THE PRESERVATION OF PUBLIC SPACE IN UNCERTAIN TIMES: THE HICKMAN COUNTY COURTHOUSE, 1925-2020

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the challenges faced by rural county seats across the South as consumer and travel preferences have changed throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century. I used the case study approach, selecting Hickman County, a rural county in Middle Tennessee, as an example of the extremes that local government officials will take to ensure the continued vitality of their downtown spaces. Hickman County Commission's decision to sell its historic courthouse in the fall and winter of 2019-2020 was extreme step, one documented in only a few other places in the nation. Built in 1925-1926 the courthouse had defined public space in the county seat of Centerville for almost 100 years. Hickman County had a generation of preservation successes, from successful efforts to save rural schools to recent commercial rehabilitation of buildings on the town square. Yet, demographic changes, the estimated costs of the project, and a countywide tendency to identify more strongly with neighborhood and community, meant that the courthouse largely lost its constituency for preservation.

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INTRODUCTION: A FUTURE IN QUESTION

Scattered across the landscape of Middle Tennessee and its Western Highland Rim are numerous examples of the town square plan that has defined many county seats and has become part of the traditional image of these towns. Many travelers can drive through the picturesque landscape of the state and then suddenly encounter one of these courthouse squares. The county courthouse sits in the center of town, alongside restaurant, businesses, and professional offices—and sometimes even a theater or the shell of an old opera house flanking each side of the courthouse. Adjacent to the square are more businesses and often churches, which begin a gradual transition to the private space of homes and neighborhoods. These courthouse squares, in reality, represent a crucial piece of the historical and cultural landscapes of Tennessee and the larger United States. Analyzing these spaces as important pieces of Tennessee's historical and cultural landscapes provides an important lens into several different themes and issues related to rural historic preservation as well as the question of changing rural identity.[1] However, as rural communities and their downtown squares change and face uncertain futures, the way in which the physical landscape is addressed and the challenges faced in preserving these landscapes together provide a lens through which public historians can begin to view and address the challenge of connecting community members to certain pieces of these landscapes.

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[1] Lisa Tolbert, *Constructing Townscapes: Space and Society in Antebellum, Tennessee* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 7; Edward T. Price, "The Central Courthouse Square in the American County Seat," in *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture*, ed. Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1986), 124; Carroll Van West, *Tennessee's Historic Landscapes: A Traveler's Guide* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 339.

In her study of Tennessee's antebellum landscape, historian Lisa C. Tolbert, one of the leaders in the discussion and research in this area, argues that "the cultural influence of the county seat extended to shaping the most basic ideas about how towns should be designed to perform effectively their most important social and economic functions. County seats with their courthouse squares constituted a distinctive town form."[2] Tolbert's observations built upon those of cultural geographer Edward Price, who emphasized town squares as larger public spaces. Price observed that "the geometry of the square is not merely symbolic. It governs the access to the various stores and offices in their places around it."[3] In his book titled *Tennessee's Historic Landscapes: A Traveler's Guide,* Carroll Van West argues that the courthouse square "stood at the town's center of political, commercial, and financial power. It was where parades ended, where political rallies could gather hundreds on the open spaces and sidewalks, and where community events and festivals took place."[4]

For the last several decades historians have viewed these public spaces through complex lenses. Examining these spaces can reveal information about changes in the community, how the community has structured and defined itself, as well as how issues such as segregation and gender roles played out in that space. In the case of more rural counties and communities, one can see these dynamics play out as the square became, and in many cases remains, a central space for community members from throughout the entire county.

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[2] Tolbert, *Constructing Townscapes*, 7.

[3] Price, "The Central Courthouse Square," 142.

[4] West, *Tennessee's Historic Landscapes,* 339.

Changes in transportation and commerce threatened the centrality of courthouse squares in the twentieth century.[5] In the case of Hickman County, the growth of the highway and interstate systems fundamentally changed the landscape of the county in a number of ways. Interstate 40 crosses the county about twenty miles north of Centerville, thereby not allowing for easy access to the town for interstate travelers. Even more immediately, the construction on State Highway 100, which passes directly through the Centerville downtown square, in the mid-twentieth century resulted in physical changes to the town square that included the loss of several historic buildings.[6]

To address the issue of small-town preservation, especially in the commercial cores, the National Trust of Historic Preservation launched its Main Street Program in 1979.[7] The Main Street Program, established with the goal of revitalizing struggling downtowns across the country, the program operates under a four-point process based on organization, design, promotion, and economic restructuring.[8] This model has been applied in Main Street programs across the United States. Within Middle Tennessee, some of the most recognized examples include Murfreesboro, Franklin, and Columbia.

However, the Main Street Program revitalization process did not touch every downtown square. In the case of Centerville, the county seat of Hickman County, with the exception of a few prominent lawyers and a few long-standing businesses, the downtown square lost commercial businesses, a pattern which quickly became reflected in the number of empty storefronts. Loss represents a major difference between the situation of Centerville and other similar town squares throughout Middle Tennessee that did experience the revitalization of the downtown square area that other local squares experienced. Across the United States, the Main Street Program has represented a powerful revitalization force that has brought positive changes to many American town squares. A still vibrant program in many communities, the program's mission states on its website that,

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[5] Janet M. Fitchen, *Endangered Spaces, Enduring Places: Change, Identity, and Survival in Rural America* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1991), 2-6.

[6] Collection of Section 106 Reviews Completed by the Tennessee Department of Transportation, Hickman County Historical Society Collection, Centerville, Tennessee.

[7] Kent A. Robertson, "The Main Street Approach to Downtown Development: An Examination of the Four-Point Program," *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 56.

[8] Ibid., 57.

> The National Main Street Center leads a movement committed to strengthening communities through preservation-based economic development in older and historic downtowns and neighborhood commercial districts.[9]

A good example of the impact that the Main Street Program can have on communities and downtown squares can be seen in Murfreesboro, barely an hour and half east of Centerville. One of the earliest established in the state of Tennessee in the mid-1980s, Main Street Murfreesboro represents an example of one downtown square where revitalization allowed the businesses and communities surrounding it to flourish and grow in the wake of the 1980s recession that had negatively impacted so many other communities. Today in Murfreesboro, Main Street remains an active and thriving organization that continues to lead events, economic development, and community engagement on Murfreesboro's square even as the larger city of Murfreesboro continues to grow at one of the fastest rates in the state.[10]

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[9] "About Us," Main Street Murfreesboro, Accessed March 2020. https://mainstreetmurfreesboro.org/about-us/.

[10] Ibid.

Other communities throughout Middle Tennessee that operate impactful Main Street Programs include Columbia, Franklin, Leiper's Fork, Gallatin, and Lawrenceburg.[11] Each of these communities has followed a pattern similar to Murfreesboro following their establishment in the early 1980s and acting as agents working for the revitalization of their respective downtown spaces.

Communities that actively pursued Main Street programs more frequently developed active, revitalized downtown square spaces that stand in stark contrast to the Centerville square in Hickman County. Located along the Western Highland Rim of Middle Tennessee, Centerville represents one of the older and more rural of Tennessee's central courthouse squares.[12] While Centerville developed its own Main Street Program, it did not see the same earlier push for this change during the 1980s recession. So, whereas some Middle Tennessee communities were able to make the push and economically stabilize the square and allow for preservation and restoration work to be done on those downtown buildings, Centerville continued to see economic decline as businesses went out and the buildings throughout the downtown square began to deteriorate.

However, what makes the case of the Centerville square unique is that this situation within the largest town was then amplified by a lack of community concern to restore and preserve this specific portion of the county's built environment. As will be seen in the following chapter, this lack of direct engagement and drive for the preservation of the square, unlike preservation efforts aimed at other buildings throughout the county, set the stage for some of the additional issues that play into the question of the sale of the Hickman County courthouse.

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[11] "Tennessee Main Street," Tennessee Preservation Trust, Accessed June 2020, http://www.tennesseepreservationtrust.org/resources/the-tennessee-main-street-program.

[12] W. Jerome D Spence and David L. Spence, *A History of Hickman County*, (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Publishing, 1900), 62-64.

In recent months, the question of the future of the town square has been suddenly pushed to the forefront as larger trends of rural depopulation and a loss of jobs have challenged county leaders. In the spring of 2020, the county commission sold the historic county courthouse to private developers with HCTN Properties II. The county's historic courthouse, located in the center of the square and surrounded by a small, hexagonal-shaped green space and several monuments, had defined the town's built environment for almost a century. Due to the town's location at the top of a hill in a bend of the Duck River, almost any road a person takes to the square provides an image of the courthouse and surrounding businesses. The Centerville courthouse dominates the cultural landscape as a both an architectural landmark and a central gathering place.

Contracted through the G. B. Howard and Co. of Nashville in the early 1920s as a replacement for the county's previous antebellum courthouse, the building was intended to be the most "modern" building on the square.[13] Ten years ago, the construction of a new justice center lessened the public functions of the courthouse. The Hickman County Archives occupies the first floor while the basement and second floor are empty. The Hickman County Commission deferred a host of pressing maintenance issues and the building lacks handicap accessibility. In October 2019, the commission moved forward with a plan to sell the courthouse rather than utilize local tax money to pay for the restoration and needed repairs. The final sale took place in March 2020.[14]

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[13] "Award Contract for Hickman Courthouse," *Nashville Banner,* August 10, 1925.

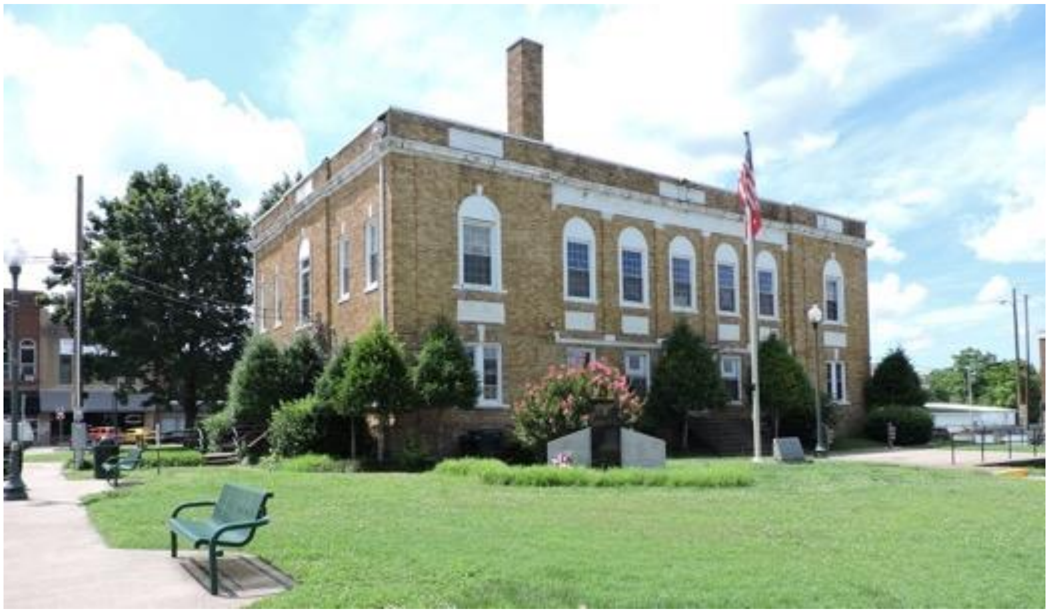

Figure 1: Centerville historic 1925 courthouse. Photo taken by author, Summer 2019

In recent years, two American towns in Ohio and Oregon have repurposed large, historic courthouses for commercial or residential uses.[15] Such a sale of public assets happens, but it is rare. Hickman County's decision raises several sets of important questions: as rural county seats decline economically, how do historic preservationists work with county officials to preserve public spaces? Does the sale of public assets merely represent a closing, yet sad, chapter in the county's twenty-first century history? What is lost when historic public space disappears, particularly in a rural community?

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[14] "Courthouse, two others, are sold by county," *Hickman County Times,* March 30, 2020.

[15] "It's official: Old Nueces County Courthouse has finally been sold; here's what's next," *Caller Times,* Accessed March 2020. https://www.caller.com/story/news/local/2018/05/24/its-official-old-nueces-county-courthouse-has-finally-been-sold/630298002/; "County board approves $28 million sale of Central Courthouse to NBP Capital," Multnomah County, Accessed March 2020. https://multco.us/multnomah-county/news/county-board-approves-28-million-sale-central-courthouse-nbp-capital.

This thesis begins with an exploration of Centerville and Hickman County—thereby providing the context that framed the county commission's fateful decision to the sell the courthouse. In the first chapter, Hickman County's nineteenth century historical context is examined, and the second chapter then builds on this through an examination of the county's twentieth-century history. In the third chapter, trends in historic preservation throughout the county are explored using the cases of three prominent local schools that have been preserved as community centers. In the final chapter and conclusion, the immediate challenges physically facing the courthouse as well as its future are explored. In examining each of these areas, it becomes clear that the recent sale of the historic Hickman County courthouse reveals a set of challenges and questions for historic preservationists working with rural communities moving forward. In the case of Hickman County, this challenge can be seen in the fact that the deterioration and ultimate sale of the courthouse reflects an unusually large preservation failure in a county that has for several decades proudly preserved a number of other public spaces. So whereas the buildings throughout the county that have been at the center of community-driven preservation efforts can all be connected to a hyper-local sense of identity, the courthouse no longer functions as a focal point and instead reflects a larger sense of uncertainty in the community about the future of Hickman County's identity as a rural place in a rapidly growing region.

CHAPTER I: RESORTS, FURNACES, AND FARMLAND: HICKMAN COUNTY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Edwin Hickman, James Robertson, and Robert Weakley first explored the region that became Hickman County in 1791.[1] The Tennessee General Assembly established the county in 1807. Upon its founding, the county actually stretched beyond its current borders south to the present-day Tennessee-Alabama state line before later general assemblies divided it in order to establish additional counties. The county is the eighth largest in the state measuring approximately 610 square miles.[2] Over the course of the beginning of the twentieth century, the county saw a decrease in population, especially between 1910 and 1960, dropping from just over 16,000 down to around 11,000. The population then increased again from around 1970 to the most recent census—which has the population standing at around 25,000 people, with most of that growth coming between 1980 and 2010.[3] However, despite this period in which most of the county has seen an increase in population, Centerville has continued to decrease in population.[4] These changes and fluctuations in the county's population, and the larger forces that drove them, such as urbanization and developments in transportation, medical services, and technology, help to frame the current situation of the courthouse sale. In particular, the economic forces of the twentieth century, including the World Wars and the Great

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[1] Edward Dotson, "Hickman County." Tennessee Encyclopedia, Last Modified March 1, 2018, Accessed April 2020. http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/hickman-county/.
[2] Ibid.
[3] "Quick Facts: Hickman County, Tennessee," United States Census Bureau, accessed April 21, 2020, https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/hickmancountytennessee.
[4] Ibid.

Depression, that shaped the county, its smaller communities, and formed the core of community members' sense of identity disappeared throughout the course of the twentieth century, thereby leaving the county facing an uncertain future moving into the twenty-first century.

When the Tennessee General Assembly created the county, the village of Vernon was named the county seat. Vernon no longer exists today, and a Tennessee State Historical Commission marker marks the spot. The county commission established Centerville as the county seat with a courthouse square plan in 1823.[5] The *Nashville Banner* and *Nashville Whig* announced the sale of the lots for the new town, stating that:

> The undersigned, Commissioners to superintend the selling of the town lots in the town of CENTERVILLE, in conformity to an act of the Legislature of 1821, and another in 1822, will offer for sale at public auction to the highest bidder, the lots in the town of Centerville.[6]

According to one of the early histories of the county, the money earned from the sale of these lots funded construction of a jail as well as the new courthouse. Local historians have speculated for decades about the move of the county seat due to the unpopularity of the move among residents of the town of Vernon, who wanted to have the town seat remain there.[7]

The new county seat was to be located at the county's geographic center.[8] Additionally, its location at a bend in the Duck River proved ideal for developing commerce within the county as it connected the town to other inland river communities.

