaved people and more interpretation of their lives. Writing in 1995, Theresa A. Singleton credits “black activism, the passage of historic preservation legislation, the emergence of an archaeological interest in American ethnic groups, and the increased use of archaeology in the public interpretation of historic sites, including plantations,” for the heightened interest in practicing archaeology at sites where African Americans lived and worked.² The discovery of the African Burial Ground four years earlier also had an enormous impact on archaeology of enslaved communities.

In 1991, the General Services Administration (GSA) began to survey and clear a federally-owned site in Manhattan in order to build a new office building. They were acting in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. This law requires that any site receiving any federal funds (including funds from states that accept federal funding) must first be surveyed by archaeologists if it is immediately threatened by development or natural destruction. Under this law, archaeologists document the impact that any proposed construction will have on natural or historic resources at that site, and mitigate this impact by recovering as much data from the threatened portion as possible. If the proposed project will impact a cemetery, the decision is usually made to exhume and relocate the remains rather than cover them with

² Theresa A. Singleton, “The Archaeology of Slavery in North America,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 120.

a new building or road.³ The cultural resource management company who did the excavation inadvertently discovered the eighteenth-century African Burial Ground. They exhumed the remains of 419 individuals with a bulldozer and damaged many of the skeletons. It was not until a huge outcry by the general public, the descendant community, politicians, and other local leaders was raised over the disrespectful way the remains were exhumed, and the outdated “racing” of human skeletal remains, that construction was shut down in 1992.⁴ This one site had an enormous impact on excavation, on how archaeologists worked with descendant communities, and on the memorialization and interpretation of the lives Africans and African Americans. I will discuss the myriad aspects of the African Burial Ground below, including the interpretation of the artifacts found there. As I will show, the interpretation of African and African American artifacts at many sites has both changed and augmented the interpretation of what has been found in the written records.

In the 1960s, archaeologist Charles Fairbanks found evidence of the cabins for the enslaved population at the Von Bulow Plantation in Florida, but it was not until the 1990s that archaeologists began to excavate plantations in search of new information on

³Thomas A.J. Crist, "Empowerment, Ecology, and Evidence: The Relevance of Mortuary Archaeology to the Public," in *Public Benefits of Archaeology* ed. Barbara J. Little (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 110.

⁴Cheryl J. La Roche and Michael L. Blakey, “Seizing Intellectual Power: The Dialogue at the New York African Burial Ground,” *Historical Archaeology* 31, no. 3 (1997): 84-106; Mark E. Mack and Michael L. Blakey, “The New York African Burial Project: Past Biases, Current Dilemmas, and Future Research Opportunities,” *Historical Archaeology* 38, no. 1, *Transcending Boundaries, Transforming the Discipline: African Diaspora Archaeologies in the New Millennium* (2004): 10-17; Michael L. Blakey, “African Burial Ground Project: Paradigm for Cooperation?” *Museum International* 62, no. 1-2 (2010): 61-68; Andrea Frohne, “Politics of Narrative at the African Burial Ground in New York City: The Final Monument,” in *African Art Interviews Narratives: Bodies of Knowledge at Work*, ed. Joanna Grabski and Carol Magee (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 114-130.

enslaved communities rather than concentrating on the slaveholders at the site.⁵ Writing in 1990, Theresa A. Singleton looks back at what historical archaeologists had already learned from their plantation research and proposes goals for the future. She recognizes that the proliferation of research at many sites, along with much of the data collection and interpretation in the 1970s and 1980s, is a strength of the field as it asks new questions of both old and new data.⁶ She expresses the hope that future archaeologists will look at “how a particular plantation society operated within a historical frame of reference.”⁷ Her work marked a turning point in the field as the archaeology of enslaved communities came to be seen as important by both archaeologists and historians. They looked more closely at the foodways, traditions, and beliefs that enslaved people had brought with them from Africa and how they transformed them to better suit their lives in America as well as how they influenced (rather than simply being influenced by) Euro-American culture.

In Uncommon Ground: Archaeology and Early African America, 1650-1800

(1992) Leland Ferguson expands on Singleton’s work as he traces the development of the archaeology of enslavement. He argues that “African American archaeology is brand-new: we are just beginning to discover what the buried record has to offer.”⁸ He states that the blue glass beads, African-style shrines, and spoons engraved with symbols similar to Bankongo cosmograms found at various sites where enslaved people lived each

⁵ Charles E. Orser, Jr., “The Past Ten Years of Plantation Archaeology in the Southern United States,” *Southeastern Archaeology* 3, no. 1 (summer 1984): 2.

⁶ Theresa A. Singleton, “The Archaeology of the Plantation South: A Review of Approaches and Goals,” *Historical Archaeology* 24, no. 4 (1990): 70, 76.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁸ Leland Ferguson, *Uncommon Ground: Archaeology and Early African America, 1650-1800* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 1992), xxxiv, 116-117.

show the resistance of enslaved people who kept their African spiritual practices in this country instead of, or in addition to, practicing Christianity. He insists that archaeologists who are studying African American life must have a good background knowledge of African culture and African and African American history to properly interpret artifacts that they find, echoing the words of Melville Herskovits. He also emphasizes that when archaeology and history are combined they can form a more complete picture of the past, as had been proven at the African Burial Ground.⁹

In 1995, David Fountain found that many historians were still ignoring artifacts and information that archaeologists discovered related to slavery.¹⁰ He explains how archaeologists had ascertained that African Americans influenced housing for the enslaved community and also discovered how they cooked their meals and what types of meat and vegetables they ate. For example, Thomas Wheaton and Patrick Garrow found archaeological features evidencing traditional West African architecture in quarters built by and for enslaved people in South Carolina. Fountain also cites the work of several different archaeologists working at a myriad of sites who found charred crocks suitable for cooking one-pot meals near the quarters of enslaved people, indicating that enslaved people cooked their own meals at their quarters instead of having them prepared for them at the slaveholder's house. The remains of many different types of local wild species of game and fish, along with handmade fish hooks and lead shot, show that many enslaved people fished and hunted to supplement the rations they received from the slaveholders. This shows that after working a full day for the person who enslaved them, many

⁹ Ibid, xl-xlv.

¹⁰ David Fountain, "Historians and Historical Archaeology: Slave Sites," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 26, no. 1 (summer, 1995): 68.

enslaved people had to procure and prepare their own food. This evidence was not always apparent in the written records.¹¹

Since Fountain's work was published, many more archaeologists working on southern plantations, including Mount Vernon, Monticello, and the Hermitage, have found evidence that enslaved people supplemented their rations with food that they hunted, caught, or grew themselves.¹² For example, Patricia Samford read in the primary documents related to plantation management that enslaved workers in the Piedmont region of Virginia were provided with rations, but the archaeological evidence shows that they supplemented their meals with wild game, chickens and eggs that they raised themselves, and wild plants. Fish hooks and gun parts at these Virginia plantations provide further evidence that they obtained some of their own food.¹³ Archaeologists found that the enslaved people at Yaughan and Curriboo plantations also supplemented their diet with wild plants and with game that they probably hunted with the muskets also found on the sites.¹⁴ The evidence from these sites and others show that some enslaved people provided their own food when they could because they were given meager rations

¹¹ Ibid, 69-75.

¹² Barbara J. Heath, *Hidden Lives: The Archaeology of Slave Life at Thomas Jefferson's Poplar Forest* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 59-61; William M. Kelso, *Archaeology at Monticello: Artifacts of Everyday Life in the Plantation Community* (Charlottesville, VA: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, 1997), 68, 93-96; Larry McKee, "Food Supply and Plantation Social Order: An Archaeological Perspective," in "*I, Too, am America: Archaeological Studies of African-American Life*," ed. Theresa A. Singleton (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 218-239; Theresa A. Singleton, "The Archaeology of Slave Life," in *Images of the Recent Past: Readings in Historical Archaeology*, ed. Charles E. Orser, Jr. (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1996), 154-156; Lucia Stanton, *Slavery at Monticello* (Charlottesville, VA: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, 2003), 38-39; Larry McKee, "The Archaeological Study of Slavery and Plantation Life in Tennessee," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (fall 2000): 193-195.

¹³ Patricia A. Samford, *Subfloor Pits and the Archaeology of Slavery in Colonial Virginia* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2007), 100-101.

¹⁴ Charles E. Orser, Jr., *Historical Archaeology*, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2004), 44-45.

by the people who enslaved them, which did not provide the calories needed for the work they were required to perform.

Foodways can also lead to discussions of how much enslaved people actually ate, which directly relates to how healthy they were. How much food enslaved people received as rations and how much food they had to procure themselves is a subject of much controversy, and it varied so greatly from person to person that there is no one definitive statement that describes all of the people who were enslaved. Historian Lowell H. Harrison states that enslaved people in Tennessee usually received rations from their slaveholders once a week, but they were expected to supplement those rations by fishing and hunting and by growing some of their own vegetables.¹⁵ A formerly enslaved man named Robert Falls from North Carolina, interviewed by a member of the Works Project Administration (WPA) in the 1930s, stated: “They didn’t half feed us either...They fed the animals better.”¹⁶ Besides archaeological evidence and oral narratives, medical records can be studied to determine how much food enslaved people had to eat.

In her research of medical records and contemporary doctors’ writings about formerly enslaved African American Union soldiers, Margaret Humphreys found that many of them came to the army with a long history of malnutrition. Doctors also noted that many men were unfit for duty because of hernias caused by overwork or injuries caused by beatings.¹⁷ That those who were so severely injured survived at all was often

¹⁵ Lowell H. Harrison, “Recollections of Some Tennessee Slaves,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (summer 1974): 176-177.

¹⁶ Robert Falls, “I Would Die Fighting rather Than Be a Slave Again,” in *Mighty Rough Times, I Tell You*, ed. Andrea Sutcliffe (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, 2000), 87.

¹⁷ Margaret Humphreys, *Intensely Human: The Health of the Black Soldier in the American Civil War* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 7-10.

due to medical treatment given to the injured person, usually by someone in the slaveholder's family or from a member of the African American community.

For decades after emancipation, what white historians published about the health-care of enslaved people came from the letters, diaries, and other primary sources of slaveholders. These sources tend to focus on how white slaveholders provided medical care for enslaved people, but imply that the enslaved people themselves did not have any medical knowledge or traditions; however, within the enslaved community at many plantations there was a traditional healer who practiced medicine, using many of the same herbs as whites and Native Americans in the area. For African and African American people, there was also a spiritual element in healing that was absent in the medical practices of Euro-Americans.¹⁸ In one of her books about the enslaved people of Thomas Jefferson, Lucia Stanton states, “There were two worlds at Monticello, where medicine and beliefs in one were perceived as poison and superstition in the other.”¹⁹ Material evidence of both the medical and the spiritual aspects of healing can sometimes be found in the archaeological record.²⁰ For example, archaeologists found glass medicine bottles at Poplar Forest (Thomas Jefferson’s Virginia retreat); Patricia M. Samford found evidence of both pharmaceutical bottles and religious shrines on her work in quarters for enslaved people in colonial Virginia; and William Kelso found African religious artifacts

¹⁸ Sharla Fett, *Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 2-11.

¹⁹ Lucia Stanton, *Slavery at Monticello* (Charlottesville, VA: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, 2003), 43.

²⁰ Theresa A. Singleton, “The Archaeology of Slave Life,” in *Images of the Recent Past: Readings in Historical Archaeology*, ed. Charles E. Orser, Jr. (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1996), 157.

during excavations on Mulberry Row at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello.²¹ As of this writing we have found no archaeological or written evidence of who provided health-care to the enslaved community at Grassmere, but we know that they did receive health-care due to the healed infections and fractures found on some of their bones (discussed further in Chapter Four). The study of human remains can also provide us with information about how much people had to eat, how hard they worked, and their general health.

Bioarchaeology is the study of human remains excavated at archaeological sites. This sub-discipline of archaeology can provide us with a good deal of information about the health of the deceased. Bioarchaeologists require specialized training in biology, anatomy, and medicine in order to correctly identify bones, estimate the age and sex of the remains, and find evidence of disease, malnutrition, infection, injury, or overwork to the deceased individuals.²² For example, people who did hard physical labor had larger muscles with more pronounced attachments to their bones while they were alive. Bioarchaeologists can examine these points of attachment on human bone and determine if the person led a sedentary life, one of strenuous activity, or one of moderate exercise.

Bioarchaeology, and the way that bioarchaeology has been practiced on different groups of people, has led to a wide range of responses from various segments of society. From the nineteenth century to the late twentieth century, archaeologists excavated numerous Native American burial grounds for the purpose of taking the remains back to

²¹ Barbara J. Heath, *Hidden Lives: The Archaeology of Slave Life at Thomas Jefferson's Poplar Forest* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 18; Samford, 93, 150-172; William M. Kelso, *Archaeology at Monticello: Artifacts of Everyday Life in the Plantation Community* (Charlottesville, VA: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, 2003), 73.

²² Theresa A. Singleton, "The Archaeology of Slave Life," in *Images of the Recent Past: Readings in Historical Archaeology*, ed. Charles E. Orser, Jr. (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1996), 156-157.

museums and studying them, often using scientific racism to “prove” that Native Americans were inferior to Europeans but superior to Africans.²³ Many Native Americans vehemently objected to this desecration of their ancestors' resting places and remains, and in 1990 federal legislation passed that prohibited archaeologists from excavating their graves.

The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (NAGPRA) governs the way that archaeologists and historians treat Native American remains and funerary objects. According to NAGPRA, no one may excavate a Native American or Native Hawaiian burial site on federal or tribal lands over the objections of a Native American tribe associated with the site or without the approval of a State Historic Preservation Officer.²⁴ While there are no federal laws governing the excavation of any human remains other than those of Native Americans, states and municipalities have laws dictating the responsibilities of those who accidentally uncover or purposely excavate human remains. Ethics should also play a role in any excavation.

Both the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) and the Society for Historical Archaeology (SHA) have codes of ethics for their members. In 1991, the year after NAGPRA became law and the same year that excavation began at the African Burial Ground, the SAA formed a committee to draft a code of ethics. After much discussion, the Executive Board adopted the Principles of Archaeological Ethics in 1996. It reads, in part,

²³ Crist, 102-105.

²⁴ “Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act,” in *Federal Historic Preservation Laws*, 2nd ed., National Conference of State Historic Preservation (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2006), 166-182.

Responsible archaeological research, including all levels of professional activity, requires an acknowledgement of public accountability and a commitment to make every reasonable effort, in good faith, to consult actively with affected group(s), with the goal of establishing a working relationship that can be beneficial to all parties involved.²⁵

While this statement applies to all groups of people, it grew in part out of the protests and activism of both Native Americans and African Americans over how their ancestors were treated at archaeological sites. As Stephen Silliman and T.J. Ferguson state, “Some communities have requested, if not demanded, more accountability from archaeologists and more openness in the archaeological process that permits their participation as researchers, consultants, stakeholders, and historical or political authorities.”²⁶ Joe Watkins further asserts that “The archaeologist must educate affected cultural groups about a project so that they can have an informed understanding of the reasons for the project, the types of information being sought, and the implications and utility of the study to the group studied and to archaeology. This inability to communicate effectively has been one of the discipline’s major failures.”²⁷ Silliman and Ferguson stress that “effective consultation and productive collaboration with descendant groups has improved and will continue to improve archaeology by expanding the repertoire of questions we ask, developing new methods to investigate those questions, opening the interpretation of results to include Indigenous and other perspectives on theory and

²⁵ "Principles of Archaeological Ethics," Society for American Archaeologists, accessed February 22, 2007, <http://saa.org/AbouttheSociety/PrinciplesofArchaeologicalEthics/tabid/203/Default.aspx>

²⁶ Stephen W. Silliman and T.J. Ferguson, “Consultation and Collaboration with Descendant Communities” in *Voices in American Archaeology*, ed. Wendy Ashmore, Dorothy T. Lippert and Barbara J. Mills (Washington, D.C.: Society for American Archaeology Press, 2010), 48, 59.

²⁷ Joe Watkins, *Indigenous Archaeology: American Indian Values and Scientific Practice* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2000), 171.

history, and making the discipline accountable outside of itself.”²⁸ Little and Shackel add that public archaeology today includes “activities in support of education, civic renewal, peace, and justice.”²⁹ Both Melville Herskovits (1958) and David Fountain (1995) had exhorted historians and archaeologists to learn about the cultures that they were studying.³⁰ More recently, Silliman, Ferguson, Little, and Shackel commented on how much more open and inclusive archaeologists have become. Today, historical archaeologists must be inclusive, collaborating with descendant communities and sharing their findings with them and the general public. This was not initially the policy at the African Burial Ground.

African Burial Ground

The GSA excavated 419 sets of remains at the African Burial Ground from the summer of 1991 to the summer of 1992, when the protests of the descendant community and community leaders led to legal action by Congressman Gus Savage, New York City Mayor David Dinkins, and New York State Senator David Patterson to stop the excavation. The original research design, which should have specified what information was sought of the remains, was woefully inadequate in specific details. The descendant community became aware of the fact that the New York Metropolitan Forensic Anthropology team’s research agenda focused almost exclusively on classifying remains by race, without seeking further information on ethnicity, geographic origins of those enslaved, tribal affiliations, or evidence of retained African cultural influences. The

²⁸ Silliman and Ferguson, 49.

²⁹ Barbara J. Little and Paul Shackel, *Archaeology, Heritage, and Civic Engagement: Working Toward the Public Good* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2014), 23.

³⁰ Herskovits, 292; Fountain, 68.

research design also indicated that those who had written the research plan had little or no knowledge of African or African American culture during this time period. The combination of the continuation of burial excavations over the objections of descendants and activists, the race-based research agenda, and the lack of scholars of African and African American culture on the research team, led to a radical change in the study of the burial ground's remains.³¹

At the insistence of the large and diverse descendant community, the remains were taken away from the New York Metropolitan Forensic Anthropology team. Anthropologists at historically Black Howard University submitted their own research proposal, listening to the requests of the descendant community and enlisting the help of scholars of African and African American culture. This new research design specified “three major research questions about the people buried at the site: what are the [ethnic or geographical, rather than racial] origins of the population, what was their physical quality of life, and what can the site reveal about the biological and cultural transition from African to African-American identities?”³² In 1995, the research design was expanded to include looking for modes of resistance to enslavement.³³ The impact of the descendant community cannot be understated: they stopped the excavations of a government agency, completely changed what kinds of research questions bioarchaeologists would ask of the remains, and had those remains taken away from the New York Metropolitan Forensic Anthropology team and delivered to Howard University for the study to be completed under the direction of Dr. Michael Blakey, a specialist in African American history, the

³¹ La Roche and Blakey, 85-89.

³² *Ibid.*, 86.

³³ *Ibid.*, 86-87.

study of race, and biological anthropology. As a result the public learned information that they would not otherwise have learned. Those interred at the African Burial Ground performed tremendous amounts of hard physical labor and suffered from poor nutrition, infections, and reduced fertility, received little or no medical care, and often succumbed to early death due to overwork.

Among the individuals exhumed from the African Burial Ground, the bony muscle attachments of many of the male and female sets of remains showed high frequencies of hypertrophy, changes associated with torn or excessively strained muscles caused not just by hard work but by strenuous work that caused bodily damage. This shows that both men and women were doing extremely hard physical labor, and that slaveholders considered these enslaved people to be disposable: people who could be worked literally to death and then replaced by more African survivors of the Middle Passage.³⁴ Many men also had spinal injuries associated with excessive strain. Men were more likely to have used the muscles of their lower and middle back, while women used their upper back and neck muscles more frequently than men. Five women had fractures of their cranial base, indicating that they were carrying loads on their heads that were too heavy for them. These findings cannot tell us anything about the emotional lives of these enslaved people, but they give us a picture of a group of enslaved people being worked much too hard by their slaveholders in which the women worked as hard as the men but

³⁴ Mark E. Mack and Michael L. Blakey, "The New York African Burial Project: Past Biases, Current Dilemmas, and Future Research Opportunities," *Historical Archaeology* 38, no. 1, *Transcending Boundaries, Transforming the Discipline: African Diaspora Archaeologies in the New Millennium* (2004): 12; Michael L. Blakey, "African Burial Ground Project: Paradigm for Cooperation?" *Museum International* 62, no. 1-2 (2010): 66.

carried bundles on their heads instead of in their arms. We could not get this picture from documents alone.

Other tests on human remains can indicate where people were born and where their ancestors were from. Researchers working with remains from the African Burial Ground tested the mitochondrial DNA of thirty-two individuals. This type of DNA is inherited solely from the mother, and can be used to trace an individual's maternal ancestry. Their results indicate that their maternal ancestors probably came from Nigeria, Niger, Senegal, and Benin. By using hereditary traits of the shape and dimensions of the skull, researchers were able to measure the skulls of twenty-six of the enslaved people and determine that they were more similar to populations from Ghana and the Ivory Coast than people from other parts of Africa. Similar hereditary traits of tooth size and shape can also be used to assess biological distance between populations. Researchers also collected data on the teeth of several individuals in the hopes that they would be able to use those measurements to determine where those individuals were born. Some of the people had had their teeth modified into wedges or hourglasses. Dental modification is common in some parts of Africa, and specific types of modification are linked to specific ancestral groups or homelands.³⁵ One man who had his teeth filed into the shape of an hourglass was in a coffin decorated with tacks in the shape of a sankofa (see Figure 1).³⁶

According to the African Burial Ground website:

Sankofa is a Ghanaian akansha symbol system--one of the eight created by Africans to communicate among each other. It literally translates to "look to the past to inform the future." This sheds light on the struggles of enslaved African peoples... The symbol itself is depicted by a

³⁵ Mack and Blakey, 11.

³⁶ Barbara J. Little, *Historical Archaeology: Why the Past Matters* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2007), 151-152.

bird which appears to be moving forward while looking back, supporting the idea of incorporating the aspects of the past into the future. Furthermore, this symbol bears resemblance to the symbols that enslaved Africans retained despite subjection.³⁷



Figure 1: Sankofa

Citation: “Sankofa—Learn from the Past,” National Park Service, African Burial Ground, accessed March 2, 2017, <https://www.nps.gov/afbg/learn/historyculture/sankofa.htm>.

The modified teeth and the sankofa together indicate that this man was born in Africa, survived the Middle Passage, and was enslaved in New York. Stable isotope analysis on the strontium levels in his teeth, however, indicate that he might have been born in America.³⁸

³⁷ “Sankofa—Learn from the Past,” National Park Service, African Burial Ground, accessed March 2, 2017, <https://www.nps.gov/afbg/learn/historyculture/sankofa.htm>.

³⁸ Warren R. Perry, Jean Howson, and Barbara A. Bianco, “Making Sense of Evidence: The African Burial Ground,” *HERB: Resources for Teachers*, accessed March 2, 2017, <http://herb.lw4.gc.cuny.edu/items/show/810>.

Isotopes include common elements such as carbon, oxygen, nitrogen, and strontium. Different isotopes of carbon, for example, will each have the same number of protons but a different number of neutrons within each atom. This affects the weight of the element, but not its chemical properties. Specific isotopes are common in the bedrock in specific geographic areas. Some of these elements are ingested in locally procured food and water and can be found in the teeth and bones of people who lived there. Scientists can do a stable isotope analysis of teeth or bones to help determine where the individuals spent their childhood and adolescence, while their bones and teeth were still developing.³⁹ For example, bioarchaeologist Sheila Mendonça de Souza, working at a mass grave of enslaved people in Rio de Janeiro, used strontium isotope analysis of the remains as well as water sources in Africa to determine that the enslaved people came from a wide range of places in Africa, not just the coastal areas. This information surprised both archaeologists and historians, as it was thought that most Africans were captured close to the coast.⁴⁰ Archaeologists working in Jamestown, Virginia used carbon isotope analysis to determine if various people buried there in the 1600s had spent their childhoods in England, with its wheat-based diet, or Virginia, with its corn-based diet.⁴¹ The stable isotope analysis results from several people interred at the African Burial Ground indicate that individuals spent their childhoods in various locations, including different parts of Africa and the Caribbean. Some of the people interred had grown up in

³⁹ Michelle Machiek, "Time Team America: Isotope Analysis" 2013, last updated 2014, Oregon Public Broadcasting, accessed October 1, 2016, www.pbs.org/time-team/experience-archaeology/

⁴⁰ Tom Phillips, "Rio's Cemetery of New Blacks Sheds Light on Horrors of Slave Trade," *The Guardian*, December 20, 2011, accessed September 13, 2016, <https://www.theguardian/world/2011/dec/20/rio-cemetery-of-the-new-blacks-brazil>.

⁴¹ William M. Kelso, *Jamestown: The Buried Truth* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 128-129, 158.

New York. As I will detail later, Tiffany Tung is conducting a stable isotope analysis of the enslaved people who were buried at Grassmere. Each of the tests performed on the remains tells us more about the people who were buried there.

The African Burial Ground was an important site for management at Grassmere to look at before they began excavating their own cemetery for enslaved people. Plantation sites, and what archaeologists have learned on those sites, also provide valuable information about what artifacts may be found at Grassmere and how they should be interpreted.

Mount Vernon

Mount Vernon is an important historic site as the home of the country's first president. The historical archaeological excavations may also provide guidance for future excavations at Grassmere. George Washington inherited his family's Virginia plantation in 1761. His fame as a general in the Revolutionary War and as the first president of the new nation attracted many visitors before his death in 1799 and continues to attract visitors today. The Mount Vernon Ladies' Association (MVLA) was created in 1853 with the sole purpose of buying and restoring Mount Vernon. They opened the house to the public in 1860.⁴² From the time it opened visitors were able to visit Washington's tomb, and those who chose to could also visit the small, unmarked graveyard for African Americans nearby.

⁴² George Washington's Mount Vernon Official Guidebook, 3rd ed., ed. Stephen A. McLeod (Mount Vernon, VA: Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, 2016), 20-23.

Unlike the African Burial Ground, Monticello, or Grassmere, the site of the cemetery for enslaved people at Mount Vernon has always been known. The Mount Vernon Ladies Association placed a marker on the cemetery for enslaved people at Mount Vernon in 1928, but research on those who were buried there did not start until 2014.⁴³ Archaeologists want to determine how many people are buried there, how many were adults and how many were children, and exactly where each is located. This project will take several years. As they state on their website, “To ensure utmost respect is paid to the people interred in the African American cemetery, the remains will not be excavated.” Detailed information about each year of the fieldwork at the cemetery is described on their website.⁴⁴ Information on other excavations at Mount Vernon are available both on the website and in a number of publications.

Archaeological excavations, supported by the MVLA, began in the 1930s with the goal of finding the remnants of outbuildings, fence lines, and landscape features that were no longer visible above ground. In the 1950s, archaeologists uncovered the foundations of the Greenhouse Quarter, where many enslaved people lived. Their focus was on the buildings and not the lives of those who lived there, however. In the 1980s a permanent archaeology program was established and the Virginia Research Center for Archaeology began excavating the House for Families, another quarter for enslaved people. This work

⁴³ Linnea Grim, “So Deeply Dyed in Our Fabric That It Cannot Be Washed Out”: Developing Institutional Support for the Interpretation of Slavery,” in *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites* ed. Kristin L. Gallas and James DeWolf Perry (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 33.

⁴⁴ “Slave Cemetery Survey,” Mount Vernon, accessed October 5, 2016, <http://www.mountvernon.org/preservation/archaeology/slave-burial-ground-research/>

uncovered a good deal of artifacts and faunal remains that told the researchers much about the lives of people enslaved by George Washington.⁴⁵

The House for Families was the main quarters for enslaved people working in the mansion or artisan shops at Mansion House Farm and may have been built as early as 1743. It replaced a barracks-style communal residence in which many individual enslaved people could live. Leading a historic trend toward enslaved housing which focused on families living together, Washington replaced communal dwellings with family cabins, including the House for Families, in 1793. The cellar of the House for Families was originally used for storage, but sometime later it became a place to dump refuse. When the building was demolished in 1793 and the enslaved people moved to new quarters, the discarded ceramics, wine bottles, buttons, pipes, tools, buckles, etc. were protected by the debris. The high quality of the ceramics and the number of dishes with the same pattern implies that the Washingtons passed down dishes to their enslaved people as sets, not as individual damaged pieces. These hand-me-downs can imply to visitors seeing an exhibit of artifacts found at Mount Vernon that this group of enslaved people, as opposed to the field hands, lived a better life due to their closer relationship with the Washingtons. Archaeologists and historians have to be careful to remind visitors that slavery should not be confused with poverty. Enslaved people with pretty dishes could still be sold or have family members sold away from them, and had little control

⁴⁵ Mark D. Bograd and Theresa A. Singleton, "The Interpretation of Slavery: Mount Vernon, Monticello, and Colonial Williamsburg," in *Presenting Archaeology to the Public: Digging for Truths* ed. John H. Jameson, Jr. (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1997), 195; Esther C. White, "Archaeology and Tourism at Mount Vernon," in *Public Benefits of Archaeology*, ed. Barbara J. Little (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2002), 146.

over their own bodies or lives. When archaeologists examined foodways at Mount Vernon, they discovered areas in which enslaved people did exercise some control.⁴⁶

Archaeologists were particularly interested in determining what the enslaved people actually ate, as opposed to what rations were specified in the written documents. They determined that in addition to the shad and herring allotted to them, enslaved people also ate catfish, perch, and bass. Faunal remains also indicated that the enslaved people ate squirrel, deer, turkey, and other wild game in addition to the rationed beef and pork. The large number of gun parts found here and at other sites of quarters for enslaved people have shown that enslaved people had greater access to firearms than written records suggest, probably so that they could hunt the wild game that they used to supplement their rations. They also harvested black walnuts and persimmons that grew on the plantation. The comparison of the written and archaeological records gives historical archaeologists a much more nuanced picture of the lives of the enslaved people at Mount Vernon. Although George Washington did provide some food for his enslaved workers, they had to do extra work to obtain enough to feed their families. Enslaved people at Monticello also had gardens in which they grew some of their own vegetables to augment their rations.⁴⁷

Monticello

The nation's third president also owned a plantation in Virginia which has garnered interest from visitors and archaeologists alike. Thomas Jefferson's enslaved

⁴⁶ Pogue, 111-119, 125; Eleanor Bren, "The Archaeology of Enslavement: Mount Vernon's House for Families," in *Lives Bound Together: Slavery at George Washington's Mount Vernon*, ed. Susan P. Schoelwer (Mount Vernon, VA: Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, 2016), 82-87.

⁴⁷ Pogue, 111-119, 125; Bren, 82-87.

people began building Monticello in 1768, and it was his permanent residence until his death in 1826. The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation purchased the mansion in 1923 and has been actively researching and restoring the house, grounds, and outbuildings ever since.⁴⁸

The change in emphasis over time from the former president and his white family to the enslaved community at Monticello followed the same pattern as at Mount Vernon and at most other plantation sites.⁴⁹ Archaeologists started digging at Monticello in the 1950s, first with a focus on the area immediately around the mansion. An archaeology department, led by William Kelso, was established there in 1979, and with his arrival the focus shifted to the area around Mulberry Row where many of the enslaved people lived and practiced their trades. In 1997, the focus shifted again, this time to shovel-test surveying the 2000-acre core of the property to determine what each area was used for and where it would be most worthwhile for archaeologists to concentrate their efforts.⁵⁰

The excavations at Mulberry Row revealed the size, shape, and number of buildings that were located there as well as what each building was used for. Archaeologists were also able to determine what different enslaved people ate and what material goods they owned. For example, in addition to the beef and pork provided in their rations, they ate deer as well. This shows that enslaved people were hunting for their

⁴⁸ Charley Miller and Peter Miller, *Monticello: The Official Guide to Thomas Jefferson's World* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2016), 13, 138-139.

⁴⁹ William Kelso, *Archaeology at Monticello: Artifacts of Everyday Life in the Plantation Community* (Charlottesville, VA: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, 1997), 18-19.

⁵⁰ "Monticello," Digital Archaeological Archive of Comparative Slavery, last modified 2016, accessed October 5, 2016, www.daacs.org/plantations/monticello; William Kelso, "Mulberry Row: Slave Life at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello," *Archaeology* 39, no 5 (September/October, 1986): 29-31; Barbara J. Heath, "Archaeology and Interpretation at Monticello and Poplar Forest," in *Presenting Archaeology to the Public: Digging for Truths* ed. John H. Jameson, Jr. (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1997), 177-178.

food instead of just receiving all of it in their allotted rations. An analysis of ceramics found around the entire plantation site indicates that enslaved people received cast-off ceramics from Jefferson, as some ceramics perfectly matched what was used in the mansion. Archaeologists also discovered that there was a hierarchy among the enslaved workers that affected housing and access to resources: those higher in status lived in larger stone houses with wooden floors and stone fireplaces, while those of lower social standing lived in smaller log cabins with dirt floors. They combined this information with Jefferson's written records to give a much fuller picture of enslaved life at Monticello.⁵¹ With this information staff members at Monticello were able to reconstruct some of the buildings along Mulberry Row and furnish them with appropriate reproductions of items that the inhabitants there had. They were also able to put many of the original artifacts in display cases with interpretive signs telling the visitor more about the lives of those who were enslaved by Thomas Jefferson. However, the information that archaeologists found was not interpreted until about 1991, five years after it had been discovered, and special tours focusing on the inhabitants of Mulberry Row were not offered until 1993.

Archaeologists were instrumental in working with the public when an African American graveyard was found at Monticello in 2002. This archaeological work done here was handled much more respectfully than that at the African Burial Ground had been. In a 2016 guidebook to Monticello Charley and Peter Miller note, "Although the names of Monticello's residents are known, it has not been possible to identify the individuals

⁵¹ Mark D. Bograd and Theresa A. Singleton, "The Interpretation of Slavery: Mount Vernon, Monticello, and Colonial Williamsburg," in *Presenting Archaeology to the Public: Digging for Truths* ed. John H. Jameson, Jr. (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1997), 198. William Kelso, "Mulberry Row: Slave Life at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello," *Archaeology* 39, no 5 (September/October, 1986): 28-35; William Kelso, *Archaeology at Monticello: Artifacts of Everyday Life in the Plantation Community* (Charlottesville, VA: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, 1997), 13, 44-46, 51, 65-66.

buried here. No graves were disturbed in the course of the archaeological investigation.”⁵² Archaeologists did not exhume the remains, but they measured the graves and determined that both adults and children of various ages had been buried there. They noted the exact location of each grave, as well as headstones and footstones, and posited that those who had been buried in little groups were probably related. When they were done with their work, the workers at Monticello held a commemoration ceremony to honor those who had worked, lived, and died at Monticello. Although there are no records of who is buried there, the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation placed a large sign in front of the cemetery which lists the names of each enslaved person who died at Monticello along with their birth and death dates and their family relationships, if known.⁵³ The respectful and professional way in which the remains of the enslaved people here were studied and commemorated without excavation shows that archaeologists there had learned the lessons of the African Burial Ground’s descendant community objections and requests.

The Hermitage

Like the plantations of other former presidents, the Hermitage has attracted many visitors, and archaeologists have done excavations to learn more about the inhabitants and their lives. Andrew Jackson lived at the Hermitage, near Nashville, TN, from 1804 until his death in 1845. The Ladies Hermitage Association acquired the house and property in 1889. When archaeologists began doing excavations there in the 1970s they focused, as was typical of the time, on the site of the cabin where the Jacksons lived

⁵² Miller and Miller, 36.

⁵³ Diane Swann-Wright, "Slave Graveyard at Monticello," *Footsteps* 4, no. 3 (May-June 2002): 39.

while the mansion was being built, finding the cabins for the enslaved people, and determining where the brick kiln, the necessary, and the Jackson's tomb was.⁵⁴ Some of their discoveries, however, led their interpretation in a new direction, and archaeology at the Hermitage began to focus on the enslaved community.

At different sites on the plantation where enslaved people had lived, archaeologists found small bottles of mercury. Although we do not use it as medicine now, mercury was used to treat various illnesses in the antebellum area. Each of these bottles had been placed under the floor of the cabin in which it was found, as if it had been stored there (as opposed to being dropped there).⁵⁵ They also found pits at most of the dwellings in which enslaved people had lived. They were of different sizes; some were close to a hearth and some were not, and some cabins had more than others. Hermitage Archaeologist Larry McKee believed that they were European in origin.⁵⁶ It would be several more years before Patricia Samford published her work on subfloor pits and made sense of this information.

In her work on slaveholding sites in Chesapeake Virginia, Patricia Samford found several subfloor pits in the quarters of enslaved people. Some of these pits may have been originally dug to get clay to use as chinking in chimneys or walls, but some were later lined with wood or brick to make them sturdier. Paleoethnobotanical evidence of plant remains from the pits located near a hearth shows that they probably held food. Subfloor pits that were farther away from the hearth may have been used as personal storage areas.

⁵⁴ Samuel D. Smith, "Plantation Archaeology at the Hermitage: Some Suggested Patterns," *Tennessee Anthropologist* 2, no.2 (fall 1977): 152-158.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 152-158.

⁵⁶ Larry McKee, "The Archaeological Study of Slavery and Plantation Life in Tennessee," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (fall 2000):195-197.

These pits were found in the early barracks-style quarters in which many enslaved people lived communally but not in the later single-family quarters. Archaeologists theorize that many strangers living together needed individual space for their belongings, whereas people living with their family members did not. Samford admits that it is hard to test this hypothesis, since any item an enslaved person felt was important enough to store was also important enough to take with him when he left. Still, archaeologists found a lock, a key, a scythe, eating utensils, a shoe buckle, a button, and other personal items in a total of four subfloor pits. There is also evidence that some enslaved people used subfloor pits as shrines. Wine bottles, animal bones, eggshells, and seashells were all found together in some subfloor pits. When they are placed in a specific arrangement, they were spiritually significant to the Igbo people who were prevalent in the Chesapeake area of colonial Virginia that Samford studied.⁵⁷ Her work illustrates that enslaved people kept some of their spiritual practices in this country, even if they had to keep it a secret from their slaveholder.