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[5] Spence, *A History of Hickman County*, 71; Dotson, "Hickman County," http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/hickman-county/.

[6] "Centerville" *Nashville Banner and Nashville Whig,* May 28, 1823.

[7] Spence, *A History of Hickman County,* 62-63.

[8] "Hickman County, Tennessee (1820)," Tennessee Virtual Archive, Accessed March 2020, https://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15138coll23/id/9136/rec/3.

Upon the establishment of Centerville, the original log courthouse that had been constructed in Vernon was reportedly disassembled and moved to Centerville.[9]

This intentional plan to develop Centerville with a courthouse square plan parallels what was happening in towns across Middle Tennessee during the early nineteenth century.[10] Price describes the importance of this early pattern, stating that "often the central square was given special deference by orienting the lots in the four bordering blocks to face it […] In the original sale of lots those facing the square were tagged with the highest prices and were the first to sell."[11] Although no record of what these original lots ultimately sold for, advertisements of the sale of square lots in Nashville newspapers demonstrate the local push to attract outside investors.[12]

From 1823 to 1860, Centerville grew as the economic and commerce center for the county. According to a set of records compiled by the Hickman County Historical Society, some of the first buildings on the square included a log hotel and a Methodist church (also a log building). In the 1830s merchants opened several stores, and by the 1840s, brick buildings had replaced many of the original log building. Of these pre-Civil

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[9] Spence, *A History of Hickman County,* 71.

[10] Lisa C. Tolbert, *Constructing Townscapes: Space and Society in Antebellum Tennessee,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 17-20; Lauren Batte, Holly Rine, and Carroll Van West, "Historic County Courthouses in Tennessee, 1865-1945." National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form. Tennessee Historical Commission, 1995; "Town Lots," *National Banner and Nashville Whig,* May 8, 1819; "Sale of LOTS at Gallatin," *National Banner and Nashville Whig,* May 8, 1819; "TOWN LOTS in Murfreesborough, FOR SALE," *The Clarion and Tennessee State Gazette,* May 19, 1818;

[11] Edward T. Price, "The Central Courthouse Square in the American County Seat," in *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture,* ed. Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1986), 139.

[12] "Centerville," *Nashville Banner* and *Nashville Whig,* September 15, 1823; Several articles with identical wording advertising these lots as being for sale were published in several Tennessee newspapers over a period of several months.

War buildings, only one building, which housed the Methodist Church, the local Sons of Temperance chapter, and the local Free Mason Lodge remains standing today.[13]

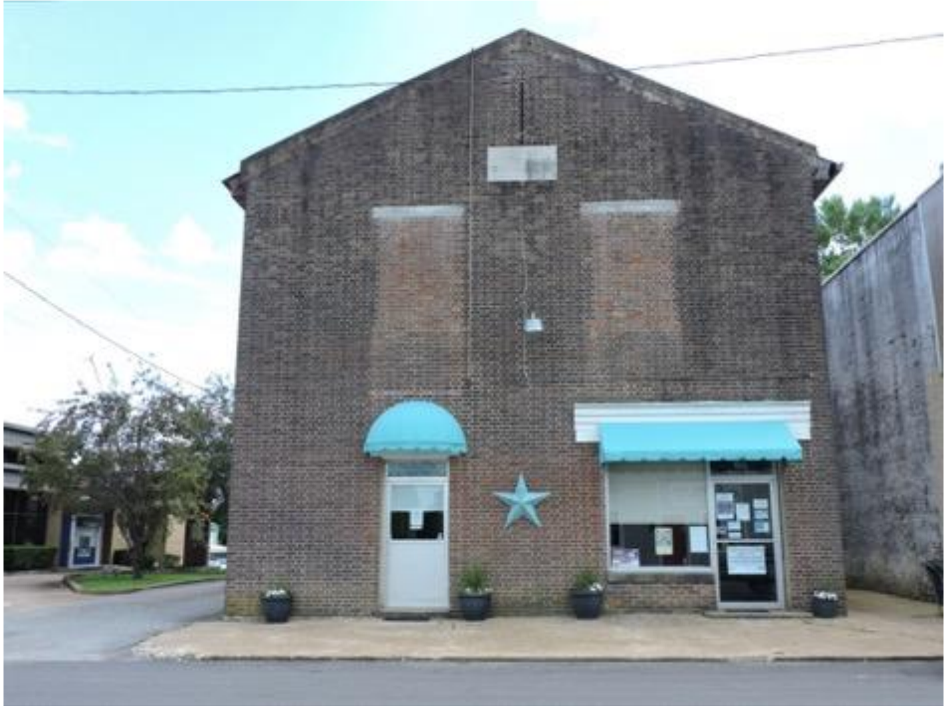

Figure 2: Downtown Centerville's only remaining Antebellum building. Photo taken by Author, Summer 2019.

During the Civil War, Centerville became a severely contested space and the center of numerous instances of guerilla fighting. In 1863, retreating Confederate Generals Nathan Bedford Forest and Joseph Wheeler passed through following their defeat at the Battle of Dover. While the pursuing Union troops, under the command of General Jefferson C. Davis, only captured about 30 Confederate troops, they did ultimately stop in Centerville and rest. The town again became a contested space in 1864 when Confederate troops under the command of Colonel Jacob B. Biffle pursued Union troops, under the command of Colonel John Murphy, from the town of Buffalo. Upon reaching Centerville, the Union troops quickly occupied the courthouse, where they remained until it was possible to retreat back to Nashville. However, following these events, Confederate Captain Albert H. Cross ordered that the Centerville Courthouse burned in order to prevent Union troops from utilizing it again. In response to this order, Union troops returned and burned almost all of the commercial buildings in the downtown area as well as numerous homes surrounding the town.[14]

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[13] Mary Beth Pruitt, "History of the Square," document compiled for the Hickman County Historical Society.

Guerilla fighting also occurred in other parts of the county. There are numerous accounts of looting, burning of businesses and homes, and murders throughout the county. One such instance can be seen in the account of the murder of Caleb McGraw. In his article titled "America's Civil War in War Tennessee's Hickman County," Alan Gaff describes this case, stating that:

> Caleb McGraw had been suspected of spying on his fellow citizens and informing Federal authorities when Confederate soldiers came home on furlough in 1862. One night some neighbors came by and took McGraw to Duck River, opposite the mouth of Short Creek, where he was told to choose between taking the oath of allegiance to the Confederate States of America or drowning.
>
> When McGraw refused to take the oath, his captors tied a large rock around his neck, rowed out into the river and again asked him to

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[14] Tennessee Civil War Trails Marker, Centerville, Tennessee. Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area.

> swear his allegiance. Upon his second refusal, his neighbors promptly pitched the suspected spy into a watery grave.[15]

Another notable instance in the county can be seen in the events known as the Reynoldsburg Massacre. Also recounted in Alan Gaff's article, the exact location of the massacre is unknown now since the Reynoldsburg Road no longer exists. In November 1864, just prior to the Battles of Franklin and Nashville, local Confederate troops captured several Union troops from the surrounding area and, after marching them to a remote ravine located alongside Reynoldsburg Road, executed them. Two Union soldiers managed to escape, however, in total, seventeen unknown Union soldiers were buried in that ravine, the location of which has also been lost.[16]

The chaos that the Civil War brought to Centerville then continued into the Reconstruction years when former Confederates terrorized Unionists and newly freed African Americans. A letter written by a local official describes the violence in the county, stating that:

> Since April 15/65 there have been numerous outrages committed against freedmen in this district. The violence committed was generally death. […] There is still lingering in this county a set of desperadoes that have never yet submitted to the civil authorities, armed to the hilt, who are still the terror to the freedmen, urged up no doubt by the citizens here. […] The

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[15] "The Murder of Dr. McGraw," *The Nashville Daily Union,* August 30, 1865; Alan Gaff, "America's Civil War In War Tennessee's Hickman County," History Net. Accessed May 2020. https://www.historynet.com/americas-civil-war-in-war-tennessees-hickman-county.htm.

[16] Gaff, "America's Civil War In War Tennessee's Hickman County," https://www.historynet.com/americas-civil-war-in-war-tennessees-hickman-county.htm.

> fellows still prowl through the county boasting that they have never surrendered and never intend to. […].[17]

More insight into the violence of that time may have been lost in a courthouse square fire that occurred on the square in 1866.[18] As newspapers reported, there was a fire in a building in town (the exact location of this building is not recorded). At the time of the fire, this building contained the post office, numerous county records, and the Freedmen Bureau's office, thus the fire resulted in the destruction of numerous pre-1866 records.[19] Because of this, there are not a large number of sources that address the history of Centerville prior to the Civil War. Additionally, because of a combination of this fire, two later fires, and a large tornado in 1919, the county has lost other valuable primary sources.[20]

Pinewood

One of the most famous settlements in Hickman County during the nineteenth century is that of Pinewood. Pinewood was an industrial plantation. Samuel Graham moved to Hickman County in the mid-1830s and established the Pinewood Plantation and Mill in the 1840s, and it quickly became a local leader in the county in its production of spun cotton and wool.[21] Although local tradition and early scholarship on Pinewood claims that Graham never owned any enslaved peoples, the census records reflect a different reality.[22] By 1850, Graham owned two enslaved women and in 1860 he owned four enslaved people.[23] Thus, the workers he employed at the mill were mostly white.

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[17] "Reports of Outrages, Riots, and Murders," Jan. 15, 1866-Aug. 12, 1868, The Freedmen's Bureau Online, Accessed June 2020, https://www.freedmensbureau.com/tennessee/reports/centreville.htm.

[18] "Burning of Records at Centerville," *Nashville Union and American,* March 16, 1866.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Mary Beth Pruitt, "History of the Square," document compiled for the Hickman County Historical Society.

[21] "Photograph of Pinewood Mansion." Tennessee Virtual Archive. Accessed April 2020. https://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15138coll6/id/4374/.

The plantation continued to grow in the years leading up to the Civil War. By the time of the 1860 census, Graham's estate was valued at $55,038,[24] by far the most valuable property in the county. In 1860, plans were completed to begin the construction of what would be one of the largest homes in the county. However, construction was delayed upon the beginning of the war and it was not until 1868 that the house, a grand mansion in the Italianate style, was finished. Throughout the war, Pinewood witnessed numerous raids and guerilla fights, but Graham continued to run the mills and increased the site's production of cotton spun rope for the Confederate government.[25]

After Emancipation, Graham operated the property like other "New South" industrial towns, paying his employees in company money that could only be used at the company store.[26] A fire in 1870 destroyed the cotton mills, resulting in a loss of about $100,000. Graham rebuilt operations and Pinewood continued for another generation. The site saw growth through the 1880s. and as many as 500 people worked there.[27] Financial difficulties, caused by a combination of accounting errors and poor investment decisions, meant that the place was almost bankrupt—some $100,000 in arrears at the time of Graham's death in 1892.[28] Pinewood never fully recovered. In the years following, portions of the land were slowly sold off and several buildings were moved, repurposed, or destroyed, although some key buildings, such as the company store, are extant.[29]

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[22] James L. McDonough, "Forgotten Empire: Sam Graham's Pinewood." *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (Spring 1968): 42.

[23] United States Census, 1850 Slave Schedule Showing Samuel L. Graham. District 6, Hickman County, Tennessee.

[24] United States 1860 Census Record Showing Samuel Graham. District 6, Hickman County, Tennessee.

[25] McDonough, "Forgotten Empire," 43.

[26] West, Carroll Van, Elizabeth Moore, Elizabeth Goetsch, Katherine Looney. "Pinewood: Finding the Stories of a Forgotten Southern Industrial Village." Survey and Heritage Development Recommendations. Murfreesboro: MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, 2008.

[27] West, "Pinewood," April 2008.

In 1968, Mark Wayne Craig, dean of David Lipscomb College, purchased the property and began the process of restoring the house as well as getting it nominated to the National Register of Historic Places in 1970. However, in spring 1975, only shortly after Craig had completed the nomination and restoration work, a fire began in the kitchen of the house. Due to recent flooding in the surrounding creeks, first responders were delayed in being able to reach the house, and it was declared a total loss.[30]

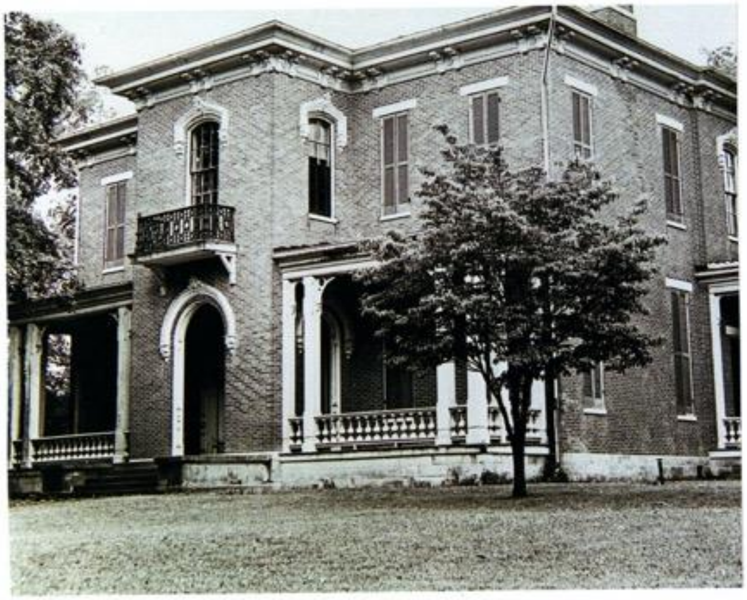

Figure 3: Pinewood Mansion. Courtesy of the Tennessee State Library & Archives

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[28] McDonough, "Forgotten Empire," 45.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Restored 'Pinewood' Destroyed," *The Tennessean*, March 16, 1975.

Post-Civil War Centerville

The town square began to show economic recovery in the 1870s. The Olympic Opera House, constructed in the late 1870s, quickly became a popular gathering place due to its seating capacity, which was far larger than courthouse.[31] Over the course of this building's history, it has served as an opera house, retail space, roller skating rink, basketball court, movie theater, and lawyer's office.[32] Initially, the building operated with the opera house on the second floor and retail space below. There is very little mention of the building when it served as a roller-skating rink, but for a large part of the 1920s, the spacious second floor served as the basketball court for many of the local school teams as it did provide a central location for games as well as an amount of space that most communities simply did not have. Following the construction of Fairview Academy later in the decade, the building was again repurposed in the 1930s as a movie theatre while a dedicated building was being constructed for that purpose. Thus, this building becomes a clear example of a building on the Centerville square that functions at the center of community life in a number of different ways. In large part because of this building's size community-centered activities.[33]

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[31] "Centreville," *Nashville Banner,* October 6, 1906.

[32] Mary Beth Pruitt, "History of the Square," document compiled for the Hickman County Historical Society.

[33] Hickman County Historical Society, *Historical Sketches of Hickman County: Newspaper Articles, 1878-1937.* Self-Published.