Archaeologists at the Hermitage also found artifacts that they believe had spiritual meaning for the enslaved population. These items include pierced coins, beads, and marbles marked with an "X" that may have represented the "'cross in a circle' motif [that] is evocative of the Kongo cosmogram."⁵⁸ Aaron Russell also discusses the hand-shaped "charms" and the possibility that they were also used as spiritual objects by the enslaved

⁵⁷ Patricia M. Samford, *Subfloor Pits and the Archaeology of Slavery in Colonial Virginia* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2007), 108-109, 140-145, 149-173.

⁵⁸ Aaron Russell, "Material Culture and African-American Spirituality at the Hermitage," *Historical Archaeology* 31, no. 2 (1997): 67-76, quote 71.

community.⁵⁹ Several other archaeologists declared that they were definitely charms, as cited in James M. Davidson's 2014 article that completely debunks this theory. While Russell cites the work of Samuel Smith and Larry McKee, who equate these items with "the Islamic 'Hand of Fatima,' used to ward off the evil eye" and note their "similarity with Latin American *figas* (hand-shaped charms) and *milagros* (votive items), which are thought to confer luck, fertility, and protection from supernatural forces,"⁶⁰ Davidson shows that they were actually clasps used on clothing. Davidson states that in contrast to what was available when the "hand charms" were first excavated, he had the benefit of looking through hundreds of newspapers after they had been digitized, which made them easier to search. He found references to African American hand charms but discovered that they referred to small cloth bags, not objects shaped like a hand. He was also able to find ads for the clasps in newspapers.⁶¹ Smith, McKee, and Russell had each done their own research and had solid reasons for believing that these "hand charms" had spiritual significance, but further research—with the help of the internet—proved them wrong. This example should remind archaeologists and historians at Grassmere and elsewhere that they must remain open to new ideas, interpretations, and questions whether they come from members of the public, with whom the archaeologists actively engage,⁶² or from their colleagues.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 66-67.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 67.

⁶¹ James M. Davidson, "Deconstructing the Myth of the 'Hand Charm': Mundane Clothing Fasteners and the Their Curious Transformations into Supernatural Objects," *Historical Archaeology* 48, no. 2 (2014): 27-47.

⁶² Larry McKee and Brain W. Thomas, "Starting a Conversation: The Public Style of Archaeology at the Hermitage," *Southeastern Archaeology* 17, no. 2 (winter 1998): 133-139.

When archaeologist Whitney Battle-Baptiste worked at the Hermitage in the late 1990s, she was most interested in determining how the enslaved community used the landscape and how they created a space for themselves. She discovered a cooking pit near the field quarters for the enslaved community, far away from the mansion. The enslaved people had placed it where it was surrounded by their dwellings and could not be seen from the overseer's house or the mansion where the Jackson family lived. Upon excavation, she found several items that the enslaved people had dropped around the cooking pit, including fish hooks, mouth harps, marbles, straight pins, and buttons. The location of the cooking pit tells us that the people of the enslaved community chose a spot where they could not be observed by the overseer or slaveholder. They also used the area for far more than cooking—women sewed, children played with their toys, someone made music on the mouth harp. Singing and socializing must have occurred around the fire too, away from the prying eyes of those who enslaved them. The fish hooks indicate that the enslaved population fished, probably to augment the rations that they received from Jackson. This echoes the archaeological evidence found at other plantation sites: after putting in a long day of work for the slaveholder, members of the enslaved community had to do more work in order to get enough to eat. These details are not mentioned in the historical record, but they greatly augment what we know about the enslaved community at the Hermitage.⁶³ Since William Dickson Shute relocated the original slave cabins to the site behind the house, information about how Grassmere's enslaved community used their outdoor space has been lost.

⁶³ Whitney Battle-Baptiste, *Black Feminist Archaeology* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2011), 103-105.

We also do not know where specific enslaved people lived. When historical archaeologist Jillian E. Galle looked at artifacts that had been found at the Hermitage, she was specifically trying to determine where the enslaved seamstress Gracy Bradley had lived.

All that is known of Gracy from the historical documents is that Jackson bought her, her mother, and three of her siblings in 1833, that she married Alfred, the wagoner, within a year of her arrival, and that she lived at the Hermitage until she died in 1882.⁶⁴ Galle examined the artifacts found at four dwellings for enslaved people including one called the Triplex, a three-unit dwelling close to the back of the mansion. Galle determined that there was a large quantity of sewing goods discovered at the middle unit of the Triplex, including the hooks and eyes, needles, scissors, straight pins, and thimbles that were found in smaller quantities at other dwellings in which enslaved people lived. However, there were also sewing artifacts found at the Triplex Middle that were not found elsewhere, such as a tambour hook, a crochet hook, an ivory needle case, a lace needle, and knitting needle guards. The artifacts show that the seamstress must have lived in the Triplex Middle due to the high quantity of sewing tools and unique sewing tools found there. She notes that Gracy was able to save scraps of fabric, lace, and ribbon from clothing she made for the white family to barter with members of the enslaved community or to make into nice clothing for them.⁶⁵ The position of the Triplex close to

⁶⁴ Jillian E. Galle, "Designing Women: Measuring Acquisition and Access at the Hermitage Plantation," in *Engendering African American Archaeology: A Southern Perspective*, ed. Jillian E. Galle and Amy L. Young (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004), 42.

⁶⁵ Jillian E. Galle, "Designing Women: Measuring Acquisition and Access at the Hermitage Plantation," in *Engendering African American Archaeology: A Southern Perspective*, ed. Jillian E. Galle and Amy L. Young (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004), 46-55.

the mansion, in direct line of sight of its inhabitants, means that Gracy did not enjoy the relative privacy of those who gathered around the cooking pit.

Since subfloor pits were found at the Hermitage, it is possible that enslaved people at Grassmere used them as well. If the site of the original slave cabins at Grassmere is found in a future excavation, archaeologists can look for evidence of a cooking pit where enslaved people gathered together for meals and socializing out of sight of the slaveholder. If the cabins were built in a row and could always be seen by the slaveholder, we will know that the Dunns and/or the Shutes wanted more control over their enslaved population.

Somerset Place Plantation

Unlike the previous three sites discussed, Somerset Place Plantation was not owned by someone famous and the site does not attract the significant numbers of guests that visit the plantations of former presidents. The extent of their historical documents, their continuing archaeological excavations, and their interpretation of slavery, however, contribute information that management at Grassmere can use in future excavation and interpretation.

Josiah Collins I named his Creswell, North Carolina farm Somerset Place Plantation in 1817. In 1830 his grandson Josiah Collins III directed his enslaved people to build the mansion that stands there today. In 1860, 328 enslaved people were living and working on this more than 4,000 acre plantation. After Emancipation the family was

unable to run the plantation on their own. The property was sold out of the family and fell into disrepair. The extant buildings on the site were restored in the 1950s, and in 1967 it became a public historic site.⁶⁶ As was typical in this time period site managers determined to focus on the white Collins family, and North Carolina historian William Tarlton led excavations and some reconstructions there in 1951-1954.⁶⁷

Tarlton was tasked with finding the foundations of historic buildings and roadways. The questions he asked were only about structures and roads, not about the white or the black inhabitants of the plantation. As Carl Steen points out, he did his work before the “‘new scientific archaeology’ of the 1960s and 1970s,” and he was much more interested in architecture than archaeology. His methods of archaeology were also sloppy by today’s standards: he used a bulldozer to remove upper strata during excavation; when he excavated, he mixed strata and the artifacts they contained; he did not analyze or keep good records of the artifacts that he found. While his field report and some of his field notes and maps still exist, his site plan and much of his other collected data have been lost. The records that do exist, however, have been invaluable for later archaeologists on the site.⁶⁸

While Tarlton’s methods and research questions are outdated, he was unusual in that he wanted to reconstruct some of the slave cabins. While he wanted to use one as a restroom and a few as guest houses, he felt that “the cabins nearest to the historical area

⁶⁶ Dorothy Spruill Redford, *Somerset Homecoming: Recovering a Lost Heritage* (NY: Doubleday, 1988), 107-122.

⁶⁷ Carl Steen, “Restoration Excavations at Somerset Place Plantation State Historic Site, 1994 and 2001,” ed. R.P. Stephen Davis, Jr., North Carolina Archaeological Council Publication No. 28 (Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Archaeological Council, 2003), 33; Alisa Y. Harrison, “Reconstructing Somerset Place: Slavery, Memory, and Historical Consciousness,” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 2008), 166-181.

⁶⁸ Steen, 33-39, quote 33.

proper should be authentically restored inside and outside and furnished as a historical exhibit.”⁶⁹ This shows both a trivialization of the history of enslaved people and a desire to interpret the history of the enslaved people who lived at the plantation at the same time.

In 1994, under contract from the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Division of Archives and History, Historic Sites Section, Carl Steen and his crew from Diachronic Research Foundation were tasked with finding five different buildings: the Chapel, The Hospital, the Kitchen, the small Slave Quarter, and the Large Slave Quarter, as well as the roads and pathways that connected them in the antebellum era. Management at the site, led by Dorothy Spruill Redford, wanted to reconstruct those buildings on their original sites to show visitors where some of the enslaved people would have lived and what they would have seen when they lived there. Even though many archaeologists at that time were focusing on the people who lived on a site rather than just the buildings, the budget precluded excavating middens and doing extensive research and interpretation of the artifacts that they found. Using Tarlton’s extant maps, Steen and his crew were able to locate the buildings before they started digging, thus saving much time and money. Even though the artifacts he found were in a hopeless jumble due to previous excavations, Steen was able to determine that the antebellum enslaved population had very few material possessions compared to enslaved people at similar sites. He posits that the isolation of the plantation offered enslaved individuals few opportunities to sell any extra vegetables, eggs, chickens, or crafts that they produced. Through their respective artifact assemblages, he was only able to prove that

⁶⁹ Harrison, 193.

the small and large slave quarters were residences for enslaved people. Between 1996 and 2002, the large slave quarter, the small slave quarter, and the hospital were all reconstructed “based on archaeological, architectural, and documentary research ... Furnishing the interiors of each building will take time, as more research is needed to complement the archaeological findings.”⁷⁰ This shows the management at Somerset Place working with both archaeological and historical information to present the most complete picture of slavery on the site as they can.

Freedman’s Cemetery

Freedman’s Cemetery offers a fascinating contrast to the African Burial Ground with respect to the participation of the respective descendant communities, the excavation of human remains, and the interpretation of the lives of those who were buried there. In 1986, due to a heavy volume of traffic, the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) did the required archaeological survey of an area they wanted to use to expand the freeway and build a Dallas Area Rapid Transit line. They quickly realized that the proposed new construction would go right through the Freedman’s Cemetery. This cemetery had been used for the free black community of North Dallas from 1869 through the early 1900s. At its largest point it contained four acres, but it had already been encroached upon by roads and a playground. The descendant community contacted TxDOT to ensure that this historic African American cemetery and the remains of the deceased and the African American history they represented were treated respectfully.

⁷⁰ Linda F. Carnes and Dorothy S. Redford, “Appendix B: The Somerset Place Report: Afterward,” in “Restoration Excavations at Somerset Place Plantation State Historic Site, 1994 and 2001,” ed. R.P. Stephen Davis, Jr., North Carolina Archaeological Council Publication No. 28 (Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Archaeological Council, 2003), 243-246.

TxDot worked with several private citizens as well as organizations such as Black Dallas Remembered, Inc., the Dallas Landmark Commission, the Dallas County Historical Commission, and the Texas Historical Commission to come up with a plan to both solve the city's transportation issues and treat the African American community respectfully.⁷¹

In 1991, TxDot, the Dallas Park Board, and Black Dallas Remembered, Inc. made a final plan for the excavation that "recognized the historic importance of Freedman's Cemetery and set out stipulations for site security, archaeological excavation and, after the human remains were studied by an osteologist on-site, reinternment in an available area of the cemetery."⁷² One thousand one hundred fifty seven people were removed from the burial site and reburied in land adjacent to the cemetery, which had been bought for this purpose. At the request of the descendant community, exams were done by the osteologist on site and were restricted to a visual inspection and measurements. Each artifact was reburied with the person it was found with. In the cases in which deterioration of the coffins had caused the artifacts to be loose in the dirt, the artifacts were given to the African American Museum to be added to their permanent collection.⁷³

TxDOT worked with local organizations as well as African American historians and archaeologists to produce an "osteological report, an historical study of the Freedman's Cemetery and the community that it was a part of, educational materials on the cemetery and community for the Dallas Public Schools, and a master plan for on-going community and student involvement with the materials related to the cemetery."

⁷¹ "Facing the Rising Sun: Freedman's Cemetery Exhibition Catalogue," ed. Alan Govenar and Phillip Collins (Dallas, TX: African American Museum and Black Dallas Remembered, 2000), 5, 6, 9.

⁷² Ibid., 5-6.

⁷³ Ibid., 5-6.

They also published a book and helped with the African American Museum Exhibit, both entitled “Facing the Rising Sun: Freedman’s Cemetery,” to share the lives of those who lived in the community.⁷⁴ This is a remarkable story of a descendant community who actively sought to work with a government agency and a government agency who willingly worked with them, especially because of the completely different reaction of the government agency involved with the African Burial Ground in Manhattan.

Conclusions

On the surface it seems quite odd that archaeological digs separated by half a century, the Civil Rights Movement, and the New Social History should all focus on buildings and not on discovering how the people there lived. One has to dig deeper into the material about this public history site to see that their goals are bigger than their funds, and they have to choose their projects carefully and in a certain order with the guidance of a master plan. As they receive grants, they can fund more archaeological digs on the middens around each building to determine more about how the enslaved people there lived.⁷⁵ It is important for management at Grassmere and any other site to plan out their goals to get the best use possible out of often limited funds. Finding the sites of the buildings in which the enslaved people lived and where they were treated for injury and illness, then reconstructing and interpreting them, allows visitors to see how part of the plantation would have looked like in the antebellum era. As site managers acquire more money they can excavate the middens, learn more about the enslaved population, and incorporate that into their interpretation.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 5-6, 11, quote 6.

⁷⁵ Redford, 32-99.

The myriad topics in this chapter show how important it is to work with the descendant community, research artifacts thoroughly but be open to new information, and that human remains can tell us a good bit about a person's physical life but not about their mental, emotional, or spiritual life. Management at Grassmere must keep these lessons in mind as they interpret information they have and plan future exhibits and excavations.

CHAPTER FOUR: HISTORIC GRASSMERE

In order to gather as much information about the enslaved population of Grassmere as possible, the research presented below combines data archaeologists gathered from the 2014 excavation of the graveyard for enslaved people¹ with available primary documents. Although written records contain more information about the slaveholding family than about the enslaved people themselves, some of the names, ages, and family relationships of the enslaved people who lived at Grassmere were documented. They also give a sense of how the slaveholders treated the people they enslaved.

Bioarchaeology of the Graveyard for the Enslaved People of Grassmere

When TRC Environmental Corporation, Nashville exhumed the remains in Grassmere's graveyard for enslaved people near the zoo's ticket booth, the archaeologists determined that nineteen people, (nine adults and ten children or infants), had been buried in nineteen graves (Figures 1-2). An additional set of fetal remains was recovered during bioarchaeological investigations, bringing the total to twenty individuals. Artifacts recovered included beads, buttons, and pins.² They discovered that each person had been buried in a coffin, at least 17 of which were hexagonal. The coffins and the few remnants

¹ Larry McKee and Hannah Guidry, "Excavation of a Mid-Nineteenth Century Cemetery at the Nashville Zoo," 30 Days of Tennessee Archaeology, Day 18 (September 17, 2014), accessed September 2, 2015, <https://tennesseearchaeologycouncil.wordpress.com>; Shannon Chappell Hodge, Ph.D., "Who Was Buried at Grassmere Plantation?" 30 Days of Tennessee Archaeology, Day 11 (September 10, 2014), accessed September 2, 2015, <https://tennesseearchaeologycouncil.wordpress.com>

² Michael Cass, "Nashville Zoo Graves Turn up More Than Expected," *Nashville Tennessean* (May 4, 2014), accessed September 2, 2015, <http://www.tennessean.com/story/news/2014/05/04/zoo-graves-turn-anyone-expected/8705721>.

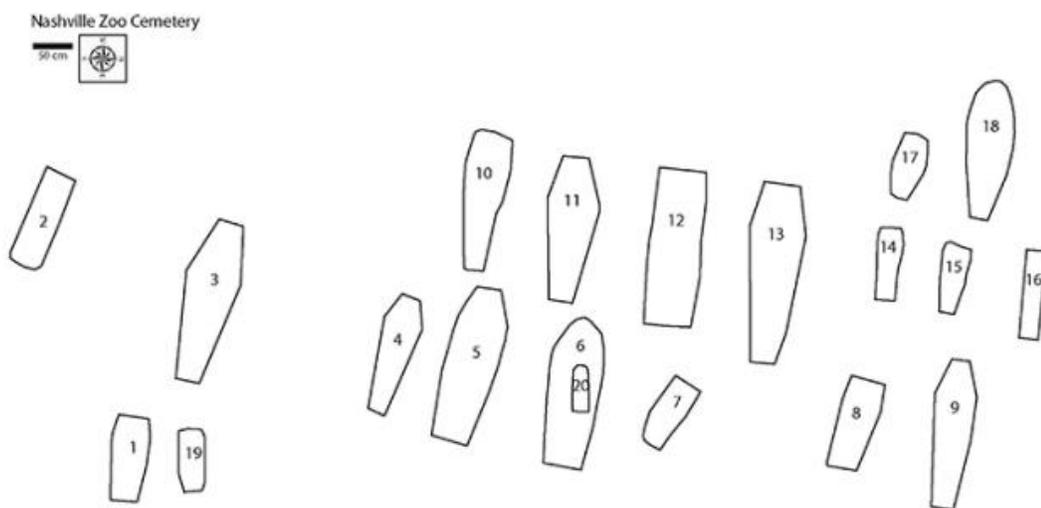


Figure 2: Plan view of Nashville Zoo Cemetery. Image courtesy TRC Environmental

Citation: Hodge, Shannon Chappell. "Who was buried at Grassmere Plantation?" 30 Days of Tennessee Archaeology, Day 11, September 10, 2014. Accessed September 2, 2015. <https://tennesseearchaeologycouncil.wordpress.com>

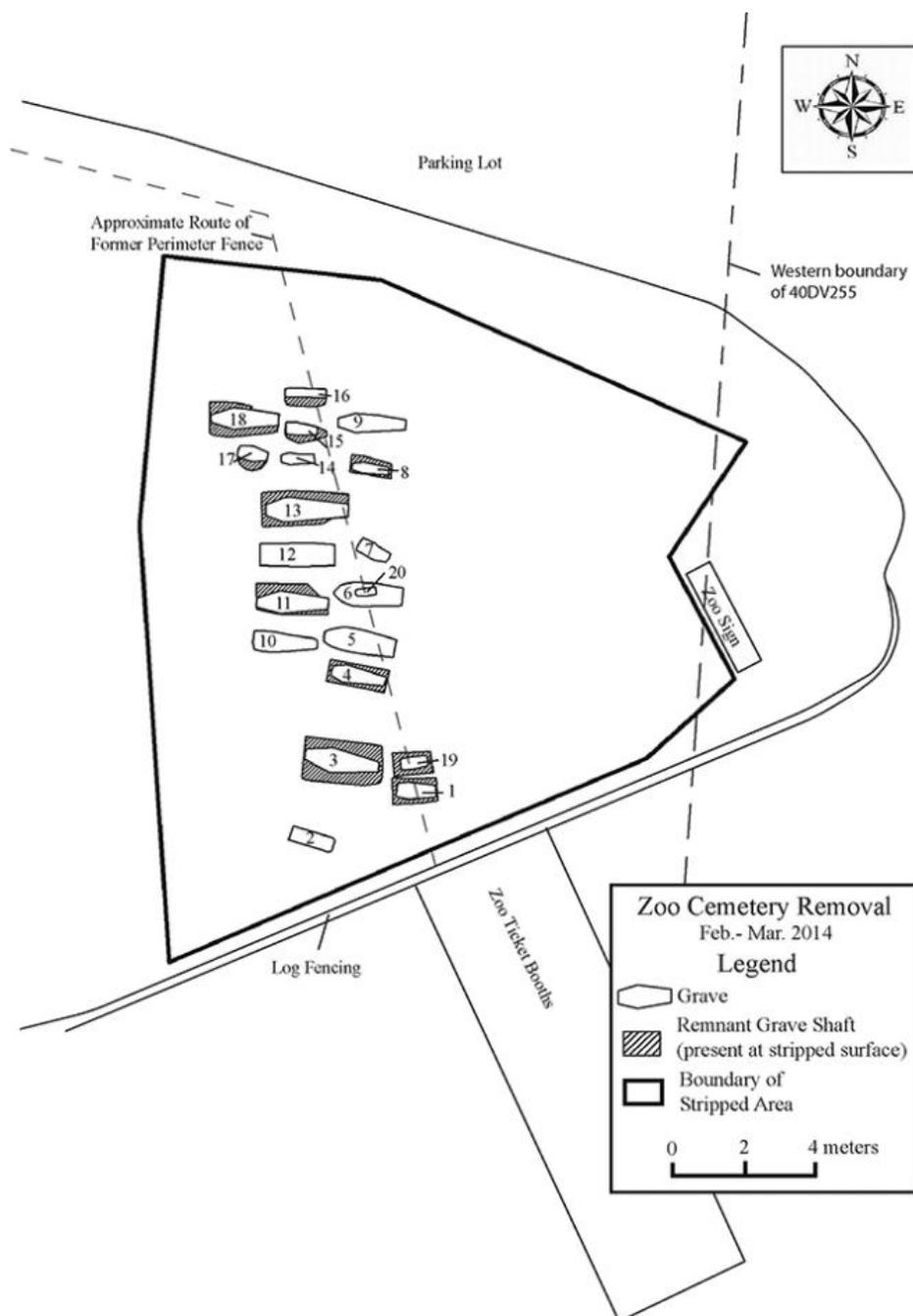


Figure 3: Plan View of Nashville Zoo Cemetery including perimeter fence and parking lot

Citation: McKee, Larry, and Hannah Guidry. "Excavation of a Mid-Nineteenth Century Cemetery at the Nashville Zoo." 30 Days of Tennessee Archaeology, Day 18, September 17, 2014. Accessed September 2, 2015, <https://tennesseearchaeologycouncil.wordpress.co>

of clothing found suggested that these people were buried between 1820 and 1850. There were several glass seed beads found with two of the infants, which appear to have been used to decorate the clothing in which they had been buried. Nineteen of the people had been buried facing east with their heads to the west, following both African and Christian custom. TRC documented each step of the exhumations, photographing the darker shades of soil where coffins and bodies had decomposed, as well as extant hardware from the coffins, remnants of clothing, and parts of a shoe. Some of the pictures document the spatial relations between each set of remains. They hypothesize that the people who were buried near each other may have had a familial relationship.¹

Although the exhumations took place while the zoo was open, the archaeologists and zoo employees took great care to ensure that no visitor either gawked at or was upset by the sight of human remains. Zoo maintenance workers put a fence around the site and covered it with cloth so that no one could see through it. Zoo employees had the opportunity to go down to the site at a certain time on a specific day to ask the archaeologists questions. They were not allowed to get too close to the graves or take pictures of the skeletons. By following these rules, employees acknowledged the fact that these bones were the remains of human beings and that we needed to respect them.

Larry McKee of TRC Environmental called Dr. Shannon Hodge, Ph.D., and asked if she would oversee DNA tests on the remains to see if she could determine what part of the world their ancestors had come from. Dr. Hodge agreed and took samples from several of the sets of skeletal remains. Historic Nashville Inc., the Nashville Metropolitan

¹ McKee and Guidry.

Historical Commission Foundation, and the Nashville Zoo each provided funds to test some of these samples.² Dr. Hodge also offered to volunteer her time to analyze the remains and assess the age and sex of the individuals, as well as to look for any skeletal and dental pathology. Many of the skeletons were badly decomposed due to the acidic soil in which they were buried, and only nine of the twenty interred could be more closely examined after their documentation *in situ*. Dr. Hodge found that these nine individuals had been fairly healthy and had no skeletal indicators of developmental delay or adult illness due to malnutrition. Some of them had healed injuries, including one adult man with a broken hip socket, a woman with compression fractures in her lower spine, and another man whose foot showed evidence of a healed infection. Six of the adults had had arthritis in their spines or knees, probably caused by hard physical labor. Burial Thirteen, who was probably a young man between seventeen and twenty-one years old, showed many signs of having had sickle cell disease. All of the deceased had died before they turned fifty years old. Seven were less than forty years old. Among the adult remains, five of the people were probably male, and four were probably female. Among both males and females, patterns of arthritis and the marks left by muscle attachments on their bones also that they did heavy physical labor. DNA and skeletal markers indicate that these people were of African descent.³

Dr. Hodge's work was complemented by that of Dr. Tiffany Tung, who is conducting a stable carbon and oxygen isotope analysis of nine individuals from the

² Melissa Wylie, "Historic Nashville Proud to Help Fund DNA Research of Unmarked Cemetery at Nashville Zoo," *Historic Nashville Inc. Newsletter*, June 2014, accessed September 2, 2015, <http://t.e2mainet/webview/1btteg/3aeaea7cf29df1688bdcfcb87f551998>.

³ Hodge; Tori Mason and Shannon Hodge, "The Bitter and the Sweet: Cemetery Relocation at the Nashville Zoo at Grassmere," The Tennessee Association of Museums Annual Conference, March, 2015.

graveyard. Tung's preliminary results show that five of these people did not spend their childhoods at Grassmere but grew up somewhere else. Oxygen isotope analysis indicates that they may have come from inland West Africa, Natchez, Mississippi, or Alexandria, Virginia. Individuals labeled Three, Nine, and Ten were born at Grassmere or in the local area but then lived elsewhere before they were buried in the graveyard for the enslaved people.⁴ Archaeologists reinterred the remains in a new cemetery near the historic home on June 12, 2014, in the same positions relative to each other in which they had originally been buried. Grassmere management held a memorial ceremony for them on November 22, 2014.⁵

The skeletal remains told us a good deal about the physical lives of these people who were enslaved at Grassmere. From her study of the man with the fractured hip and the woman with the compression fracture in her lower spine, Dr. Hodge believes that they sustained these injuries in accidents. While the muscle attachments and arthritis indicate that they did hard physical labor, the bones did not show the marks of people who performed extremely strenuous and damaging physical labor, as some people buried at the African Burial Ground had endured.⁶ That said, bones do not tell us if the enslaved people endured sexual or emotional abuse. We also cannot know if they endured physical abuse that left marks on the flesh but not the bone. What archaeologists learn from remains is just part of the story of the physical life of the deceased. Although the majority

⁴ Tung, Tiffany A., Molly Shea, and Larisa DeSantis, "Documenting Forced Movement of African Slaves to the Grassmere Plantation, Nashville, Tennessee, Using Carbon and Oxygen Stable Isotope Analysis of Dentition," presented at the 80th Annual Meeting of the Society for American Anthropology, San Francisco, CA, 2015.

⁵ McKee and Guidry; Mason and Hodge.

⁶ Hodge; Mack and Blakey, 12.

of enslaved people did not leave written records, they were recorded in some historical documents. Researching these documents was an important part of this project.

Historical Research on the Enslaved People of Grassmere

Any public site that interprets the lives of the enslaved researches available primary documents and then uses any information found there. As my brief survey of a few sites shows, the amount of information on individual enslaved people varies greatly from place to place. There are almost no letters or diaries from the Dunn family in the Grassmere Collection of papers at the Tennessee State Library and Archives or in other archival collections of people known to have had a connection with the Dunn family, so it is very hard to answer many of the questions that we have about the enslaved community. A few of those questions are: What were they given to eat? Did they need to grow vegetables, gather nuts, or hunt game to supplement their rations? Which person did which job? Who was related to whom? Were there many families here, or was the enslaved community made up of people who were not related to each other? What was the enslaved community like? Did they practice any African traditions? What religion did they practice when the slaveholder could see them? What religion did they practice when the slaveholder could not see them? Who, if anyone, was allowed to go in to town? Did Dunn or Shute hire out any enslaved people to other plantations or to people who lived in town?

The information that we do have about the Dunn family and the people they enslaved comes from public documents such as deeds, wills, court records, and state and federal census records. While he still lived in Wytheville, Virginia, Michael Dunn used

an enslaved woman as Moll as a guarantee that he would show up for a court case against Samuel Lewallen in April 1795. There is not a deed that shows that Moll was returned to him, so we cannot be sure that she came to Tennessee with him when he moved there with some enslaved people a few years later.⁷ Records do not show whether or not she had a family that she was separated from when Michael Dunn used her as a commodity in this court case. We do not know if she lived temporarily in quarters provided by Samuel Lewallen or if she was left there when Michael Dunn moved to Nashville. The extant documents show a pattern of Michael Dunn using enslaved people as commodities. Although these records give no information on how that affected the social and emotional lives of the people under his power, historians must stop to think about how Moll must have felt to be taken away from her home and community because her slaveholder was having legal difficulties.

In 1809, Dunn bought a young woman named Viney from David Moore. He was her third owner in eight months.⁸ Again we can only imagine the disruption in Viney's life as she was forcibly moved three times in eight months, possibly away from her family. This is the only record we have of Michael Dunn buying an enslaved person in Tennessee. As Virginia had much older and more established markets for enslaved people in the early 1800s, it is quite possible that most of the enslaved people who lived

⁷ Wythe County, VA Deed Book #1, page 277, recorded March 24, 1795, Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA.

⁸ Davidson County, TN Will Book # 4, page 66, recorded February 14, 1809, Metropolitan Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN.

at Grassmere came from there. Goodstein points out that most early Tennessee settlers brought enslaved people with them from North Carolina, Virginia, or Kentucky.⁹

Michael Dunn did sell several enslaved people as part of his job as sheriff of Davidson County circa 1808-1817, but this was one of his duties when people were deeply in debt and the sheriff was required to auction off some of their property.¹⁰ Repeatedly performing this task for his job may have reinforced the contemporary idea that it was acceptable to use enslaved people as commodities. Anita Goodstein notes, “Sheriffs’ sales of blacks for the payment of their masters’ debts were a source of bargain purchases.” There are no records of him selling a person who was enslaved at Grassmere while he lived there.¹¹

After he left Grassmere to go live with his daughter Martha and son-in-law John Thompson at their neighboring farm Glen Leven in 1846, however, Michael Dunn left several people in trust for some of his more vulnerable family members. Between 1846 and 1849 he put Robertson (~33 years old), Andrew (~30 years old), Ann (~15 years old), Henry (~56 years old), Milly (~35 years old), and William (~20 years old) in trust with John Thompson for his daughter Mary Hamilton. In each deed Michael Dunn

⁹ Goodstein, 73.

¹⁰ “Sheriffs of Davidson County,” last updated August 22, 2005, accessed December 7, 2006, <http://www.nashville-sheriffs-.net/sheriffs-chron.htm>; Davidson County, TN Deed Book H, page 10, recorded December 10, 1809, Metro Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN; Davidson County, TN Deed Book H, page 69, recorded February 13, 1812, Metro Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN; Davidson County, TN Deed Book H, page 70-71, recorded February 13, 1812, Metro Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN; Davidson County, TN Deed Book H, page 84, recorded May 9, 1812, Metro Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN; Davidson County, TN Deed Book H, page 135, recorded March 7, 1814, Metro Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN; Davidson County, TN Deed Book H, page 146, recorded June 15, 1814, Metro Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN; Davidson County, TN Deed Book H, page 209, recorded September 19, 1815, Metro Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN; Davidson County, TN Deed Book H, page 278, recorded February 7, 1817, Metro Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN.

¹¹ Goodstein, 74.

specified that these enslaved people were to be for Mary's use only and not to be used to pay her husband's current or future debts. Although five of his nine children were living at that time he did not put any enslaved people in trust for any of Mary's siblings. It is obvious that he did not trust Mary's husband James to care for her or her children.¹²

Michael Dunn also left enslaved people in trust for two of his grandchildren who had lost their mothers, Michael Dunn's daughters. He put Tanny (~12 years old), Charles (~9 years old), and Augustus (~9 years old) in trust with his son William D. Dunn for his grandson William R. Blocker's education. William Blocker's mother, Ann Dunn Blocker, had died earlier in 1846. Michael Dunn also put Mariah (~36 years old) and her three children Louisa (~16 years old), Rhoda (~6 years old), and Stephen (~3 years old) in trust with John Thompson for his granddaughter Isora Lowe. Isora's mother Christiana Dunn Lowe had died in 1841.¹³ While Michael Dunn did his best to provide for the people in his family whom he felt were the most vulnerable, he broke up other families to do so.

When a formerly enslaved woman identified in her slave narrative only as "Mrs. Chapman" was seven years old, she was sold separately from her mother. When she was interviewed by Ophelia Settle Egypt from Fisk University in the 1930s, she recalled, "I belonged to a girl, but she wasn't old enough, and she had to have a guardian for me. I

¹² Davidson County, TN Deed Book #9, page 214, recorded November 17, 1846, Metro Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN; Davidson County, TN Deed Book #9, page 386, recorded February 3, 1847, Metro Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN; Davidson County, TN Deed Book #12, page 496, recorded October 17, 1849, Metro Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN; Dunn Genealogical Data, Box 29, folder 3, Grassmere Collection, 1786-1985, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN.

¹³ Davidson County, TN Deed Book # 9, page 248, recorded December 7, 1846, Metro Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN; Davidson County, TN Deed Book # 9, page 248, recorded December 7, 1846, Metro Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN; Dunn Genealogical Data, Box 29, folder 3, Grassmere Collection, 1786-1985, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN.

was hired out to make money for that child.”¹⁴ Mrs. Chapman’s experience is probably similar to that of Tanny, Charles, Augustus, Mariah, Louisa, Rhoda, and Stephen when they were sold away from their own family members for the economic benefit of the slaveholding family.

We can glimpse Michael Dunn’s attitude toward enslaved people through these legal documents. Michael Dunn was providing for his family in a way that was socially acceptable at the time, but he was using people as commodities and tearing up the families of enslaved people at the same time. We do not know the parents of the children who Michael Dunn puts in trust for his own grandson William or even if he owned their parents, but they were not deeded to William with any adults. Michael Dunn does let Mariah stay with three of her children. We do not have enough information to know if they were her only children or not. We also do not know who the children’s father was.

When Michael Dunn wrote his will in 1851, he put an enslaved man named Ben in trust with John Thompson for Isora Lowe. His comment on Ben is telling: “It is also my will and desire that if said Negro boy Ben should misbehave or act in such a manner that said John Thompson may judge to not be for the advantage of said Isora Lowe he is hereby authorized to sell or exchange said boy Ben for money or other property and to hold in trust in the same manner...” When Michael Dunn died three years later, the inventory taken after his death lists Ben’s age as 38 years old—he would hardly have

¹⁴ Mr. and Mrs. Chapman, “We Didn’t Know Nothing Else but Slavery,” in *Mighty Rough Times, I Tell You*, ed. Andrea Sutcliffe (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, 2000), 28.

been a boy when Michael Dunn wrote his will.¹⁵ I do not know if Ben knew that he might be sold for what Michael Dunn or John Thompson felt was bad behavior, but he surely knew that the death of his slaveholder would cause a great disruption in his life. The death of a slaveholder and consequent estate settlement had a profound effect on the lives of enslaved people and they feared the uncertainty of whether they would have to leave their family, home, and community.¹⁶ Since Michael Dunn had already put ten enslaved people in trust with John Thompson, it is possible that Ben would rejoin friends and family members. Since I have not found a deed for Ben or a record of his birth, I do not know how long he was enslaved by Dunn or if he would ever have met Robertson, Andrew, Ann, Mariah, Louisa, Rhoda, Stephen, Henry, Milly, or William—Ben may have been going to a community full of strangers. The fact that Michael Dunn felt it would be fine to sell a person for bad behavior, and that he wrote the sale of a person into his will, demonstrates his complete lack of respect for Ben as a human being. That said, we do not have enough information to know how Michael Dunn treated his enslaved people overall—did he just see them as commodities, or was he abusive? Did he provide them with adequate food, shelter, and clothing? The extant documentation does not provide clear answers to these questions.

Both Ben and a fifteen-year-old enslaved young man named Henderson were listed in the inventory taken after Michael Dunn died. Henderson is not mentioned in Michael Dunn's will or any other document I found. By law he would have been included

¹⁵ Davidson County, TN Will Book # 16, page 216-217, recorded January 21, 1854, Metropolitan Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN; Davidson County, TN Will Book # 16, page 254, recorded March 14, 1854, Metropolitan Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN.

¹⁶ Franklin and Schweningen, 11, 20, 38.

in what Michael Dunn called "the residue of my estate." Per the terms of Dunn's will he also would have been given to John Thompson to hold in trust for Isora Lowe.¹⁷ Again we can only guess at how being forcibly moved affected this young man, but it almost certainly disrupted Henderson's family and social relationships.