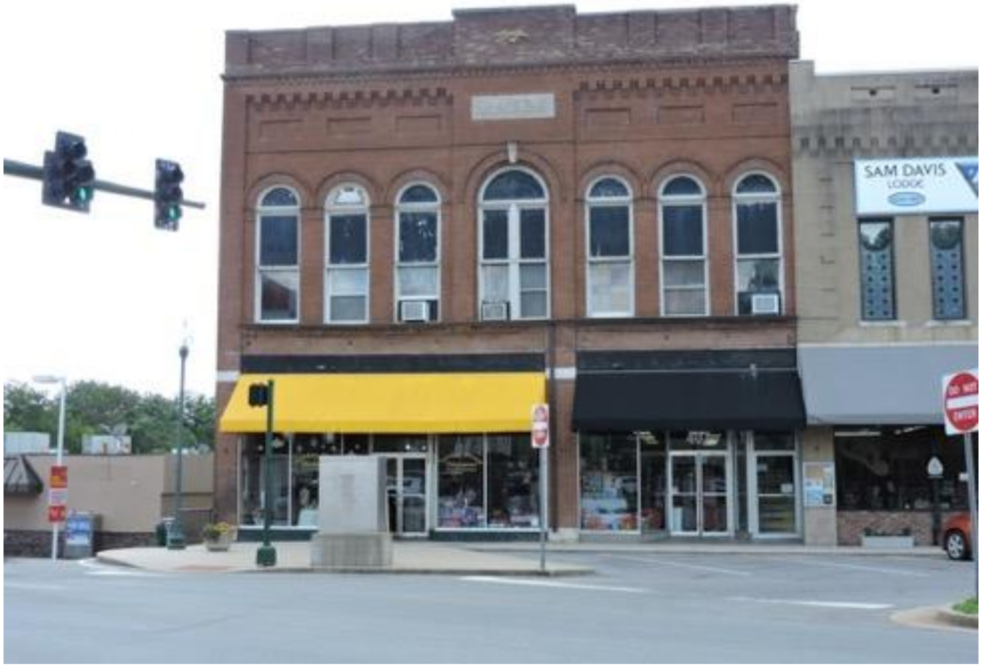

Figure 4: The former Olympic Opera House in Centerville, now known as the Bates Building. Photo by author.

Next to this building is the Sam Davis Knights of Pythias Lodge built around 1900 (see figure 4). The Knights of Pythias Lodge, as the building adjoining the Bates building—which remains one of the largest on the square—is not only visually prominent, but it also historically functioned as one of the most prominent local fraternal organizations, with many of its members being county government officials, lawyers, and businessmen.[34] However, the Knights of Pythias, first founded in 1864, originally existed as a segregated organizations that essentially had two separate branches.[35] The historically white chapter in Centerville is prominently located in that building that adjoins the former Olympic Opera House and directly faced the courthouse and its green space. But in looking at some of the newspaper articles published during the early twentieth-century, there are also existed in Centerville a historically African American branch of the Knights of Pythias established in 1880.[36] Although this is not the sole example of this dynamic in the town of Centerville, it is one of most clearly visible examples in terms of revealing the way in which segregation shaped this landscape. The amount of physical separation between the segregated white spaces of the immediate downtown space immediately surrounding the courthouse and the portion of town that, historically, has existed as the African American community space are physically separate spaces that deeply reflect these cultural influences.

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[34] "Home." Sam Davis Lodge, Knights of Pythias. Accessed April 24, 2020. http://www.samdavislodge.org.

[35] "D. C. Knights of Pythias Hope to Eliminate Color Barrier," *The Washington Post*, February 22, 1990.

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[36] "Centerville Notes," *The Nashville Globe*, April 2, 1909.

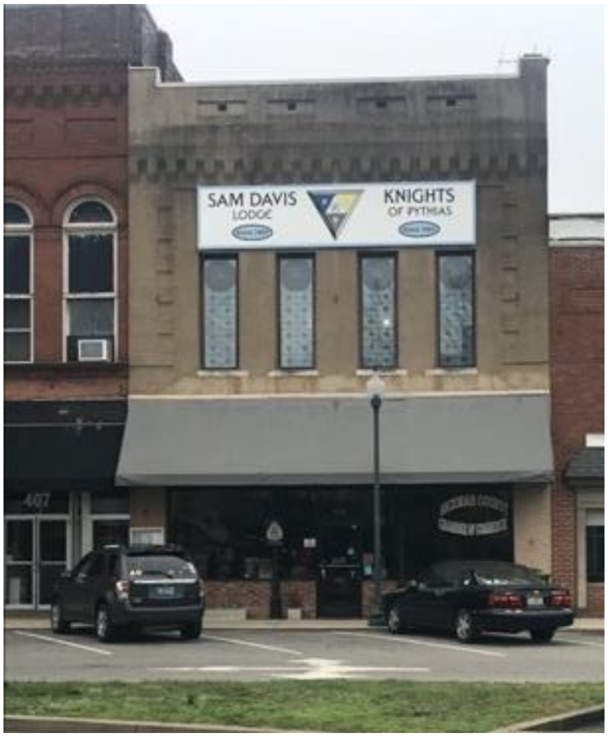

Figure 5: This building continues to house the Sam Davis Knights of Pythias Lodge (2nd Floor) and the Hickman County Chamber of Commerce (1st floor). Photo taken by author.

Established shortly after the Civil War, the African American branch of the Knights, while clearly prominent within the African American community, was not so prominently located. Rather than being located on the square—like both the white Knights Lodge and the Masons Lodge—this organization was located down Columbia Avenue leading off of the square in the original building that housed Mt. Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church.[37] The area surrounding this church was home to a thriving African American community by the end of the Civil War, and although it does fall within Centerville city limits, its location a mile off of the square—which so clearly functions at the center of the community—one can see through this analysis how examining the physical space of Centerville’s downtown space can help begin to reveal some of the complexities of this space and its role within the community.[38] It helps reveal more about the history of the community and the people who make up that community, as well as how historical ideologies influenced the material landscape of this community, especially in the ways that segregation influenced the literal construction of the town.

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[37] Ibid.

Based on this, from the time of the town’s founding, one can see how, immediately upon the town’s founding, the physical spaces immediately functioned as a way to define the cultural landscape of the county. In beginning to understand these dynamics, it also becomes a way to contextualize the Hickman County Courthouse within the larger landscape of the county’s historical and cultural landscapes.

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[38] “A Colored High School,” *Hickman Pioneer,* December 2, 1887.

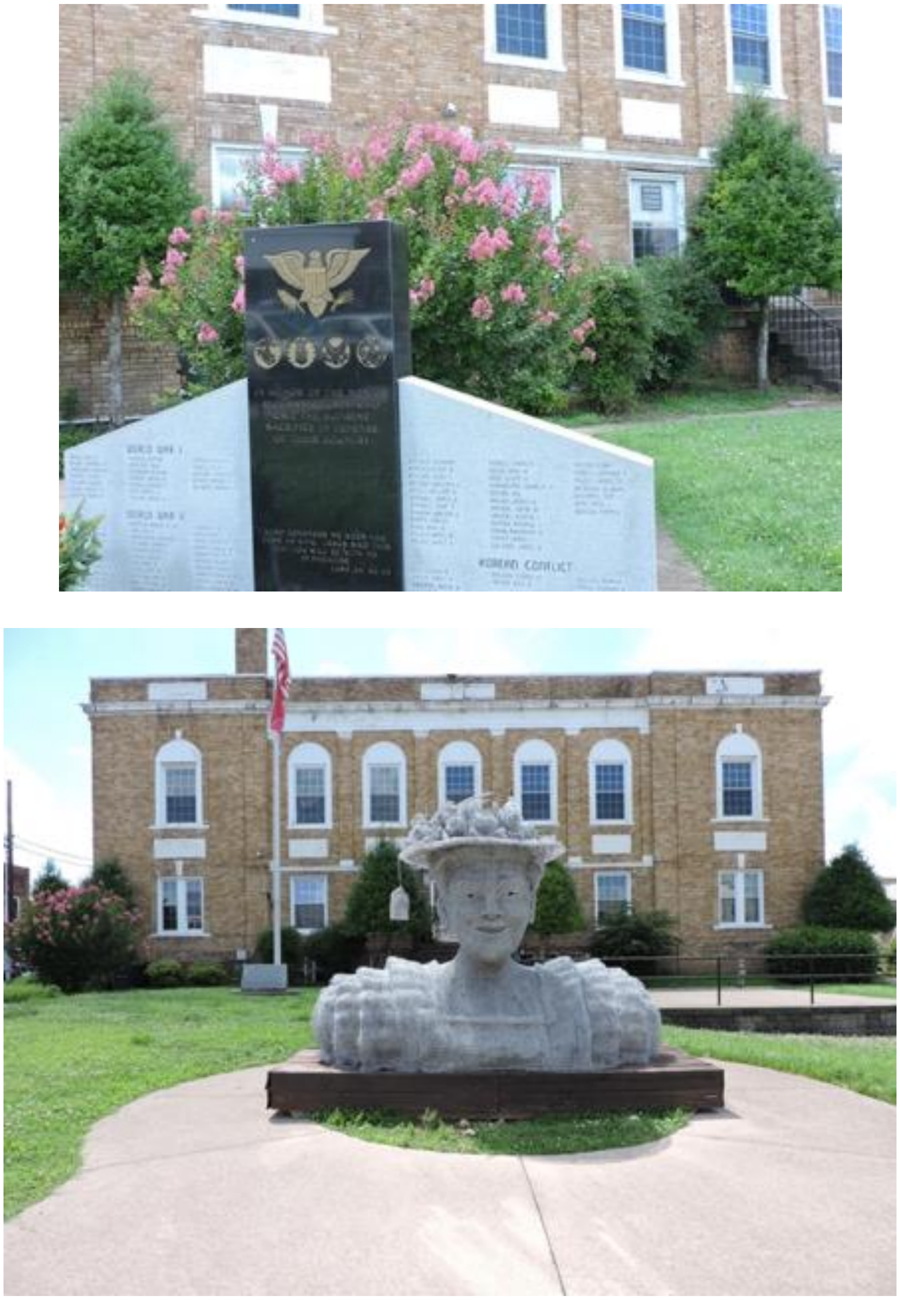
KOREAN CONFLICT

Figure 6-7: Images of the War Memorial and Minnie Pearl statue located outside of the Hickman County Courthouse

The Larger Space

As the center of commerce for Hickman County, Centerville's downtown merchants consistently interacted with the different parts of Hickman County's economy. Besides agriculture, which remains one of the largest and most active part of the economy today, the county also witnessed a thriving iron furnace industry throughout the nineteenth century, a phosphate mining boom during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century centuries, as well as a tourism boom that grew out of the present of a set of resorts centered on Sulphur water springs (located at Bon Aqua, Primm Springs, and Beaverdam Springs).

From the mid-nineteenth century, Hickman County experienced a tourism boom due to the presence of three sets of Sulphur water springs in the county, around which elaborate resorts were constructed, and each of these remained as popular tourist attractions throughout the century. In the northeastern part of the county, the Weems family constructed the Bon Aqua Springs Resort. The southeastern portion of the county contained the Primm Springs Resort, and the western portion of the county contained the slightly less well-known resort known as the Beaverdam Springs Resort.

The Beaverdam Springs Resort opened in the mid-nineteenth century and remained open until the late 1930s. There is comparatively less information about this resort than the others, largely because there are fewer remaining buildings and structures related to this site than Primm Springs or Bon Aqua Springs. This resort is the only one of the three that has not been listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In the northeastern portion of the county, Bon Aqua existed as the dominant resort during these same years. Established by William Locke Weems's family, this resort was known in newspapers and period accounts as the "Queen of the Southern Spas."[39] The property originally belonged to a Revolutionary War veteran named Andrew Ponder, who opened Ponder's Inn sometime around 1806. The land was then sold to William B. Ross in 1823, but Ross then sold it again in 1837 to Weems. In 1879, the Nashville and Tuscaloosa Railroad Company constructed a railroad line running from Dickson to Centerville that passed within half a mile of the resort, thus increasing its popularity as access became greater. Besides the individual guests visiting, the site also became an important event space where groups from across Middle Tennessee would gather.[40] Throughout the end of the nineteenth and moving into the beginning of the twentieth centuries, the Bon Aqua Springs Resort maintained its popularity.[41]

To the south of Bon Aqua, the Primm family established a third resort, known as Primm Springs Resort, originally known as White Sulphur Springs, in the mid-1830s. In the 1860s, the work of the Estes family increased the resort's popularity which, at its height contained thirty structures. At the height of its popularity, the site was also known as a popular destination for moonshiners throughout the prohibition years. A significant number of references to this resort can be seen in newspapers in neighboring counties—especially from nearby Maury County—frequently referring to the Primm Springs Resort as a popular summer destination, and many of these references can be seen throughout the property's National Register of Historic Place nomination form.[42]

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[39] Dotson, "Hickman County," http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/hickman-county/.

[40] Nancy L Adgent, "Bon Aqua Springs Resort," Tennessee Encyclopedia. Accessed March 2020. https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/bon-aqua-springs-resort/.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Richard Quin, "Primm Springs Historic District," National Register of Historic Places nomination form. Tennessee Historical Commission, 1985.

Another defining feature of Hickman County's landscape throughout the nineteenth century can be seen in the development of a thriving iron furnace industry. During these years, there were at least five of these furnaces constructed across four major communities whose economies centered on that work for at least a brief period of time. The remnants of these five furnaces—which stand in a wide-range of conditions, are listed on the National Register of Historic Places and include the Lee and Gould Furnace (also known as the Sugar Creek Furnace), the Old Aetna Furnace, the New Aetna Furnace, the Oakland Furnace and Forge, and the Standard Furnace.[43]

Each of these furnaces represents an important piece of its respective community and its identity. Although many are in poor condition, are overgrown, or are extremely difficult to locate, the Lee and Gould Furnace, located on the edge of the Nunnelly community, represents an example of these early nineteenth century furnaces that remains in good condition. Constructed in 1830, this particular furnace only operated for about two years before members of the Lee and Gould company determined that there was not enough iron ore in the hillside to justify the cost of operating the furnace, and it was ultimately closed in 1832. However, the Lee and Gould Furnace gained additional significance within the county's history a few years following its closure in 1838. At that time, the United States was deeply in the middle of what became known as the Trail of Tears following the passage of President Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act in 1830. Under the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail program of the National Park Service, the Lee and Gould Furnace has been designated as a witness building along Benge's

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[43] National Register of Historic Places Nominations, Hickman County, Tennessee. Tennessee Historical Commission. https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/SearchResults/.

Route of the Trail of Tears. As the only building in Hickman County with this designation, this furnace represents the only building in the county that remains standing and was directly along the Trail as it crossed through Hickman County.

Although it really took off in the early twentieth century and would peak around the years of World War I, Hickman County also witnessed the beginnings of a fairly successful phosphate mining industry. Although it did not last as long as some of the other major industries, it still played an important economic role in communities like Shady Grove. Once mined, the phosphate was a popular ingredient in a number of fertilizers, animal supplements, and other chemicals. In World War I, phosphate then became used in making armor plating for military equipment. The discovery of phosphate locally during these years provided an economic boost for several Hickman County communities, especially in the southeastern portion of the county closer to Maury County, where an even greater amount of phosphate had been discovered.[44]

The boom industries of the nineteenth century did not last past the Great Depression of the twentieth century.[45] All three of the major resorts had closed by 1945 along with the majority of the furnaces and phosphate mines. Because these three industries acted as such important parts of both the economy and sense of identity within these communities, the loss of these radically shifted the county on numerous levels—both through the economic loss and the way it changed the landscape of these communities.

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[44] Juanita Keys, "Phosphate Mining and Industry," Tennessee Encyclopedia, Accessed June 2020, http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/phosphate-mining-and-industry/.

[45] Dotson, "Hickman County," http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/hickman-county/.