It is unclear how Michael Dunn's grandson William Dickson Shute acquired the thirty-two enslaved people whom he owned in 1860. There is no record of him buying enslaved people in Davidson County, where Grassmere is located, or in Rutherford County, where he grew up. There is also no record of his wife Lavinia Hilliard Shute receiving enslaved people as part of her dowry, although this was a common custom. We know that they owned a woman named Flora in 1859 and that she took care of their young daughter Maggie.¹⁸ The few extant letters that Lavinia and William wrote during the Civil War do offer some information about the enslaved people owned by the Shutes. They each left Grassmere for a time in 1862, after Nashville was occupied by the Union Army. William writes to Lavinia, "I am sorry how I did not warn my negroes (the men at least) & brought you and the children out for I know you feel miserable surrounded by Lincoln's bandits."¹⁹ A few days later he writes Lavinia, "Encourage the negroes to work. Tell Louis I look to him to take care of the horses & mules & Ben the hogs, raise meat

¹⁷ Davidson County, TN Will Book # 16, page 216-217, recorded January 21, 1854, Metropolitan Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN; Davidson County, TN Will Book # 16, page 254, recorded March 14, 1854, Metropolitan Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN; Davidson County, TN Will Book # 16, page 216-217, recorded January 21, 1854, Metropolitan Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN; Davidson County, TN Will Book # 16, page 254, recorded March 14, 1854, Metropolitan Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN.

¹⁸ "Diary of Kate S. Carney Murfreesboro, TN January 1, 1859-July 30, 1868." Kate S. Carney Diary M-139 in the Southern Historical Collection Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 115.

¹⁹ Letter from William Dickson Shute to Lavinia Hilliard Shute, March 23, 1862. Memphis, TN. Grassmere Collection, 1786-1985, Box 17, folder 10, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN.

and bread.”²⁰ After Federal troops had taken over a city, enslaved people often did less work, stopped working altogether, or even left the farm or plantation.²¹ We do not know how the enslaved people of Grassmere reacted to Union occupation—William Dickson Shute may simply have wanted to make sure that his family had enough to eat, or perhaps Lavinia was able to get word to him that their formerly enslaved people were leaving the farm.

We have one letter from Lavinia to Mary Thompson, the wife of John Thompson, at the neighboring farm Glen Leven, also written in 1862. She writes, “I hope Mr. B. has explained to you why I left so quietly and unexpectedly...I do wish you would go over and let Mr. B. and the servants know you have heard from me & tell Lampy I will be home in about a month anyhow I reckon but keep it as quiet as possible.” In closing the letter she adds, “Give my love to all the servants at home and at your house. Amy sends her love to her Mammy, Papy & Mitch.”²² Although we still cannot determine how the enslaved people were treated and cared for when the Shutes lived at Grassmere, the tone of Lavinia’s letter differs dramatically from that of Michael Dunn’s will. We do not know who Amy and Mitch were, nor who her "Mammy" and "Papy" were, but from where they are mentioned in the letter it is quite possible that they were enslaved people. From records that John Thompson kept we know that he enslaved a woman named Nancy Dunn who had four children: Anthony (born in 1834), Augustus (born in 1836), Amanda (born in 1838), and Rebecca (born in 1843). John Thompson did not own the father of

²⁰Letter from William Dickson Shute to Lavinia Hilliard Shute, March 29, 1862. Memphis, TN. Grassmere Collection, 1786-1985, Box 17, folder 10, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN.

²¹ Camp, 118-138; Litwack, 51-63.

²² Letter from Lavinia Hilliard Shute to Mary Thompson, July 6, 1862. Jackson, MS. Box 17 folder 9. Grassmere Collection, 1786-1985, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN.

these children, but since Nancy had the last name “Dunn” it is probable that the father lived at Grassmere. It was not uncommon for enslaved people from neighboring farms or plantations to marry each other or be related to each other. It is quite possible that Amy was enslaved by the Shutes at Grassmere while her parents and Mitch (her sibling? her child? her husband?) were enslaved by the Thompsons at Glen Leven.²³

Conclusions

The information that we learned from science and material culture showed that although the enslaved people at Grassmere did a good deal of physical labor, they were given adequate food and health care. Although we do not know what their funerals were like, all were buried in clothing rather than shrouds, and they were placed in wooden coffins before burial. This shows that either the slaveholders, the enslaved community, or both treated the deceased with reverence, which was not always the case when enslaved people were buried.²⁴ We can guess that people who were buried near each other were family members, but we cannot determine more than that without further DNA testing. Since some people lived elsewhere but were then buried at Grassmere, it is possible that their bodies were brought back to be buried with their families. On the other hand since Michael Dunn used his enslaved people as commodities and moved them when it was best for his own family, it is possible that members of enslaved families were widely

²³ Ophelia Thompson Paine, *The African American Community at Glen Leven* (Sewanee, TN: Patricia West/Tree of Life Memoirs, 2016), 69; Glen Leven Ledger, 1847-1852, microfilm 1071, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN; John McCline, *Slavery in the Clover Bottoms: John McCline's Narrative of his Life during Slavery and the Civil War*, ed. Jan Furman (Knoxville: The University Press, 1998), 34.

²⁴ "St. Helena Dig" press release, University of Bristol, last updated March 8, 2012, accessed September 13, 2016, <http://bristol.ac.uk/news/2012/8294.html>; Tom Phillips, "Rio's Cemetery of New Blacks Sheds Light on Horrors of Slave Trade," *The Guardian*, December 20, 2011, accessed September 13, 2016, <https://www.theguardian/world/2011/dec/20/rio-cemetery-of-the-new-blacks-brazil>

scattered in life and were then buried in many different graveyards. While emotional scars do not show up on the bones, the written records make it clear that the enslaved population at Grassmere lived under the threat of being used as a commodity and sent to live elsewhere. This action would forcibly remove them from their home and community and any family members they had at Grassmere. Both the fear and the reality of being forcibly moved could have been traumatizing for the enslaved population.

The results of Tung's ongoing isotope analysis will give us more avenues of research to consider as we look at this enslaved population. As previously noted, it was not uncommon for slaveholders to hire out their enslaved workers, especially in Nashville. It is possible that some of the enslaved people of Grassmere were hired out to other plantations or worked in the city while still being owned by Michael Dunn. There may be records of them having been hired out or records of payments to Michael Dunn by those who rented his enslaved people. Michael Dunn may have brought people who were born in Alexandria, Virginia with him when he moved from Wytheville to Nashville in the early 1800s, and there may be records of those sales that we have not explored yet. Many people who were sold in Natchez were forcibly removed from Alexandria. There may be records of Dunn purchasing people at the slave market in Natchez, Mississippi. It is unlikely that people who spent their childhoods in inland West Africa would have lived at Grassmere and died in 1820 or later, since federal law prohibited Americans from importing Africans from Africa in 1808, so that is not a likely avenue of research. Still, historians must always be open to new sources of information, and no public history site that interprets slavery well is able to do so without years of research. I will explore some of these sites in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: PUBLIC INTERPRETATION OF SLAVERY

Introduction

A review of past methods of interpreting slavery at comparable public historical sites is essential in helping Grassmere management develop more inclusive graphics and public programs. Many historic sites have been interpreted and open to the public much longer than Grassmere has. Grassmere now has the advantage of having a Historic Site Manager and an Education Director who are enthusiastic about making their interpretation more inclusive, something that has not always been true since the main focus of the Nashville Zoo is the animals. I will review key publications and revisit the sites introduced in Chapter Three in order to determine what methods of public interpretation will work best for Grassmere.¹

Representations of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums (2002) was a landmark book by Jennifer L. Eichstedt and Stephen Small in which they surveyed 122 historic southern plantation museums to evaluate each site's interpretation of slavery—or lack thereof. Their results demonstrate the strong racial bias of most of these museums. They discuss the “symbolic annihilation and erasure” of African Americans and omission of slavery at many of the sites that they visited. At these sites so much of the interpretation was focused on the white plantation owners and their material

¹ Helpful titles not discussed here include Christy Matthews, “Where Do We Go from Here? Researching and Interpreting the African-American Experience,” *Historical Archaeology* 31, no. 3 (1997): 107-113; Julia Rose, “Collective Memories and the Changing Representation of American Slavery,” *The Journal of Museum Education* 29, no 2-3 (spring/summer-fall, 2004): 26-31; Max Van Balgooy, *Interpreting African American History and Culture at Museums and Historic Sites* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015); Julia Rose, *Interpreting Difficult History at Museums and Historic Sites* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016).

goods that African American life there was discussed only briefly or completely ignored. Most interpreters ignored the subject of slavery altogether, used the words "servants" or "servitude" to make it sound as if the African Americans there were not enslaved, explained that "work was done" but not who did the work, "trivialized" or made fun of slavery, or only discussed slavery at a certain part of the site, such as the enslaved quarters or the kitchen, or even on a completely separate tour.² Their book condemns public historians at that time and is still used by historians today to critique southern plantation museums.³ However, because this book was written in 2002 and much of the research was done earlier than that, the authors do not critique the websites of southern plantation museums. I have found a good deal of information about enslaved people on the websites of some plantation museums, but this material often that does not get discussed in as much detail at the historic site itself. For example, public historians at both Mount Vernon and the Hermitage list the names, skills, and any additional information known about the enslaved people who worked there on their websites.⁴

Building on Eichstedt and Small's work, the authors of the essays in James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton's book *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of*

² Eichstedt and Small, 105-107, 135-136, 147,171.

³ Amanda G. Seymour, "Pride and Prejudice: Interpreting Slavery at the Homes of Five Founding Fathers," in *Interpreting African American Culture at Museums and Historic Sites*, ed. Max van Balgooy (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 3-12.

⁴ "Mount Vernon Slavery Database," Mount Vernon, last modified 2016, accessed October 5, 2016, <http://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/slavery/slavery-database>; "Getting Word: African American Families of Monticello," Monticello, last modified 2016, accessed October 5, 2016, <https://www.monticello.org/getting-word>; "Andrew Jackson's Enslaved Laborers," The Hermitage, last modified 2016, accessed October 5, 2016, <http://thehermitage.com/learn/mansion-grounds/slavery/>; "Slaves of the Plantation," Whitney Plantation, last modified 2016, accessed October 5, 2016, <http://www.whitneyplantation.com/slaves-of-the-plantation.html>

American Memory (2006) discuss the contested history of slavery, race, and the Civil War at public sites. They point out that

the clash between memory's ownership and history's interpretation often takes place in the public arena of historic museums, memorials, and historical sites. During the twentieth century the struggle for control of the memory of America's past has been central to debates over national identity and significant for concerns about modern civil rights...contemporary debates must be grounded in a knowledge of history.⁵

While a variety of public opinions must be considered at public sites, public historians have a responsibility to portray history based on historical and archaeological evidence, not on myths and traditions. The authors explore such topics as the relationship between Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson at Monticello, the interpretation of the Liberty Bell forged over a century before Emancipation, and public reactions to the causes of the Civil War. These and other topics, and how public historians handled them and the public response to them, give readers ideas to build on and ideas to avoid. For example, they discuss how public history sites can lead public discussions on controversial topics like slavery. Not only do these discussions allow members of the public to share their opinions with exhibit planners, it gives them a sense of ownership in the exhibit. The exhibit planners gain new perspectives and learn what other kinds of exhibits the local community would like to see.⁶

Antoinette T. Jackson continues to expand on the work of Eichstedt and Small in *Speaking for the Enslaved: Heritage Interpretation at Antebellum Plantation Sites* (2012). Even after Eichstedt and Small's critiques were well-received and highly

⁵ James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, editors, *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* (NY: The New Press, 2006), xi.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 65-68.

influential, she explains that most tours and brochures only focus on the white families who lived at southern plantations such as Friendfield Plantation (Georgetown, South Carolina, mid-1800s) and Snee Farm Plantation (Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, 1787-1968). She shows how using input from the African American descendant community, as well as information gleaned from archaeological excavations, can deepen and broaden the story of the African American people who also lived and worked on these plantations.⁷

Kristin L. Gallas and James De Wolf Perry continue to build on Eichstedt and Small's work in their how-to manual *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites* (2015). They discuss how to get support from one's institution and initiate organizational change to interpret slavery at a historic site, and ways to get the community involved in these new programs. Site directors must realize that many visitors want to learn more about the enslaved population at the site but may have limited knowledge of slavery in general, and develop their interpretation accordingly. They must also train their staff how to do research to improve their own limited knowledge about slavery and teach them how to present the issue sensitively. The historical content they gather will be useful for both internal discussions with policy makers and external discussions with visitors.⁸ Although this book is organized much differently than that of Eichstedt and Small or Jackson, it builds on the idea that slavery is either badly interpreted or not interpreted at all at many sites. The authors also give readers concrete suggestions for improving interpretation at his/her site, including getting the support of their institution to interpret slavery, how to

⁷ Antoinette T. Jackson, *Speaking for the Enslaved: Heritage Interpretation at Antebellum Plantation Sites* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2012), 13-18.

⁸ Kristin L. Gallas and James De Wolf Perry, *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), xiv-xviii, 119-120.

train their staff to have the confidence and historical context to discuss slavery with visitors, and how to get the community involved with their programs.

Historian Rachel Wolgemuth comments, “Be assured that if you’re not displeasing someone, you’re probably not doing anything of note.”⁹ Public historians can never expect to have complete harmony among all of their employees and guests at a site any more than the original owners had complete harmony with all of their family members and enslaved people, but as Lonnie Bunch, the director of the National African American History Museum states, “It is essential for museums to create a new synthesis that allows visitors to see how diverse ethnic and racial groups in this society struggled and interacted with each other. This interaction, often violent and often contested, shaped and changed each group and the whole society. Creating such a synthesis and presenting it honestly—warts and all—is not easily accomplished. But it is a goal worthy of the effort.”¹⁰ Below I will examine some historic sites that have changed or are working on changing their interpretation and have hit road blocks and faced differences of opinion or outright criticism, both from inside and outside their institutions. While each of them is striving to follow “best practices,” that term has different meanings for different people. None of them are perfect, and each has its challenges and critics. Still, there is something to learn from each of them. I will discuss several different sites below and look at what public historians from Grassmere can learn from them.

Mount Vernon

⁹ Rachel Wolgemuth, *Cemetery Tours and Programming: A Guide* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield 2016), x.

¹⁰ Julia Rose, *Interpreting Difficult History at Museums and Historic Sites* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 136.

Linnea Grim notes that the interpretation of African Americans at Mount Vernon has developed gradually since 1928, when the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association placed a marker at the cemetery for enslaved people on the site, to the reconstruction of quarters of some of the enslaved community in 1962, to the "active archaeology and scholarly research" that continues today.¹¹ In 1997, Mark D. Bograd and Theresa A. Singleton described the interpretation of slavery and Mount Vernon as "benignly portrayed." They detail the quarters for enslaved people at the Spinning House, where enslaved women had spun linen and wool. The quality of the furniture, ceramics, and bedding in the room make it seem as if the room was for honored guests rather than enslaved people and gave the impression that enslaved people had a rather nice life. This example illustrates the fact that public historians must furnish rooms and exhibits carefully in an effort to represent what used to be there, not what looks most appealing.¹²

In 2013, Amanda Seymour found that the introductory film, graphics located around the property, and interpreters either portrayed slavery in a benign way or marginalized it, indicating that despite the work of Eichstedt and Small eleven years earlier, not all docents and curators had incorporated the lessons of the book into their interpretation.¹³ Seymour goes into detail about a first-person interpretation of William Lee, George Washington's personal valet. She was struck by the interpreter's comment that "here at Mount Vernon, compared to other estates, life is better for us slaves."

¹¹ Linnea Grim, "So Deeply Dyed in Our Fabric That It Cannot Be Washed Out": Developing Institutional Support for the Interpretation of Slavery," in *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites* ed. Kristin L. Gallas and James DeWolf Perry (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 33.

¹² Mark D. Bograd and Theresa A. Singleton, "The Interpretation of Slavery: Mount Vernon, Monticello, and Colonial Williamsburg," in *Presenting Archaeology to the Public: Digging for Truths* ed. John H. Jameson, Jr. (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1997), 196.

¹³ Grim, 33-34, quote 33.

Seymour continues, “He elaborated on the different areas where Washington showed ‘compassion’ and ‘humanity’ toward those he had enslaved, including the recognition of marriages even though they were not recognized under the law, and his level of care for the enslaved people who became ill.”¹⁴ Seymour objects to the fact that the interpreter focused on Washington and stated how well he treated his enslaved people in certain cases instead of focusing on Lee’s life and his personal experiences as a person who was enslaved by another person. This is a dilemma faced by every public historian who interprets a famous slaveholder—how do you present negative and uncomfortable information about someone who many see as a hero and a patriot, such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, or Andrew Jackson? How do you keep your visitors and your Board of Directors happy while still presenting facts about slavery as accurately as you can? Seymour adds that if interpreters and staff do not know anything about the life of an individual enslaved person, they should not do a first-person interpretation of him, “as it belies the experience of slavery and can create a version of American history to which visitors are more likely to look back with a sense of nostalgia rather than hindsight-fueled caution and sorrow.”¹⁵ This is a valid point, and public historians should explore first-person interpretations, tours, graphics, artifacts, motion pictures, and other options for reaching their audience while being true to the subject. A combination of many methods of interpretation may be used at various parts of a site. When employees at Mount Vernon looked at all of their interpretation, they agreed that it needed to be improved.

¹⁴ Amanda G. Seymour, “Pride and Prejudice: Interpreting Slavery at the Homes of Five Founding Fathers,” in *Interpreting African American Culture at Museums and Historic Sites*, ed. Max van Balgooy (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 6.

¹⁵ Seymour, 6-7, quote 7.

In 2013, the curatorial staff was planning to develop an exhibit about the enslaved people of Mount Vernon. The curatorial staff worked closely with the archaeology, preservation, and research departments to develop programs and exhibits, and they all wanted to improve their interpretation of slavery, but they were worried that the board would not support this idea. Assistant curator Jessie MacLeod took their concerns to the board. She explained to them that “slavery is of increasing interest to the American public as the nation grapples with the legacy of slavery and racial inequality” and that Mount Vernon had a rich supply of documents, archaeological artifacts, buildings, oral histories, and other items that would help them to research and interpret the lives of enslaved people. All of this was good information for the board to have, but MacLeod’s final statement may have been the most convincing, “George Washington’s estate is no longer in a leadership position among its peer institutions on the topic of slavery and risks falling behind if it does not adopt strategies to interpret slavery in innovative ways, following the example of Monticello, Montpelier, the Smithsonian, and other sites.”¹⁶ No board of directors wants to think that their institution is falling behind other institutions, especially if they had previously been a leader, but telling the board first that there was interest in slavery, and then telling them about the resources they had to research and interpret slavery well, all helped the curators’ cause.