The results of this downturn have carried a long-lasting impact on the county. Governor Bill Lee's 2019 executive order about assessing economic needs in Tennessee counties lists Hickman County as a "Transitional" county, being economically rated as 2,331 of 3,113 of counties in the United States. This status as a "Transitional" county essentially marks Hickman County as lying somewhere in between the more prosperous counties in the state and those that have been identified as being "Distressed" due to their economic underdevelopment and poverty levels. The average per capita market income of people in the county stands at $21,936 with a poverty rating of 19.70% and a three-year average unemployment rate of 4.5%. Thus, although Hickman County does not fall into Lee's category of being a county in "distress," it is clear based on these numbers that Hickman County has struggled economically in recent decades.[46]

However, when the history and economic downturn of the county is placed within the larger historical context, the county provides an example of what historians and sociologists recognize as part of a larger pattern and experience for members of smaller rural communities.[47] Several researchers have written on these changes in recent years, with some such as Jane M. Fitchen going as far as to center her book, titled *Endangered Spaces, Enduring Places: Change, Identity, and Survival in Rural America,* on the argument that "In many rural places, the entire image of rural life is being called into question, and rural identity is being blurred."[48] She further argues that, in order to understand the physical changes in rural communities as well as changes that go as far as rural identity, one must examine all of these contextual pieces of what changes were re-shaping and re-defining rural counties at almost every level.[49]

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[46] "Distressed Counties." Tennessee Government. Accessed May 2020. https://www.tn.gov/transparenttn/open-ecd/openecd/tnecd-performance-metrics/openecd-long-term-objectives-quick-stats/distressed-counties.html.

[47] Janet M. Fitchen, *Endangered Spaces, Enduring Places: Change, Identity, and Survival in Rural America* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1991), 6-7; Patrick J. Carr and Maria J. Kefalas, *Hollowing Out the Middle: The Rural Brain Drain and What it Means for America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009), 9.

[48] Fitchen, *Endangered Spaces, Enduring Places,* 2.

Sociologist Robert Wuthnow has also extensively studied these changes in rural communities in his books *Small-Town America: Finding Community, Shaping the Future* and *The Left Behind: Decline and Rage in Small-Town America.* In Wuthnow's most recent book on the subject, he frames his discussion of these changes in rural communities such as Hickman County in terms of their contradictions—which is especially applicable in relation to the controversy over the future of the courthouse.[50] He points out that "talking to rural Americans, you learn quickly how deeply their identity is rooted in their town. […] they were also remarkably attached to the *place*."[51] And yet, within Wuthnow's frame of argument, this reality is contrasted with the fact that "rural families have not only anticipated its inevitability but also encouraged their children to seek better jobs elsewhere for generations."[52] So in the wake of the 1980s recession, one can also see how these changes reshaped the very foundations of what the community looks like, which therefore also changes who is considering and making decisions regarding the future of different parts of that landscape.

In the case of Hickman County, one can see this broadly playing out in the ways in which the loss of the county's most prominent industries has changed the dynamics and population of the county. By examining and comparing census records from the last decades, once can see the depopulation trend that has occurred over the years as members of younger generations have left for college or jobs.[53] And of those who stay, most commute long distances to other counties in order to work—a fact which in the last decade earned Hickman County the recognition of being the Tennessee County with one of the longest average commutes for residents.[54] Thus, in this way, one can see how in many ways, Hickman County very much falls into the pattern of similar rural counties and communities across Tennessee and the South.

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[49] Ibid.
[50] Wuthnow, *The Left Behind*, 4-7, 25.
[51] Ibid., 6, 23.
[52] Ibid., 7.

This pattern of depopulation, loss of jobs, and a changing relationship with the rest of the state in terms of the county's economy all have a direct and significant in terms of how the county has dealt with and continues to deal with its downtown square and the future of the courthouse. In connecting the broader historical context of rural communities with more immediate questions of the downtown courthouse squares, public historians can begin to connect some of the contextual pieces of how the changes that rural communities have undergone in recent decades can be used to better understand how choices of preservation and interpretation are being made within those communities. And, in the case of Hickman County, these changes have recently come to a head through an almost unprecedented decision on the part of the county government.

In October 2019, the Hickman County Commission held their monthly meeting at which time the commissioners voted to move forward with the sale of several older buildings that, while still in use, had largely fallen into disrepair. This decision included the historic courthouse located in the middle of the Centerville square. Immediately, this decision appeared on the front page of the weekly county paper and community members responded with anger and frustration that the County Commission would even consider such as option. The ensuing debate raised a number of questions regarding to this decision—including the looming question of whose county this courthouse was representative of as community members with varying levels of attachment to the building debated its future.[55]

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[53] "Quick Facts," United States Census Bureau, https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/hickmancountytennessee.

[54] "By the numbers: Rural and urban Tennessee," *The Jackson Sun,* Accessed March 2020, https://www.jacksonsun.com/story/news/2017/08/04/numbers-rural-and-urban-tennessee/539651001/: See also "Just How Rural or Urban are Tennessee's 95 Counties?: Finding a Measure for Policy Makers," a 2016 report prepared for the Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations at: https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/tacir/documents/2016JustHowRuralOrUrban.pdf.

Thus, almost a century following the construction of the courthouse in the spot that had become so symbolic to the county, one sees the culmination of several questions. The square full of empty storefronts and a general sense that the town is no longer the center of commerce at the center of a thriving county became the backdrop of the discussion of the future of the old courthouse sitting at the center of the discussion.

The question of what happens to this central space—beyond the questions regarding historic preservation—also represents an issue of defining and understanding this space within the context of whose space it really is and whose community space this area represents. The construction and layout of this town are, at their most fundamental level, based on gendered and racialized ideas about space, which can be most clearly seen in the courthouse itself in the physical features that clearly tie the building to its construction during segregation. Thus, in order to understand the historical and cultural landscape of the decision regarding the Hickman County courthouse, it is first important to understand how other historical factors and themes have shaped the way the landscape was constructed and how the courthouse has fit within that landscape.

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[55] Hickman County Commission Meeting, October 2019; "Courthouse, two others, are sold by county," *Hickman County Times*, March 30, 2020; Based on reactions posted on community social media groups such as the Facebook group Concerned Citizens of Hickman County, Accessed October 2019, https://www.facebook.com/groups/534904056579877/.

CHAPTER II: TURBULENCE AND CHANGE: CENTERVILLE'S TWENTIETH CENTURY HISTORY

The twentieth century was a time of change in Hickman County but not one of significant population growth. Significant patterns of change include the demise of phosphate mining, public school expansion, construction of a new courthouse, construction of new highways and interstates, and revolutions in farming as progressive agricultural institutions took root in the community. But change did not necessarily mean equal levels of growth for community members across the county. Even though some portions of the county experienced economic growth, overall, Hickman County remained stagnant with a population that only grew by about 400 people over the course of the century. Additionally, these changes throughout the twentieth century re-emphasize the importance of the county's sense of uncertainty as its population stagnated and it lost a clear sense of its identity throughout the twentieth century, which has most recently revealed itself in the controversy over the future of the 1925 courthouse.

Phosphate Mining and Railroads

In 1893 miners in Hickman County discovered phosphate, which was valuable for its use in fertilizers, animal supplements, and armor plating during World War I. Tennessee Phosphate Company, which operated in Hickman, Maury, and Lewis counties as well as in other parts of Middle Tennessee, controlled the Hickman County operations. The potential of the phosphate mines encouraged the Louisville and Nashville Railroad to build a spur line from Hickman through almost the length of the county, ending near Kimmins. Thus, the mines also encouraged railroad growth in the county, which to that point had been located off this vital transportation system. The company largely shipped the phosphate to Nashville for processing. However, once a larger source of phosphate was discovered in neighboring Maury County, phosphate mining in Hickman County began to gradually decrease and was largely ended by the 1920s.[1]

Public School Expansion

An additional development in the county throughout the twentieth century was that of the expansion and improvement of the public school system. By the end of the nineteenth century, Hickman County contained upwards of 90 schools scattered across its rural landscape, most of which were only one or two room buildings and contained less than 30 students. Because of the extremely rural nature of the county and the fact that these schools were so firmly rooted in their local communities, they quickly became a powerful source of community identity and pride. Then, as the county moved into the twentieth century, evidence of this wave of expansion and improvement can be seen in the physical landscape of the county as these early twentieth century buildings are the ones that remain scattered across the county and that have been at the center of most of the local preservation movements.

However, by the 1920s, this landscape began to change. The county began very slowly consolidating these student bodies and constructing new buildings to serve these students throughout the mid-twentieth century, although it was an extremely slow process for the majority of the county. And even as these consolidation efforts began to occur, the process remained segregated until the later Supreme Court Case *Brown v. Board of Education* legally ended the segregation of schools. These developments can be seen across the county in both white and African American school communities, although even then, the discrepancies of segregated space are still extremely visible in these buildings—several of which remain standing today and are visibly different in terms of both size and construction materials—with the white schools built during these years being comparatively larger, brick buildings and the African American schools being somewhat smaller, wood frame buildings.

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[1] Juanita Keys, "Phosphate Mining and Industry," Tennessee Encyclopedia, Accessed June 2020, http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/phosphate-mining-and-industry/.

Today, there are four extant examples of remaining school buildings that reflect the growth and change within the school system during the early twentieth century. These schools were built between 1920s and 1930s, all New Deal era schools, include the Shady Grove School (white), the Nunnelly School (white), the Wrigley School (African American), and the Fort Cooper School (African American). Several of these buildings, especially the Shady Grove and Nunnelly Schools, also became, towards the end of the century, the focus of some of the most powerful local preservation efforts in the county. And of the ones that have not been at the center of these efforts, there is still a clear reluctance to destroy the building—for example, the Fort Cooper School is in poor condition at this point, yet the community remains reluctant to take it down.

1925-1926 Courthouse

Although the county's antebellum courthouse had been repaired following the damage it received both during and immediately following the Civil War and Reconstruction, by the early 1920s, it had become clear that the building was no longer sustainable for the county. Thus in 1925, county leaders voted that courthouse was to be replaced by the building that stands today which was completed in 1926.[2] Newspapers describe it as being one of the most modern buildings to be constructed in Centerville. The dignified architecture of the courthouse, and its many modern interior features, signified a new era for the county, and town. Centerville now had a central landmark at the intersection of all of the major roads passing through the county.

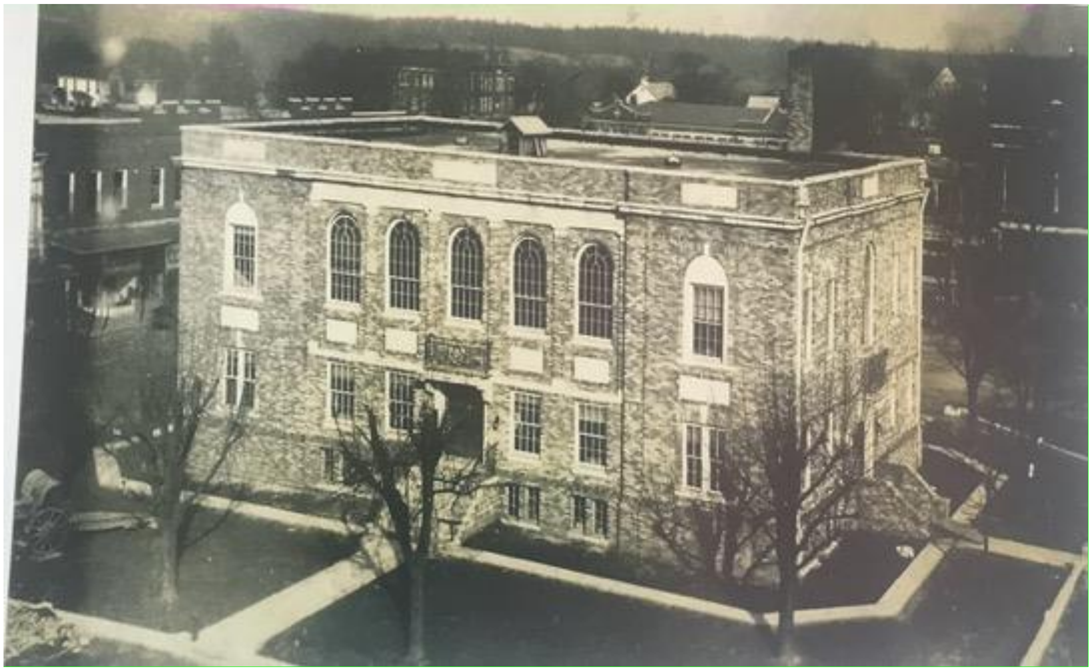

Figure 8: 1930s Image of the 1925 courthouse. Photo Courtesy of the Hickman County Historical Society.

A plaque just inside the courthouse lists some of the key figures in the design and construction of the building, as well as the local community members who made up the building committee. Tisdale and Stone of Nashville served as the architects, G. B.

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[2] "Hickman Opens New Courthouse Soon," *The Nashville Banner,* July 11, 1926.

Howard and Co., also of Nashville, were the contractors, and the local building committee was made up of Ed Russell, J. A. McCord, T. M. Huddleston, and John H. Clagett.

As with other buildings constructed during these years, it is important to note the influence of segregation in defining this space. In this particular building, the separation remains most noticeable in what remains of the segregated first floor bathrooms—with the pair of white bathrooms being conveniently located, and what were the pair of African American bathrooms located under the stairs near the entrance to the basement.

Construction of the new courthouse made a firm statement about how the county saw itself moving forward. The fact that it was built to be the most modern-looking building on the square established it as a statement of the county aiming for growth and progress in the new century—a fact further emphasized by them drawing on architects and contractors from Nashville. Marking it as different from other buildings on the square, it was constructed with a brick that did not match the buildings surrounding it, and its construction was of extreme symmetry. Unlike the courthouse that preceded it, there were none of the antebellum features (such as the large white columns) that carried over to this new building. Yet, at the same time, this building also reinforced the segregated nature of the downtown space as the building was constructed so as to clearly define whose space it really was. Thus, with the construction of the courthouse, built at the height of several of the county’s major industries, one can see the building as a clear statement about how community members envisioned the county’s future.

Impact of Progressive Agriculture Movement

Agriculture had long been the number one industry in Hickman County and continued to remain prominent in the twentieth century, even as other major industries in the county began to struggle. Among the county's Tennessee Century Farms, families created these farms in the early twentieth century: the Mathis Angus Farm I (1903), the Mathis Angus Farm II (1905), the Prince Lane Farm (1910), the Martin Farm (1905), the Rial Farm (1916), the Fox Family Farm (1918), and the Mathis Angus Farm III (1918).[3]

These farms, like most of the century farms throughout Hickman County, tend to be largely cattle farms with lesser reliance on crops like corn and tobacco, and although each of these had their own unique set of circumstances and differences, the time period at which they were established suggests that they would have grown and developed within the framework of the progressive agriculture movement. In the years leading into World War I, when most of these farms were established, one of the first stages of the progressive agriculture movement involved diversifying crops, a fact which is reflected in the crops that these farms focused on.[4] These changes, which historians describe as being a significant influence in the later soil conservation movement, likely would have had a major impact on the way these farms developed.[5]

Progressive agricultural institutions also took root in the county during this century and greatly influenced the role of these farms within the county's economy. The implementation of state programs such as the UT Extension Service, the Future Farmers of American, 4-H, and Home Demonstration programs were crucial to the development of farming in Hickman County during these years as they provided access and resources to farmers that had not been there previously.[6] Programs like these are what tied Hickman County into these larger, national movements and agricultural changes that were occurring, especially in the first half of the twentieth century.[7]

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[3] "Hickman County," Tennessee Century Farms, Accessed June 2020, http://www.tncenturyfarms.org/hickman-county/.

[4] "Hickman County Farm Join Ranks of State's Century Farms Program: Martin Farms Recognized for Agricultural Contributions," MTSU Press Release; "Hickman County Farm Join Ranks of State's Century Farms Program: Prince Lane Farm Recognized for Agricultural Contributions," MTSU Press Release.

[5] Gilbert C. Fite, *Cotton Fields No More: Southern Agriculture, 1865-1980* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1984), 68-69.

The New Deal brought the Soil Conservation Service, which encouraged and assisted farmers to address issues related to severe soil erosion across the United States. In April 1935, Congress passed a law to form the Soil Conservation Service (renamed in 1994 to the Natural Resources Conservation Service) as part of the USDA. The goal of this program, especially in the wake of the Dust Bowl further west, was to address the growing issue of soil erosion and its impact on farms across the United States.[8]

For rural farming communities like those in Hickman County, this law became most directly connected in 1937 when the USDA passed the Standard State Soil Conservation Districts Law, which encouraged the individual states to provide outreach and address soil use and erosions concerns at a local level.[9]

In July 1951, the Hickman County Soil Conservation District was established by local farmers, including R. H. Bratton, Walter Brown, Lewis Fox, Ashord Prince, and J. W. Shouse. Today, the organization remains active in a number of community programs and events and continues to promote soil conservation as a way to maintain the productivity of Hickman County's farms as well as to preserve its landscape and natural resources.[10]

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[6] There likely exists additional information on the role of these organizations in Hickman County at the County Archives and Hickman County Historical Society, however, due to closures in the Spring of 2020 due to COVID-19, those source were not able to be included here.
[7] Fite, *Cotton Fields No More*, 74-75.
[8] "History of NRCS." Natural Resources Conservation Service. Accessed June 2020. https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/about/history/.
[9] Ibid.

From Railroads to Highways

Hickman County's single railroad link connected the county to the Nashville and Northwestern, a branch of the Louisville and Nashville system at Dickson. That rail link later led to the development of State Highway 46, still one of the county's most important transportation links.[11] The growth of the Good Roads Movement and the construction of state highways soon eclipsed the power of the railroads. The Good Roads Movement, which began as early as the 1890s, represented one of the earliest pushes to transform America's road system—especially as cars began to become more accessible and popular—by creating a consistent and well-maintained highway system.[12] Tennessee Highways 48, 50, and 100 intersected outside of Centerville, and Interstate 40 runs along the northern portion of the county. The roads gave farmers better outlets for truck farming and better connections to larger markets in Dickson and Columbia, which allowed for Hickman County's already strong agricultural economy to continue to strengthen throughout the century.

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[10] "Our History," Hickman County Soil Conservation District, Accessed June 2020. www.hcscd.com/about-us/our-hist
ory.

[11] West, Carroll Van, Elizabeth Moore, Elizabeth Goetsch, Katherine Looney. "Pinewood: Finding the Stories of a Forgotten Southern Industrial Village." Survey and Heritage Development Recommendations. Murfreesboro: MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, 2008.

[12] Richard F. Weingroff, "Good Roads Everywhere: Charles Henry Davis and the National Highways Association," U. S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration, Accessed June 2020, https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/davis.cfm.

Resorts

Established in the mid-nineteenth century, the Bon Aqua Springs Resort, Primm Springs Resort, and Beaverdam Springs Resort operated in three different portions of the county. They reached the height of their popularity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, although all three ultimately closed by 1945.

Following its early success in the nineteenth century, the Beaverdam Springs Resort closed in in the mid-1930s, and the property was then purchased by the Synod of the Presbyterian Church 1940. Since then, it has been repurposed as a summer camp for local Presbyterian churches.[13] This resort remains the only one of these three major resorts in Hickman County that was not listed to the National Register of Historic Places.

From the early twentieth century on, the Bon Aqua resort changed hands several times, and in 1901, the most famous of the resort's hotels—which boasted 101 rooms that had the potential to allow for 500 guests—was constructed. Despite this new addition, the resort continued to struggle by the time the Great Depression hit the county. Finally, the Bon Aqua Springs Resort closed around 1945, and many of the buildings—including the main hotel—were dismantled.[14]

The next chapter of this property's history began in the early 1970s when country music star Johnny Cash took possession of the property. While he was in possession of the property, Cash turned one building, which had previously contained the general store that served the resort, into a performance venue for local musicians. This continued until shortly after Cash's death, when the property was again sold.[15]

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[13] "About NaCoMe Camp and Retreat Center," NaCoMe, Accessed July 2020, https://www.nacome.org/about-nacome-camp.

[14] Dotson, "Hickman County," http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/hickman-county/.

The buildings most directly associated with the resort site were nominated to the National Register of Historic Places in 1980, and a Tennessee Historical Commission Marker was placed near the site of the old hotel. At the time of its nomination, the remaining contributing buildings included: the Thomas-White House (ca. 1865), a cottage (ca. 1895), a corn crib (ca. 1880), a reservoir (ca. 1900), the Clark House (ca. 1880), a chicken house (ca. 1900), a suspension bridge (ca. 1925/1940), a Dam (ca. 1885), a swimming pool (ca. 1885), ruins of a spring house (ca. 1880), a cave entrance (ca. 1885), an additional spring house (ca. 1885), and the ruins of several other associated building—including the main hotel.[16]

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[15] "The Little Stage," Storytellers Hideaway Farm and Museum, Accessed June 2020, https://www.storytellershideawayfarm.com/the-little-stage.

[16] Richard Quin, "Bon Aqua Springs Historic District," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Tennessee Historical Commission, January 1990.

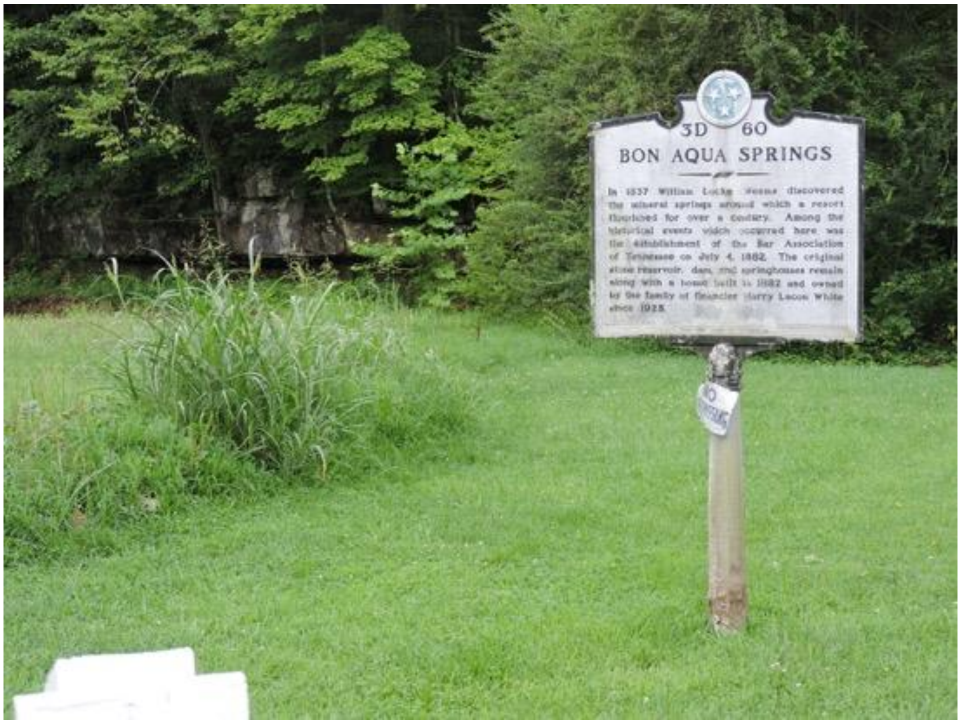

Figure 9: Tennessee State Historical Commission Marker noting the former location of the Bon Aqua Springs Hotel and Resort

After about 1990, the property was largely left vacant, and the last few buildings associated with both the resort and the Cash family fell into disrepair. Recently, sections of the former Cash property, including the building that housed the stage and Cash's house, have been purchased by private developers and repurposed as the Storyteller's Museum and Hideaway Farm. This endeavor has resulted in extensive restoration to the remaining buildings on this property and has begun to result in increased tourism to Bon Aqua for the first time in several decades.[17]

Around the same time as the closure of the Bon Aqua Springs Resort, the Primm Springs Resort also closed. While this resort remained highly popular throughout the first part of the century under the management of the Estes family, especially during the years of prohibition, the growth of scientific medicine in treating health issues that had previously been treated by the mineral waters of Primm Springs finally brought the downturn of the resort. The Primm Springs Resort, which was nominated to the National Register in 1985 represents the resort with the largest number of remaining buildings, although today, the site remains fenced in as private property and is not accessible to the public. At the time of its nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, the remaining contributing buildings included: a dance pavilion (ca. 1920s), 6 cottages (ca. 1870s), Puppy Branch Dam (ca. 1870s), the Estes House Hotel (ca. 1874), a stone springhouse (ca. 1900s), a small hotel or boarding house (ca. 1890s), the Estes Store and Primm Springs Post Office (ca. 1860s), the Miss Hugh Ella Estes House (ca. 1890s), the Sargent House (ca. 1880s), the Sargent Store (ca. 1880s), and the Estes Barn (ca. 1870s). There were no non-contributing buildings listed on the nomination.[18]

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[17] "The Little Stage," https://www.storytellershideawayfarm.com/the-little-stage.

Hickman County Post-World War II

By the post-World War II years, Hickman County's economic landscape had dramatically changed as, except for agriculture, almost all of its core industries that had sustained it throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had collapsed. While there has been some industrial growth in the county, especially on the east side of the county, in the second half of the twentieth century, this transition away from the county's previous core industries is when one can see more and more community members commuting or even completely leaving in search of work. The southeastern portion of the county has seen more tourism since the construction of the Natchez Trace Parkway in the 1960s as people travel through the county on the Trace, however, that increase has not been seen in most other portions of the county.

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[18] Richard Quin, "Primm Springs Historic District," National Register of Historic Places nomination form. Tennessee Historical Commission, 1985.

Thus, as Hickman County moved through the twentieth century, the population of the county stagnated. Throughout the county, some of the buildings that community members view as most significant and representative of this portion of the county's history have been preserved, but some, such as the courthouse, began to deteriorate or were demolished outright. Thus, these changes throughout the century help explain and lead into the current question of the future of the courthouse in the twenty-first century as community members wrestle with the uncertain future of the county in the wake of the changes that have occurred in recent decades.

CHAPTER III: PATTERNS IN HISTORIC PRESERVATION IN HICKMAN COUNTY

In Hickman County, historic preservation has been at work for fifty years. The federal government introduced the first efforts as it completed the Natchez Trace Parkway through a corner of the county in the 1960s. The Gordon House at Shady Grove preserved one of the oldest buildings in the county. Then in the 1970s, Numerous grassroots, community-driven efforts have preserved the historic schools and houses. Those preservation efforts came about from the consolidation of the county school system and the impact of the 1981-1982 recession. In the 1980s, the Tennessee Division of Archeology and Tennessee Historical Commission undertook a detail study of the state's early iron furnace industry, which identified several significant sites. Then there is a discernible gap until recently when citizens also have revitalized and restored numerous buildings in downtown Centerville.[1]

These important efforts reveal how historic preservationists can support rural communities and help them achieve economic and cultural goals, and they also reveal how important the connection that community members have with a specific building is in engaging with and fueling preservation efforts. Community identity is important. Residents are extremely attached to a sense of place and in a particular neighborhood, not the county as a whole. For successful preservation efforts attention must center on those buildings and places that have become integral to community, not just their physical, architectural merits.

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[1] "About," Historic Downtown Centerville, Inc, Accessed April 2020, https://www.historicdowntowncenterville.org/about/.

Next is a review of those early efforts, which will lead to questions about why gaining momentum for a county-wide effort to preserve the historic courthouse proved so difficult.

Shady Grove, in southeastern Hickman County, is a good early example of historic preservation in action. One of the county's historically farming communities, Shady Grove dates to the early nineteenth century and is today is recognized as being the home of one of the county's largest Century Farms—the Baker Farm, established in 1899,as well as for its popular access points to the Natchez Trace Parkway.[2] The Natchez Trace represents an important piece of the development of the Shady Grove community. Originally, what is known as the "Old Natchez Trace" ran approximately 444 miles from Nashville, Tennessee to Natchez, Mississippi acted as a popular route for several southeastern Native American tribes. Later, it became popular as more Americans moved south and west, at which point it also acted as an important trade route.[3]

Located on the edge of Hickman County along the Natchez Trace still stands the John Gordon House (circa 1818), which is located at the site of the old Duck River Ferry Site. John Gordon had this house and ferry site built to take advantage of being along the Trace. Gordon, a veteran of the War or 1812, died in 1819 shortly after the house was completed, and his wife Dolly ultimately operated the ferry until her death in 1859. Following her death, the ferry continued to be run until 1896.[4]

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[2] "Hickman County," Tennessee Century Farms, Accessed March 2020, http://www.tncenturyfarms.org/hickman-county/.

[3] Ilene J. Cornwell, "Old Natchez Trace," National Register of Historic Places nomination form, Tennessee Historical Commission, 1975.

[4] "Gordon House and Duck River Ferry Site, Natchez Trace," Natchez Trace Travel, Accessed June 2020. https:///www.natcheztracetravel.com/natchez-trace-tennessee/columbia-centerville-tn/83-gordon-house-and-duck-river-ferry-ste.html.

As one of the only remaining houses along the Natchez Trace from that time, it also represents on of the best preserved of the early homes in the county. Because it is located along the Trace, the maintenance and preservation of the house largely falls onto the National Park Service. The early work spearheaded by the National Park Service can be seen in the changes that resulted from assessments completed in 1983 and 1988.[5] Then in 1989, MTSU's Center for Historic Preservation completed an additional assessment that focused on changes that needed to be made in order to restore the house itself as well as to make it more accessible for interpretation to the public.[6]

Shady Grove also maintains a historic school that has been at the center of local preservation efforts. The first building that housed the Shady Grove School (ca. 1880) was a two-story wood building across the street from the Methodist Church and Church of Christ buildings.[7] One of the earliest schools in the county to include a high school, this public space and institution quickly became one closely associated with the community as a whole. The current building, constructed in the 1920s, is brick with two classroom wings, an auditorium, and a separate wood building housing the gymnasium (See Figure 9-10). By this time, the school had become a focal, unifying point in the community, as evident by the presence of the school in numerous newspaper articles highlighting its success—even the coverage of the school's opening highlight it as the new "Shady Grove Academy."[8]

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[5] Denver Service Center, "Development Concept Plan/Environmental Assessment: Gordon House/Duck River Historic Area, Natchez Trace Parkway," December 1983; Emerick, Michael. "Preliminary Historic Structures Report for the John Gordon House," Submitted to the Tennessee Valley Authority Cultural Resources, November 1988.

[6] Betterly, Richard, David Bush, Susan Cabot, Lea Lewis, Jeff Mansell, Mary McLeod, Stewart Southard, Sarrina ViAnne/ "The Gordon House Development Plan." Murfreesboro: MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, 1989.

[7] "A New Academy in Hickman," *The Tennessean,"* October 18, 1879.

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[8] "A New Academy in Hickman," *The Tennessean,"* October 18, 1879; "Shady Grove Institute in Hickman," *The Tennessean,* May 10, 1897.