On October 1, 2016, Mount Vernon opened an exhibit entitled "Lives Bound Together: Slavery at George Washington's Mount Vernon" that is scheduled to be on view until September 30, 2018. This exhibit, and the accompanying book of the same title, explores how the black and white residents of Mount Vernon interacted on a daily

¹⁶ Grim, 34, 40.

basis. The book includes short biographies of several of George Washington's enslaved people, along with more general information about slavery at Mount Vernon. Other essays describe how historians researched slavery at Mount Vernon through archaeology, historical documents, digital technology, and the landscape. Descendants of some of the people who were enslaved at Mount Vernon wrote essays of their personal reflections about George Washington owning their ancestors. Finally, the graphics in the exhibit relate how George Washington's opinion of owning other humans changed over the years, leading him to free several enslaved people in his will. The text does not shy away from information about how many enslaved people ran away from life under Washington, or the punishments meted out for these and other acts of rebellion. While the theme is "Lives Bound Together," the museum does not try to make it seem as though slavery was a benevolent institution.¹⁷

It is unfortunate that this wonderful, well-researched, and balanced exhibit with detailed information about enslavement at Mount Vernon and many specific individuals who were enslaved there can still be considered segregated knowledge. This exhibit, like all large exhibits, is located in the Visitor's Center and not in the main house. It is open as long as the site is open, and there is no extra charge to see it. It would not be possible to include this entire wealth of information on a regular house tour. That said, it was not even mentioned on the house tour by any of the docents I saw in December 2016.

On house tours at Mount Vernon, a docent is stationed in each room. As at many other sites, the quality of interpretation and the way that enslavement is interpreted, or

¹⁷ *Lives Bound Together: Slavery at George Washington's Mount Vernon*, ed. Susan P. Schoelwer (Mount Vernon, VA: Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, 2016), 1-113.

ignored, depends on the guide.¹⁸ Some spoke of "servants," some of "slaves," some of "enslaved people." Some mentioned specific enslaved people by name and described the work that they did in the active voice; others said that work "was done" but did not state who did the work. The graphics around the site, on the other hand, gave many great details about enslavement at Mount Vernon and the lives of several individuals. They included pictures of archaeological artifacts as well as images of historical documents and explained what information they had garnered from each. Their website is also replete with information about enslavement at Mount Vernon, both in general and more specifically about certain people.¹⁹

As Eichstedt and Small found in 2002 and I discovered as I toured sites in 2016, even sites that are doing wonderful exhibits on slavery are still segregating that knowledge by offering separate tours that focus on slavery instead of integrating it into the main tour and by placing exhibits on slavery off the beaten path.²⁰ Docents seem to rely on the exhibit to tell visitors about slavery, but since I encountered many docents who did not mention these slavery exhibits many visitors could easily miss them. The Hermitage also has a wonderful tour on slavery that is not incorporated into its overall interpretation.

The Hermitage

I took the Hermitage's tour of its history of slavery, "Beyond the Mansion Tour," in August, 2016. Visitors rode around the estate in a horse-drawn wagon and looked at

¹⁸ Eichstedt and Small, 265.

¹⁹ www.mountvernon.org

²⁰ Eichstedt and Small, 199.

the quarters where enslaved people had lived and the fields where they had worked. Jamie, our tour guide, told us how many enslaved people Andrew Jackson had owned over the years and explained the hard work they would have had to do to bring in a good cotton crop each year. She mentioned that Ben and Squire manned the cotton gin and were very valued because of their skill with this machine. She also showed us the site where Gracy the seamstress probably lived (applying Jillian Galle's research presented in Chapter Three), as determined by the number of needles and other sewing implements that archaeologists had found there. Jamie noted both good and bad aspects of Jackson as a slaveholder: he often kept families of enslaved people together instead of selling individuals, but he would also have enslaved people whipped or mete out other harsh punishments if he felt it was warranted. The layout of the field quarters was such that Jackson had a straight line of sight to them, allowing him to supervise the enslaved people even when they were done with their daily work. Jamie told us that everyone in the enslaved community received rations, but as archaeological evidence showed that they also fished and hunted to augment their diet it seems that their rations were insufficient. Overall it was a very informative tour that put slavery in context, discussed slavery in general at the Hermitage, and told visitors about a few specific enslaved people.

The house tour was conducted by several different docents, with varying degrees of quality and inconsistencies in the language used. Some of the docents used the word "slaves" while others used the word "enslaved." Some stated that enslaved people did the work, others stated in the passive voice criticized by Eichstedt and Small that "the work was done" without mentioning who did that work. The script of the audio tour, which had

stops around the plantation, was more balanced in its presentation of slavery. As I noted earlier about websites, audio tours do not depend on the preferences of each tour guide but can be written, edited, and produced by the Education Department or management.

The best interpretation of slavery was set up on a touch-screen computer. Entitled "Hermitage Slave Families and Occupations," it listed the enslaved people who lived there in 1829 by their family groups, if known. Descendants of enslaved people who lived and worked at the Hermitage would find this to be a great genealogical resource. In addition to listing the jobs of each person, there were more detailed stories about eighteen of the enslaved people. The computer was in the Visitors' Center but did not have a sign describing what it was, and none of the employees mentioned it to us.

The Hermitage does an uneven job of interpreting slavery. Their "Beyond the Mansion Tour" is wonderfully researched and presented, but it is still segregated knowledge. Visitors have to pay extra for this tour, and it is not offered as often as the regular house tour on which the enslaved population is rarely mentioned. Archaeologists have done so many excavations at this site that they know a good deal about the population here, but when I attended a conference here years ago I learned that the public historians at the site had to battle the Board of Directors to be allowed to even mention that Andrew Jackson owned enslaved people. This is far from the only site that has faced this problem.²¹ Other public historians should be aware that even if they do outstanding

²¹ Vlach, John Michael, "The Last Great Taboo Subject: Exhibiting Slavery at the Library of Congress," in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* ed. James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 57-73; Gary B. Nash, "For Whom Will the Liberty Bell Toll? From Controversy to Cooperation," in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* ed. James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 75-101; Joanne Melish, "Recovering (from) Slavery: Four Struggles to Tell

research and have the sources and artifacts to do exemplary exhibits, they may have to convince others at their institution that discussing slavery at their site is worthwhile.

Monticello

In 1988, the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, which owns and operates Monticello, stated in its Master Plan for 1988-1993 that it wanted to “assume a position of leadership among historic sites in the interpretation of slave communities.”²² Since that time it has used its extensive documentation, architecture, furniture, archaeological collections and ongoing archaeological field research to improve its interpretation through tours, graphics, and reconstructions. Implementing this plan included extensive research, interpreter training, and collaboration among members of all different departments and the board of directors.²³ Interpreters did not begin telling visitors about Mulberry Row, where free and enslaved artisans lived and worked, until 1990. Staff members also published a pamphlet that year which provided some information about the enslaved community.²⁴ Lucia Stanton, Senior Historian at the site, also wrote books detailing the lives of many of the people and families enslaved at Monticello.²⁵

the Truth," in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* ed. James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 103-132; Carisa Worden, "Reparations and Remembrance: Racial Justice and Public History in Suburban New York," in *Living History: Encountering the Memory of the Heirs of Slavery*, ed. Ana Lucia Araujo (Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 57-82; Regina Faden, "Museums and the Story of Slavery: The Challenge of Language," in *Politics of Memory: Making Slavery Visible in the Public Space* ed. Ana Lucia Araujo (New York: Routledge, 2016), 252-266.

²² Grim, 35.

²³ Grim, 35-44, 87-88.

²⁴ Bograd and Singleton, 198.

²⁵ Lucia Stanton, *Free Some Day: The African-American Families of Monticello* (Charlottesville, VA: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, 2000); Lucia Stanton, *Slavery at Monticello* (Charlottesville, VA: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, 2003); Lucia Stanton, “*Those Who Labor for my Happiness*”: *Slavery at Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2012).

In 2013, Amanda Seymour found that while interpreters did provide information about enslaved people at Monticello that included “violence, splitting of families through sale or purchase, interracial unions, and Jefferson’s freeing of only a small fraction of his total slaves upon his death,” these harsher aspects of slavery were only discussed on the special slavery tours or in spaces where the most interpretation of enslaved people occurred, such as beneath the house and along Mulberry Row. Visitors who only took the house tour would still hear about slavery, but the focus was on the “less unsettling topics” of slavery, such as how enslaved people cooked and served food for the Jefferson family and their guests.²⁶ If interpreters focus on the jobs that enslaved people did without including the context of being enslaved, slavery *can* sound no different from free people doing a job in exchange for room and board. Describing enslaved people and their work in this kind of “fleeting and perfunctory way” without including the larger context fits Eichstedt and Small’s definition of symbolic annihilation.²⁷ Some people may feel that integrating slavery into regular tours is enough, but Amanda Seymour disagrees: “Failing to give a detailed or realistic presentation of slavery at historic sites may keep visitors (subconsciously or otherwise) unaware of slavery’s structure, prevalence, and nature... It is not enough for sites to acknowledge the presence of slavery. The *ways* that slavery is interpreted has direct bearing on the message that the site sends to the public.”²⁸

When I visited Monticello in the summer of 2016, I found that slavery was unevenly integrated into the interpretation. Enslaved people were mentioned on the house tours, but they were not well integrated into the content. The words “servant,” “slave,”

²⁶ Seymour, 8.

²⁷ Eichstedt and Small, 107.

²⁸ Seymour, 11.

and “enslaved person” were used interchangeably. Eichstedt and Small note that the word “servant” is a euphemism for slavery that symbolically annihilates or erases the reality of white people owning African American people from the minds of the interpreters and visitors.²⁹ One tour guide stated that Thomas Jefferson had definitely had children with Sally Hemings; the next day a different tour guide stated that most historians *believed* that that had occurred. On the special tour about slavery, the tour guide went into great detail about Sally Hemings, her extended family and how she was related to Jefferson’s late wife, the children the Jefferson and Sally Hemings had together, and the lives of those children and their descendants.

The film “Thomas Jefferson’s World” was also inconsistent in its treatment of the enslaved people, sometimes using the passive voice to describe what work was done and then listing the names and families of several specific enslaved people, their jobs, and what life was like for the enslaved community. Both the film and the tour guides acknowledged the contradiction of Thomas Jefferson enslaving people and writing the Declaration of Independence.³⁰

The graphics consisted of general information about slavery in the area to give visitors context, then talked about slavery at Monticello, and included the names, birth and death dates, family relationships, jobs, and brief biographies of dozens of the enslaved people who had worked for Thomas Jefferson. The text contained information on enslaved people whom Thomas Jefferson had had sold or whipped as punishment,

²⁹ Eichstedt and Small, 107.

³⁰ *Thomas Jefferson’s World* (Monticello, 2016).

information that many sites associated with the legacies of prominent historical figures would shy away from. There was also a free app about slavery that was prominently advertised on various signs so that visitors could download it to their phones. The text on one sign proclaimed that interpretation at Monticello was a work in progress, and that they would be reconstructing more buildings along Mulberry Row using information from both written documents and artifacts found through archaeology.

While the interpretation of slavery at Monticello is definitely uneven, and what visitors hear depends on the tour guide, the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation has made a great deal of progress in doing more inclusive interpretation in the last few decades. There is room for improvement, and they have already stated that they will be working on improving their interpretation over the next several years.

Travellers Rest

The enslaved people of Judge John Overton, owner of Travellers Rest in Nashville, TN, began building his house on a Native American site in 1799. It remained in Overton's family until 1954, when the National Society of Colonial Dames bought it and began restoring it. As was typical of public history interpretation at that time, the Colonial Dames focused on Judge Overton and his accomplishments and ignored the more than sixty enslaved people who built and ran the plantation. In 1989, a community board began managing Travellers Rest, and since that time the staff has done quite a bit of historical research to make their interpretation more inclusive of all of the people who used to live there. While they would like to do archaeological excavations to find the

quarters where the enslaved people lived, John Overton had built his plantation on the site of a Native American burial ground, and because excavation risks disturbing the remains, that is not an option at this time.³¹

African Americans who were enslaved at Travellers Rest are mentioned several times in the self-guided Battle of Nashville exhibit and accompanying film, although not in as much depth as the Overtons and their extended family who stayed with them in the Civil War. A few of the enslaved people are mentioned by name, and a letter from an enslaved person who escaped from Travellers Rest to join the United States Colored Troops is quoted in the film. The film also includes a segment entitled “Breaking the Yoke of Slavery,” but both the film and the exhibit avoid discussing the reasons for the Civil War.³²

On the guided tour of the house, the tour guide used the passive voice to describe what work was done without mentioning that enslaved people did the work. There was a mannequin near the front door dressed in cheap, plain clothing from the early 1800s. The tour guide told us that this represented the “domestic servant” who would have greeted guests and offered them a drink. She later informed us that “it was not uncommon to pair master and slave at an early age—as early as three—to establish the master/slave relationship.” She also remarked that Judge Overton leased his skilled enslaved people to other white men and that this “was another source of income for him.” She did not mention what the enslaved people might have thought about this practice and whether

³¹ “Historic Preservation,” Travellers Rest, last modified 2014, accessed October 5, 2016, <http://www.travellersrestplantation.org/history-historic-preservation>; Tonya Staggs, personal communication, March 12, 2016, Weston, WV.

³² *Voices of War* (Travellers Rest, 2014).

any of them were able to keep some of the money to improve conditions for themselves or their families or possibly to buy their freedom.

Since I had visited Travellers Rest a few months earlier, I knew that they had a large and comprehensive exhibit on slavery in the Weaving House. On both visits I had to ask the tour guide about it. On the earlier visit the male tour guide had answered that they did have such an exhibit, but it was closed because the curator was on vacation. He did not seem to care that the exhibit was not open for visitors. The female tour guide on my later visit was more enthusiastic than her colleague had been, and after I asked about it she mentioned that it had won an award.

In fact, “A Past Uncovered: The Story of the Enslaved People of Travellers Rest” won two awards. The Tennessee Association of Museums (TAM) gave it the Award of Excellence at their annual conference in March 2016,³³ and the American Association of State and Local History (AASLH) bestowed the Leadership in History award on it that same year. AASLH declares that this exhibit “is a sign of departure for the organization which has followed good preservation methods, but needed to more fully integrate the African American slaves who lived their lives building a farm for the white Overton family.”³⁴ AASLH reveals that staff at Travellers Rest applied for and received a grant that will allow them to put podcasts and other information about enslaved people on their website. They conclude, “By reintroducing the story of slaves at Travellers Rest, this site has made a decisive step towards telling a more complex and diverse story of life on the

³³ “2016 TAM Award WINNERS,” Tennessee Association of Museums, last modified 2016, accessed October 5, 2016, <http://tnmuseums.org/2016-TAM-Award-Winners-Nashville>

³⁴ “A Past Uncovered: The Story of the Enslaved People of Travellers Rest,” AASLH, last modified 2016, accessed October 5, 2016, <http://awards.aaslh.org/award/a-past-uncovered-the-story-of-the-enslaved-people-of-travellers-rest>

Tennessee frontier.”³⁵ And a visit to this exhibit does show the visitor quite a bit about the enslaved people of Travellers Rest who have been ignored for so long.

Using deeds, inventories, letters, census records, and runaway slave ads, historians at Travellers Rest pieced together the names, birth dates, death dates, and genealogical information on dozens of people who were enslaved at Travellers Rest. In some cases they were able to trace the history of people long after they were emancipated. They also relate the story of Roscoe Overton who, inspired by the TV movie “Roots” began to trace his own family tree and discovered that his ancestors had been enslaved at Travellers Rest. The specific information about individual enslaved people is augmented by discussion of what slavery was like on a farm in middle Tennessee during the 1800s.

While this is an excellent exhibit and it deserves the awards that it won, it is still segregated knowledge because it is not part of the regular house tour and is in a completely separate building. Tour guides can weave this information into existing tours to give visitors a more inclusive history of the plantation. It is troubling that the tour guides do not mention this award-winning exhibit to visitors. I would not have known about it if someone had not mentioned it to me before I got there. While Travellers Rest should be commended for the great strides they have made in interpreting the lives of the enslaved people who lived there, they still need to make that interpretation a more integral part of their tours.

Somerset Place Plantation

³⁵ Ibid.

Dorothy Spruill Redford did not know that Somerset Place existed when she saw “Roots” in 1977 and got interested in researching her own family tree. After interviewing her older relatives and learning all that she could from them, she spent her free time in libraries and archives researching her ancestors and discovered that some of them had been enslaved at Somerset Place.³⁶ When she first visited Somerset in 1983 she found that enslaved people were virtually ignored in the interpretation:

Beyond the center, the walkway stopped at the edge of a vast grassy field. There, on a lonely wooden sign no more than a foot high, were printed the words ‘Site of Slave Quarters.’ No buildings. No rubble. No remains. Just a sign and an open field. In one hand I held the names of almost one hundred and fifty slaves I knew belonged to the Collinses. In the other I held pamphlet that said three hundred slaves once worked on this plantation. And this was their legacy—a single rotting sign.³⁷

Disappointed but determined not to give up, Redford continued to research slavery in North Carolina in general and the lives of those who lived at Somerset in particular. She shared her charts and family trees in lectures to genealogists and church members, but she did not have a chance to share them at Somerset until site manager Bill Edwards said he’d “like to have something on the slave experience” for Founder’s Day in May 1984. Redford and her mother brought all of her charts and information to the big event, and Edwards led her to the old kitchen where her ancestors had cooked the food for the white family. No one came inside the stifling building to look at her displays.³⁸ Undaunted, she began interviewing African Americans in the area who were also descendants of those who had been enslaved at Somerset. She also spoke at churches and handed out flyers, trying to get the African American community involved in their local history. Her efforts

³⁶ Redford, 32-99, Harrison 312-317.

³⁷ Redford, 97.

³⁸ Redford, 99-176, quote 173; Harrison, 320-322.

have resulted in many members of the descendant community continuing to be actively involved with the site today.³⁹

By the end of 1984, Redford knew that she wanted to have a homecoming for descendants of people enslaved at Somerset Place Plantation in 1986.⁴⁰ Although some people may be uncomfortable visiting the place where their ancestors were enslaved, Redford has a different opinion: “You inherit your ancestor’s genes and their blood, but not their sins or glories... That, I told Francis, was a focus of the homecoming. That we can live with the past without being dragged down by it. That we cannot deny what happened here—that we must not deny it—and that we must restore this place to reflect all our histories.”⁴¹ As Harrison describes it, “Descendants gathered not to mourn their forbears’ bondage but to celebrate the families that had begun at Somerset when it was a working plantation, and to transform it from a site that venerated the planter class to one that honored the enslaved.”⁴² Redford was hired as a Program Coordinator soon after this first Homecoming and was promoted to Site Manager in 1990.⁴³ She continues to work to highlight the lives of the enslaved families who used to live at Somerset, and her efforts were crucial in the later archaeological excavations and in the reconstructions of the large slave quarter, small slave quarter, and hospital.⁴⁴

³⁹ Dina A. Bailey and Richard C. Cooper, “The Necessity of Community Involvement: Talking about Slavery in the Twenty-First Century,” in *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites*, ed. Kristin L. Gallas and James DeWolf Perry (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 66-68; Redford, 178-191; Harrison, 323-328.

⁴⁰ Redford 191-257; Harrison 328-329.

⁴¹ Redford, 219.