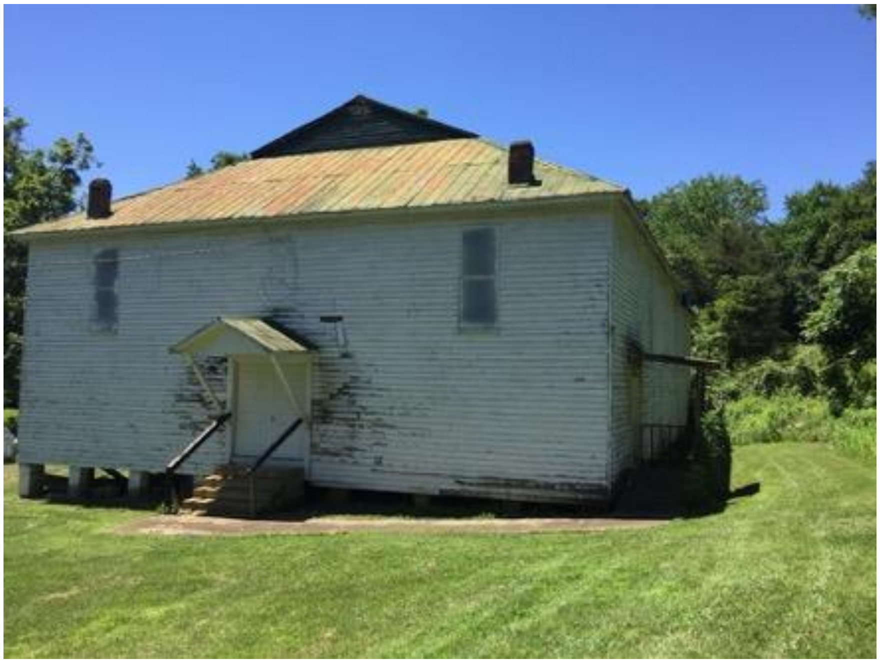

Figure 10-11: The Shady Grove School and Gymnasium following restoration efforts. Photo taken by author, Summer 2019.

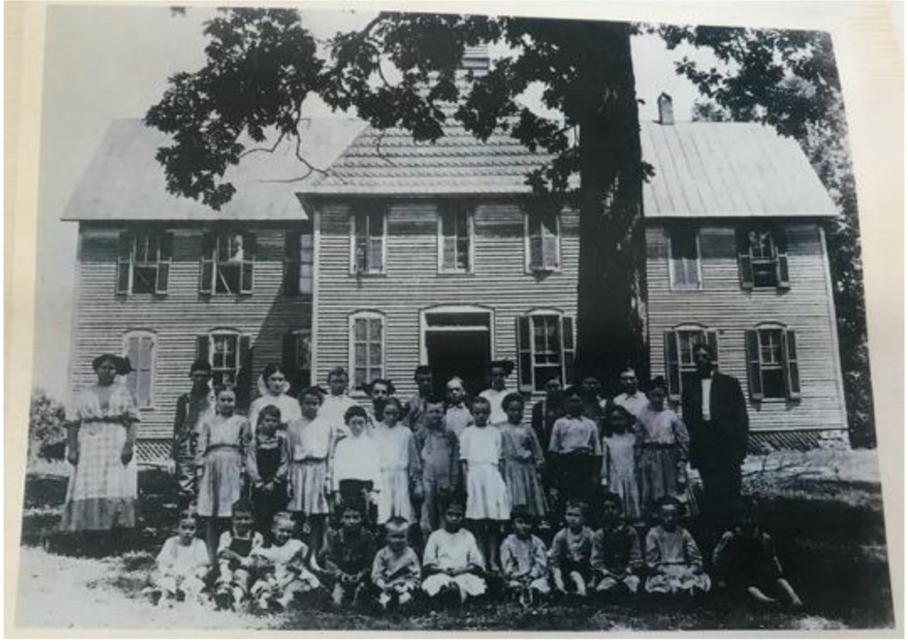

Figure 12: Picture of original Shady Grove School, courtesy of Hickman County Historical Society

However, what happens to rural schools when school boards decide to consolidate buildings? In the case of the Shady Grove School, this point came in the late 1970s when the Hickman County School system consolidated operations, closing the smaller community-based schools like the Shady Grove School.[9] To members of the Shady Grove community, this school had become more than a building—it was a part of the cultural and physical landscape of the community and thus tied more concretely into that sense of community identity that historians and sociologists point to.[10] Once the school system consolidated and county officials would not allow it to operate as a school, Shady Grove residents quickly moved to preserve and maintain the building, which now serves as a community center. It is used for public meetings, yard sales, church fundraisers, weddings, and other events. The gymnasium, in particular, is a popular local venue for parties and wedding receptions. Thus, the campus remains an integral part of the community landscape even though it is not operating in its original context. As it fills this role within the community, it is important to note that, in order to maintain the building's condition, community members continue to raise funds to continue preserving the building.[11]

A similar case can be seen in the Nunnelly community, which is located to the northwest of the county of Centerville. The Nunnelly community represents one of the oldest iron furnace-centered communities in Hickman County. Established in the mid-nineteenth century at about the same time as other furnace-based communities found throughout the county, the Nunnelly community is, in some ways similar to that of Shady Grove in terms of its emphasis on being a tightknit, locally-focused portion of the county. Although the furnace had closed by the mid-twentieth century, the Nunnelly community has remained a very focused, place-name based community.[12]

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[9] "Preservation award won at Nunnelly," *The Hickman County Times*, June 20, 2011; *A Patchwork History of Hickman.*

[10] Janet M. Fitchen, *Endangered Spaces, Enduring Places: Change, Identity, and Survival in Rural America* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1991), 8-9, 43.

[11] "Shady Grove Community Center," Facebook, Accessed March 2020, https://www.facebook.com/shadygrovecommcenter/.

In fact, Nunnelly was one of the last of Hickman's community schools to close in 1978.[13] Immediately following its closure, the community worked to restore the building and turn it into a community center. This work was later recognized with Certificate of Merit Award from the Tennessee Historical Commission, in part due to the way in which the project drew in such a large number of community members, including a inmates of from the nearby Turney Corrections Center who repaired the roof.[14]

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[12] "Nunnelly gets crowd for its homecoming," *The Hickman County Times*, October 17, 2011; "Preservation award won at Nunnelly," *The Hickman County Times*, June 20, 2011.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.

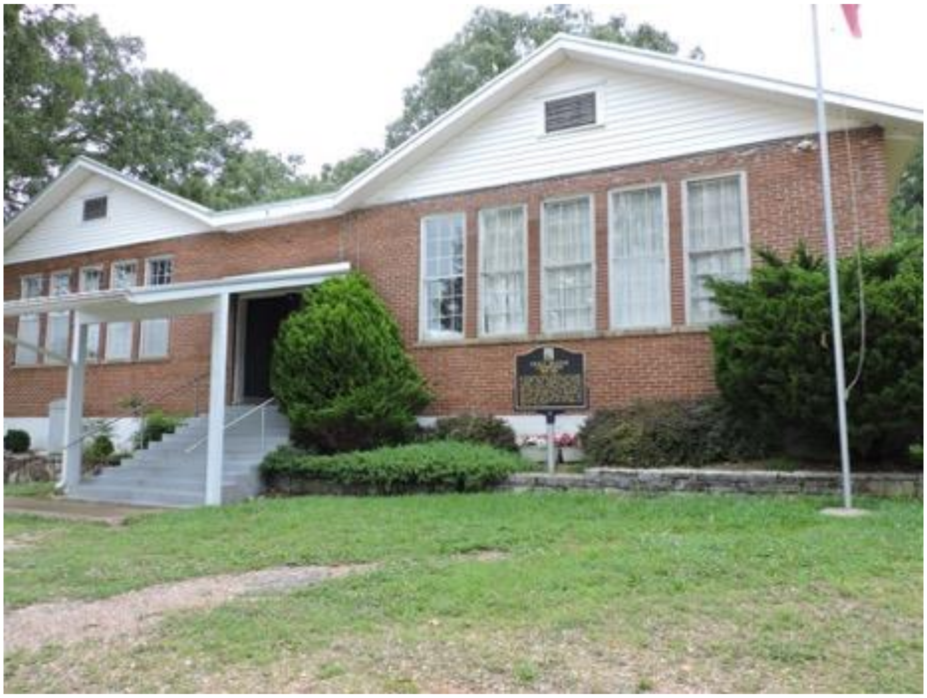

Figure 13: Nunnelly Community Center. Photo taken by author, Summer 2019.

African American residents launched another important community-driven preservation effort for the of the O. H. Bernard Community Center in Centerville.[15] Historically located on the outskirts of downtown Centerville, can be seen in the building is the third school built for Centerville's African American community. Accounts in county histories note that, by at least the early 1920s, the community school was known as the Ali Vesta School.[16] In 1928, county officials replaced the Ali Vesta School with Hickman County's sole Rosenwald School—the O. H. Bernard School.[17] The school was built as a three-teacher floor plan at a total cost of $5065, with $2,740 listed as coming from public funds, $1,050 from members of the African American community, and $1,275 from the Rosenwald fund.[18] Its namesake was O. H. Bernard, a prominent Tennessee school system official—who first served as the superintendent for Robertson County Schools before going on to serve as a second state agent in 1920 and in the division of schoolhouse planning and construction.[19] Rosenwald Schools are famous across the South for their role in improving education of African American students by providing improved school buildings.[20] The original building was a brick, three-teacher building that stood in stark contrast to the other wood-framed, two-teacher buildings that were most prominent throughout the county. In the 1930s, county officials expanded the school and added a gymnasium.[21]

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[15] "A Colored High School," *Hickman Pioneer,* December 2, 1887; Dye, *A Patchwork History of Hickman County, 1807-1984.* Edited by Dana Dye, (Self-published, 1984).

[16] Dye, *A Patchwork History of Hickman County, 1807-1984.*

[17] "O. H. Bernard School," Fisk University Rosenwald Database. Accessed April 23, 2020, http://rosenwald.fisk.edu/?module=search.details&set_v=aWQ9MzkzMw==&school_county=Hickman&school_state=TN&button=Search&o=0.

In December 1955, the Bernard School caught fire in what was deemed an accident by local newspapers. The original building was completely destroyed, although the gymnasium remained standing, as it does to this day. By late 1956, county officials completed the new, larger building and re-opened it for classes. The new school was part of their efforts to “equalize” black schools to white schools and offer a reason why

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[18] Ibid.

[19] S.L. Smith, *Builders of Goodwill: The Story of the State Agents of Negro Education in the South, 1910 to 1950* (Nashville: Tennessee Book Company, 1950), 26.

[20] Mary S. Hoffschwelle, *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006).

[21] “O. H. Bernard School for Annual, March 6, 1950,” Photo by Joseph Shipp, posted on The Ship Studio Archive Instagram Account on March 6, 2017, Accessed February 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/BRTZpZMDvwO/.

"separate but equal" schools should continue to operate, even after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.[22]

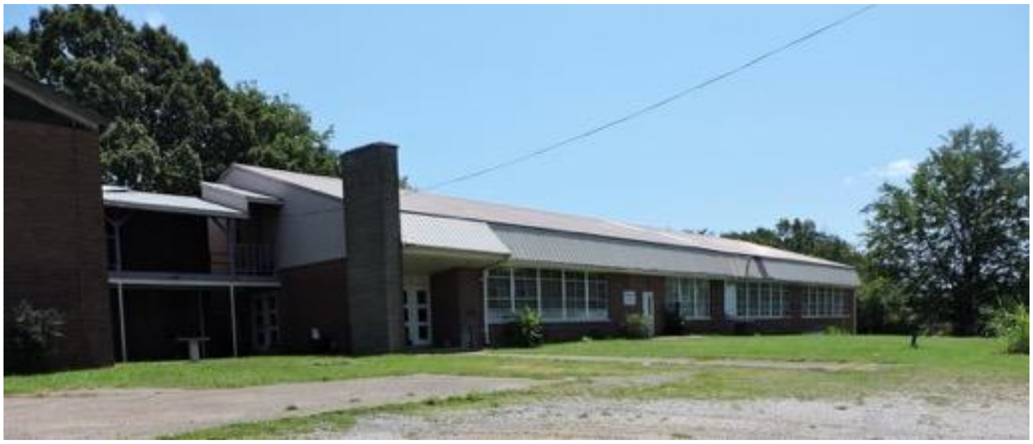

Figure 14: Photo of the O. H. Bernard School built in 1956. Photo taken by author, Summer 2019.

Upon Tennessee's desegregation of the school system in 1968, the O. H. Bernard School closed in 1969 and was initially repurposed as a kindergarten and special education building until 1984. Following the closure of the building as a kindergarten, the building was sold to a manufacturer that operated out of the building until 2006 when the building was acquired by Bernard Community Center, Inc. Since then, the group has paid off the purchase cost and fundraising efforts now center on the restoration of the building which, following the closure of the manufacturer businesses, severely deteriorated. Since then, community members have maintained the building through powerful community fundraising efforts.[23] Most recently, the Bernard Community Center, Inc. board held a fundraiser to help fund ongoing restoration efforts resulted in a donation of more than $6,000 from the Hickman County Democratic Party.[24]

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[22] Chuck Offenburger, "Time to Remember Glory and Right Some Wrongs in a Fave Tennessee Place," Offenburger.com, August 22, 2016. Accessed April 2020. http://offenburger.com/index.php/time-to-remember-some-glory-right-some-wrongs-in-a-favorite-place-in-tennessee-hickman-county/.

However, the legal consolidation and desegregation of the school system neither immediately nor fully erased the segregated structure of the Hickman County school system. In March 1973, the Hickman County Chapter of the NAACP filed an official complaint containing eight points to the Hickman County School Board. The complaint argues that the school board was continuing to discriminate in its hiring practices throughout the school system. In particular, the president of the local chapter points out that no African American teachers had been hired throughout the school system since the consolidation of the schools and the resulting closure of the O. H. Bernard School. They then argue that the school board needs to address not only its discriminatory hiring practices but also the lack of representation of the African American community on the school board itself, which at that point was fully white.[25] Thus, one can see how, even following the legal desegregation and the consolidation of the schools in Hickman County was applied, the buildings that had fundamentally defined Centerville and the surrounding communities were still at play.

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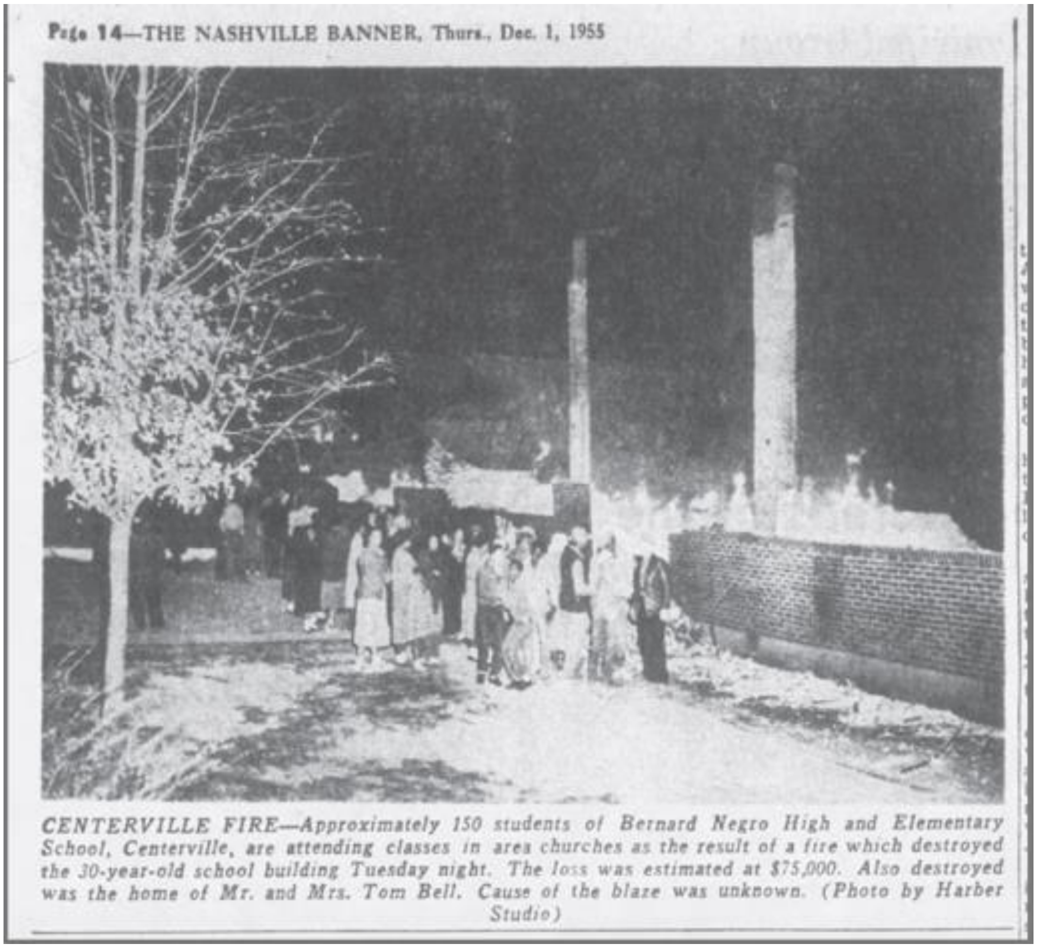
[23] "For the Center," *The Hickman County Times,* April 20, 2020.

[24] Ibid.

[25] "Hickman NAACP Hits Schools," *The Tennessean,* March 31, 1973.



Page 14—THE NASHVILLE BANNER, Thurs., Dec. 1, 1955

CENTERVILLE FIRE—Approximately 150 students of Bernard Negro High and Elementary School, Centerville, are attending classes in area churches as the result of a fire which destroyed the 30-year-old school building Tuesday night. The loss was estimated at $75,000. Also destroyed was the home of Mr. and Mrs. Tom Bell. Cause of the blaze was unknown. (Photo by Harber Studio)

Figure 15: Image of Newspaper coverage of the burning of the O. H. Bernard Rosenwald School. December 1, 1955.

The preservation of these three schools demonstrate the success of community-driven historic preservation efforts in Hickman County. The projects succeeded because so many residents perceived them as integral to their sense of community as their own identity. Why has this intense interest in public school buildings not translated to an interest in preserving the count courthouse as public space? Typically, communities rally behind their courthouses as a very public and integral piece of their lives.[26] Those questions will be explored in the next chapter.

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[26] Herbert L. Harper, "The Antebellum Courthouse of Tennessee," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (Spring 1971): 3.

CHAPTER IV: A HISTORIC COURTHOUSE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY?: WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

A series of events that began in October 2019 ultimately led to the sale of the county's historic courthouse in March 2020. In October 2019, the Hickman County Commission, after some discussion, voted to sell three older buildings in Centerville that were deemed too expensive and damaged to be repaired and restored. Two of the buildings—one of them the UT Extension building—were constructed in the 1950s-1960s, thus their proposed sale did not spark much controversy. However, the proposed sale of the 1925 historic courthouse, located at the center of the square in the county seat, immediately became the recipient of public backlash across several different forums—especially in social media forums.[1]

County and heritage leaders had been concerned about the historic courthouse for years, and yet, despite that concern, the building continued to deteriorate. In 2007, county officials asked the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation to conduct an assessment of the Hickman County Courthouse that included recommendations for both needed preservation repairs as well as considerable discussion about its future use. The report explained the physical issues that had developed as the building deteriorated in recent decades, including the worn bricks, outdated wiring, and moisture issues. After addressing these problems, the report also suggested some ways to repurpose the building—including as an event space, museum, and office space.[2]

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[1] Hickman County Commission Meetings, October 2019, January and March 2020; "Courthouse, two others, are sold by county," *Hickman County Times,* March 30, 2020.

Despite the advice, county and heritage officials took no further action than accepting the report and considering its recommendations. A decade later, the building's preservation needs and discussion of future uses remained unresolved. .[3] Thus, in light of this lack of action more than a decade ago, the question of the courthouse's condition becomes more poignant. The costly issues facing the building in 2019 that county commissioners cite as a significant factor in their choice to sell the building were referenced in the 2007 report and remain issues today. However, unlike other public buildings for which there have been active, community-driven efforts to preserve important public space, the same sustained level of response has not been seen in the case of the 1925 courthouse, despite the initial backlash.

The backlash the county officials faced in 2019 focused on several issues. One, local residents thought that the sudden decision to sell the building was an attack on the county's history. Others worried that county officials were trying to make this sale secretly in order to pocket the money for unknown purposes. Others still complained that local leaders simply were not thinking about the interests of the community. Those supporting the sale argued that the cost of repairing the almost 100-year-old courthouse was too expensive. They believed that amount of taxpayer money should be used for the future development of the county.[4]

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[2] Leslie Owens, Michael Thomas Gavin, and Caneta S. Hankins, "The Historic Hickman County Courthouse: Serving the Community into the Next Century," (Murfreesboro: MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, 2007.

[3] Ibid.

Interestingly, those who wanted to preserve the historic courthouse struggled to find wide support—unlike the campaigns a generation earlier that saved the public schools at Nunnelly, Shady Grove, and the O. H. Bernard school. In part, this can be seen as a result of the fact that, since 1990, the county had experienced significant demographic change. In 1990 population was 16,754 and by 2018 that number increased to 25, 063, compared to the less than 1% increase over the prior 100 years. Centerville did not benefit from this population growth—indeed it lost population over the same 30 years as more people moved to the east side of the county.

East Hickman is more economically connected to surrounding counties such as Dickson and Williamson and its residents depend significantly on access to Interstate 40 and Tennessee Highway 840 to commute to jobs in those two counties, as well as Nashville. Centerville is 20 miles from the east side of the county. The thousands of newcomers to the county who lived miles away from the courthouse square did not have that same level of connection and association with the building as part of their community landscape.[5]

Logistically, the sale of the courthouse and its initial announcement raised a series of questions for county officials as they began to initiate this process. The most important concern was preservation: if the building was sold, would the county have a voice in what would happen to the building in the future? While members of the county commission ideally might want the new buyer to preserve the building and repurpose it for the greater good of the community, once sold and privatized, did they really have any input in those decisions?

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[4] Based on reactions posted on community social media groups such as the Facebook group Concerned Citizens of Hickman County, Accessed October 2019, https://www.facebook.com/groups/534904056579877/.

[5] Ibid.

The scope of the sale also raised concerns: Did this sale include just the courthouse building itself or would it include the public lawn space surrounding the building? This courthouse lawn throughout the year serves as the setting for a festival, a craft fair space, senior high school portraits, and a set of monuments. Different groups had sponsored the monuments over the decades: the American Legion's War Memorial, a memorial to a recently deceased police officer, a Civil War interpretive marker placed as part of the Civil War Trails project by the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area, and the famous statue of Sarah Ophelia Colley Cannon—better known as Minnie Pearl. Born in Centerville in 1912, Minnie Pearl is most famous for her work as a country comedian in the Grand Ole Opry for more than 50 years and for her show *Hee Haw* that ran from 1969 to 1991.[6]

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[6] Brenda Colladay, "Minnie Pearl," *Tennessee Encyclopedia,* Accessed June 2020. https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/minnie-pearl/.

WORLD WAR I
WORLD WAR II
KOREAN CONFLICT

HICKMAN COUNTY COURTHOUSE
★ ★ ★
A Brick Fortress

Figures 16-18: The American Legion War Memorial Monument, Minnie Pearl Statue, and the Civil War Trails Marker located just outside the courthouse. Photo taken by author, Summer 2019.

Decisions about the monuments may be difficult. Under the Tennessee Heritage Protection Act, there is a very specific and challenging process through which the county and the new owners of the building would have to work through in order to gain approval to remove war memorials.[7]

These questions indicate that residents are uneasy about the prospect of losing public space in the town square. Because rather than functioning as the center piece of the public square, the sale of the building could potentially result in limitations or changes to how community members use the space surrounding the courthouse at the center of the square.

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[7] "Tennessee Heritage Protection Act," Tennessee Government, Accessed April 27, 2020. https://www.tn.gov/environment/about-tdec/tennessee-historical-commission/redirect---tennessee-historical-commission/tennessee-heritage-protection-act.html.

County commissioners reacted to the concerns by exploring possible solutions that would allow them to remove themselves from the responsibility of funding the restoration to of the courthouse, while at the same time keeping the courthouse lawn as public space.[8] First, they considered selling the courthouse for $1.00 to a nonprofit community groups in Centerville and allowing them to fundraise and decide the future of the courthouse. Two non-profits, the Hickman County Historical Society and Historic Downtown Centerville, Inc., wanted to find ways to preserve, repair, and repurpose the courthouse, but the estimated costs of $1 to $3 million dollar restoration cost was well beyond their institutional means.[9] Following the non-profits' decision to decline this offer, in January 2020, the next option was the county's plan to sell the courthouse to the town of Centerville for a relatively low price.[10] However, this plan was soon dismissed later that month based on the belief that the town of Centerville was then going to flip the building and sell it to a private buyer at a higher price—thereby defeating the point of the county not selling it to a private buyer.[11]

Following the failure of this second option, the county moved quickly to sell the courthouse to a private buyer in February 2020. During the month of March, buyers were able to submit their sealed bids to the county commission. On March 30, 2020, the commission met to sell the courthouse. Due to concerns over COVID-19, this meeting was closed to the public.[12]

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[8] Hickman County Commission Meetings, October 2019, January and March 2020.

[9] Conversations between the author and members of the Hickman County Historical Society and Historic Downtown Centerville, Inc., Spring 2020.

[10] Hickman County Commission Meetings, October 2019, January and March 2020.

[11] Conversations between the author and members of the Hickman County Historical Society and Historic Downtown Centerville, Inc., Spring 2020.

Two bids were submitted for the courthouse and the surrounding green space—one at $15,000 and one at $250,000—and, not surprisingly, the $250,000 bid was ultimately the one accepted.[13] HCTN Properties II, a group that, according to the *Hickman County Times,* "has been buying properties sin downtown Centerville since mid-2018," submitted the winning bid.[14]

How this process will move forward in the coming months is uncertain. Because the Hickman County Archives are currently the only county offices still housed in the courthouse, the county will retain possession of the building for another year while a new location for the archives is prepared. Following that, HCTN Properties II will take possession and begin the restoration process—which, at this time, it remains too early to know how long that process will take given the extensive wear the courthouse has sustained.

What does the sale of the courthouse mean for historic preservation in Hickman County? Certainly, it is a different narrative than the preservation of the three historic schools in the late twentieth century. The eastern section of Hickman County in the twenty-first century has boomed in population but in the county seat of Centerville, there has been little growth at all. Sociologist Jane Fitchen has observed that "in many rural places, the entre image of rural life is being called into question, and rural identity is becoming blurred."[15] Fitchen further observes that rural economic decline has over recent years "caus[ed] a divergence between reality and ideology and forc[ed] an adjustment in conceptualization of the community."[16]

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[12] Hickman County Commission Meetings, October 2019, January and March 2020; "Courthouse, two others, are sold by county," *Hickman County Times,* March 30, 2020.

[13] "Courthouse, two others, are sold by county," *Hickman County Times,* March 30, 2020.

[14] Ibid.

One can see this reshaping of identity over the last several decades in Hickman County as one of the driving forces behind the debate over the future of the courthouse. Too many new residents have few connections to the courthouse square; their lives and work are miles away. The downtown square of Centerville is not a political or commercial center as it had been in the mid-twentieth century. Those who live further away from Centerville no longer have a direct interest in the future of the building that would convince them to utilize taxpayer money for its restoration.

For Centerville residents the courthouse represents an important piece of the Centerville built environment, but those outside of the town, and especially in the most remote portions of the county lack a similar connection to the building and their own sense of community identity.

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[15] Fitchen, *Endangered Spaces,* 2.

[16] Ibid., 255.

CONCLUSION: KEEPING THE COURTHOUSE PUBLIC

Although the county no longer has possession of the courthouse, it still possible work together with the new owners of the building to repair and put the building to the best use for community members. In this way, the changes that this decision will bring to the Centerville square can, to some degree, still provide an opportunity for partnership and community input throughout the process. In particular, because of the county commission's knowledge of the courthouse building and the space surrounding it, a partnership could involve helping the county assess how to move the restoration and repurposing of the courthouse forward. Recognizing the county's previous knowledges of the issues facing the building is important because it can provide a foundational understanding for the new owners of the building as they begin to take possession of the building and plan for its restoration.

A foundational document for that community dialogue is the 2007 report from the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation—titled "The Historic Hickman County Courthouse: Serving the Community into the Next Century." For the courthouse's preservation needs thirteen years ago, Center faculty and staff made a number of recommendations:

- a thorough inspection to identity any hazardous materials used in the building's original construction
- the issue of outdated wiring throughout the building that could prove dangerous
- moisture issues in the basement of the building
- discoloration and wear on the exterior brick and concrete

- the need to repoint the brick
- and interior and exterior modifications to allow handicap access to the building

Center staff also explored a number of public uses, including:

- Office spaces
- Museum
- Welcome Center
- Event Space
- Arts and Cultural Center[1]

Accessibility Issues

In terms of the future use of the building, one of the most pressing is its compliance with the regulations set forth by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.[2] One of the building's four entrances has ramp access, but even on this side, when one enters the building, there is another set of interior steps that render that side non-ADA compliant. Thus, the new owners should immediately address accessibility of the first floor so that it can be fully re-purposed.

A more complex accessibility issue lies with the second floor. Because of the symmetrical square shape of the courthouse, this issue has proven to be one of the most challenging for county officials over the last several years—and especially in the months leading up to the county's decision to sell the courthouse.[3] The main staircase still has the remnants of an older chair lift system that no longer functions. The preferred way to make the second floor accessible remains the addition of an elevator—which could prove to be both an expensive and challenging alteration to this building. One solution is to add an exterior elevator onto the outside of the building on one of the existing entrances, as is the case at Franklin County Courthouse in Winchester, or to fundamentally change the interior structure of the building in order to accommodate the addition of an elevator.

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[1] Leslie Owens, Michael Thomas Gavin, and Caneta S. Hankins, "The Historic Hickman County Courthouse: Serving the Community into the Next Century," (Murfreesboro: MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, 2007, 2-3.

[2] "Guidance on the 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design," U. S. Department of Justice. Accessed March 2020, https://www.ada.gov/regs2010/2010ADAStandards/Guidance2010ADAstandards.htm.

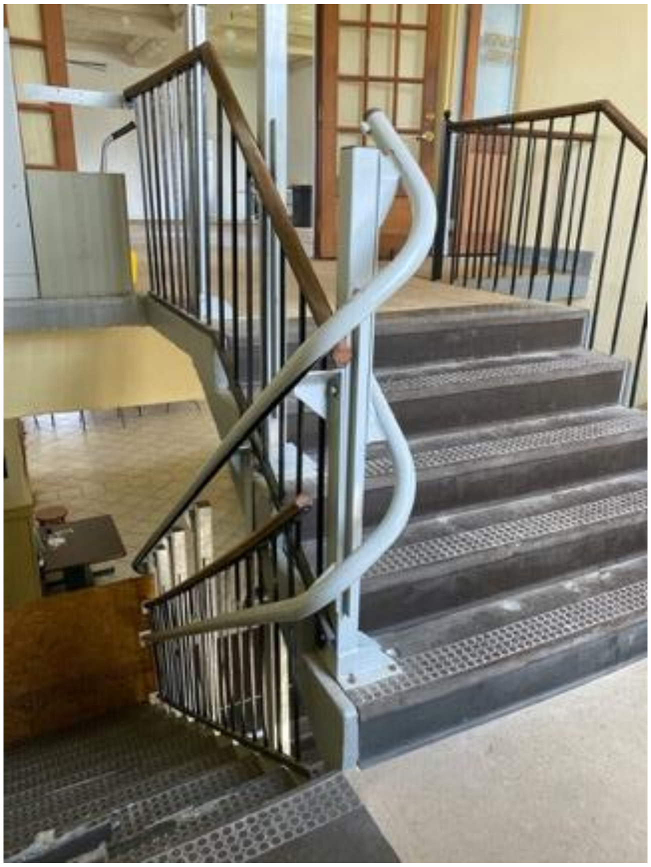

Figure 19: Stairs and old chair lift going to second floor of courthouse. Image taken by author, Spring 2020

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[3] "The Historic Hickman County Courthouse," 1; "Courthouse, two others, are sold by county," *Hickman County Times*, March 30, 2020.