⁴² Harrison, 333.

⁴³ Harrison, 362-369.

⁴⁴ Linda F. Carnes and Dorothy S. Redford, “Appendix B: The Somerset Place Report: Afterward,” in “Restoration Excavations at Somerset Place Plantation State Historic Site, 1994 and 2001,” ed. R.P.

After the 1986 homecoming, Redford disclosed, “The state decided to develop the Somerset site, to re-create the conditions and community of the slaves who lived there, and I was hired to take charge of the project...I want these grounds to be a model, an inspiration to other blacks whose families came off other plantations to realize their history and search for their own slave ancestors...The cabins will come first, built slowly, one by one, of the same size and shape and on the same spots where they originally stood. People will walk into them as they can now walk into the Collins mansion. And they will know who lived here, which room Old Suck actually sat in when she gathered her clan around her, which house Fred Littlejohn slept in with his wife and children. They will know the work these slaves did and how they did it—the sweat and the skill of these men and women.”⁴⁵ Redford’s idea of reconstructing the cabins in order to teach history fits with that of Edward A. Chappell: “the re-creation of whole historical environments remains one of the most effective means we have of teaching a history that has now become almost incomprehensible.”⁴⁶ Being able to walk into the cabins, see exactly what size they were and know how many people lived in each one, is a more powerful way of learning experientially, rather than simply having it described to you by a docent.

Dorothy Redford specifically wants the focus of interpretation at Somerset to be on the African American families who lived there and the successes of their many descendants: “Slavery *was* horrible, and it was about death. But at Somerset it was also about life. This wasn’t a place for killing. We died here, but we also gave birth here. And

Stephen Davis, Jr., North Carolina Archaeological Council Publication No. 28 (Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Archaeological Council, 2003), 243-246.

⁴⁵ Redford, 261.

⁴⁶ Edward A. Chappell, “Museums and American Slavery,” in *“I, Too, Am America”*: *Archaeological Studies of African-American Life* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 250.

we grew beyond this place.”⁴⁷ Not all historians agree with this idea. Julia Rose emphasizes that “Museums exist to tell stories and enlighten, after all. And while they most often are sites of celebration and stand as marvels to humankind’s ability to innovate and explore, there is a desperate need to remember that we also possess the ability to do harm.”⁴⁸ Gallas and Perry advise public historians to “Balance the suffering and trauma of slavery with uplifting stories of survival and resistance, using traditional narrative templates for maximum effect.”⁴⁹ Historian Alisa Harrison also has a strong opinion about how slavery should be interpreted and presented to the public.

Harrison critiques Somerset’s interpretation from its opening in 1967 through the end of the twentieth century in great detail in her dissertation “Reconstructing Somerset Place: Slavery, Memory, and Historical Consciousness.” At first she seems pleased with the site’s current interpretation with its emphasis on “the slaves’ lives and experiences” and “how they confronted the constraints of slavery, and how their skills, their knowledge, and their labor were central to the success of the antebellum South.”⁵⁰ She acknowledges that this interpretation broke away from the usual Lost Cause narrative at many southern sites and concedes that their exhibits “reflect current historiographical approaches.”⁵¹

Harrison also seems to approve of the first Homecoming at Somerset Place:

“Whereas the descendants’ history of slavery had once seemed shrouded in secrecy partly

⁴⁷ Redford, 221.

⁴⁸ Jonathan Scott Holloway, “Foreword,” *Interpreting Difficult History at Museums and Historic Sites* by Julia Rose (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), ix.

⁴⁹ Gallas and Perry, 16.

⁵⁰ Harrison, 2.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 4, 17, quote 17.

out of shame for their victimization, the homecoming in 1986, with its official title, “Coming Home: A Celebration of Family and Life,” allowed them to embrace publicly a new narrative of cultural resilience, kin and community, and to understand African Americans as primary actors in a story about the antebellum past.”⁵² But she then gives it and the interpretation that follows, which now includes a good deal of information on slavery and specific enslaved people and families who lived at Somerset, a damning critique: “They emphasized that Somerset’s story was less about conflict and pain and more about reconciliation and resilience, largely in order to keep the site safely within the American mainstream. Programmers presented Somerset as a place to celebrate and recover ‘a lost heritage,’ but in the process—however unintentionally—they shortchanged the history it might have told. The homecomings and the interpretations that followed were designed with a particular end in mind: to demonstrate how far the descendants of the enslaved had come, and to pay homage to the ancestors who had laid the foundations for present-day African Americans’ success.”⁵³ She adds, “The fact of emancipation and subsequent success cannot reduce the significance of oppression in the past and should not obscure evidence of ongoing injustice.”⁵⁴ She does not share the feelings on this subject of any members of the descendant community who attended a homecoming, chose not to attend a homecoming, or were interviewed by Redford, a member of the media, or herself. Since the descendant community has been and still is so active at this site since the 1980s, this seems like quite an exclusion.

⁵² Ibid., 334.

⁵³ Harrison, 337.

⁵⁴ Harrison, 340.

Harrison goes much farther in her expectations of public history interpretation than Eichstedt and Small do. While she appreciates that attitudes toward interpreting slavery have become more inclusive, “it was far less clear whether or not that had translated into politics...Adding black faces to a previously all-white environment may have helped Somerset to conform to contemporary political mores and the site appear more historically accurate, but it only addressed the basic problem that plagued it, which was not simply exclusion but more seriously white supremacy.”⁵⁵ She rails against Somerset for interpreting slavery in a realistic way that includes things that made it horrible, yet still allowing visitors to leave feeling happy that so many descendants of people who were enslaved at Somerset Place have been successful in their own lives.⁵⁶ She ends her dissertation by declaring:

While slavery as a system no longer exists, *all* Americans still reap its benefits. At the very same time as African Americans suffer from the long term effects of slavery and the entire nation remains gripped by the destructive power of white supremacy, Americans as a group enjoy unrivaled privilege in large part because of the centuries of slavery that enabled the formation of their particular brand of freedom and democracy. This is a legacy that may be impossible to represent at state historic sites without indicting an entire nation in the present. Indictment is not the purpose of historical narratives presented at state sites.⁵⁷

Harrison's ideas, and how they compare and contrast to those of other public historians, will be discussed in more detail in the Conclusion section.

"Facing the Rising Sun: Freedman's Cemetery,"
Exhibit at the African American Museum, Dallas, Texas

⁵⁵ Harrison, 387-388.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 406-407.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 412.

This permanent exhibit relates the stories of the segregated African American community in North Dallas that formed soon after Emancipation. This exhibit is different from most that I have looked at because it focuses entirely on an African American community that was never associated with a slaveholder's plantation home, and it was developed by African American scholars, civic leaders, and other members of the community. It includes interactive video kiosks, audio recordings of African American music and speeches, newspapers, ephemera, photographs, business directories, and other material from the community. Artifacts from the cemetery that could not be reunited with their owners are also on display. The exhibit planners arranged these items around what they felt were the most important themes: "Slavery, Emancipation, Reconstruction, Burial Traditions, Early Families, Education, Health & Medicine, Religion, Music & Entertainment, Spoken Word Traditions, Business, Social Clubs, and Civic Change."⁵⁸ The book that accompanies the exhibit shares the same title and themes and includes dozens of documents from and photographs of the people in this community from the late 1880s through the 1950s.⁵⁹ An additional essay describes how African traditions influenced burial customs among African Americans.⁶⁰ Duane E. Peters' essay "Progress and History at Odds" describes how many cemeteries have been paved over, built on, or dug up without regard for the people buried there or the descendant community and is apropos for this paper. He asserts that "The Freedman's Cemetery Project is

⁵⁸ Alan Govenar, "Exhibition Overview," in *Facing the Rising Sun: Freedman's Cemetery* ed. Alan Govenar and Phillip Collins (Dallas: African American Museum, 2000), 21.

⁵⁹ Bob Ray Sanders and Alan Govenar, "Annotated Exhibition Checklist," in *Facing the Rising Sun: Freedman's Cemetery* ed. Alan Govenar and Phillip Collins (Dallas: African American Museum, 2000), 31-147.

⁶⁰ Sterling Stuckey, "African Influences in African American Burial Traditions," in *Facing the Rising Sun: Freedman's Cemetery* ed. Alan Govenar and Phillip Collins (Dallas: African American Museum, 2000), 23-24.

representative of the increasing awareness of affected descendant communities and their rights concerning the protection of historic cemeteries."⁶¹ The interpretation here and at the African Burial Ground present a sharp contrast of how the two different groups of descendant communities and public historians decided to interpret their history. I will discuss these contrasts after detailing the African Burial Ground National Monument.

African Burial Ground National Monument

The protests of the descendant community to the way the GSA handled the remains at the African Burial Ground led to the appointment of Sherrill D. Wilson as director of the Office of Public Education and Interpretation. She was responsible for providing all public education programs and outreach for the project, including introducing people to the fact that slavery did exist in Manhattan. The site became a National Historic Landmark in 1993 and a National Monument in 2006 due to the insistence of the public. Today there is a Visitor's Center, a memorial, and a museum on the site. The protests and their results show that not only do archaeologists have to be sensitive to the people who are living today, they have to provide the public with an educational component to explain what they are doing.⁶²

There are three main goals of the interpretation at the African Burial Ground National Monument: to tell the story of African Americans in New York from its earliest settlement until state emancipation became law in 1827; to explain how bioarchaeologists tested the remains and learned more about the deceased; and to explain the controversies

⁶¹ Duane E. Peter, "Progress and History at Odds," in *Facing the Rising Sun: Freedman's Cemetery* ed. Alan Govenar and Phillip Collins (Dallas: African American Museum, 2000), 25.

⁶² LaRoche and Blakey, 90; Blakey, 2010, 67.

that erupted at the site from the time the GSA unearthed the remains with a bulldozer to the battles over who would tell the stories of the people buried there.⁶³

Brian Purnell, a professor of Africana Studies at Bowdoin College, is critical of the interpretation because it does not discuss the lives of Africans before they came to America nor the great cultural diversity found among the many tribes and regions from which they came. He and other critics argue that too much time and space is devoted to the political battles the descendant community fought with the GSA, and the later battles members of the descendant community had among themselves about who should interpret the lives of those buried there and how the dead should be memorialized. Purnell and others accuse the National Park Service of allowing presentism to override historical scholarship. Purnell does acknowledge, however, that "No single memorial or exhibit can adequately represent the extensive history of Africans and their progeny in America."⁶⁴

I feel that describing the political battle between the GSA and the descendant community shows that racism, the legacy of slavery, is still very much a part of American culture today. It follows the work of the American Alliance of Museums, which "has called on museums and historic places that convey local or global heritage to become places of learning where people can use lessons from the past to address contemporary political and social issues. Making these links between the past and the present can facilitate an exploration of both historic and contemporary concerns related to social

⁶³ Brian Purnell, review of "The African Burial Ground National Monument," *The Journal of American History* 97, vol. 3 (December 2010): 736.

⁶⁴ Purnell, 740; Frohne 118-119.

justice.”⁶⁵ The people buried at the ABG had been enslaved, overworked, abused, and malnourished. Their bones told that story. The abuse would have been enough to spark controversy but as people at many different sites have discovered, slavery also provokes bitter debate. As Barbara Little and Paul Shackel remark in their discussion of Farmington Plantation in Louisville, Kentucky, “When archaeologists originally planned the excavations at Farmington in 1997, they did not realize that the focus they gave to slavery would ignite a debate about Louisville’s slave past as it reflects the racial tensions of the present. They did not consider that they would be dealing with the remnants of the festering racial wounds of slavery.”⁶⁶ But different people respond to the idea of slavery in different ways.

Jeff Hayward, from the research firm People, Places, and Design, interviewed a diverse group of people while the African Burial Ground Memorial was in its planning stages. African Americans showed a higher rate of interest in the site than people of other racial backgrounds (80% vs. 45%). They also showed a higher rate of interest in African American history (82% vs. 16%). All interviewees felt that they would have a strong and unpleasant emotional response to exhibits about racism and slavery, but “people of African descent said they were also likely to feel pride and inspiration.”⁶⁷ These interviews show that the reaction of visitors may be affected by their race in ways that public historians may not have predicted. Historian Conny Graft asks, “By deemphasizing the stories of enslaved people, have museums unintentionally missed

⁶⁵ Little and Shackel, 127.

⁶⁶ Little and Shackel, 133.

⁶⁷ Conny Graft, “Visitors Are Ready, Are We?” in *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites*, ed. Kristin L. Gallas and James DeWolf Perry (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 73-74.

opportunities to help Americans recognize and honor the courage and spirit of enslaved people and to foster feelings of pride and inspiration about this history?"⁶⁸ As we have seen from her critique of Somerset Place, Alisa Harrison holds the opposite opinion. She would emphasize the horrors of slavery over the inspiration people might feel about the successes of the descendants of enslaved people.⁶⁹ Julia Rose would also focus on the difficult part of the history, perhaps to the detriment of the small kernels of good that African Americans are able to glean from it.⁷⁰ Public historians must find a way to tell about the atrocities and pain of slavery while also celebrating the agency of enslaved African Americans who formed communities and thrived despite racism then as today. They have to point out also that racism is a legacy of slavery that directly hurts a large part of the population and indirectly hurts us all.

Although Freedman's Cemetery and the African Burial Ground are both graveyards, they have very different histories. Freedman's Cemetery was started by emancipated African Americans who lived in North Dallas but had the opportunity to move elsewhere; the African Burial Ground was for enslaved people more than a century earlier who had no choice in where they lived or who they worked for. Planners of the Freedman's Cemetery interpretation had a wealth of photographs, documents, and ephemera to choose from when they were designing their exhibits, and they could call on many members of the descendant community who had known people who were buried there; those buried at the African Burial Ground left only a smattering of material goods

⁶⁸ Graft, 75.

⁶⁹ Harrison, 406-407.

⁷⁰ Julia Rose, *Interpreting Difficult History at Museums and Historic Sites* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 4.

for anyone to interpret and display, and we do not know who their descendants are because their names and death dates were unrecorded.

The overall tone of the two exhibits is a sharp contrast. Those at the Freedman's Cemetery discuss slavery but have a much broader scope, and they discuss the successes of the descendant community. The exhibits at the African Burial Ground discuss African Americans during slavery but end their interpretation when the state of New York abolished slavery. They do not talk about any successful African Americans from New York post-emancipation, but focus on the controversies of the descendant community during the excavation of the African Burial Ground. Each of these sites had a good deal of input from their respective descendant communities, exemplifying the fact that "the descendant community" does not speak with one voice. I point all of this out not to criticize the interpretation at either site, but rather to show a specific example of the differing opinions of public historians Graft, Harrison, Rose, and Redford at work in two different exhibits. Public historians have to remain open to new ideas and the input of the local descendant community when planning a new exhibit and remember that the best way to interpret slavery may be different at each site.

Whitney Plantation

Eichstedt and Small could not include Whitney Plantation in their 2002 book, as it did not open as a historic site until December 2014. If it had been open, they could have documented a public history site vastly different from all of the others that they toured.

John J. Cummings, III, a retired white trial lawyer, bought Whitney Plantation just to add it to his many real estate holdings. When he discovered the extensive

documentation of the enslaved people who had lived and worked there, however, he decided to turn it into a southern plantation museum unlike any other southern plantation museum: "I decided that Whitney Plantation would be used to honor the individuals whose work had made it a profitable operation in the 1800s, and to acknowledge the contribution that millions of forced laborers made to our nation...By providing a meaningful and factually accurate education about slavery, the Whitney Plantation hopes to begin righting some of the wrongs of our history."⁷¹ This thinking runs counter to that of the other plantation museums that I have discussed when they were founded.

The focus of Whitney Plantation is not the only thing that makes it unique. Cummings is a millionaire who can finance each project he undertakes, negating the need to economize or spend time writing grants or fund-raising. He did not have a board of directors as he researched and planned the museum, negating that need to reach a consensus on a very controversial topic with a group of people to whom he must report. He is not an historian, although Senegalese scholar Ibrahima Seck has worked with him for the past fourteen years.⁷²

Some of the exhibits were designed to represent enslaved people not just from that estate, but from Louisiana as a whole. The Field of Angels cemetery commemorates 2,200 children who were enslaved in Louisiana and died before they were three years old. A sculpture of a black angel holding an infant and taking her up to Heaven is the

⁷¹ John J. Cummings, III, "The U.S. Has 35,000 Museums. Why is Only One About Slavery?", Washington Post, August 13, 2015, accessed October 5, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/08/13/the-u-s-has-35000-museums-why-is-only-one-about-slavery/?utm_term=.689577e7a6b7

⁷² Ibid.

centerpiece of this exhibit.⁷³ Another memorial commemorates 107,000 people who were enslaved in Louisiana. It was named for Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, an author and Rutgers University professor who built a database entitled "The Louisiana Slave Database." The name of each person that she found and listed on her database is engraved on the memorial.⁷⁴ The "Children of the Whitney" exhibit is made up of a group of sculptures of enslaved children. Each represents a person who was a child at the end of the Civil War and was interviewed by someone from the Federal Writer's Program in 1940. Pieces of these interviews are part of the exhibit, so that visitors can get a firsthand account of what their lives were like.⁷⁵

Tours through the big house are led by docents, and journalist David Amsden related that "a number of docents struggled to find the proper tone... Yet this awkwardness might well serve as one of the Whitney's strengths. Talking about slavery and race is awkward, and the museum stands a chance of becoming the rare place where this discomfort can be embraced, and where the dynamic among the mainly mixed-race tours can offer an ancillary form of education." He goes on to describe examples of African American visitors telling stories of their enslaved ancestors and how it affects their lives today.⁷⁶

⁷³ "The Field of Angels," Whitney Plantation, last modified 2015, accessed October 5, 2016, <http://www.whitneyplantation.com/the-field-of-angels.html>

⁷⁴ "Allées Gwendolyn Midlo Hall," Whitney Plantation, last modified 2015, accessed October 5, 2016, <http://www.whitneyplantation.com/all%c3%a9es-gwendolyn-midlo-hall.html>

⁷⁵ "The Children of the Whitney," Whitney Plantation, last modified 2015, accessed October 5, 2016, <http://www.whitneyplantation.com/the-children-of-the-whitney.html>

⁷⁶ David Amsden, "Building the First Slavery Museum in America," New York Times, February 26, 2015, accessed October 5, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/01/magazine/building-the-first-slave-museum-in-america.html?hp&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&module=photo-spot-region®ion=top-news&WT.nav=top-news&_r=1

Conclusions

Amsden quotes author and Harvard professor Walter Johnson, "Slavery gets understood as a kind of prehistory to freedom rather than what it really is: the foundation for a country where white supremacy was predicated upon African-American exploitation. This is still, in many respects, the America of 2015."⁷⁷ Johnson's words echo what Alisa Harrison emphasizes about white supremacy in her critique of interpretation at Somerset Plantation.⁷⁸ But can any public history site overthrow white supremacy? Should that be its goal? And how would it accomplish that? Johnson and Harrison offer no suggestions. John J. Cummings argues that "Without knowledge about how slavery worked and how crushing the experience was—not only for those who endured it, but also for their descendants—it's impossible to list the weight of the lingering repercussions of that institution. Every generation of Americans since 1865 has been burdened by the hangover of slavery, through the unequal education, and limited political and economical opportunities available to black Americans."⁷⁹ Maybe this expresses what Johnson and Harrison expect from a public history site on which African Americans had been enslaved—interpretation that teaches the horror of slavery and how its legacy of racism continues to oppress African Americans today. Is there room in this

⁷⁷ David Amsden, "Building the First Slavery Museum in America," *New York Times*, February 26, 2015, accessed October 5, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/01/magazine/building-the-first-slave-museum-in-america.html?hp&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&module=photo-spot-region®ion=top-news&WT.nav=top-news&_r=1

⁷⁸ Harrison, 412.