Environmental Concerns

There is a need to address the problems that pose health risks to those who work in and visit the building. These issues include the mold that has appeared in certain portions of the building, especially in the basement, as well as the need for an assessment of the materials used in the original construction of the building in 1925—which likely include asbestos and lead. Before new wirings are installed, the issues of mold and hazardous materials are crucial.

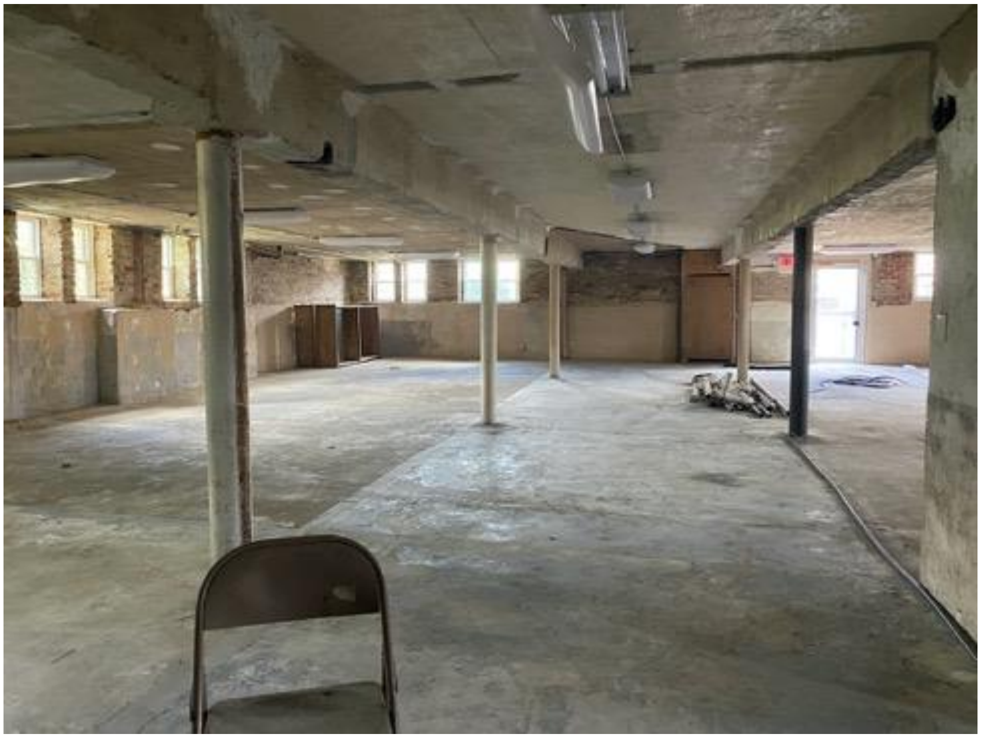

Figure 20: Current state of the basement of Courthouse, Image taken by author, Spring 2020

Recommendations for the Courthouse Lawn and Monuments

Since the sale of the courthouse included the green space surrounding the building, there will need to be public discussions about the future of the monuments surrounding the courthouse. The most prominently visible monument is that of the Minnie Pearl statue made entirely of chicken wire. Local artist Ricky Pittman designed the statue, which memorializes one of the most famous figures in recent Hickman County history.[4]A short distance away from the Minnie Pearl statue stands the local war memorial, which installed in the mid-1990s by the local American Legion Chapter. It emphasizes county veterans from the twentieth century, including local Korean War Medal of Honor Recipient William Franklin Lyell. In recognition of Centerville's contentious Civil War history, there also stands a Civil War Trails marker outside the courthouse that was a part of the efforts of the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage in the 2010s to place a marker in each Tennessee county. The marker in Centerville emphasizes the destruction and contention between Union and Confederate troops in Centerville through the war, and especially in 1863-1864. Most recently, a marker was installed near the Civil War Trails marker that honors local police officer Timothy "Buck" Buchanan, who passed away in 2019.

Additionally, there are several memorial plaques mounted to the interior walls of the first floor of the courthouse that will need to be assessed in terms of whether they will remain or not. The first of these is the 1925 building dedication plaque that lists important names related to the construction of the building. The second is a bronze plaque donated by the local chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, although there is no date listed on that plaque as to when it was dedicated, it simply stating “In memory of the men of Hickman County, Tennessee who fought in the Confederate Army during the War Between the States, 1861-1865. Presented by the Thomas Stewart Easley Chapter No 1814, United Daughters of the Confederacy.”

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[4] "Centerville, Tennessee: Chicken Wire Minnie Pearl Head," Roadside America. Accessed May 2020. https://www.roadsideamerica.co m/tip/52354.

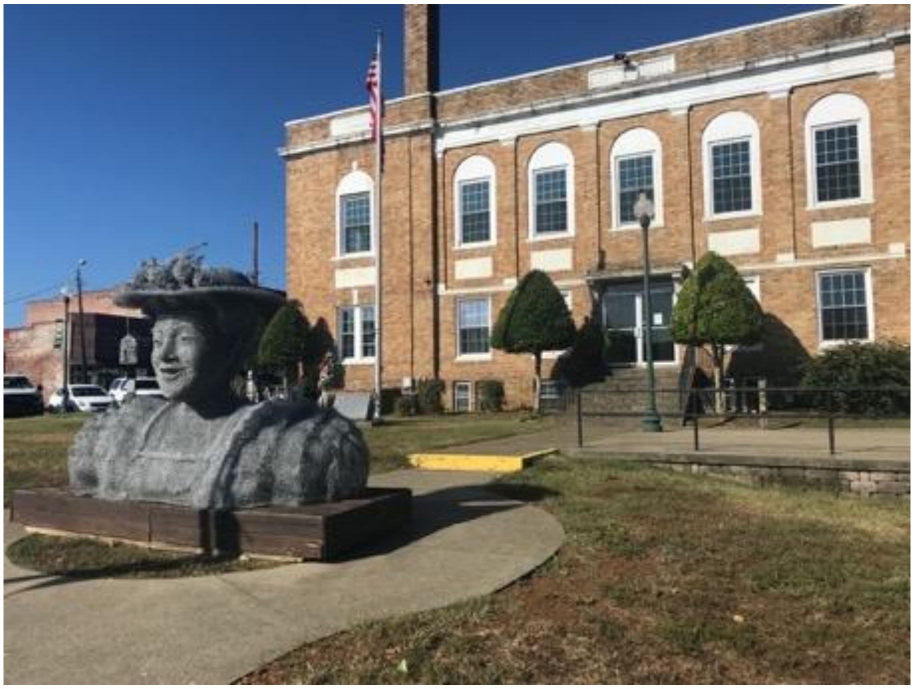

Figure 21: Minnie Pearl Monument located outside of the courthouse. Photo taken by author, Summer 2019.

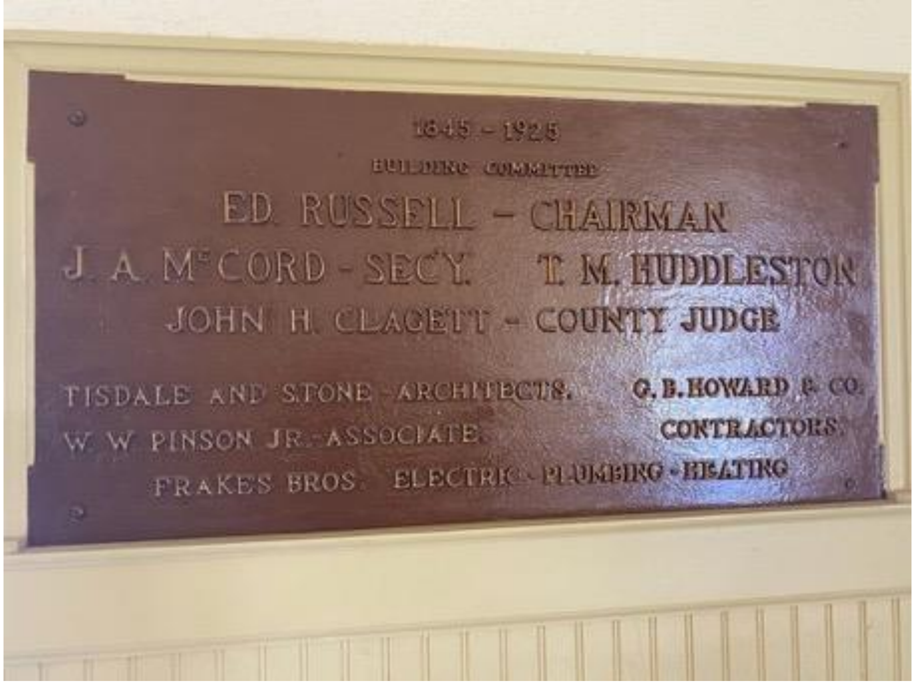
1845 – 1925
BUILDING COMMITTEE
ED. RUSSELL – CHAIRMAN
J. A. McCORD - SECY.
T. M. HUDDLESTON
JOHN H. CLAGETT – COUNTY JUDGE
TISDALE AND STONE - ARCHITECTS.
W. W. PINSON JR. - ASSOCIATE
G. B. HOWARD & CO.
CONTRACTORS.
FRAKES BROS. ELECTRIC - PLUMBING - HEATING

Figure 22: Building Dedication Plaque. Photo taken by Author, Spring 2020

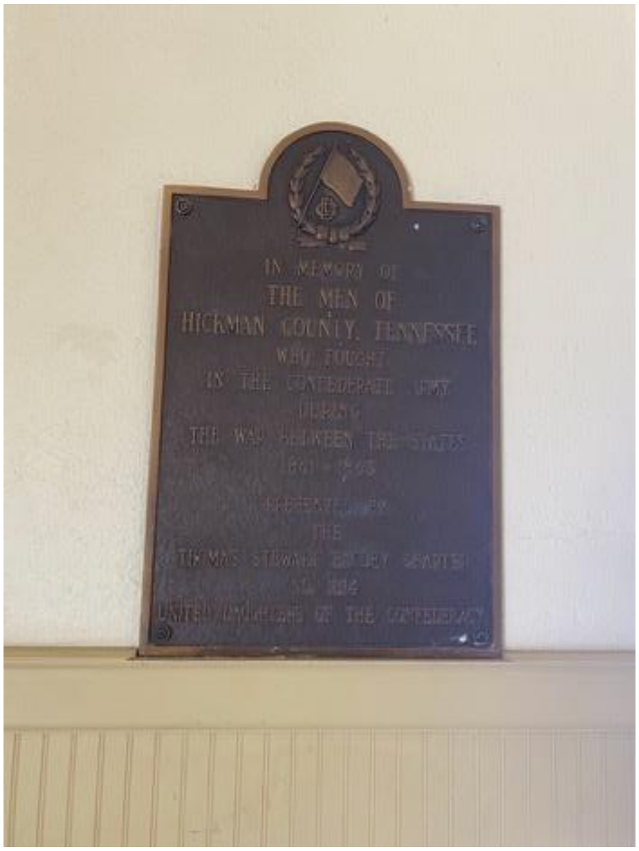
IN MEMORY OF
THE MEN OF
HICKMAN COUNTY, TENNESSEE
WHO FOUGHT
IN THE CONFEDERATE ARMY
DURING
THE WAR BETWEEN THE STATES
1861 - 1865
PRESENTED BY
THE
THOMAS STEWART EASLEY CHAPTER
NO. 1024
UNITED DAUGHTERS OF THE CONFEDERACY

Figure 23: Confederate Memorial Plaque, Image taken by author, Spring 2020

I recommend that the new owners consider installing exhibit panels on the first-floor walls to tell more about the building and the community's history. By incorporating these elements into the building, the new owners can encourage community members to re-engage with the space despite the changes.

As Hickman County's residents continue moving forward with the process of finalizing the sale of the 1925 courthouse, it is important for public historians to examine the path that brought the county to the point of selling the building, as well as what steps can be taken to retain the history and sense of public space the courthouse and its ground embody.

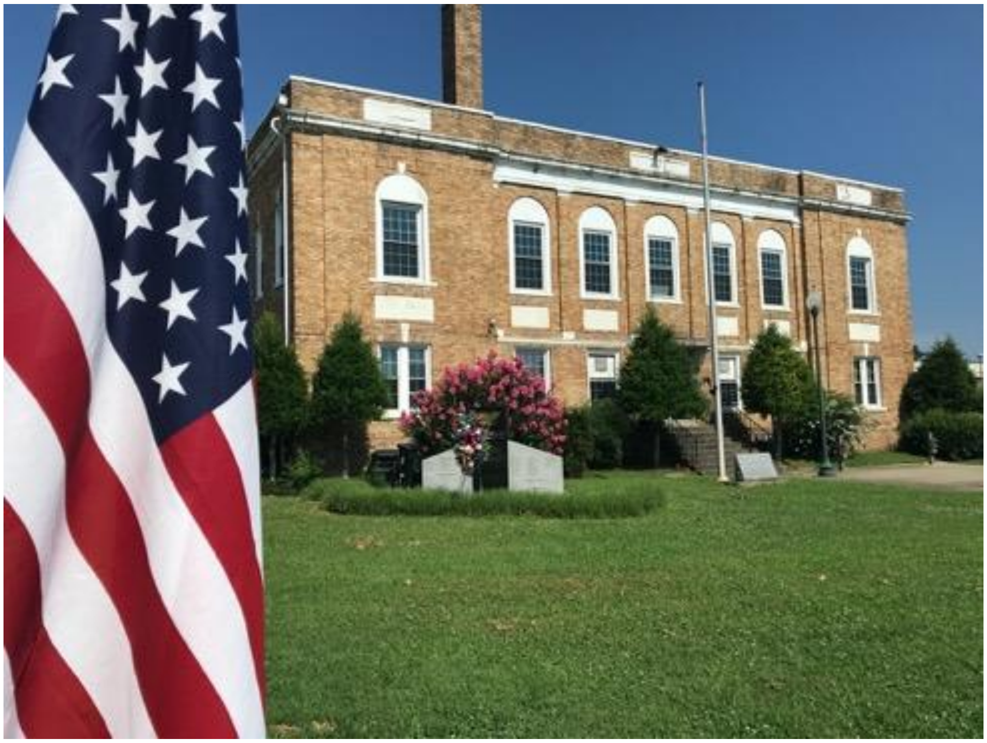

Figure 24: Courthouse. Photo by author, Summer 2019.

The success of school preservation in Hickman County suggests that the best future for the courthouse will lie in adaptive reuse, with a public presence. Within historic preservation, adaptive reuse essentially means that a historic building is preserved, adapted, and repurposed within the community—much like the school buildings throughout the county that have been preserved and repurposed. While the adaptive reuse model does not necessarily always require direct community involvement, if the new owners encourage community involvement and move forward with the adaptive reuse model for the courthouse, it could allow for a better public reception to the changes made as a result of the sale. In this way, despite the fundamental change it will undergo as it transitions to new ownership, the building can remain as a piece of the community landscape. Additionally, because of the patterns seen in the county in this regard, this approach will encourage the greatest amount of engagement and investment from community members.

Thus, in analyzing each of these pieces, one can begin to understand how the decision made by the Hickman County Commission in October 2019 does not exist as just the sale of an old, deteriorating building. At the center of the question of the future of the courthouse is the intersection of several different issues in relation to the future of rural historic preservation and understanding, as public historians, how all of these changes and issues come together within communities like Centerville and Hickman County. As Hickman County has fundamentally transformed in recent decades, the community's uncertainties about how its past connects to its future has greatly influenced decisions related to historic preservation. In examining and beginning to understand these changes, public historians and preservationist can better understand some the ways that changing rural communities can experience a disconnect from historic preservationists in terms of which public buildings and landscapes are worth preserving.

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