⁷⁹ John J. Cummings, III, "The U.S. Has 35,000 Museums. Why is Only One About Slavery?", *Washington Post*, August 13, 2015, accessed October 5, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/08/13/the-u-s-has-35000-museums-why-is-only-one-about-slavery/?utm_term=.689577e7a6b7

view for any celebration of descendants of enslaved people who have gotten an education, held good jobs, and become religious, civic, and political leaders? I see the challenge as working between the extremes: educating the public about the horrors of slavery and how American society is still very racist today while also acknowledging the many African Americans who have overcome that racism and accomplished great things. The final chapter will show how management at Grassmere has started to address this challenge and give suggestions for future interpretation and research.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The preceding review of archaeology of slavery and the public interpretation of slavery has shown both good ideas for Grassmere management to emulate and poor or outdated ideas that should not be followed. This chapter presents recommendations for developing interpretations at Grassmere that are more inclusive, even if public historians there have to be vague about the details about the individuals of the enslaved population until more is known about them. Dorothy Redford imparts an excellent example: present slavery as a horrible system in which African Americans were owned and cruelly subjugated by slaveholders, but also depict the agency of the enslaved people themselves.¹ In response to criticisms that public history too often conflates Black history with the history of enslavement, Grassmere should not portray African American history as if it consisted only of slavery but discuss the successes that many African Americans have achieved since emancipation. Without denying that racism still exists in this country, public historians need to talk about the African Americans who have been civic, government, and society leaders from the era of slavery to the present. Public archaeologists working on excavating a site where enslaved people lived need to look for ways that enslaved people showed agency, even if that was never written down and the individuals were never known outside of their own small community.

¹ Redford, 221, 261.

Recommendations for Future Archaeological Research

As the zoo grows, zoo staff will have to be sensitive to the possibility of finding new archaeological sites. Every hard rain brings new pottery sherds to the surface. If we are able to hire archaeologists to excavate the original kitchen that was near the front of the house, we may be able to learn more not only about the kitchen tools, but also about the enslaved person or persons who lived on the upper level.

Finding the sites of the original cabins would also give us an idea of where the enslaved people lived and could tell us more about the individual inhabitants. As late as 1989, there was an electric pole with wires carrying electricity to what is the picnic area near the tortoise exhibit in what is currently the northwest corner of the zoo. This area is far away from the house, but it is possible that one or more cabins for enslaved people were here. These cabins could have been lived in by the Morton family after Emancipation and wired for electricity, as the cabins just behind the main house were. An excavation at this picnic area could reveal if cabins were here in the antebellum era and possibly answer some questions about the enslaved community. How were the cabins arranged? Did they make a cooking pit like the one at the Hermitage? Do clusters of artifacts there relate to leisure activities suggesting that they gathered together to sing, play games, sew, talk, or hold religious services at a cooking pit or other central yet hidden space? Did they have to provide some of their own food through fishing, hunting, or subsistence gardening? Did they use subfloor pits? If so were they for storage, or will they give us information about the spiritual lives of the enslaved community? Are there any medicine bottles or other artifacts that show what their health-care may have been

like? If the cabins were only lived in by members of the Morton family, the artifacts could still reveal information about their lives.

As stated in Chapter Two, the Dunns and Shutes raised cattle, hogs, donkeys, mules, and horses. Around the grounds there are probably still traces of the barns, sheds, and fence lines used to shelter and contain these animals. There was also probably a separate dairy in which they processed the milk. As the zoo continues to grow, it is possible that construction workers will stumble onto these sites by mistake. Grassmere management must make sure that there is a policy in place to preserve these sites, or at least to get as much information from these sites as they can before they become new animal exhibits.

Recommendations for Future Archival Research

Further archival research may also provide more information about the enslaved population at Grassmere.

When this project began in 2014, the public historians at Grassmere hoped to be able to answer many questions about the enslaved people who used to live and work there. Although several names of enslaved people who worked at Grassmere are now known, very little is known about the lives of the specific enslaved people who lived there. Through further research into primary documents, more questions may be answered: Were any enslaved people rented out to work somewhere else? This information may be contained in ledger books that have yet to be discovered in an archive. Did Moll come with Michael Dunn to Nashville, or was she kept by Samuel Lewallen in Wytheville? It is possible that she was mentioned in the court records again,

if Michael Dunn kept his court date. What happened to Robertson, Andrew, Ann, Henry, Milly, and William after they were put in trust for Michael Dunn's daughter Mary Hamilton? Further investigation of Mary and her husband James through deeds and court records may reveal if they were sold by the Hamiltons. Ben, as well as Mariah and her children Louisa, Rhoda, and Stephen, were held in trust by John Thompson for Dunn's granddaughter Isora Lowe. Further research into deeds may show whether or not Thompson sold any of these people and used the money to provide for Lowe. Tanny, Charles, and Augustus were held in trust by William Dunn, who lived in Mobile, Alabama, for Michael Dunn's grandson William R. Blocker. A search of the deeds in Alabama may show whether these children were sold again or whether they remained in Dunn's family. Tanny, Charles, and Augustus would have been about thirty years old when they were emancipated, and it is possible that they lived as free men for decades. They may have been recorded in newspapers, city directories, marriage records, death records, or other public documents in Alabama. As research continues, more information may come to light about the enslaved population of Grassmere.

In 2016, Grassmere received a grant from Humanities Tennessee to partner with local scholars to help further the research and interpretation of the enslaved community. Dr. Learotha Williams, Assistant Professor of History at Tennessee State University, Dr. Ashley Bouknight, Assistant Curator at the Hermitage, and Rob DeHart, Curator at Tennessee State Museum, are helping us with this project and will have their input ready in summer 2017. They were each given a list of the primary sources which I have already consulted for information about the enslaved population. The hope is that they will know

of other sources that I have not examined that may hold information which will greatly augment what we already know.

Recommendations for Future Public Interpretation

Throughout this project, as the archaeological and historical research progressed, Tori Mason, Dr. Hodge, Dr. Tung, Larry McKee, myself, and other people who have helped with this endeavor presented programs or wrote articles to share our knowledge on many of the aspects of this project for a myriad of audiences: the American Association for State and Local History, the Association of Living History Farms and Agricultural Museums, Bellevue History and Genealogy Group, Metropolitan Nashville Historical Commission, MTSU Lifelong Learners, Paleopathology Association, Rutherford County Archives Society, the Tennessee Association of Museums, and others. There were also presentations at the zoo and at local libraries, which were open to the general public. The research has also been discussed with many zoo visitors, and a large conference poster produced by the archaeologists from TRC hangs on the back of the cabin where visitors can see photographs of the artifacts that were found and read what the archaeologists learned about the people who were buried there. These various presentations, articles, and projects have attracted notice from many visitors as well as public historians, and we get many more questions and comments about slavery at Grassmere than we did before. Grassmere staff will continue to research and share that information with a wide audience. This includes refining our interpretation at the site.

The public historians at the Nashville Zoo have only been researching the enslaved population there for a few years, and there is extremely little information about

slavery in the Grasmere documents held at Tennessee State Library and Archives. Grasmere does not have the treasure trove of primary documents or the large staff of historians, archaeologists, and curators that they have at Mount Vernon and Monticello, nor do we have the vast financial resources of David Amsden at Whitney Plantation. Grasmere also has to be sensitive to the fact that we are a zoo that is primarily a site for children's education and entertainment, and it may seem inappropriate to both the descendant community and to our visitors in general if we focus too much on slavery. However, Grasmere has been accepted as part of the historic site community by the other historic sites in middle Tennessee, and staff members have also participated in history conferences at the national level. The interpretation of slavery at Grasmere will continue to grow and expand over the next several years.

A survey of the descendant community and/or members of the visiting public may be the best way to determine what kinds of interpretation will be most appropriate and best received. It is possible that input from the descendant community will provide us with new directions for our interpretation. Until a survey can be done, there are a few ideas that management at Grasmere can work on.

To make our interpretation more inclusive I recommend adding information about slavery in middle Tennessee to our guided house tours. I also recommend changing our signs to include what we know about the enslaved people of Grasmere. We can display a table of information showing the names and approximate birth dates of members of the enslaved community found in the primary documents (see Table 1, Appendix). We can also post this information on our website. This can be a resource for people researching

their enslaved ancestors, as it has been at Mount Vernon, Monticello, and the Hermitage.² Since many people go to our website to find out what hours the zoo is open, get directions, etc., this is another way to provide inclusive information for our visitors. However, if respondents to the survey feel that posting information on their ancestors on a zoo website is inappropriate zoo staff should look for another way to disseminate the information. It is possible that we could create a website dedicated solely to the history of Grassmere that does not include information about the zoo animals. Other ways to be more inclusive involve special programs.

From speaking with other public historians in middle Tennessee, I have learned that when they offer special African American genealogy workshops, Juneteenth events, or other events that focus on African Americans and their history they see far more African Americans than usually visit their site. After these events, however, they do see an increase in African American visitors at their site, participating in the tours or programs that are offered every day. Eichstedt and Small specifically focused on the standard programs at the sites they visited and did not scrutinize special events.³ Anecdotal evidence suggests that these programs bring more African Americans to public history sites, who can provide feedback to the public historians working there, who can then consider that as they plan both more special programs and more regular programs. This is a roundabout way of getting input from the descendant community, but it may be

² “Mount Vernon Slavery Database,” Mount Vernon, last modified 2016, accessed October 5, 2016, <http://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/slavery/slavery-database>; “Getting Word: African American Families of Monticello,” Monticello, last modified 2016, accessed October 5, 2016, <https://www.monticello.org/getting-word>; “Andrew Jackson’s Enslaved Laborers,” The Hermitage, last modified 2016, accessed October 5, 2016, <http://thehermitage.com/learn/mansion-grounds/slavery/>; “Slaves of the Plantation,” Whitney Plantation, last modified 2016, accessed October 5, 2016, <http://www.whitneyplantation.com/slaves-of-the-plantation.html>

³ Eichstedt and Small, 19.

more effective than only making the standard tour more inclusive. I still believe that standard tours should be inclusive, but how many people will visit a local site repeatedly to determine if the public historians there have made the standard house tours more inclusive or not? However, local African Americans may attend special programs about African American history, stay to take a house tour, and be pleasantly surprised at how inclusive the tour is. Grassmere management is already talking about the possibility of doing an annual Juneteenth program. I also recommend an annual memorial service at the graveyard for enslaved people. If members of the descendant community come forward, they should be offered the opportunity to have a reunion at the house.⁴

Months after the memorial ceremony for the enslaved individuals exhumed from Grassmere's excavated burial ground, an African American woman approached Mason. She said that she was not sure if she was descended from the enslaved people in the graveyard or not, but she was descended from Frank Morton. Morton and many members of his family worked at Grassmere from roughly 1920 until 1980. The woman wanted to talk to Mason and learn what she knew about the Morton family, and she was willing to share her own information as well. The two of them enjoyed a longer visit in May 2015 and have arranged to meet again, along with other members of the woman's family. We are very happy to have made this connection. Grassmere is developing an exhibit on the Morton family and hopes to have it up in the next several months, continuing the story of

⁴ John F. Baker Jr. writes about his genealogical research into his ancestors who were enslaved at Wessyngton Plantation in Springfield, TN. The descendants of the people who were enslaved there have enjoyed reunions on the property. John F. Baker Jr., *The Washingtons of Wessyngton Plantation: Stories of My Family's Journey to Freedom* (New York, NY: Atria Books, 2009).

African American history at Grassmere post-Emancipation and discussing the successes of African Americans in Nashville.

Conclusions

Slavery is an important topic for southern plantation sites to present through tours, graphics, exhibits, and special programs. This project is intended to be used as a resource for future scholarship into the enslaved people of Grassmere, as well as a guide for presenting information about their lives and slavery in middle Tennessee. The recommendations that I have for Grassmere are contextual and site-specific. They will not be the right decisions for every site, but this thesis will give other public historians a place to start.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: TABLE 1: PRIMARY DOCUMENTS OF GRASSMERE'S
ENSLAVED COMMUNITY

Name of enslaved person	Approximate birth year	Information	Date of source
Moll	unknown	While he still lived in Wytheville, VA, Michael Dunn gave Moll to Samuel Lewallen as a guarantee that he would be appear in court. ⁱ	1795
Viney	1793	Michael Dunn bought Viney (~16 years old) from David Moore. ⁱⁱ	1809
Robertson	1811	Michael Dunn deeded Robertson (~35 years old) to his son-in-law John Thompson to be held in trust for Dunn's daughter Mary Hamilton. ⁱⁱⁱ	1846
Andrew	1816	Michael Dunn deeded Andrew (~30 years old) to his son-in-law John Thompson to be held in trust for Dunn's daughter Mary Hamilton. ^{iv}	1846
Ann	1831	Michael Dunn deeded Ann (~15 years old) to his son-in-law John Thompson to be held in trust for Dunn's daughter Mary Hamilton. ^v	1846
Tanny	1834	Michael Dunn deeded Tanny (~12 years old) to his son William D. Dunn to hold in trust for his grandson William R. Blocker. ^{vi}	1846
Charles	1837	Michael Dunn deeded Charles (~9 years old) to his son William D. Dunn to hold in trust for his grandson William R. Blocker. ^{vii}	1846
Augustus	1837	Michael Dunn deeded Augustus (~9 years old) to his son William D. Dunn to hold in trust for his grandson William R. Blocker. ^{viii}	1846

Table 1 continued

Name of enslaved person	Approximate birth year	Information	Date of source
Mariah	1810	Michael Dunn deeded Mariah (~36 years old) and her three children Louisa (~16 years old), Rhoda (~6 years old), and Stephen (~3 years old) to John Thompson to be held in trust for Dunn's granddaughter Isora Lowe. ^{ix}	1846
Louisa	1830	Michael Dunn deeded Mariah (~36 years old) and her three children Louisa (~16 years old), Rhoda (~6 years old), and Stephen (~3 years old) to John Thompson to be held in trust for Dunn's granddaughter Isora Lowe. ^x	1846
Rhoda	1840	Michael Dunn deeded Mariah (~36 years old) and her three children Louisa (~16 years old), Rhoda (~6 years old), and Stephen (~3 years old) to John Thompson to be held in trust for Dunn's granddaughter Isora Lowe. ^{xi}	1846
Stephen	1843	Michael Dunn deeded Mariah (~36 years old) and her three children Louisa (~16 years old), Rhoda (~6 years old), and Stephen (~3 years old) to John Thompson to be held in trust for Dunn's granddaughter Isora Lowe. ^{xii}	1846
Henry	1791	Michael Dunn deeded Henry (~56 years old) to his son-in-law John Thompson to be held in trust for Dunn's daughter Mary Hamilton. ^{xiii}	1847

Table 1 continued

Name of enslaved person	Approximate birth year	Information	Date of source
Milly	1812	Michael Dunn deeded Milly (~35 years old) to his son-in-law John Thompson to be held in trust for Dunn's daughter Mary Hamilton. ^{xiv}	1847
William	1829	Michael Dunn deeded William (~20 years old) to his son-in-law John Thompson to be held in trust for Dunn's daughter Mary Hamilton. ^{xv}	1849
Ben	1816	Upon Michael Dunn's death in 1854, Ben (~38 years old) was given to John Thompson to hold in trust for Dunn's granddaughter Isora Lowe. ^{xvi}	1854
Henderson	1839	Henderson (~15 years old) was listed in the inventory taken after Michael Dunn's death. ^{xvii}	1854
Flora	unknown	Flora was owned by William Dickson Shute and probably took care of Maggie Shute when Maggie was little. ^{xviii}	1859
Louis	unknown	Louis took care of the horses and mules. ^{xix}	1862
Ben	unknown	Ben took care of the hogs. ^{xx}	1862

ⁱ Wythe County, VA Deed Book #1, page 277, recorded March 24, 1795. Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA.

ⁱⁱ Davidson County, TN Will Book #4, page 66, recorded February 14, 1809. Metro Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN.

Table 1 continued

ⁱⁱⁱ Davidson County, TN Deed Book #9, page 214, recorded November 17, 1846. Metro Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN.

^{iv} Davidson County, TN Deed Book #9, page 214, recorded November 17, 1846. Metro Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN.

^v Davidson County, TN Deed Book #9, page 214, recorded November 17, 1846. Metro Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN.

^{vi} Davidson County, TN Deed Book #9, page 248, recorded December 7, 1846. Metro Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN.

^{vii} Davidson County, TN Deed Book #9, page 248, recorded December 7, 1846. Metro Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN.

^{viii} Davidson County, TN Deed Book #9, page 248, recorded December 7, 1846. Metro Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN.

^{ix} Davidson County, TN Deed Book #9, page 248, recorded December 7, 1846. Metro Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN.

^x Davidson County, TN Deed Book #9, page 248, recorded December 7, 1846. Metro Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN.

^{xi} Davidson County, TN Deed Book #9, page 248, recorded December 7, 1846. Metro Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN.

^{xii} Davidson County, TN Deed Book #9, page 248, recorded December 7, 1846. Metro Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN.

^{xiii} Davidson County, TN Deed Book #9, page 386, recorded February 3, 1847. Metro Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN.

^{xiv} Davidson County, TN Deed Book #9, page 386, recorded February 3, 1847. Metro Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN.

^{xv} Davidson County, TN Deed Book #12, page 496, recorded October 17, 1849. Metro Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN.

^{xvi} Davidson County, TN Will Book #16, page 216-217, recorded January 21, 1854. Metro Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN.

^{xvii} Davidson County, TN Will Book #16, page 216-217, recorded January 21, 1854. Metro Nashville Archives, Nashville, TN.

^{xviii} "Diary of Kate S Carney Murfreesboro, TN January 1, 1859-July 30, 1868." Kate S Carney Diary #m-139 in the Southern Historical Collection Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 115.

^{xix} Letter from William Dickson Shute to Lavinia Shute, March 29, 1862. Memphis, TN. Grassmere Collection, Box 17, folder 10, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN.

Table 1 continued

^{xx} Letter from William Dickson Shute to Lavinia Shute, March 29, 1862. Memphis, TN. Grassmere Collection, Box 17, folder 10, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN.