

Historic Family Farms: New Approaches to Their Preservation and Interpretation

By

J. Ethan Holden

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Dissertation Committee:

Carroll Van West, Chair

Stacey Graham

Brenden Martin

Louis Kyriakoudes

An old proverb states that a society grows great when people plant trees in whose shade they shall never sit.

This work, then, is dedicated to all the tireless hands that worked the land of Bates Hollow, and planted the trees under which I now sit. Though some may not have seen the shade or realized the full fruits of their labor, I am forever indebted to them for the comfort and life they provided me.

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores issues in rural historic preservation by examining existing scholarship, issues, and approaches while also evaluating and suggesting new approaches to the preservation of rural history and landscapes. Rural areas and family farms are under increasing development pressure and threatened by urban sprawl. Without these resources, we are perilously close to losing key parts of American rural history. The dissertation focuses on Tennessee since it has one of the oldest historic family farm preservation efforts in the nation in the form of its Tennessee Century Farms Program, which was established in 1975. The files gathered from this program form the backbone of the dissertation. This dissertation focuses on twenty-first century challenges facing rural landscapes in Tennessee and articulates potential solutions to these preservation and conservation issues. The dissertation makes extensive use of case studies, as well as information from the Tennessee Century Farms Program, to blend agricultural history with landscape conservation and public history best practice to draw conclusions on how public historians and historic preservationists can contribute to the preservation of family farms and rural landscapes. The geographic scope of the dissertation covers all three grand divisions of Tennessee. In doing so, the dissertation can compare and contrast preservation approaches for rural resources across the state.



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AGRH (Albert Gore Research Center)

CHP (Center for Historic Preservation)

ETDD (East Tennessee Development District)

MTSU (Middle Tennessee State University)

NCPE (National Council for Preservation Education)

NHA (National Heritage Areas)

NHPA (National Historic Preservation Act)

NPS (National Park Service)

NRHP (National Register of Historic Places)

NTHP (National Trust for Historic Preservation)

SPOOM (Society for the Preservation of Old Mills)

TAHS (Thomas Amis Historical Site)

TAM (Tennessee Agricultural Museum)

TCF (Tennessee Century Farm)

TCFP (Tennessee Century Farms Program)

TCWNHA (Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area)

TDA (Tennessee Department of Agriculture)

THC (Tennessee Historical Commission)

WCA (Wilson County Archives)

WCCFS (Wilson County Century Farms Survey)



## **INTRODUCTION: A NEW APPROACH TO RURAL PRESERVATION**

This dissertation began with a fieldwork visit to Foxwood Farms, located in Mt. Juliet in Wilson County, Tennessee, on September 18, 2020. That morning I excitedly packed up my clipboard and grabbed my mask. The owner of the farm agreed to meet me outside on the front porch, six feet apart, to comply with the COVID-19 guidelines instituted by the Center for Historic Preservation (CHP) and Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU). As I crossed over the cattle gate and started up the driveway, I could not help but feel a little nervous. This visit was the first time I conducted any kind of fieldwork alone, and the Wilson County Century Farm Survey's (WCCFS) success hung on my ability to implement it at the ground level. Questions such as, were my survey forms intuitive, are my scripts helpful, is my fieldwork note format going to work, and will the owner be receptive to the survey, all bounced around in my head. By the time I parked my truck, I had a tiny knot in my stomach.

Imagine my relief when the farmer walked outside and I recognized him from my time working at the Wilson County Archives. The owner, David Howell, was a frequent patron there. An avid genealogist, he knew much more about the county archives collection than I did, and more than once assisted me in helping another visitor while I learned the ropes. He greeted me with a giant smile and some coffee, and we sat down on the porch of his circa 1840 dwelling in the cool September air and talked about his farm, his family, his concerns, his plans, and the price of feed and return on cattle, among other things. I learned that he served in the army, and that he and his wife lived in England for a time before returning to Tennessee. His daughter works for the highway planning

services department in Baltimore and identifies historic buildings for the highway department as part of her job. I learned the farm itself was established in 1809, but because his family did not acquire it until 1828, he couldn't include that date as part of the Century Farm application. He talked about how they lost 128 acres of the original land grant when the Old Hickory Lake was impounded. Howell pointed out that the impoundment worked against the farm then and now. Then, the lake took good land out of production. Now, lakefront property is in high demand in Mt. Juliet, and both he and other farmers in the area experienced intense development pressure as a result. The sound of a new subdivision's construction one farm over drove home his point. Howell revealed that he planned on putting the land in the Land Trust for Tennessee to keep it from suffering the same fate as the farms around him, though he wished that there were other viable ways to preserve the land.

An hour or so passed in conversation before we began to investigate the farm. We started with an old roadbed, which he claimed to be an old buffalo trail. Next, we surveyed rolling pastures and old stone fences. The main focus of the tour was the historic Liberty Chapel, located on the edge of the property. The building was originally called the Tipton Meeting House and dated to 1812. Three denominations worshipped there before the church was finally abandoned in the 1960s with the coming of the lake and the migration of the traditional community. Howell maintained the building on his own dime. After spending the morning and better part of the early afternoon touring his farm together, my field visit was over.



*Figure 1: David Howell, the owner of Foxwood Farms, standing in one of his fields, 9.18.2020. Image courtesy of the author.*



*Figure 2: The old road bed located on the Foxwood Farms property, 9.18.2020. Image courtesy of the author.*





*Figure 3: Three-quarter view of the Liberty Chapel, 9.18.2020. Image courtesy of the author.*





*Figure 4: David Howell pointing out the preservation challenges facing Liberty Chapel, 9.18.2020.. Image courtesy of the author.*

Howell and Foxwood Farms are, in many ways, representative examples of the farmers, farms, and owners of rural resources that I explore throughout the dissertation. The concerns he had for the preservation and conservation, and the steps he had personally taken to address those concerns, were not isolated. The owners of historic family farms are often good stewards. Those same people shared concerns such as increasingly pronounced development pressure, estate planning and the preservation of a farm in perpetuity, a focus on the land's preservation over that of buildings, and the financial viability of running and preserving a farm. These issues consistently appeared in my subsequent field visits and case studies. Though the individual circumstance of each farm and rural resource changed, they all shared the same concerns as David Howell, and all sought answers to their rural preservation challenges.

This dissertation is a response to these desires and needs. The scope, sources, methodology, and chapter structure are all designed to answer the following questions: what are the major preservation challenges facing farms and rural resources in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? How have preservationists and public historians sought to preserve rural resources in the past, and are those methods and approaches still valid? How can the dissertation's case studies develop new rural preservation practice, and how can public historians and preservationists step forward and contribute meaningfully to the preservation of historic family farms?

Fieldwork and case studies took place in all three grand divisions of Tennessee, with a particular focus on Middle Tennessee. At the most fundamental level, Tennessee was chosen as the subject of the dissertation because it is home to a wide range of

property types that are facing their own unique preservation challenges. For example, in Middle Tennessee I had an opportunity to work with rural resource managers and farmers who are facing very real, persistent, and relevant threats to the preservation and conservation of their land due to explosive population growth. Conversely, some of the case studies took place in regions experiencing minimal growth with limited economic development, creating a different set of preservation challenges. Covering both types of properties ensured that the dissertation could speak to the widest variety of rural resources and their preservation concerns.

Rather than being concerned with specific time periods or subjects in agricultural history and historiography, the dissertation focuses on evaluating rural preservation practice and advancing new ways to preserve and conserve rural resources and rural land. However, understanding historical context and historical significance is a critical part of the preservation process and can inform preservation activities in the future. In that regard, the chronological scope extends from early settlement and the Revolutionary War, through the Antebellum period and Reconstruction, past the Progressive Era and the New Deal, and into the Agricultural Crisis of the 1980s and recent COVID-19 pandemic in the 2020s. Such a broad temporal scope allows for a long view of change over time and constancy on the landscape, and makes the case for rural resources and their historical significance in Tennessee.

In addition to time and geography, the scope of the project also encompasses an incredibly broad variety of rural resources. While several chapters focus exclusively on farms and farming landscapes, the dissertation also addresses the challenges facing other

common types of rural resources, such as cemeteries, schools, churches, and mills. The inclusion of the broader rural landscape in my scope of work accomplishes two goals, the first of which is to expand the usefulness and practicality of the dissertation to a wider audience. Second, including the broader landscape allows the reader to see how preservation approaches might differ for each individual resource, and how multiple resources might share the same preservation approach. A good example is to compare and contrast the preservation of a cemetery with a farm. Clearly the physical preservation of tombstones differs from the preservation of outbuildings. However, they also share similar preservation concerns. Both require stewardship and/or community support to stay vital. A vital resource is one that can support itself and continue to remain important and significant to its community in the future as it once did in the past.

The sources used in the dissertation fall into two broad categories. First, there are primary sources related to the Tennessee Century Farms Program (TCFP), records of which are housed at the Albert Gore Research Center (AGRH) and the CHP at MTSU. A second group of sources comes from case studies affiliated with the CHP. The Century Farm files were crucial to the completion of the dissertation. In 1975, the Tennessee Department of Agriculture (TDA) established the TCFP. Then in 1985, the CHP took responsibility of administering the program. The TCFP documents, honors, and recognizes the dedication and contribution of Tennessee farm families who have owned and farmed the same land for 100 years. To be a part of the Century Farm program, the owners must complete an application that documents, historically, the founding of the



farm, the generations to own the farm and their agricultural production, and any other family lore, photographs, or sources that the owners want to include.<sup>1</sup>

Second, case studies and project reports completed through and by the CHP were just as crucial to the completion of the dissertation. One of the core features of the reports was the information gathered from property owners and the community. By listening to the members of the public and their specific needs, the author was able to gather direct information about preservation and preservation concerns. The next core feature was the institutional, technical, and scholarly knowledge provided through the CHP staff and existing CHP collections. These sources combined years of fieldwork, experience, and scholarly development to create quality reports that accurately addressed the needs of property owners.<sup>2</sup>

The case study chapters have a set organization. First, each chapter looks at why the property matters, and examines its historical context and significance. Then the study identifies preservation concerns for the property. These preservation concerns are

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<sup>1</sup> This is a cursory overview of the Tennessee Century Farm Program. The TCFP is covered in greater detail in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2: Wilson County Century Farm Survey. The completed TNCFP files, as one can imagine, are incredibly valuable sources for any kind of agricultural history or rural preservation undertaking. Having access to records that detail founding dates, acreage and its change over time, agricultural production, inheritance patterns, and personal information about the owners of the farms allows for nuanced collection of stories that contributes to, and in some ways changes, our perspective of Tennessee's agricultural history. The inclusion of personal documents, letters, receipts, and photographs adds a personal touch to the applications that is missing from other accounts. Additionally, the personal recollections or histories that owners often put into the documents provides a tangible link to their lives and the ways that memory interacts in a rural setting. This untapped information on memory and the rural experience deserves scholarly attention on its own.

<sup>2</sup> The CHP is a proponent of the "boots-on-the-ground" approach to rural preservation. The approach emphasizes that the practicing preservation professional visit the sites that they are addressing and actually listen to the needs of the property owner. The CHP's approach was central to the completion of the dissertation, and consequently yielded some of the most important information. Interviews and discussions with farmers, community members, and other professionals form the backbone of all the case studies and the Wilson County Century Farm Survey, in particular.

generated by the author and by others involved in the process, such as the property owner or other preservation specialists. Following the identification of preservation concerns, the chapter then examines past and current efforts by the owner to preserve the rural resource. These efforts differ, sometimes quite radically, from case study to case study.

The case studies also provide preservation recommendations and preservation strategies tailored to the rural resource. Though many preservation recommendations are author-generated, determining these recommendations and strategies was a collaborative process. For example, with case studies that involved CHP reports, many of the recommendations and strategies were developed in conjunction with CHP personnel or fellow graduate research assistants. This collaborative process informed the author's recommendations. Likewise, many of the recommendations and strategies come from collaboration with the owners of the rural resources themselves. A prime example is the Wilson County Century Farm Survey. In addition to asking for preservation concerns, the author also interviewed farmers for their recommendations or what they were doing themselves to solve these preservation concerns and keep their farm vital. Finally, there are instances where recommendations provided by the author are those found in already established preservation guides and/or scholarship.

Chapter one, "The Concept of Rural Preservation," demonstrates in greater detail how the dissertation fits into established scholarship on rural preservation and how current preservation pressures unique to the 21<sup>st</sup> century make this study relevant and useful for farm families. Rural preservation as a field has evolved considerably from its origins in traditional historic preservation to a field of study that counts among its number

preservationists, activists, public historians, and conservationists. Indeed, the very nature of rural preservation demands a holistic approach, one that is not just focused on buildings but also on the land, people, and the community. This dissertation is a continuation of the legacy of rural preservationists, public historians, and public programs such as Farm Aid and the Tennessee Century Farm Program.

The second chapter, “Wilson County Century Farm Survey,” presents the findings of a survey undertaken from 2019-2020 on Wilson County Century Farms. The author sent out a survey form to all Wilson County Century Farms. The survey form provided an update for existing Century Farm applications and asked owners about the major preservation challenges facing them. Field visits came next. During fieldwork, the author investigated the farm, documented their cultural resources, and interviewed them directly about preservation concerns they had. The results of the process were two-fold. First, the chapter traces the broad history and themes of Wilson County’s agricultural history through the lenses of its Century Farms and suggests a new period of agricultural history and development, the commercialization of agriculture. During this period, larger commercial farms produced agricultural products at prices that family farms could not compete with. As a result, many family farmers and their descendants left the farm for higher paying jobs. Second, the survey results revealed that Wilson County Century Farmers were more concerned with preserving their land rather than buildings.

The third chapter, “African American Century Farms: Significance and Preservation,” explores the African American farming experience through the lenses of the TNCFP and other sources. The chapter is statewide in its scope and draws upon a

larger variety of primary sources, demonstrating that African American farmers historically faced, and continue to face, greater obstacles to obtaining, running, and keeping their farms vital than white farmers. The chapter also analyzes unique preservation concerns that African Americans face. Black farmers face challenges such as heirs property and long-standing discrimination in state and federal agricultural programs.

The fourth chapter, “Case Study: Amis Farm,” explores the Amis Farm and associated Thomas Amis Historical Site outside of Rogersville in Hawkins County. Founded in 1781 by Thomas Amis, a Revolutionary War veteran from North Carolina, the Amis Farm is home to a vibrant, chronologically deep cultural landscape that features the Thomas Amis House (built in 1782), a cemetery with both white and African American burials, a 1780s dam, the ruins of a 1780s mill, 20<sup>th</sup> century barns and outbuildings, and a 21<sup>st</sup> century restaurant. The history of the Amis Farm begins pre-statehood and covers such important topics as the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, Reconstruction, Progressivism, and Agricultural History. The major contribution of the Amis Farm to the dissertation and rural preservation scholarship comes from an exploration of its ties to heritage tourism. Through the efforts of its owners Jake and Wendy Jacobs, the Amis Farm was brought back from the brink of an overgrown and forgotten place to one that is recognized both in the area and across the state as a vibrant heritage tourism destination. Crucial to recovery of the site was the founding of the Amis Mill Eatery, an award-winning restaurant located on the site and overlooking the historic dam. The recovery of the Amis property demonstrates the power of heritage tourism in

rural preservation. However, it also demonstrates the double-edged nature of heritage tourism and the inappropriateness of applying it to all rural preservation situations.

Chapter five, “Case Study: Fowler’s Mill & Farm,” continues the examination of heritage tourism, in addition to exploring agritourism and the farm-to-market movement as valuable preservation approaches. Chapter five focuses on Fowler’s Mill, a circa 1875, National Register-listed mill located on the Fowler Farm, a Tennessee Century Farm in Monroe County. Charles and Elizabeth Wyley Kelso established the farm. The Kelso family was a milling family, an activity they continued from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The challenges and opportunities of heritage tourism and agri-business in a physically isolated farm in an “at-risk” economic county are profound. While heritage tourism and agri-business are both viable methods of preservation, they rely intensely on the ability of the owner to maintain networks, take on the financial burden, and have the vision for success. Farmers with limited capital in isolated areas may find such an approach out of their reach.

Chapter seven, “The Broader Rural Landscape: Palestine Church and Cemetery and Wheeler School as Case Studies,” addresses rural resources beyond the farm. Rather than focusing on farms and associated rural resources located on the farm, this chapter encompasses two case studies for rural properties associated with family farms. The first property is the Palestine Church and Cemetery, located in West Tennessee. The second property is the Wheeler School, now located in Fiddler’s Grove, a “pioneer village” located on the Wilson County Fairgrounds in Lebanon, Tennessee. The Palestine Church and Cemetery demonstrates the historical importance of churches and cemeteries to rural

communities, while the Wheeler School provides a look at African American education in rural areas, especially its connection to nationally significant leaders as W.E.B.

DuBois, who taught there in the 1880s. The contributions of these case studies to rural preservation are multiple. The Palestine cultural landscape addresses issues of vandalism and provides a discussion on how abandoned rural resources can find themselves linked to dark history and the paranormal. Additionally, the Palestine case study also shows the difficulty faced in preserving old churches whose community has been lost, or has moved and relocated. In such cases, preservation entirely depends on building a new constituency to support the church. In contrast, the Wheeler School demonstrates how rural preservation can be damaging without proper interpretation and context. An African American school, the Wheeler School was relocated to Fiddler's Grove. However, the site does not interpret the Wheeler School, or Wilson County's agricultural history, with a critical eye. The nostalgia and presentation of Fiddler's Grove as an authentic "pioneer village" represents a narrow construction of rural and agricultural life as it existed.

The final chapter, "Rural Preservation Looking Forward," is where the author reviews the status and future of rural preservation. Rural preservation, while not as fully developed as other fields of historic preservation, is no longer ignored. Both preservationists and the general public now understand that rural landscapes are important parts of our everyday lives and our shared history. However, there are still major challenges that face rural resources and their preservation. Though there are state, federal, and private initiatives that support rural preservation, the reliance upon private ownership and owner-led initiatives makes it a hard process that demands large amounts of time and money. Such a fact precludes many rural resources owners from engaging in

rural preservation. While the dissertation presents strategies to overcome these challenges, the reality is that there is no silver bullet to rural preservation, even for resources located within the same community. Such a reality necessitates the continued application of fieldwork and case studies both in Tennessee and across the nation to determine additional strategies. Additionally, future rural preservation will, by necessity, be shaped and guided by the relationship of the field to climate change and climate-related disasters. As our climate continues to change, previously productive farms will find their livelihood threatened by changing growing seasons or other related events. Such changes will further compound problems facing rural resource owners in preserving and keeping their farms. Though such a future may seem bleak, future rural preservationists can leverage these problems to organize rural resource owners into a force that advocates for climate justice and rural preservation.

## CHAPTER 1: THE CONCEPT OF RURAL PRESERVATION

Every few years a headline, news story, or blog post announces the “death” of rural America and the family farm. Who killed it, of course, varies with the article and the year. For some, it is government regulation or overreach. For others, it is corporate agriculture, either in the United States or abroad. Development and population growth are also key suspects, while some of the more sensational articles may cite the unwillingness of future generations to work on the farm like their parents. Each of these explanations are too simple by themselves, but combined they begin to shape answers. And yet, despite its many announced deaths, the family farm continues to shape lives and culture, a testament to the resiliency of its owners and surrounding communities.<sup>1</sup>

The rural landscape of Middle Tennessee, especially its Central Basin surrounding Nashville, is facing pressing demands for more land for suburbs, industries, and retail on a level unmatched in many Tennesseans lifetimes. Counties such as Davidson, Rutherford, Williamson, Sumner, and Wilson are experiencing historic

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, both the literature and media surrounding the subject is incredibly deep and stretches over a long period of time. Historic newspaper articles illustrate the point quite well. A search on Newspapers.com reveals such headlines as “Saving the Disappearing Family Farm,” published in *The Missoulian* on April 2, 1978. The article suggests that it is a combination of industrialization and real-estate speculation that has led to the loss of America’s family farms. An article published in the *Stevens Point Journal* on June 13, 1990, titled, “Family farm heads for extinction, farm official says,” likewise points to industrialization, in addition to property taxes, biotechnology, environmental concerns, and commercial agriculture as the primary threats facing family farms. A more recent article published by Alana Semuels in *Time Magazine*, titled, “‘They’re Trying to Wipe Us Off the Map’: Small American Farmers Are Nearing Extinction” (2019), expounds on the concerns faced by modern farmers. In a poignant and well written article, Semuels explores through interviews with farmers issues such as corporate farming, government policy, unstable agricultural prices in a volatile global market, the loss of young farmers to other careers, and suicide. For more articles on the subject, see: Michele Chandler, “Matt Rothe: How the Tractor Killed the Family Farm,” *Stanford Business*, December 11, 2011; Tim Schaefer, “3 reasons why farming families don’t get along: Part one in a series,” *FarmProgress*, August 26, 2016; Phil Lempert, “Why Our Farms are Disappearing: Development is taking over land use to grow commodity crops,” *Winsight Grocery Business*, September 10, 2018; Chris McGeal, “How America’s food giants swallowed the family farms,” *The Guardian*, March 9, 2019.



growth. Indeed, there seems to be no end to the surge, with projections and estimates all showing an ever-greater number of people moving to the area. Matthew Harris, an Associate Professor of Business at the University of Tennessee, published his own projections on growth in 2019. According to Harris' projections, the population of Tennessee is going to grow by more than one million people from 2018-2040, or the span of twenty-two years. This translates into roughly 124 people moving into the state every day. Tim Kuhn, the director of the Tennessee State Data Center, believes more than half of the growth will occur in Davidson, Rutherford, Williamson, Sumner, and Wilson Counties. Data projections indicate that Rutherford, which is currently the state's fifth largest county, will surpass Knox County to be the third largest county in Tennessee by 2050.<sup>2</sup> The increase in population means an increased demand for housing, which leads to suburban sprawl displacing family farms.

Urban and suburban growth are not alone in threatening rural resources. Since the end of World War II, small farms have become increasingly dependent on outside income to support their operation, whereas before farms could operate on their own income.<sup>3</sup> The result of the shift is two-fold. First, it makes farming an operation that only those with a

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<sup>2</sup> Erin Hatfield, "Boyd Center Population Projections: Gains in Middle Tennessee, More Seniors," *The University of Tennessee Knoxville News*, <https://news.utk.edu/2019/12/10/boyd-center-population-projections-gains-in-middle-tennessee-more-seniors/#:~:text=About%20half%20of%20that%20growth%20will%20be%20in%20Middle%20Tennessee.&text=Boyd%20Center%20Associate%20Professor%20Matthew,to%207.84%20million%20in%202040.>, accessed 4.16.2021.

<sup>3</sup> This trend is articulated well in Michael Wilcox, Jr, and Jane Howell Starnes' article, "Fam Numbers in Tennessee," published by the University of Tennessee Extension office in 2012. They identified the decreasing number of Tennessee farmers who consider farming to be their primary occupation. They found that there was a thirty percent decrease in Tennessee farmers who considered farming to be their primary occupation. By 2007, nearly two-thirds of Tennessee principal operators considered work off the farm to be their primary occupation. [https://trace.tennessee.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1043&context=utk\\_agexfinman](https://trace.tennessee.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1043&context=utk_agexfinman), accessed June 7, 2022.

steady, reliable income can afford. Second, the limited financial return from farming encourages the owners and their descendants to sell the farm. In areas where land for development and growth are in high demand, selling the farm can create generational wealth for the owners of their farm and their descendants.

The specialization in producing agricultural commodities also threatens the preservation of rural resources and landscapes. In addition to making farms dependent on outside income, specialization, often at the encouragement of market demand or state agencies, has decreased the agricultural diversity of farms since World War II. Whereas before farmers may have produced dairy, grown tobacco crops, raised livestock, and grown small gardens for sale at market, many now focus exclusively on one type of agricultural production. However, the effects are mitigated somewhat by the increasing popularity of the “farm-to-table” movement, which gained popularity in the 2000s. Known alternatively as “farm-to-fork” or “local food movement,” the movement encourages both commercial and private consumers to buy their agricultural produce from local farmers. Proponents cite various economic, environmental, social, and physical benefits from buying locally. Most importantly for farmers, the movement allows for additional income and encourages a departure from specialized agricultural production.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, just as growth and development change the rural landscape, they also change the composition of the community and existing communal networks. This unseen

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<sup>4</sup> Roslynn Brain, “The Local Food Movement: Definitions, Benefits, and Resources,” Utah State University Extension, 2012.

landscape can be just as important as the physical landscape. Farmers generally know their neighbors, and they often will work together to bring in a crop of hay, work on a piece of equipment, or mend fences. Indeed, though many think of farms as independent properties, they can be as connected as a traditional urban neighborhood. As the network deteriorates, it can be harder for a farmer to justify continuing the operation of their farm. Rural resources such as churches, rural schools, and small towns also face similar preservation concerns, such as financial restrictions, abandonment/neglect, abusive alterations, vandalism, or the desire to replace old with new. These dwindling resources also contribute to the deterioration of the social, cultural, religious, and economic life of rural areas.

### What Have Historic Preservationists Been Up To?

Rural historic preservation –outside of large landmark estates and plantations—began with the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) in 1966. The NHPA created the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), which is an official list of individual buildings, districts, objects, and archaeological sites of historical significance.<sup>5</sup> The criteria of eligibility for listing to the National Register initially privileged (and some would say still do privilege) high-style architecture, buildings, and monuments. Commonplace buildings, landscapes, and cemeteries did not receive the same amount of attention as those high-style examples in the 1960s and for most of the 1970s.

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<sup>5</sup> “National Historic Preservation Act,” *National Park Service*, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/historicpreservation/national-historic-preservation-act.htm>, accessed 4.15.21.

Then came the vernacular architecture movement that focused on the commonplace, especially in rural America. Henry Glassie's *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia: A Structural Analysis of Historic Artifacts* (1975) provided an initial template and foundation for the identification and assessment of commonplace buildings. Glassie argued that commonplace buildings do matter and that they are historically significant for what they can tell us about the past and the people who built them. He carried out extensive, boots-on-the-ground fieldwork in which he meticulously documented and recorded the form and structure of the buildings. Glassie explained the evolution of local building traditions of his subjects and contextualized them with broader historical narratives. By demonstrating that rural resources individually and as a collective could be historically significant also bolstered the cause of rural preservation.<sup>6</sup>

In Glassie's wake came important studies from a wealth of historians and cultural geographers in the 1980s, most notably geographers Allen Noble and Terry Jordan. Allen Noble is best known for his seminal work *Wood, Brick & Stone: The North American Settlement Landscape* (1984). Published in two volumes, the first volume is titled *Houses* and the second is *Barns and Other Farm Structures*. Noble clearly draws from the work of Henry Glassie and geographer Fred B. Kniffen. Indeed, Noble states in the preface that he intended his work to be a “college level course textbook” that would not only introduce students to the “major features of the American settlement landscape,” but also summarize and present the historiography of cultural geography as a field.<sup>7</sup> Though much

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<sup>6</sup> Henry Glassie, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia: A Structural Analysis of Historic Artifacts* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975).

<sup>7</sup> Allen G. Noble, *Wood, Brick and Stone: The North American Settlement Landscape* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), pp. v and 1. It should also be noted that Noble, alongside Richard K. Cleek,

of Noble's work is a summary and presentation of previous studies, Noble advances an important argument that America is unique in that its settlement landscape, unlike older countries, is still intact in the building stock of rural farms and farmsteads.<sup>8</sup> By reading these buildings and analyzing their construction and spatial relationships, much could be learned about the settlement period and the groups that built them.

Terry Jordan published *American Log Buildings: An Old World Heritage* one year after Noble's work in 1985. Like Noble, Jordan emphasizes the importance of commonplace buildings in revealing the history of those who constructed them. Like Noble and Glassie, Jordan bases his book on extensive fieldwork and the documentation of the physical forms and evolution of the buildings he examines.<sup>9</sup> By linking the seemingly ordinary log buildings scattered about the rural countryside of America to a broader historical context and narrative, Jordan demonstrates again how important rural resources are and, by extension, how important rural preservation is in protecting these unique resources.

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published *The Old Barn Book: A Field Guide to North American Barns and Other Farm Structures* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press) in 1995. Noble draws heavily from his work in *Wood, Brick and Stone*, which is most evident in the sections on silos.

<sup>8</sup> Noble, *Wood, Brick and Stone*, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Like Noble, Jordan spends a large amount of time trying to determine the ethnic heritage of the buildings he examines. Though this is certainly a useful component, the focus on ethnic origin distracts from Jordan's central argument and findings (much as it did with Noble's as well) which are: the first people to effectively settle an area generally found their architecture and style imitated by subsequent settlers, and those settlers who arrived later are less likely to find their architecture and style imitated by future builders; American construction in log never approached the complexity or sophistication as that displayed in their home regions in Europe; and that there was a large amount of syncretism in log construction, that is the merging of similar traits from diverse sources over time (pp. 154-155). Terry Jordan is also the author of *Texas Graveyards: A Cultural Legacy* (1982) which is a seminal work in the literature of vernacular and rural cemeteries. Using the same approach as that in *American Log Buildings*, Jordan conducts extensive fieldwork to identify broad patterns in cemetery customs, practices, and the physical appearance of graveyard markers.

Jordan and Noble were not the only scholars in the 1980s to demonstrate the importance of rural resources and build upon the groundwork laid in the 1970s. Charles Martin's *Hollybush: Folk Building and Social Change in an Appalachian Community* (1984) is a powerful look at how the core tenets of 1970s cultural geography can be combined with oral histories to create a holistic picture of everyday life in a single case study. Martin attended Indiana University in the 1970s, which is where and when he heard Henry Glassie lecture on "American Folk Style." Glassie's lecture, Martin states, is what set him on his academic path. Glassie's influence shines through in *Hollybush*, both in how Martin approaches, documents, and carefully reconstructs the buildings in the community of Hollybush and the actual drawings and illustrations. However, where Martin differs powerfully from Glassie, Jordan, and Noble is his emphasis on oral histories and talking with the affected community, rather than relying strictly on the built and written record. Martin's methodology involved interviewing community members of Hollybush both at their homes and at buildings of Hollybush itself. His working theory was that memories and oral histories would be more accurate if the interviewee were to visit the place where the event occurred. What Martin found was that his interviewees were able to remember incredibly minute architectural, cultural, and historical details when exposed to his method. Martin's approach, combined with his reading of the built environment and primary source research, resulted in an incredibly nuanced and lucid case study that is both a model for future case studies, and a representative example for other histories of small, rural communities.

While scholarly works in the 1980s continued to lay the theoretical groundwork and justification for the study of rural resource and rural preservation, American farmers

were hit with the worst agriculture crisis since the Great Depression. The 1970s saw a boom in American agriculture, and many farmers were able to accumulate wealth and land. Despite the good times, there was trouble on the horizon. To reduce inflation, the Federal Reserve tightened their monetary policy in the late 1970s, which resulted in soaring interest rates. Rural and agricultural banks began to go out of business, and farm families found their wealth, and profits, ebbing away. By 1984, the nation's farm debt had doubled, and farmers everywhere were feeling the financial pressure.<sup>10</sup>

As the crisis deepened, both activist organizations and public historians sought to save, preserve, and document the rural resources and family farms that were facing such dire economic odds. One of the most notable movements, and one that continues to be active in the farming community, was Farm Aid. On July 13, 1985, during the Live Aid concert, Bob Dylan took the stage and remarked that he hoped some of the money raised during the concert could be used to “pay the mortgages” on some of America's farms. Following these remarks, Willie Nelson, John Mellencamp, and Neil Young founded Farm Aid, a concert that sought to raise money for farmers in the United States. The first Farm Aid concert featured more than fifty artists, including Bob Dylan, Billy Joel, B.B. King, and Johnny Cash, who played to an audience at the University of Illinois Stadium. The fourteen-hour show raised more than nine million dollars for relief aid and raised the

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<sup>10</sup> This paragraph is a cursory overview of the 1980s agricultural crisis. For a thorough and scholarly treatment of the economic effects and legacy of the crisis, see Barry J. Barnet, “The U.S. Farm Financial Crisis of the 1980s,” *Agricultural History*, Vol. 74, No. 1 (Spring, 2000): pp. 366-380. Other useful sources of information include “1980s Farm Crisis,” *Iowa PBS*, <https://www.iowapbs.org/mtom/classroom/module/13999/farm-crisis?tab=background#background>, accessed April 7, 2022, and “Taking a look back at the 1980s farm crisis and it's impacts,” *FarmProgress*, <https://www.farmprogress.com/marketing/taking-look-back-1980s-farm-crisis-and-its-impacts>, accessed April 7, 2022.

national profile of farmers and the plight that they faced.<sup>11</sup> While the monetary effectiveness of Farm Aid can be debated, national news outlets responded quite positively to Farm Aid and reported on it frequently.<sup>12</sup> Since then, Farm Aid has continued to hold concerts to raise money for American farmers.

A historic preservation program that sprang from the agricultural crisis, and one also influenced by the Farm Aid movement, was BARN AGAIN!, a program launched by the National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP) in 1987. The program was developed in response to farmers and rural landowners demolishing their barns, either because they could not afford to keep them standing or because they were constructing new barns that were geared towards different methods of agricultural production. BARN AGAIN! wanted to show barn owners how they could adapt their historic barns to serve them in their new agricultural production, rather than simply tear them down. Four demonstration projects were scheduled in 1988 with funding provided by John Deere and Pioneer Seed to display the effectiveness of rehabilitated barns done according to BARN AGAIN! standards. Then, a “Barn-Aid series” was released that specifically targeted

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<sup>11</sup> A compelling and useful history of Farm Aid can be found in Christina Crapanzano’s “A Brief History of Farm Aid,” published in *Time Magazine* on October 1, 2010. A comprehensive and critical look at Farm Aid and its legacy is a subject that remains largely unexplored in scholarly work.

<sup>12</sup> Searching through *Newspapers.com* reveals the extent to which Farm Aid received media attention, particularly in newspapers that service a large rural audience. One such article titled “Farm aid to the rescue once again” was published in *The Tennessean* on September 19, 1987. Here the article reinforces the nearly widespread recognition that Farm Aid commanded in the national eye. At the same time, a quote taking from a Farm Crisis Hotline worker in Walthill, Nebraska, also demonstrates the failure of Farm Aid to monetarily provide for farmers. The worker reported that “Farm aid has been great helping out in the emergency things—when I got into a home to help a family, and they’re faced with lights being turned out, or some medicine they need. It’s something that’s really appreciated, but it’s not something that we can help them refinance their farms with.” Indeed, it would only be the intervention of the federal government and Congress that saw farmers out of the agricultural crisis during the 1980s. However, one can safely say that the high-profile nature of Farm Aid, combined with the harsh economic reality of farmers, certainly spurred the U.S. government and others to react to the agricultural crisis of the 1980s.



owners of historic barns and provided preservation and restoration solutions. The series accompanied the release of *BARN AGAIN! A Guide to Rehabilitation of Older Farm Buildings* in 1992. Taken together, they provided guidelines for preserving old family barns and incorporated much of the literature and recommendations made by the program up to that point.<sup>13</sup> Though eleven statewide barn preservation programs were reported as having developed because of BARN AGAIN! in 2004, the program itself is no longer an active part of the rural preservation community.

The MTSU Center for Historic Preservation's response to the agricultural crisis came in 1986-1988 through the organization, administration, and implementation of the Tennessee Century Farms Program. The Tennessee Department of Agriculture (TDA) established the TCFP in 1975 to celebrate America's bicentennial. TDA staff designed a simple questionnaire for farmers to fill out and directed county extension agents to distribute the form to eligible family farms. After the information was collected from farmers, the documents were put in files and transferred to a filing cabinet at the Tennessee Agricultural Museum (TAM) in Nashville.

There the files remained until the summer of 1985, when the TDA asked the newly created MTSU Center for Historic Preservation to revive the program and produce a book that utilized the valuable information collected within those files. The project launched a flurry of scholarship aimed at both presenting the history of Century Farm

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<sup>13</sup> As with Farm Aid, there is no scholarly discourse on BARN AGAIN! or its effectiveness in a broader sense. For more information, see Mary Humstone's "Barn Again!", *National Trust for Historic Preservation*, July/August 1996, <https://forum.savingplaces.org/viewdocument/barn-again> or John P. Olsen's "BARN AGAIN! Sees Progress, Continuing Challenges," *National Trust for Historic Preservation*, July/August 2004, <https://forum.savingplaces.org/viewdocument/barn-again-see-progress-continui>, accessed April 7, 2022.

families and developing frameworks, methodologies, and contextual statements of significance by which to preserve them. In 1986, a year after the TDA inquired about a book, Carroll Van West published *Tennessee Agriculture: A Century Farms Perspective*. Drawing upon the 783 listed Century Farms at the time, West explored the individual history of each Century Farm while contextualizing those farms within their grand division and within Tennessee's broader agricultural history. Indeed, a hallmark of the book is the way in which West and his graduate students wove together the history of mills, barn construction, railroads, the Progressive movement, and other important topics to understand rural history.<sup>14</sup> *Tennessee Agriculture* not only presented a history of Century Farms and raised the program's profile, but it also contributed a valuable theme by which to evaluate farms. Essentially, it showed that what made Century Farmers significant were their ability to adapt and change over time, while also incorporating the traditions and history of the past. The theme of continuity and change would be a major one explored going forward in future publications.<sup>15</sup>

Following the publication, West and his CHP colleague Caneta Skelley Hankins collaborated on a statewide traveling exhibit on the Century Farms, titled "Tennessee's Century Farms: Change and Continuity Over 200 Years of Farming." The exhibit toured the state of Tennessee from September 1988 to December 1989. Here again the exhibit emphasized the tenacity and ability of Tennessee Century Farms to adapt their agricultural production to meet the many challenges they faced during their one-hundred-

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<sup>14</sup> These contributions came from then graduate students Jeff Durbin, Amy Dase, Kent Whitworth, Laura Barnes Hayworth, and Mary Mason Shell.

<sup>15</sup> Carroll Van West, *Tennessee Agriculture: A Century Farms Perspective* (Nashville: Tennessee Department of Agriculture, 1986).

year tenure. In a flyer promoting the traveling exhibit, Hankins and West state that “through the good and bad times, the century farmers have been the mainstay of Tennessee’s number-one industry...this project is a continuation of the Century Farms Program and a tribute to the farm families of Tennessee.”<sup>16</sup> In addition to providing the history of Century Farms, the exhibit also continued to both raise the profile of Century Farms and emphasize the importance of farmers to the economic, cultural, and historic fabric of Tennessee.

Closely following the completion of *Tennessee Agriculture* and the accompanying traveling exhibit was West’s article, “Continuity and Change in Tennessee Agriculture: The Century Farmers of Tennessee,” published in the *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* in 1988. West’s article incorporated the sizeable number of Century Farms added since the CHP assumed responsibility of the program some three years earlier. This additional information, combined with the extensive research conducted in and since *Tennessee Agriculture*, provided an even more comprehensive look at the history of Century Farms. West was able to establish several broad patterns shared by Century Farmers across the state, including the average founding dates, average land size, shifts in agricultural production, and the effects of historical events such as technological revolutions, wars, and economic developments.<sup>17</sup> In addition to continuing to build on the significance of Century Farms as representative examples of continuity and change, West’s article also addresses the academic audience and demonstrates the importance of the Century Farm

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<sup>16</sup> Center for Historic Preservation, “Tennessee’s Century Farms: Change and Continuity Over 200 years of farming: A Traveling Exhibit, September 1988-December 1989,” Flyer, MTSUCHP, 1988.

<sup>17</sup> Carroll Van West, “Continuity and Change in Tennessee Agriculture: The Century Farmers of Tennessee,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, No. 47 (1988): pp. 162-168.

collection and program to scholars. Whereas *Tennessee Agriculture* and the traveling exhibit were directed primarily towards a general audience, the article demonstrated that the data contained within the program could, and should, be used by serious scholars.<sup>18</sup>

West and Hankins again collaborated to publish “Documenting the Agrarian Past” in *History News* in 1989. The article laid out, clearly and concisely, the mission of the CHP’s involvement in the Century Farm program, outlined the goals of the CHP, and the future of the program moving forward. The authors begin by demonstrating that Tennessee, once a family farm state, was now one no longer. Thus, it was the duty of museum professionals, historic preservationists, and historians to interpret, contextualize, and preserve the history before it was forgotten. The Century Farms program, the authors argue, is Tennessee’s answer to doing just that. Under the CHP’s guidance, the program had collected photographs, historical information, and architectural information. From there, the information had then been surveyed and compiled to create a historical narrative that both emphasized the importance of the farms and contextualized them within broader narratives of Tennessee and southern agriculture. Finally, the information had then been disseminated through educational outreach programs and other forms of publication by the CHP. The authors then discussed what the CHP had accomplished during their tenure with the program. Accomplishments included the partnering of academic institutions and government agencies, the publishing of *Tennessee Agriculture*,

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<sup>18</sup> That is not to say that the article did not reach a general audience, however. An article titled “Tennessee’s Oldest Farms Shrink in Size” was published in the *Tennessee Farmer* in December 1988. The article reiterated many of the arguments found in West’s THQ article. Additionally, *The Tennessee Magazine* picked up West’s findings in their December 1988 article “Century of Christmases on 800 Farms.” Both magazines, which had a large readership base, served to further disseminate Century Farm information and raise the profile of farmers and the challenges they faced.

outreach to academia in the form of the THQ article, the exhibit which informed local communities of the TCFP and the CHP's mission, and the broadening of the network through the intense activity of the program.<sup>19</sup> The mission going forward would be the documentation and interpretation of Tennessee Century Farms, and to maintain the "stability of the state's farming community by helping it realize its past and future importance to Tennessee history and culture."<sup>20</sup>

The CHP's response to rural preservation and the agricultural crisis utilizing the Century Farm database culminated with the publication of the National Register Multiple Property Nomination, "Historic Family Farms in Middle Tennessee," in 1994. The multiple property nomination drew from prior research and scholarship to produce guidelines by which to assess historic family farms, determine their significance, and determine their eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places. It does so by asking a series of questions, such as "Is the founding of the farm associated with dates of initial settlement?" and "Are their products consistent with agricultural commodities grown at the time?". If so, the farm may be eligible for nomination to the National

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<sup>19</sup> Outreach to academia and public history professionals was further realized a year later in a presentation titled "'Century Farms' Programs as Documentary Sources in Agricultural History" given by Carroll Van West to The Association for Living Historical Farms and Agricultural Museums for its 1989 annual meeting at Salt Lake City, Utah. In his presentation, West acknowledged that the Century Farm database did indeed have its biases, including nostalgia, a reliance on family documentation, and inconsistencies in the historical record. However, West also accurately pointed out that there were many more reasons to utilize the database for study. Information that could be gleaned from the collection included raw data of founding dates, names, and acreages; how farmers viewed and remembered their past; and a look at the rural built environment in the form of the farmer's dwellings and agricultural outbuildings. The presentation opened the door for future works utilizing the Century Farm database to other scholars. Indeed, it would not be long until scholars took up the call, with the first notable work included in the study being that of Donald Winters in his 1994 *Tennessee Farming, Tennessee Farmers: Antebellum Agriculture in the Upper South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994).

<sup>20</sup> Carroll Van West and Caneta Skelley Hankins, "Documenting the Agrarian Past," *History News*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (1989), p. 12.

Register under Criterion A for Settlement or Agriculture. Here, the settlement dates and types of agricultural production are drawn from information gathered from the Century Farm database and other scholarly works on Tennessee agricultural history.

The nomination is invaluable then both for the historical context it provides and as a guide to evaluate historic family farmsteads, regardless of their eligibility for the National Register. Likewise, “Historic Family Farms” is also valuable for its focus on complete farm landscapes as historical documents. In other words, it is the combination of dwelling, outbuilding, landscape, and history that lend historical significance to a small family farm.<sup>21</sup> The Multiple Property Nomination enabled the nomination of dozens of Century Farms to the National Register of Historic Places, thus fulfilling its purpose as tool for the preservation of rural landscapes in Middle Tennessee.

An important result of the Century Farms database was the work of Vanderbilt University agricultural history professor Donald Winters, who used the Century Farm collection in his *Tennessee Farming, Tennessee Farmers: Antebellum Agriculture in the Upper South* (1994), which replaced the discredited Owsley school as a more productive way to consider the state's agricultural history. Winters focuses primarily on Tennessee agricultural history beginning in the early settlement period and ending on the eve of the Civil War. In addition to writing a thorough and exhaustive historical record, Winters also addresses the weaknesses of the Owsley school. Using both the data gathered by Frank Owsley and Blanche Henry Clark and the Century Farm records, Winters shows

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<sup>21</sup> Carroll Van West, “Historic Family Farms in Middle Tennessee,” National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, Tennessee Historical Commission, 1994.

that although rural society was fluid, it was dominated by a rural elite that controlled a “disproportionate share” of good land in rural society.<sup>22</sup> Likewise, Winters illustrates that the institution of slavery was indeed an important facet of both rural economic and cultural life, an issue downplayed by both Clark and Owsley. Lastly, Winters explores important subjects ignored in the Owsley school, such as the African American experience in Tennessee farming and the role women played in building agricultural and rural communities.<sup>23</sup>

Two other 1990s studies also built a new foundation for agricultural history research in Tennessee. The first is Mary Hoffschwelle’s *Rebuilding the Rural Southern Community: Reformers, Schools, and Homes in Tennessee, 1900-1930*, published in 1998. Hoffschwelle’s work builds on her dissertation, “Rebuilding the Rural Southern Community: Reformers, Schools, and Homes in Tennessee, 1914-1929,” completed for her Ph.D. at Vanderbilt University in 1993. Hoffschwelle’s book examines Progressive organizations in Tennessee and their interactions with race and architectural/material culture to address issues of agriculture and rural life in Tennessee from 1900-1930. The agencies that she focuses on include the General Education Board, the Julius Rosenwald Fund, and the United States Department of Agriculture Extension Service. Hoffschwelle argues that Progressives tried to convince country people to exchange local control and

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<sup>22</sup> Donald L. Winters, *Tennessee Farming, Tennessee Farmers: Antebellum Agriculture in the Upper South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), p. 116.

<sup>23</sup> The Owsley school began in the 1940s. The nexus of the school was Vanderbilt University, and the founder of the school was Frank Owsley. Affiliated with the Southern Agrarians and The Fugitive Movement, Owsley issued a call for historians to write the “true” history of the south and southern agriculture. See Blanche Henry Clark, *The Tennessee Yeoman, 1840-1860* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1942) and Frank Lawrence Owsley, *Plain Folk of the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1949).

tax dollars for “centralized government expertise.” In response, the people in Hoffschwelle’s book adopted or rejected Progressive impulses based upon their own individual needs. The author traces this story through an analysis of Progressive Agriculture journals of the time. Doing so brings to vivid life the push and pull dynamic between Progressive thought and country experience. Equally important, however, is the author’s use of the built environment as a source. She does so by exploring the ways in which it was representative of Progressive goals and rural values.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to race, works on gender and women’s role in agriculture also flesh out the lived experience of Tennessee agriculture. The recovery of farm women’s voices by works such as Melissa Walker’s *All We Knew Was to Farm: Rural Women in the Upcountry South* (2000) and Lu Ann Jones’ *Mama Learned Us to Work: Farm Women in the New South* (2002) has deepened our understanding of the everyday lives of those involved in agricultural production in Tennessee. Both historians grew up on farms or in rural communities, and as such have personal connections to their subjects. They also both utilize oral histories to construct their arguments. Walker explores the role that women played in the everyday work of the upcountry south. Women were vital in forming support networks and producing extra goods for trade to keep the farm afloat. However, they were pressured into entering the industrial world as wage earners. Though they and their families were able to take jobs outside of the farm and accumulate some

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<sup>24</sup> Hoffschwelle explores the subject in her discussions on Rosenwald Schools (for a full, thorough, and groundbreaking treatise on Rosenwald Schools, see Hoffschwelle’s *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South* [Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006]) and the Home Demonstration Program. Though the analysis of the exterior of the built environment is important, the book also demonstrates the power of examining the interior of the built environment as well. The interior of a house can just as easily demonstrate Progressive reform or broader historical trends as the exterior. Hoffschwelle’s approach is a break from previous works that relied solely on the exterior of the rural built environment.



wealth, they found that their traditional roles were diminished.<sup>25</sup> Jones also shows how important women and their “cottage industries” were in keeping the farm afloat.

Progressives and home extension agents targeted rural women for reform because they were considered the “linchpins” of transforming the backward rural south.<sup>26</sup>

The 1990s also saw an explosion of public history works pertaining to preserving rural spaces written mostly by historic preservationists. Randall Arendt’s *Rural by Design: Maintaining Small Town Character* (1994) brought a landscape architect’s edge to rural preservation. Arendt is a landscape planner, site designer, and an advocate for “conservation planning.”<sup>27</sup> Rather than focusing on historic buildings, Arendt focuses on how developers can build in a way that respects the historic, cultural, and natural qualities of a particular area. Arendt believes primarily that the key to rural preservation resides in planning. He argues that, instead of communities having to rely on state and federal means, they are better served by carefully crafted planning and zoning laws that are tailored to their needs. Critical to his approach is the role of citizenry at a local level and the ability of municipal and, sometimes, the state government to tailor approaches unique to each community’s needs. His demonstrated through multiple case studies and detailed

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<sup>25</sup> Melissa Walker, *All We Knew Was to Farm: Rural Women in the Upcountry South, 1919-1941* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000).

<sup>26</sup> Lu Ann Jones, *Mama Learned Us to Work: Farm Women in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

<sup>27</sup> Arendt’s arguments and theoretics have translated well in reality. In addition to being the most sought-after speaker on the topic of creative development, his projects, one of which took place in Tennessee, are both economic and environmental successes. Though he is a planner, his influence in the field of preservation is well felt. The National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Land Trust Alliance, and the American Farmland Trust have all featured him as key speakers during their conferences. More information on Arendt and his projects can be found here:

[https://apa.ny.gov/Local\\_Government/InfoAboutRandallArendt.pdf](https://apa.ny.gov/Local_Government/InfoAboutRandallArendt.pdf), accessed April 7, 2022.

projects listed throughout his book.<sup>28</sup> Although most of Arendt's projects were based in New England and the Mid-Atlantic states, his arguments and theories have translated well in reality to other parts of the country.

In 1997, the National Trust published a major guide to rural preservation, Samuel Stokes' *Saving America's Countryside: A Guide to Rural Conservation*. Stokes contributed to the development of early National Heritage Areas (NHA) in Pennsylvania prior to the publishing of his book. Congress designates NHAs as "places where natural, cultural, and historic resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally important landscape."<sup>29</sup> The goal of NHAs is to establish a grassroots, community-first approach to heritage conservation and economic development. The Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area is a well-known example locally. Samuel Stokes was the director of the National Park Service's Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program from 1991-2006, during which time he also led the NPS program supporting National Heritage Areas.<sup>30</sup> Stokes' background informs and shapes his approach to preservation. Reflecting the emphasis on community involvement and grassroots planning shown in the NHA program, Stokes argues in his book that planning and community involvement are essential in making rural preservation work. Indeed, Stokes is skeptical of even state-

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<sup>28</sup> Randall Arendt, *Rural by Design: Maintaining Small Town Character* (Chicago: American Planning Association press, 1994). The location of the majority of these projects in the northeastern part of the United States is due to Arendt's career. After completing his training abroad, Arendt returned to Maine, where he worked for eight years at a regional planning commission. Maine is also where Arendt designed his first conservation subdivision. Following his time in Maine, Arendt went on to work in Pennsylvania and New England, though he also completed many projects across the country during that time.

<sup>29</sup> "What is a National Heritage Area?" *National Park Service*, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/what-is-a-national-heritage-area.htm>, accessed August 8, 2021.

<sup>30</sup> "About: Samuel N. Stokes," *LinkedIn*, <https://www.linkedin.com/in/samuel-n-stokes-5a779247>, accessed August 8, 2021.

level initiatives in preserving or conserving historic or cultural resources. For him, each preservation and conservation problem should be treated like an individual case, as each community and circumstance are profoundly different. The structure of the book also reflects Stokes' approach. His book explores a wealth of individual case studies to demonstrate how different elements of his preservation approach work in different circumstances. Furthermore, as made obvious from the title, Stokes makes no distinction between preservation and conservation, instead viewing both the built and natural environment as acting in concert. The result is a treatise on rural preservation that remains the most comprehensive and informative of its kind today, some twenty-five years later.<sup>31</sup>

Though works by Arendt and Stokes illustrate the evolving nature of preservation, even as late as the late 1990s there existed a lag between those who thought of preservation as a component of a holistic conservation approach, and those who practiced preservation approaches that emphasized the built environment and traditional notions of integrity and significance. Such tension is addressed by *Preservation of What, For Whom?: A Critical Look at Historical Significance*. Published in 1998 by the National Council for Preservation Education (NCPE), the book came about through a cooperative agreement between the National Park Service, Goucher College, and the NCPE. Planners from the three organizations agreed that it was time to host a series of symposia that would critically evaluate issues in preservation.<sup>32</sup> The first symposium was titled

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<sup>31</sup> Samuel N. Stokes, *Saving America's Countryside: A Guide to Rural Conservation* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997).

<sup>32</sup> Some of the questions or topics of discussion shared by the planners included: how do we raise the visibility of historic preservation, and emphasize the need for preservation to be supported by all levels of

“Preservation of What, For Whom?: A Critical Look at Historical Significance,” and was held at Goucher College in Baltimore, Maryland, on March 20-22, 1997. The papers that were presented at the conference were then compiled into the manuscript.<sup>33</sup>

One of those essays was, “Assessing Significance and Integrity in the National Register Process: Questions of Race, Class, and Gender,” by Carroll Van West, who introduced a new property type for rural preservation. The paper explored the Ladies Rest Room in Lewisburg. Built in 1924, the Ladies Rest Room was constructed as a public facility for ladies that visited town from rural areas. These buildings were part of the agricultural reform movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The goal of the reformers who developed the idea of the Ladies Rest Room was to encourage rural women to engage in consumerism. They would do so by filling the Ladies Rest Room with conveniences, such as modern appliances and furnishings. Once rural women visited, they would want those conveniences and purchase them when they were in town. West argues that these historically significance resources have been overlooked for the National Register because the NR privileges exterior appearance and buildings associated with traditionally “significant” American history. In the case of the Rest Room, its absence on the NR revealed that the process still privileged sites associated with male spaces or elite white

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government?; as we mature, how do we evaluate programs, policies, standards, guidelines, and processes that govern historic preservation?; how do preservations need to respond to changing demographic patterns of the nation, including debates about communal vs individual property rights?; and how can the answers gained from these conversations integrate into a field that cuts across a wide swathe of academic disciplines, professional practice, and public policy?

<sup>33</sup> Michael A. Tomlan, *Preservation of What, For Whom?: A Critical Look at Historical Significance* (New York: The National Council for Preservation Education, 1998), p. 5.

women.<sup>34</sup> The Ladies Rest Room in Lewisburg was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1995.<sup>35</sup>

The 2000s also saw a resurgence in publications utilizing the Century Farm information located at the CHP. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Caneta Hankins produced several published works that explored the Century Farm database further, in addition to overseeing a great expansion in Century Farm membership and improved documentation. The first was “Tennessee’s Century Farms: The Land, The People, The Legacy: Rutherford County” in 2004. The booklet explored the history of Rutherford County Century Farms as part of the county’s 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations.<sup>36</sup> The next publication was “From Settlement to Statehood: Tennessee’s Pioneer Century Farms,” published in 2008 by Hankins and Kevin Cason. Their booklet explored the earliest farms through the Pioneer Century Farms initiative, which focused on Century Farms that were established before or in the year of 1796. As Hankins demonstrates, the histories of these Pioneer Century Farm families illuminate what life was like in Tennessee before it was a state, and how those farm families survived over the years.<sup>37</sup> The last major publication to use the Century Farm database was *Plowshares and Swords: Tennessee Farm Families Tell Civil War Stories*.<sup>38</sup> Written in 2013 by Hankins and Tennessee Civil War National

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<sup>34</sup> The Ladies Rest Room, built in 1924, was built for the purpose of attracting farm women to town and exposing them to Progressive ideals. In doing so, reformers and boosters hoped to convert them to their cause.

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<sup>36</sup> Caneta Skelley Hankins, “Tennessee’s Century Farms: The Land, The People, The Legacy: Rutherford County.” Murfreesboro, Tennessee, 2004, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> Caneta Skelley Hankins and Kevin Cason, “From Settlement to Statehood: Tennessee’s Pioneer Century Farms,” Murfreesboro, Tennessee, 2008.

<sup>38</sup> Though not directly tied to the Century Farm program, Caneta Skelley Hankins and Michael Thomas Gavin also published *Barns of Tennessee* in 2009. The project began when readers asked *The Tennessee Magazine* to share photographs and share stories of the rural barns in Tennessee. Thus, Hankins and Gavin produced the work for the Tennessee Electric Cooperative Association, whose official publication is *The*

Heritage Area historian Michael Gavin, the book was published by the Center for Historic Preservation in commemoration of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Civil War. Drawing from the Century Farm database, Hankins and Gavin examine the Civil War through the lenses of the Century Farm family. Particularly instructive is their discussion on African American Century Farmers and their experience following the Civil War.<sup>39</sup>

Pete Daniel's *Dispossession: Discrimination Against African American Farmers in the Age of Civil Rights* (2013) also address issues of race. In his book, Daniel discusses how African American farmers continued to face challenges to land ownership during the Civil Rights Movement. Utilizing oral histories and the United States Department of Agriculture records, Daniel effectively argues that both government and local forces worked together to discriminate against black farmers. Daniel's argument is important because it shows that even as late as the Civil Rights Movement, African American farmers were being discriminated against and that this discrimination resulted in their being unable to farm and own land at the same rate as their white counterparts.<sup>40</sup>

More recently, arguments about historic preservation and urban gentrification and displacement have shaped concerns in rural preservation. Sharon Zukin's *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places* (2010) and Peter Moskowitz's *How to Kill a City: Gentrification, Inequality, and the Fight for the Neighborhood* (2017) are two

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*Tennessee Magazine*. TECA then published the book. In addition to providing photographs and stories from Century Farms, Hankins and Gavin also provide an illuminating and useful history on the evolution of barn construction throughout the years and a breakdown of the different types of barns and their identifying features.

<sup>39</sup> Caneta Skelley Hankins and Michael Thomas Gavin, *Plowshares and Swords: Tennessee Farm Families Tell Civil War Stories* (Murfreesboro: Center for Historic Preservation, 2013).

<sup>40</sup> Pete Daniel, *Dispossession: Discrimination Against African American Farmers in the Age of Civil Rights* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

examples of works that address gentrification and displacement in major cities. There are more than a few parallels between the loss of traditional urban neighborhoods and the paving over and displacement of rural areas today. Zukin effectively argues that preservation can sever the relationships between that cultural resource and the community around it.<sup>41</sup> She shows that if a building is frozen in time, it can no longer grow or change. Moskowitz, on the other hand, sees how preservation can contribute to gentrification. As houses are preserved, it can raise the value of surrounding property, which encourages gentrification.<sup>42</sup> Either way, both authors emphasize that though cultural resources are important, it is the community around them that lends them significance and vitality.

Their approach can apply to family farms. A farm's ability to continue agricultural production is one of the most effective methods by which it can be preserved. If a farm is preserved by freezing it in time, as Zukin argues, it can sever the farm from the community. Not as obvious at first glance, but immensely important, is the connection between the destruction of community that takes place in urban displacement, and gentrification and rural development. My discussions with farmers emphasized the importance of a community network, which in many ways is more important to landowners than the land and buildings themselves. As the community is developed or displaced due to suburban sprawl, development, rising land prices, or the continual decrease in agricultural income, many farmers find it harder to hang on to their land.

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<sup>41</sup> Sharon Zukin, *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>42</sup> Peter Moskowitz, *How to Kill a City: Gentrification, Inequality, and the Fight for the Neighborhood* (New York: Nation Books, 2017).

Though their historic dwelling and agricultural outbuildings may still stand, and their land be involved in continued agricultural production, the network that once stretched from the front door of each farm is gone, irrevocably altering the cultural landscape of the area.

The idea of rural gentrification is by no means a new one, though it has received more attention in the past twenty years. Though it may borrow the term of gentrification, rural gentrification does sport some differences from its urban counterparts in both definition, effect, and overall outlook on whether it is a positive or negative thing.<sup>43</sup> Rina Ghose published an article in *Urban Geography* titled “Big Sky or Big Sprawl? Rural Gentrification and the Changing Cultural Landscape of Missoula, Montana” in 2004. Ghose utilizes a case study in Missoula to explore the impacts from growth and urbanization. She defines rural gentrification as the process by which new middle-class migrants displace long-term residents. These new middle-class residents come to Missoula in search of the “Rocky Mountain” lifestyle, which encourages even more migration. Ghose chronicles the result of this rural gentrification: not only are the traditional communities displaced, the new communities change housing tastes, cultural tastes (such as entertainment, food, etc.), and the physical landscape as they consume

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<sup>43</sup> For an international perspective, see Martin Philips’ “Rural gentrification and the processes of class colonisation,” *Journal of Rural Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (1993): pp. 123-140. Another international study is Darren Smith, et al. “The Dynamics of Rural Gentrification and the Effects of Ageing on Gentrified Rural Places,” *Revista de Estudios Sobre Despoblación y Desarrollo Rural* Vol. 27 (2019): pp. 129-157. Smith’s work is unique in that he and the other authors look at how older gentrifiers affect rural areas. Whereas most people think of gentrifiers as being young, childless, and upper-middle class, the authors show that there exists a large number of older people (generally retirees) who participate in the gentrifying process. The findings of the study show that these older gentrifiers have much the same effect on the gentrified community as other gentrifiers. However, this older population is much more likely to be replaced by subsequent waves of gentrification and displacement.



once-open land or existing housing lots. While the residents responded by enacting stricter zoning laws and guidelines, the effectiveness of these measures were too little too late.<sup>44</sup>

A newer case study by Angela Stiefbold, titled, “The Value of Farmland: Rural Gentrification and the Movement to Stop Sprawl,” was published in *The Metropole*, the official blog of the Urban History Association, in 2018. Stiefbold’s focus is Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Prior to World War II, Bucks County engaged primarily in general agriculture. Following World War II, it faced massive development pressure from both New York City and Philadelphia. Real estate promoters encouraged both industrial and residential growth, which resulted in the displacement of thousands of farmers. The themes and definitions that she identifies correlate closely with Ghose’s findings. Farmers were pushed out because they could not afford the rising land prices resulting from development pressure, and those that did remain found themselves without their traditional agricultural community support systems. Ultimately, the farmers in Bucks County found themselves displaced and replaced with new growth and development. For those in Middle Tennessee, Stiefbold’s themes may seem eerily familiar.<sup>45</sup>

News outlets and other media also have addressed the topic of rural displacement. Two examples include an article published by Thomas Sigler in *Planetizen* in 2012 and an article published by Ross Ibbetson in 2020. Sigler gets right to the point in his article,

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<sup>44</sup> Rina Ghose, “Big Sky or Big Sprawl? Rural Gentrification and the Changing Cultural Landscape of Missoula, Montana,” *Urban Geography*, Vol. 25, No. 6 (2005): p. 1.

<sup>45</sup> Angela Shope Stiefbold, “The Value of Farmland: Rural Gentrification and The Movement to Stop Sprawl,” *The Metropole*, 2018, <https://themetropole.blog/2018/09/12/the-value-of-farmland-rural-gentrification-and-the-movement-to-stop-sprawl/>, accessed August 8, 2021.

appropriately titled, “Is There Such a Thing as ‘Rural’ Gentrification?” He uses the same definition as Ghose and Stiefbold to describe gentrification, which is the displacement of a lower-class population by a wealthier gentry class. Sigler acknowledges that urban gentrification is a hot topic issue, and that the effects of it are negative. However, he wonders if there is such a thing as rural gentrification. The author thinks so. In Sigler’s view, rural gentrification is created primarily through the settlement of professionals in small towns. These professionals settle there because e-commerce and telecommuting have made such a move from the city possible. However, Sigler’s conclusion is that gentrification in rural areas is generally more benign than urban gentrification, as low-income families can still live in adjacent townships and will benefit from enhanced public schools and new employment opportunities.<sup>46</sup> Naturally one is left to wonder if what Sigler refers to is indeed gentrification. After all, the movement of essentially small businesses into a town, while factors in gentrification, are a far cry from what Ghole and Stiefbold describe in their studies. Additionally, the author’s view that low-income families can live in “adjacent” townships is also a surprising reaction. After all, one of the negative effects of gentrification is displacement.

In 2020, Ibbetson wrote “Rural America is now experiencing ‘disaster gentrification’ as wealthy COVID-19 evacuees from the hotspot cities flock to the ‘safety’ of small towns in the flyover states-putting pressure on the local workforce and resources.” His study provides a different look at rural gentrification. He describes how

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<sup>46</sup> Thomas Sigler, “Is There Such a Thing as ‘Rural Gentrification?’”, *Planetizen*, February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2012, <https://www.planetizen.com/node/54684#:~:text=Though%20rural%20gentrification%20is%20not,reated%20by%20broader%20economic%20trends>, accessed April 7, 2022.

rural areas and counties, like Blain County in Idaho, saw an influx in 2020 of wealthy people who either fled to their summer homes in the area or rented out properties to get away from COVID hot-spots. The effects are all negative, the article reports. First, everyone fleeing to the area put a strain on the infrastructure of these small rural communities. Even worse for residents trying to survive a global pandemic, those who came often brought COVID with them. For rural areas like Blain County, which have already seen a systemic downturn in medical care infrastructure, the influx overwhelmed hospitals and put locals lives in danger.<sup>47</sup> Though disaster gentrification differs from traditional forms of gentrification in that, on balance, it should be temporary, the effects of COVID should not be underestimated—not only for the disruption it causes for local workforces, businesses, and loss of life in the local population, but also the effect it has on the mentality of wealthier people in urban areas. After seeing a pandemic of this scale, permanent movement or buying of houses for summer homes may become commonplace for those who can afford it.

Both public history practice and academic scholarship have shaped my approach. I consider not just the farm houses, but rural landscapes as well. I understand that community institutions are vital contributors to that landscape, and that race, class, and gender also shaped rural resources. The following chapters each focus on case studies that in turn address a particular rural resource or set of rural resources in one of the grand

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<sup>47</sup> Ross Ibbetson, “Rural America is now experiencing 'disaster gentrification' as wealthy Covid-19 evacuees from the hotspot cities flock to the 'safety' of small towns in the flyover states - putting pressure on the local workforce and resources,” *Daily Mail*, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8180805/Rural-america-experiencing-disaster-gentrification-wealthy-Covid-19-evacuees-flee.html>, accessed August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

divisions of Tennessee. Each case study analyzes the specific historic context and preservation concerns for each rural resource. In doing so, the case study makes preservation recommendations and/or analyzes how each case study contributes to the established knowledge of rural preservation. The case studies also reveal themes that are deserving of greater emphasis than what they have been assigned in previous works. Issues such as rural gentrification, global climate change, and the continuing consolidation of agricultural production towards commercial farms are already significant challenges facing 21<sup>st</sup> century farmers and will assuredly grow worse before the conclusion of the century. Other finds that are less broad but not less important include an emphasis by rural resource owners on preserving land over buildings, the importance of invisible community networks and the role of rural resources in maintaining that network, and an almost mandatory approach to agriculture that includes supplementing traditional agricultural production with other methods of economic income to ensure continued and sustained rural preservation.

## **CHAPTER 2: WILSON COUNTY CENTURY FARMS SURVEY**

Critical to understanding the unique issues and needs of rural preservation is engaging in person with farm families and rural resource owners who face these preservation issues and needs on a daily basis. No amount of reading, strategizing, or generalizing replaces the need to understand how change at the farm affects owners, and their communities, locally. After all, many of the rural preservation concerns identified tend to conform to generalized patterns, such as rising land prices, the consolidation of agriculture towards singular methods of production, or the aging of existing farmers and rural resource owners. While these generalizations tend to be true, the way that they translate into real life and practice vary widely among farms even located on the same road. Likewise, many preservation recommendations are drawn from broad-stroke ideas about rural preservation. Implementing strong zoning laws, passing legislation that encourages diversified agricultural production, encouraging engagement with agritourism, seeking out grants, and other such recommendations are broad, blanket statements that may not mean much to individual farmers. Much like the preservation issues, these recommendations are indeed valid and an important part of the process. However, the way that they translate into real life and practice also varies widely. At its core, rural preservation is a local and situational affair. Thus, to effectively preserve rural resources, one has to approach it as such and walk the fields and talk to the owners of the resource to develop an effective preservation approach.

As rural preservation is so situational and local, a farmer/rural resource owner can provide information that is valuable for constructing a comprehensive preservation

approach. Local or county level agricultural associations, influential farmer's markets or lucrative agricultural production methods, municipal or county level legislation/ordinances affecting farmers, and existing support networks are all valuable bits of information one can glean from conducting fieldwork and surveys. Combining this information with the rural preservationist's knowledge of broader context and preservation knowledge results in a powerful approach to rural preservation that is both comprehensive in its approach and in dialogue with local, state, and national trends. Additionally, demonstrating local knowledge and listening to individual farmers is critical for securing farmer support.

The Wilson County Century Farm Survey (WCCFS) began in August 2019 and ended in May 2020. The WCCFS focused on surveying all the Century Farms in Wilson County, Tennessee. Wilson County is home to the largest number of Century Farms in the state (coming in at 107 Century Farms), and is experiencing an unprecedented amount of growth and development pressure. In consultation with the Tennessee Century Farms Program, the author created a survey form that updated information for each Century Farm while also recording preservation assessments of the farms. In all, twenty-five of the Century Farmers completed and returned the survey form while thirteen farm families scheduled fieldwork visits, an adequate return considering that the survey took place during the global COVID-19 pandemic. Farmers were hesitant to schedule in-person fieldwork due to the risks of contracting COVID-19. Additionally, meetings and events that promoted the Century Farms program in Wilson County, such as the one held annually at the Wilson County Fair, were cancelled, thus reducing the ability to reach members of the Wilson County Century Farm community.



Figure 5: The Tennessee Century Farm Program's map of Wilson County, Tennessee. Image courtesy of the TCFP, 2022.

Farm families that felt safe enough to participate in fieldwork voiced several preservation concerns. Perhaps the greatest concerns the farmers had were preserving their farms, conserving their land, and keeping up with the demands of farm life. Many of the farmers I talked to indicated they were physically unable to maintain the property and any cultural resources they might have. Likewise, farmers cited a lack of both money and help to keep historic buildings in good condition. Maintaining old barns and corn cribs that are no longer used creates a burden for farmers. Each farmer also talked about the development pressure. As land prices continue to rise, so do land taxes, and a few of the farmers I talked to expressed interest in selling for the money or having their kids sell so that they could benefit financially. Fieldwork also revealed that, much like gentrified urban areas, there is a network of community ties that stretches from the front door of each farmhouse to the next. Finally, each farmer also worried about inheritance and passing down the farm. While a few of the farmers were interested in participating in programs like the Land Trust for Tennessee, others wanted their children to have full control of their property.

In addition to these preservation concerns, one of the most important findings of the survey is the importance of the land, not the buildings, to each of the farmers I met. While there were a few that were particularly proud of their historic dwellings or outbuildings, these feelings were secondary to the attachment each farmer felt to their land. Such an observation may not be a surprise to some, particularly those who are used to working with rural resource owners or who have studied the way in which memory



and nostalgia interact with material culture and natural landscapes.<sup>1</sup> The observation cuts against the way that historic preservation is traditionally enacted, and further undermines the narrow focus and emphasis placed on the built environment and the way it manifests in popular preservation efforts, such as Section 106 Review, the National Register Nomination process, and the awarding of preservation-related grants. It also demonstrates the continued need for the already well-articulated and popular discussions about the importance of landscape alongside the built environment, and how we can actually integrate it into preservation strategies.

### Historical Background

The number of documented Century Farms is due in large part to the activism of the Wilson County Farm Bureau which has purposely urged participation in TCFP for the last twenty years. Like their Middle Tennessee counterparts, roughly 66% of Wilson County Century Farmers in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century owned slaves, with 68% owning five or fewer slaves. Many Wilson County farmers produced market crops such as tobacco, cotton, and livestock, in addition to raising food for their families. The Civil War changed everything for farmers in the area. Physical destruction and economic loss plagued farmers, and the freeing of slaves in Tennessee also affected those whose wealth had been built on forced labor. Following Reconstruction, farms became smaller, but the number of operators increased. For black farmers, the dream of land ownership was finally achievable, though systemic racial discrimination resulted in many blacks being

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<sup>1</sup> Perhaps one of the best scholarly works that addresses this is Michael Kammen's *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1991).

forced into tenant farming. Beginning in 1900, Wilson County Century Farmers often adopted progressive farming methods. Likewise, the 1940s saw a defining moment in Wilson County Century Farm history: that of the World War II maneuvers, which were centered in Wilson County. From 1945 onward, Wilson County Century Farms continued to adapt their progressive farming methods to keep up with the outside world, including the agricultural crisis of the 1980s. Many Century Farmers served as leaders in their communities, and accomplished significant achievements in agriculture-related fields during the same period. Likewise, today's generation is pioneering and exploring other profitable methods of agriculture and agricultural production, including farm-to-table, diversified agricultural production, and agritourism.

In the National Register Multiple Property Nomination, "Historic Family Farms in Middle Tennessee," Carroll Van West identifies three significant periods in Middle Tennessee agriculture: settlement and subsistence farming (1780-1850), the expansion of the market economy (1850-1900), and rural reform and agriculture (1900-1945).<sup>2</sup> I suggest a fourth period, the commercialization of agriculture (1945-present). For example, many of the farmers I interviewed either hired farm managers or rented out their land for others to use, a trend closely linked to the 2000s. Likewise, many active farmers today depend on an outside source of income for keeping and maintaining their farm. These developments indicate a further shift in agriculture in which land ownership and operating a farm become increasingly, and in some cases totally, dependent on

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<sup>2</sup> Carroll Van West, "Historic Family Farms in Middle Tennessee," National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, November 7<sup>th</sup>, 1994; Carroll Van West, *Tennessee Agriculture: A Century Farms Perspective* (Nashville: Tennessee Department of Agriculture, 1986).

significant outside funds from two or more working adults. As the commercialization of agriculture continues, the price of living on and operating an agriculture enterprise rises. Combined with the shrinking of rural land in the face of widespread growth, we might expect to see a radically different kind of agriculture in the next few decades in Tennessee.

The following historical narrative reflects the central thesis of West's *Tennessee Agriculture: A Century Farms Perspective* (1986), which argues that adaptation, continuity, and change are the defining characteristics of Tennessee's Century Farms. West writes that "in times of agricultural crisis, the legacy of the Century Farmers is a potent reminder that farmers in the past have survived similar hard times to prosper in the future."<sup>3</sup> This observation holds true for present-day Wilson County Century Farmers, as I discovered during fieldwork.<sup>4</sup>

#### Settlement and Subsistence Farming, 1780-1850

On October 26, 1799, the Third Tennessee General Assembly created and named Wilson County for Major David Wilson, a native of Pennsylvania who had fought in the Revolutionary War. There are five major cities and towns in Wilson County. The county seat, Lebanon, was chartered in 1819 and named after the biblical reference because of its cedar groves. The first jail was finished in 1803, and the first courthouse completed in

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<sup>3</sup> Carroll Van West, *Tennessee Agriculture*, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> The Wilson County Century Farm files serve as the basis for this historical narrative, at the exclusion of analyzing other farms in the area not associated with Century Farm program. This decision reflects several research considerations, the first being that such farms are outside the scope of this project. Furthermore, the additional research necessary to gather the same kinds of facts about agricultural production and agricultural history established within the Century Farm files was not something that could be accomplished in the time frame for publication.

1806. Neddy Jacobs, an Irish immigrant, had settled in the area before Lebanon was chartered, sometime in 1800, and became a touchstone for local remembrance of the early period.<sup>5</sup>

Wilson County Century Farmers played a critical role in the settlement period. Though Tennessee was founded in 1796, some Century Farmers were already on their land and engaged in agricultural production. In the Tennessee Century Farms Program, farms founded in or before 1796 are known as Pioneer Century Farms. As West notes, many of the Pioneer farmers created valuable community institutions that made further settlement and agricultural production possible, including churches, schools, post offices, and mills. Pioneer Century Farms engaged in agriculture intended to meet the family's requirement for survival. Production for the market was secondary, given the importance of producing necessities and the lack of infrastructure. Throughout Middle Tennessee, market crops like corn, cattle, swine, wheat, horses, and hay were more popular than consumer goods like tobacco, sheep, cotton, and grains.<sup>6</sup>

Wilson County is home to two Pioneer Century Farms. Both Cloydland and Windy Hill were established in 1789. Johnny Cloyd and his wife Margaret Scott, who were both immigrants from Scotland, founded Cloydland in 1789. Together they grew corn, cotton, wheat, and hay and raised cattle, hogs, horses, and sheep on 220 acres of

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<sup>5</sup> Linda Grandstaff, *From the Wilson County Archives: Collection of Images* (Lebanon: Wilson County Archives, 2015), p. 6. A replica of the Neddy Jacobs cabin stands on the Lebanon square. A reproduction, the cabin was built using logs from a circa 1833 cabin located in nearby Leeville. The original Jacobs cabin was demolished in 1965 during the construction of I-40.

<sup>6</sup> Carroll Van West, "Historic Family Farms," ps. 9-10.

land. Their son, John Cloyd, would go on to open and operate a tan yard.<sup>7</sup> That same year, John Logue, Jr., and his wife Eleanor Logue founded Windy Hill on 1,000 acres in southwest Wilson County as part of his Revolutionary War land grant. Hay, corn, cows, and hogs were all produced on the Windy Hill Farm. The Logues' son Cairnes Logue also operated a tannery on the property.<sup>8</sup> These two Pioneer Century Farms are representative of early settlers in both crop production and the establishment of community institutions.

As more and more settlers arrived, so too did the number of farmers. By 1840, there were a total of 9,284 people living in Wilson County. Of those, 4,546 were working in agriculture, which is roughly 48% of the entire population.<sup>9</sup> Wiley Alford and Sophia Drake Alford, for example, established their farm in 1816 near the banks of Suggs Creek. The family acquired 500 acres valued at \$6000 before the end of 1850. The Alfords also owned sixteen enslaved African Americans in 1850, and eleven enslaved African Americans in 1860. In addition to farming, the Alfords also operated several institutions critical to the new community, including the "Alford Schoolhouse," which served as the polling site for the 25<sup>th</sup> district as early as the 1840s, and Pleasant Grove Methodist Church, which is still active today and located on Alford land.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Cloydland Century Farm Application, Tennessee Century Farms Program, Murfreesboro, TN. Please note that recently certified Century Farm Files are housed at the Center for Historic Preservation, while older files others are located at the Albert Gore Research Center on Middle Tennessee State University's campus. For assistance in locating these files, contact the Center for Historic Preservation.

<sup>8</sup> Windy Hill Century Farm Application, Tennessee Century Farms Program, Murfreesboro, TN.

<sup>9</sup> United States Census Bureau, United States Census, 1840, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1841/dec/1840c.html>, accessed April 7, 2022.

<sup>10</sup> Alford Farm Century Farm Application, Tennessee Century Farms Program, Murfreesboro, TN.



*Figure 6: A drawing of the Cloyd-Ligon House, often called the "oldest house in Wilson County." It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Image courtesy of the Cloydland Century Farm Application.*

A few Wilson County Century Farms specialized in crops for market production. One example is the Reiff Land Farm. Henry Reiff, credited as the architect of Andrew Jackson's Hermitage, and his wife Katherine Sisk founded the Reiff Land Farm in 1801. Their initial crops were dark-fired tobacco, sheep, flax, and horses. Dark-fired tobacco required additional steps when harvesting and preparing for market. Despite such difficulties, dark-fired tobacco was a profitable crop, and the money made from selling it at market provided valuable income for farm families.<sup>11</sup> Crops such as dark-fired tobacco suggest that the Reiffs were able to produce for market, rather than worry solely about sustenance agriculture.<sup>12</sup> After the War of 1812, Andrew Jackson commissioned the construction of a brick, two-story, five-bay Federal style dwelling in 1819. Henry Reiff was chosen as the principal builder. A fire in 1834 swept through the mansion, at which point Andrew Jackson appointed Joseph Reiff, the brother of Henry Reiff, and William Hume to rebuild it.<sup>13</sup>

From 1780-1850, Wilson County Century Farms grew crops for both the market and their families, while also laying the framework for community. The operations of Pioneer Century Farms like the 1789 Windy Hill Farm differed very little from the 1816 Alford Farm. With the exception of those who made their money from other enterprises, most of the farms primarily grew crops to meet the needs of their family and make extra money on the market if they could. However, times were about to change with the arrival

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<sup>11</sup> Murray Miles, "Tobacco," *Tennessee Encyclopedia*, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2017, <https://tennesseencyclopedia.net/entries/tobacco/>, accessed April 7, 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Reiff Land Farm Century Farm Application, Tennessee Century Farms Program, Murfreesboro, TN.

<sup>13</sup> "The Hermitage," Donelson Hermitage Chamber of Commerce, <https://www.donelsonhermitagechamber.com/historic-sites/>, accessed April 24, 2021.

of the railroads. As rail developed into a safe and efficient way to transport agricultural products to markets across the United States, farmers no longer had to rely on poor roads and unpredictable river routes. And Wilson County Century Farmers were more than prepared to take advantage of these changes.

#### Expansion of the Market Economy, 1850-1900

Before railroads, farmers had to rely on roads or transporting goods by established water routes. Though some roads were passable, many were in a sorry state of repair, as early road maintenance in Tennessee fell upon those whose property butted up against the road. The turnpike system in place by 1838 made travel by road an intensive and time-consuming process, something that many farmers found too steep a risk time and money growing crops to ship. Conversely, waterways often provided routes for shipping produce and agricultural products. Indeed, the Cragwall Farm in Wilson County had ancestors that utilized rafts to get their hogs to Nashville for sale.<sup>14</sup> However, dry spells, weather, and just the general danger of water travel kept it from being a route farmers used with surety.

The first railroad to operate in Wilson County was the Tennessee & Pacific Railroad. Chartered on May 24, 1866, the railroad's original route began in Knoxville, then went eastward through Lebanon, Nashville, Memphis, and Jackson, where it joined with railroads leading west to the Pacific. Construction began in June 1869 on a twenty-nine-mile line between Nashville and Lebanon. The line opened in 1871, only to go under due to debt. In 1877, the state seized the railroad and sold it to the Nashville,

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<sup>14</sup> Cragwall Farm Century Farm Application, Tennessee Century Farms Program, Murfreesboro, TN.



Chattanooga, & St. Louis Railway.<sup>15</sup> The arrival of the Tennessee & Pacific had an immediate impact, increasing the dollar value of exported forest products by nearly ten times.<sup>16</sup>

The new connection to the Nashville & Chattanooga Railway linked Wilson County Century Farmers with new markets.<sup>17</sup> The Nashville & Chattanooga Railway started in Nashville, proceeded to Murfreesboro, Wartrace, Tullahoma, and Chattanooga, and then went on to Atlanta and Charleston.<sup>18</sup> Thus, in 1871, it was entirely possible for a Wilson County Century Farmer in Statesville to have an agricultural product that found its way into a consumer's hands in Charleston in a manner that was often quicker and more efficient than what the turnpikes could manage. Such a development opened up a whole new world of agricultural possibilities, which is reflected in the increasing frequency with which market commodities such as tobacco, cotton, and wool appear in the agricultural output of Wilson County's Century Farms.

While railroads fueled an agricultural market revolution, agricultural reformers in Tennessee spurred change to traditional methods of agriculture. Beginning in the 1850s, these reformers began to push farmers into producing more for the market, and they also began promoting new ways to engage in agriculture. These changes are reflected in the

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<sup>15</sup> Richard E. Prince, *Nashville, Chattanooga, and St. Louis Railway: History and Steam Locomotives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), p. 28.

<sup>16</sup> Frank Burns, "Wilson County," *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History*, ed, Carroll Van West, et al. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005).

<sup>17</sup> The Nashville & Chattanooga Railway was the first completed railroad in the state, and the only state-supported railroad to pay back its obligation to the state of Tennessee.

<sup>18</sup> Carroll Van West, *Tennessee Agriculture*, p.150.

founding of the State Agricultural Bureau in 1854, and the allocation of \$30,000 in state bonds to build the state fairgrounds in 1855.<sup>19</sup>

### Slavery on Wilson County Century Farms

Though there were large slave owners in Middle Tennessee, many farmers in the region did not own slaves. Of those that did, the largest percentage owned five or fewer.<sup>20</sup> Wilson County as a whole tended to follow these patterns as well. In the 1850 Census, a total of 7,127 enslaved African Americans were in Wilson County.<sup>21</sup> The 1860 Census gives us the clearest picture of slave distribution in the county. The following table shows how many slaveholders in Wilson County, and in Tennessee as a whole, owned a particular number of slaves:

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<sup>19</sup> West, "Historic Family Farms," p. 14.

<sup>20</sup> West, *Tennessee Agriculture*, p. 223.

<sup>21</sup> United States Census Bureau, United States Census, 1850, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1853/dec/1850a.html>, accessed April 7, 2022.

Table 1: Wilson County Slave Holding Information, 1860 United States Census <sup>22</sup>		
Number of Slaves	Number of Slave Owners Owning that Number of Slaves in the County	Number of Slave Owners Owning that Number of Slaves in the State
1	272	7820
2	212	4738
3	138	3609
4	102	3012
5	95	2536
6	76	2060
7	67	1783
8	57	1565
9	52	1260
10-14	148	3779
15-19	48	1744
20-29	41	1623
30-39	11	643
40-49	6	284
50 or more	0	

<sup>22</sup> United States Census Bureau, United States Census, 1860, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1864/dec/1860a.html>, accessed April 7, 2022.

For example, eleven Wilson Countians owned 30-39 slaves in 1860 out of the total 643 Tennesseans owning 30-39 slaves across the entire state. A total of 1,323 Wilson Countians were slaveholders, and the total number of slaves in Wilson County grew to 7,961 in 1860.<sup>23</sup> Of those who owned slaves, 61% of farmers owned five or fewer slaves, thus keeping quite close with West's findings.

The slave schedules and applications show the distribution of enslavement within Wilson County Century Farms in both 1850 and 1860. The following chart shows the distribution for 1850 based on available research<sup>24</sup>:

Table 2: Wilson County Century Farm Enslavement Information, 1850	
Number of Slaves	Wilson County Century Farmers Who Owned that Number of Slaves
1-5	18
6-10	3
11-15	3
16-20	2
20+	1

The table indicates that the total number of enslaved on Wilson County Century Farms in 1850 is 163. As the chart shows, eighteen out of twenty-seven, that is 66% of Wilson County Century Farmers, owned five or fewer slaves. Of those eighteen, 50% owned one

<sup>23</sup> United States Census Bureau, United States Census, 1860, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1864/dec/1860a.html>, accessed April 7, 2022.

<sup>24</sup> It should be noted that of the twenty eight Wilson County Century Farmers with slaves, there is one for whom the number of slaves could not be determined. This comes from an application that lists the owner as owning slaves, though the family's name does not appear on either the 1850 or 1860 slave schedule.

slave. It should be noted that the three largest slaveholders in the Wilson County Century Farm database owned a total of seventy slaves, nearly 43% of the entire Wilson County Century Farm slave population, with the largest slaveholder listed as owning thirty-four slaves in 1850, or 20% of the slave population.

There are some notable changes through the next ten years. Twenty-one Wilson County Century Farmers owned slaves in 1860, whereas seven who owned slaves in 1850 no longer did so in 1860. Additionally, of the remaining twenty-one, the number of slaves decreased on four of the Wilson County Century Farms. Yet, when looking at the information, the total number of slaves increased from 163 to 202, a nearly 24% increase. The change is visible in the data drawn from the applications and schedules, as laid out in this chart:

Table 3: Wilson County Century Farm Enslavement Information, 1860	
Number of Slaves	Wilson County Century Farmers Who Owned that Number of Slaves
1-5	9
6-10	2
11-15	5
16-20	1
20+	3

As shown in the chart, the number of slave owners with five or fewer slaves decreased while those at the upper ranges of the chart increased. Indeed, sixteen Wilson County Century Farms increased the total number of their enslaved. Similar to 1850, the top three

largest slave holders in the county owned 45% of the slave population, that is ninety-two of 202, with the largest slave holder owning forty-four slaves, or 21%.

As the percentages reveal, Wilson County Century Farmers were much like their counterparts in the remainder of their county and across Middle Tennessee. The majority of slaveholders owned five or fewer slaves, revealing a farming society in which the use of enslaved labor was widespread. The 1850 and 1860 slave schedules also show that many of these smaller slaveholders sold their slaves during the decade. The data also reveals that only a few Century Farms owned almost half of the slaves in the selection. The majority of Wilson County Century Farmers benefitted from enslaved labor, yet it was the owners of the larger farms who owned the most land and consequently the most slaves.

### The Civil War and Wilson County Century Farms

As tensions over slavery finally broke into open conflict, Tennesseans faced a choice. Initially, Tennessee voted against secession in February 1861, but in June joined with the Confederacy against the United States when President Abraham Lincoln called for troops following the firing on Fort Sumter.<sup>25</sup> In *Plowshares and Swords: Tennessee Farm Families Tell Civil War Stories* (2013), Caneta Skelley Hankins and Michael T. Gavin outlined trends in Tennessee Century Farms as the Civil War began. Their findings show that two-thirds of all families derived income from agriculture and that most of these family farms had small acreages, valued at less than \$2,500. Additionally, farms

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<sup>25</sup> Caneta Hankins and Michael Gavin, *Plowshares and Swords: Tennessee Farm Families Tell Civil War Stories* (Murfreesboro: Center for Historic Preservation, 2013), p. 2.

that owned more than twenty slaves only amounted to seven percent of the slaveholding population, though these owners frequently had Confederate sympathies and were influential in their communities. Finally, those who lived in the fertile valleys were more likely to go Confederate, whereas stockmen and farmers who lived in hills and hollows were more likely to remain true to the Union.<sup>26</sup>

The assessment of Hankins and Gavin proved accurate with respect to Wilson County Century Farms. Overwhelmingly, Wilson County Century Farmers were Confederate supporters. As the Civil War raged, the conflict affected more and more families, whether through armed service or physical destruction of their farms. Take the Beech Farm, established by John Major in 1830 with 330 acres, for example. John, his wife, eight children, and their enslaved workers raised tobacco, corn, oats, hogs, horses, and wheat. John passed his slaves and farm to his son John A. Major, though by 1860, John A. Major is listed as owning no slaves.<sup>27</sup> John A. Major and his wife, Jane Clementine Donnell Major, had eleven children. Two of their sons, Samuel D. Major and James M. Major, were killed fighting during the Civil War. While it is unclear which side the Majors boys fought for, the deaths of the younger generation are something that occurred on several other Wilson County Century Farms.<sup>28</sup>

Wartime upheaval went beyond the young fighting on some distant battlefield. Tennessee was home to many of the battlefields and skirmishes of the Civil War, second only to Virginia in the total number of engagements.<sup>29</sup> Throughout the war, both

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<sup>26</sup> Hankins and Gavin, *Plowshares and Swords*, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> United States Census Bureau, U.S. Federal Census – Slave Schedules, 1860.

<sup>28</sup> Beech Hill Century Farm Application, Tennessee Century Farms Program, Murfreesboro, TN.

<sup>29</sup> Hankins and Gavin, *Plowshares and Swords*, p. 26.

Confederate and Union troops commandeered horse, mules, rations, and other equipment necessary for the armies. Bushwhackers, raiders, and looters also inflicted violence upon families.

### Reconstruction and Reorganization

When the smoke of war cleared in 1865, the damage it left behind was devastating. Hankins and Gavin summarised the extent to which the Civil War had damaged Tennessee.<sup>30</sup> In 1872, a Congressional Committee estimated Tennessee's wartime losses at \$185 million. Though some of the wartime losses consisted of property loss, valued at \$89 million dollars, the majority of the losses related to the emancipation of enslaved people following the Civil War. According to the report, roughly 275,000 slaves were freed in Tennessee, which the committee estimated as being \$96.5 million in losses.<sup>31</sup> These numbers drive home the degree to which Tennessee farmers relied on slave labor and the importance that the institution of slavery played in Tennessee agricultural history.

Though the economic loss was staggering, Tennesseans were determined to rebuild during Reconstruction. Lobbyists in agriculture again tried to get farmers to produce specialized crops, such as cotton, wheat, and tobacco, for growing urban centers.<sup>32</sup> Of all these lobbyists, Joseph B. Killebrew is perhaps one of the most notable in Tennessee.<sup>33</sup> Killebrew was the Secretary of the Bureau of Agriculture in Tennessee

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<sup>30</sup> Hankins and Gavin, *Plowshares and Swords*, pp. 44 and 66.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p. 130.

<sup>32</sup> West, "Historic Family Farms," p. 16.

<sup>33</sup> Joseph Buckner Killebrew (1831-1906) was a New South advocate and the first Tennessee Commissioner of Agriculture. He believed very deeply in the idea that Tennessee could become an



and published the landmark book *Introduction to the Resources of Tennessee* in 1875. Around the same time, the N.C. & St. Louis Railroad established a Development Department and hired Killebrew to preach the word of specialized agricultural production and burgeoning progressive farming techniques. He produced a series of pamphlets to help push commercial agriculture, with information about tobacco, community poultry and egg production, winter cover crops, silage, and other topics.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, railroad consolidation opened up the markets of St. Louis for farmers in Wilson County and Middle Tennessee. By 1880, the Louisville & Nashville railroad was able to buy out the N.C. & St. Louis, thus forming a monopoly that lasted for nearly 100 years.<sup>35</sup>

During the period of agricultural reorganization following the end of the Civil War, the total number of Middle Tennessee farms doubled and the average size of the farms decreased. Available data indicates that 48% of all farmers owned their property with 22% working as tenants or sharecroppers.<sup>36</sup> West found that after 1880, share tenants and sharecroppers came to dominate both the white and black labor force in Tennessee.<sup>37</sup> Census data for Wilson County confirms this trend. In 1860, the total number of farms in Wilson County was roughly 2,162, and those less than ninety-nine acres accounted for 60% of all farms.<sup>38</sup> In 1870, that number had risen to 3,059 farms, and farms less than ninety-nine acres accounted for 85% of all farms in Wilson County.<sup>39</sup>

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industrial area, and such was his influence that his writings became known across the nation and internationally. For a treatment of Killebrew's life and career, see Samuel B. Smith, "Joseph Buckner Killebrew and the New South Movement in Tennessee" (Ph.D. diss, Vanderbilt University, 1962).

<sup>34</sup> West, "Historic Family Farms," p.16.

<sup>35</sup> West, *Tennessee Agriculture*, p. 150.

<sup>36</sup> West, "Historic Family Farms," p. 19.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

<sup>38</sup> United States, Census of Agriculture, 1860, <http://agcensus.mannlib.cornell.edu/AgCensus/censusParts.do?year=1860>, accessed April 7, 2022.

<sup>39</sup> United States, Census of Agriculture, 1870, <http://agcensus.mannlib.cornell.edu/AgCensus/censusParts.do?year=1870>, accessed April 7, 2022.

Wilson County Century Farmers did their part to help revive the economy and rebuild communities following the Civil War, examples of which can be found in their applications. Nathan P. Lannom and his wife Caldenia Tennessee Burke Lannom (Harris-Lannom Farm, 1856) purchased a grist mill in 1884. The family hosted grinding days for the community at the grist mill.<sup>40</sup> Captain Archie Debow Norris of Clendennan's Branch Farm was a teacher at Bellwood Academy. He also served as the County Superintendent of Public Instruction for Wilson County in 1872, and was elected to the 45<sup>th</sup> General Assembly.<sup>41</sup> Dr. James Lee Wright of Blue Lake Ranch graduated from the Nashville School of Medicine in 1896 and then opened an office on Central Pike, where he practiced for fifty years.<sup>42</sup>

Many enslaved African Americans in Wilson County and Middle Tennessee claimed their freedom during the war when the Union Army occupied the area in 1862. Others bided their time until the war was over. Following the war, many blacks sought to achieve their dreams of land ownership and establish farms. Indeed, according to the Black Family Land Trust, African Americans were able to amass fifteen million acres in the South between 1865 and 1919.<sup>43</sup> Many more African Americans in the South, however, became sharecroppers or tenant farmers. In addition, a combination of systemic racism and, in many cases, violence made it very difficult for African Americans to hold onto their farms. The result, the Black Family Land Trust reports, is that black farmers

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<sup>40</sup> Harris Lannom Farm Century Farm Application, Tennessee Century Farms Program, Murfreesboro, TN.

<sup>41</sup> Clendennan's Branch Farm Century Farm Application, Tennessee Century Farms Program, Murfreesboro, TN.

<sup>42</sup> Blue Lake Ranch Century Farm Application, Tennessee Century Farms Program, Murfreesboro, TN.

<sup>43</sup> Hankins and Gavin, *Plowshares and Swords*, pp. 114-115.

currently number less than 18,000 nationwide, owning less than 1% of all farmland in the United States.<sup>44</sup>

Within the Tennessee Century Farms Program, there are only ten certified African American Century Farms. To date, no such Century Farms have been registered for Wilson County. In the 1900 Census of Agriculture, there were 530 African Americans who owned farms in Wilson County, out of 3,880 total farms. Of those, 270 owned their own farms, with fifty-one listed as part-owners, and fifty-six listed as share tenants.<sup>45</sup> By 1925, the number had grown, with 1,559 African Americans owning their own farms and 817 working as tenants. In comparison, 10,339 white farmers owned their farms, and 3,813 worked as tenant farmers.<sup>46</sup> However, 1935 saw the number decrease rapidly as the Great Depression took a huge toll on African American farmers. Although information on ownership is not available, the total number of African American agricultural operators was 496, with 3488 white agricultural operators.<sup>47</sup> The decline continued through the 20th and 21st centuries, with the 2017 Census of Agriculture listing the total number of African American farmers in Wilson County at twenty-three, owning only 700 acres of land.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Hankins and Gavin, *Plowshares and Swords*, p.. 114-115.

<sup>45</sup> United States, Census of Agriculture, 1900, <http://agcensus.mannlib.cornell.edu/AgCensus/censusParts.do?year=1900>, accessed April 7, 2022.

<sup>46</sup> United States, Census of Agriculture, 1925, <http://agcensus.mannlib.cornell.edu/AgCensus/censusParts.do?year=1925>, accessed April 7, 2022.

<sup>47</sup> United States, Census of Agriculture, 1935, <http://agcensus.mannlib.cornell.edu/AgCensus/censusParts.do?year=1935>, accessed April 7, 2022.

Agricultural operators refers to those involved in agriculture, including tenant farmers, those who own their farms, and those who manage their farms.

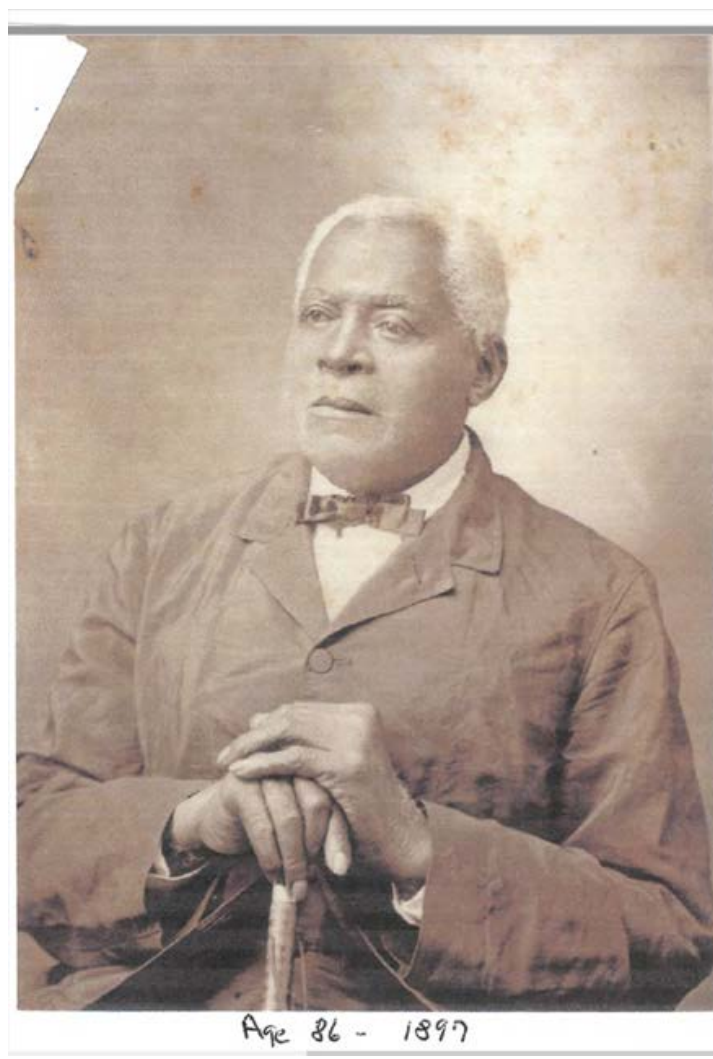
<sup>48</sup> United States, Census of Agriculture, 2017, <https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/>, accessed April 7, 2022.

Some Wilson County Century Farm applications do contain traces of African American agricultural history. The Rising Sun Farm, founded in 1824, is one such place. Previously known as the James Harvey Davis Farm, the farm was once a large slaveholding farm. Emma Davis inherited the family farm in 1864 and employed Andrew Hunter Davis, a former slave on the property, as an overseer. Andrew Hunter Davis received a parcel of land from Emma Davis. Andrew used this land to build a church. The church is known today as the La Guardo Cumberland Presbyterian Church, though it was known historically as the Andy Davis Chapel. The Reverend Andrew Davis preached at the church for many years. According to the Rising Sun application, the Chapel is the site for a large Davis family reunion.<sup>49</sup> Andrew Davis, like so many other newly emancipated African Americans across the South, utilized land ownership to develop communities for African Americans.

As the 19<sup>th</sup> century drew to a close, many Wilson County Century Farmers continued to produce farm products in much the same way they did historically, despite pushes from boosters like Killebrew and the N.C. & St. Louis line. In the coming decades, however, Wilson County Century Farmers faced even greater changes as the twin forces of progressivism and rural reform, combined with two world wars and the Great Depression, altered the face of farming in Wilson County forever.

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<sup>49</sup> Rising Sun Farms Century Farm Application, Tennessee Century Farms Program, Murfreesboro, TN.



*Figure 7: Andrew Hunter Davis, 1897. Image Courtesy of the Rising Sun Century Farm Application.*



*Figure 1: A 2011 photograph of the Laguardo Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Image Courtesy of the Rising Sun Century Farm Application.*

### Rural Reform and Agriculture 1900-1945

The period from 1900-1945 was the most transformative period for agriculture in both Wilson County and Tennessee's history. Farmers experienced two world wars and witnessed mass military maneuvers, survived the Great Depression, experienced some prosperity following World War II, adopted progressive farming techniques, and mechanized farm labor and operations. The end result was an agricultural landscape quite different from the one present in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, these same seeds planted during the 1900-1945 time period would eventually grow into the rise of commercial agriculture and the decline in family farming.

One of the defining characteristics of the period is the influence of progressive farming techniques and organizations. For Wilson County Century Farmers and Tennesseans, the first major progressive farming development was the establishment of the Farm Demonstration Program. Both the Farmers' Cooperative Demonstration Program (1904) and the Smith-Lever Act (1914) sought to provide farmers with guidance on how best to enact Progressive farming methods. In 1910 and 1911, the state of Tennessee selected six county extension agents to work within communities to "demonstrate better methods of farming and to encourage agricultural diversification."<sup>50</sup> The popularity of the program was apparent, and in 1914 the University of Tennessee established the Division of Extension in the College of Agriculture and assumed the administration of extension activities.<sup>51</sup> In 1916, the County Home Demonstration

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<sup>50</sup> Carroll Van West, "Historic Family Farms," p. 31.

<sup>51</sup> Carroll Van West, *Tennessee Agriculture*, p. 153.

Program was established for women, and that was also the year that the Extension Service hired its first African American extension agent.<sup>52</sup> Because of these reform efforts, average agricultural production began to increase in the state.

Progressive reformers in Tennessee government also played a critical role. During the summer of 1912, a train called the “Agricultural Special” spread the message of progressive farming.<sup>53</sup> In addition to the railroads, another progressive movement was gaining momentum that would dramatically alter Tennessee agriculture; the good roads movement. Beginning with Governor Austin Peay, efforts to modernize and build good roads were seen as ways to bring progressive values to people essentially viewed as “backwards.”<sup>54</sup> A key selling point was the ability of better roads to get farm products to more and larger markets.

So what exactly made a “progressive” farmer? Essentially, Tennessee progressive farmers were those who practiced soil conservation, modern farm management and, perhaps most importantly, accepted the advice of agricultural experts.<sup>55</sup> Some of the most common methods of progressive farming include using commercial fertilizers and insecticides, advanced irrigation, contour cultivation, and crop rotation. Additionally, the use of hybrid plants and livestock were hallmarks of progressive farmers. Unlike in the late nineteenth century, many farmers, including a majority of Wilson County Century Farmers, adopted these methods, with astounding results. The commercial yield in the

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<sup>52</sup> West, “Historic Family Farms,” p. 28.

<sup>53</sup> West, *Tennessee Agriculture*, p. 153.

<sup>54</sup> J. Ethan Holden, “Power, Patronage, and Preservation: Federal Highway Development in Middle Tennessee,” (master’s thesis, Middle Tennessee State University, 2018).

<sup>55</sup> Carroll Van West, “Historic Family Farms,” p. 28.



United States in 1930 was 20.5 bushels per acre. By 1963, that had risen to 65.9 bushels per acre.<sup>56</sup>

Whether it be by the planting of hybridized crops, selective breeding for livestock, the adoption of irrigation or terracing, or participating in Demonstration programs, Wilson County Century Farmers adopted progressive farming ideas. At Dromoland Farm (1836), for example, second-generation owners Nelson Bryan and Mattie Floyd Bryan raised registered walking horses, stallions, and jacks for breeding services. Indeed, Dromoland sired Prince Allen, a famous Tennessee walking horse.<sup>57</sup> At Cloydland in 1916, James Duncan Ligon, the great grandson of the farm's founder, bred a herd of Poland China Hog that "supplied much of the western hemisphere with breeding stock," the family claimed. In addition to hogs, Cloydland was also known as a breeder of registered Polled Shorthorn Cattle and Hampshire Sheep.<sup>58</sup>

Wilson County Farmers, much like farmers across the nation, experienced prosperous times during the First World War. Following the end of the war, many farmers found that the surpluses they had been encouraged to produce suddenly did not have a market. Overproduction drove down the price of agricultural goods considerably. While the roaring twenties is generally thought of as being a prosperous time for everyone in the United States, farmers were already beginning to feel a financial strain when the Stock Market crashed in 1929.

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<sup>56</sup> West, *Tennessee Agriculture*, 268.

<sup>57</sup> Dromoland Century Farm Application, Tennessee Century Farms Program, Murfreesboro, TN.

<sup>58</sup> Cloydland Century Farm Application, Tennessee Century Farms Program, Murfreesboro, TN.

The effect of the Depression on Wilson County farms, as revealed by the 1925 and 1935 Census of Agriculture, is stark. In 1925, Wilson County had 4,133 farms, with the market value per acre at \$44.62 and \$3763 per farm.<sup>59</sup> However, by 1935 the number of farms had decreased to 3,984, and the market value per acre had dropped to \$28.84 and \$2501 per farm.<sup>60</sup> Perhaps even more telling is a look at the decrease of agricultural operators from 1925 to 1935.<sup>61</sup> In 1925, there were 14,170 white operators and 2,382 black operators in Wilson County. By 1935, that number had dropped drastically to 3,488 white operators and 496 black operators,<sup>62</sup> roughly a 75% decrease in white operators and a 79% decrease in black operators in ten years. The Depression also forced a shift in farming production. Whereas before farmers produced for the market with crops like tobacco, cotton, and wool, in 1935 many shifted back towards growing crops that fed their family first, and put the market second. The 1935 Census reveals this shift, with 3,508 farms reporting the production of hay and sorghum for forage, 2,982 reporting the production of corn, and 3,159 reporting dairy production of some kind. In contrast, only 764 farms reported producing tobacco, and fifty reported cotton.<sup>63</sup>

In response to the Depression, New Deal programs such as the Tennessee Valley Authority, Civilian Conservation Corps, Agricultural Adjustment Act, Works Progress Administration, and Rural Electrification Administration reclaimed devastated farm land,

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<sup>59</sup> United States, Census of Agriculture, 1925, <http://agcensus.mannlib.cornell.edu/AgCensus/censusParts.do?year=1925>, accessed April 7, 2022.

<sup>60</sup> United States, Census of Agriculture, 1935, <http://agcensus.mannlib.cornell.edu/AgCensus/censusParts.do?year=1935>, accessed April 7, 2022.

<sup>61</sup> Agricultural operators refers to those involved in agriculture, including tenant farmers, those who own their farms, and those who manage their farms.

<sup>62</sup> United States, Census of Agriculture 1925 and 1935, accessed April 7, 2022.

<sup>63</sup> United States, Census of Agriculture 1935, accessed April 7, 2022.  
<http://agcensus.mannlib.cornell.edu/AgCensus/censusParts.do?year=1935>.

built and expanded local to-market roads, and brought light to rural areas in Tennessee.<sup>64</sup> Wilson County Century Farms experienced the New Deal to different degrees. Linwood Farm (1919) founder Ben Taylor Powell and his wife Grace Waters Powell raised corn, tobacco, small grains, sheep, cattle, hogs, and mules. The Powells implemented soil conservation methods to prevent erosion in accordance with the 1935 Soil Conservation Act, which sought to stop the “wastage of soil and moisture resources on farm, grazing, and forest lands”-- considered to be a “menace to the national welfare.”<sup>65</sup> With the help of the county Extension and Soil Conservation offices, the Powells installed a series of terraces to help stem soil erosion.<sup>66</sup> On the Alford Farm (1816) the great-granddaughter of the founders, Circe Philpot, and her husband, William Lee, had part of their land purchased by the TVA in the 1930s for a right-of-way to install electrical transmission lines.<sup>67</sup>

Despite the efforts of the New Deal administrators and their local representatives, it would not be until the coming of the Second World War that both the farmers and the American economy would really begin to recover from the Depression. Wages increased for agricultural workers nearly 21% from 1942 to 1943.<sup>68</sup> By the end of 1945, Tennessee

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<sup>64</sup> Carroll Van West, “Historic Family Farms,” p. 34.

<sup>65</sup> “Honoring 85 Years of NRCS- A Brief History,” United States Department of Agriculture: Natural Resources Conservation Service, [https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/about/history/?cid=nrcs143\\_021392#:~:text=On%20April%2027%2C%201935%20Congress,SCS\)%20as%20a%20permanent%20agency](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/about/history/?cid=nrcs143_021392#:~:text=On%20April%2027%2C%201935%20Congress,SCS)%20as%20a%20permanent%20agency), accessed April 24, 2021.

<sup>66</sup> Linwood Farm Century Farm Application, Tennessee Century Farms Program, Murfreesboro, TN.

<sup>67</sup> Alford Farm Century Farm Application, Tennessee Century Farms Program, Murfreesboro, TN.

<sup>68</sup> Woody McMillin, *In the Presence of Soldiers* (Nashville: Horton Heights Press, 2010), p. 243.

farmers were in much better shape than in 1935, experiencing greater profits and benefitting from modernization efforts such as tractors and electrification.

World War II also brought U.S. Army maneuvers to Wilson County, which led Middle Tennessee in hosting these pivotal training exercises. Forty-one of the 116 farms in the Wilson County Century Farm community directly mention the World War II maneuvers in their applications, though the number of those involved in the maneuvers was probably much higher. Woody McMillin's comprehensive history of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army's maneuvers in Middle Tennessee, *In the Presence of Soldiers: The 2<sup>nd</sup> Army Maneuvers & Other World War II Activity in Tennessee* (2010), captures with great attention to detail the minutiae of the maneuvers and war games. From 1941 to 1944, nearly twenty-five army divisions and 1.5 million personnel trained for combat in Tennessee. Farmers came into contact with tanks, young newspaper boys delivered mail to soldiers in foxholes, and entire fields were filled with soldiers and tanks maneuvering for position. Tennessee was chosen because its landscape resembled that of Belgium, Northern France, and Germany. It was the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army's responsibility to train both civilians for the arrival of the maneuvers and soldiers for their arrival to war zones.<sup>69</sup> The maneuvers began in June 1941, when 100,000 soldiers came to Middle Tennessee to begin their training, with the official time frame for said training beginning on June 2 and lasting until June 28.<sup>70</sup> It is important to note that Wilson County had the most land involved in these maneuvers. Out of the 2,254,872 acres involved in the maneuvers, 494,515 acres were in Wilson. In order to participate, farmers had to sign permission slips that essentially allowed the soldiers to

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<sup>69</sup> McMillin, *In the Presence of Soldiers*, p. 23.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p. 37.

“trespass” on their land.<sup>71</sup> Wilson County’s Cumberland University was selected as the headquarters for the XI corps.<sup>72</sup>

The importance of the maneuvers in the memory of the Wilson County Century Farmers is seen in both the applications and the owners themselves. During fieldwork, I talked with the owner of the W.D. Farm and his mother. During our conversation, they addressed the subject of the maneuvers. His mother recalled that as a girl, she rode her bike to deliver newspapers and other things to the soldiers participating in the maneuvers. She emphasized how kind they were, and how much of an adventure it was. Likewise, the owners of The Wright Place showed me trenches and other places on their property associated with the World War II maneuvers. Though they took place nearly eighty years ago, the maneuvers legacy continues to reverberate within the Wilson County Century Farm community.

Equipped with hybrid crops, new livestock breeding methods, mechanization, electrification, and a web of roads linking increasingly efficient farms with other markets, Century Farmers in Wilson County and across the South stood poised to capitalize in 1945. However, the process of agricultural commercialization would soon begin. Larger farms began to grow in size and receive government subsidies, whereas medium- and smaller-sized farms began to fall behind.<sup>73</sup> More and more rural people took jobs in the

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<sup>71</sup> McMillin, *In the Presence of Soldiers*, p. 99.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 264.

<sup>73</sup> This is most clearly articulated in Paul Keith Conkin’s *A Revolution Down on the Farm: The Transformation of American Agriculture Since 1929* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2008). In his book, Conkin argues that the agricultural revolution was both more widespread and more effective than even the industrial revolution. Key to this was the support of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and New Deal programs, like the Agricultural Adjustment Act. These programs provided subsidies for efficient farms. However, this meant that only those farms with good land and capital received government funding,



*Figure 9: Lillie wood took this photograph of soldiers participating in the maneuvers on the Bloodworth Homeplace Farm in the 1940s. Image courtesy of the Bloodworth Homeplace Century Farm Application.*

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while small family farms were left out in the cold. This directly contributed to the consolidation of commercial agriculture.

cities or moved off the farm, thus starting a process by which farming would no longer be a primary source of income, but instead dependent on outside jobs to remain profitable. The next seventy-six years would also bring change to an agricultural landscape that had already undergone radical development.

### Women and Wilson County Century Farms

Women were critical in keeping farms afloat and making ends meet. Melissa Walker's *All We Knew Was to Farm: Rural Women in the Upcountry South* (2000) and Lu Ann Jones's *Mama Learned Us to Work: Farm Women in the New South* (2002) reveal the importance of women on family farms. Walker explores the role that women played in the everyday work of the upcountry South. Women were vital in forming support networks and producing extra goods for trade to keep farms vital. However, they were pressured into entering the industrial world as wage earners. Though they and their families were able to take jobs outside of the farm and accumulate some wealth, they found that their traditional roles were diminished. Jones also shows how important women and their "cottage industries" were in keeping the farms viable. Progressives considered Jones's women the "linchpins" of transforming the "backwards" rural South.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>Lu Ann Jones, *Mama Learned Us to Work: Farm Women in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), and Melissa Walker, *All We Knew Was to Farm: Rural Women in the Upcountry South, 1919-1941* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2000).

Many women on Wilson County Century Farms fulfilled these exact same roles.

The Linwood Farm (1919) application details what an average day on the farm looked like:

A typical day on the farm would start with a big breakfast, usually biscuits and gravy and sausage, sometimes chicken or fried corn, and tomatoes. Then Robert (the farm owner) would announce what everyone needed to be doing that day on the farm, anything from weeding the tobacco patch to moving livestock from one field to another. After a long day of work, the family would come back together for dinner, before sleeping and doing it all again the next day. The farm work was also a community affair. Along with two tenant families, the Powells and their neighbors all joined in to bring in the harvest for the intensive farming of tobacco, small grains, and livestock.<sup>75</sup>

Such an account demonstrates that women occupied a vital part in the operation of the farm. In addition to cooking meals, women also tended to the livestock, weeded tobacco patches, and completed many other jobs necessary to keep a small farm going.

Many farm women also served as community leaders and were involved in various organizations. Wilson County Century Farms demonstrate the significance of Home Demonstration clubs. Winnie Anderson of Sundale Farm (1847), for example, helped organize and lead the Cottage Home Demonstration Club in the early 1930s. She was also instrumental in raising money to build the Cottage Home Club Building.<sup>76</sup> Likewise, Mary Elizabeth Halbert of the Halbert Farm was an active member of the Taylorsville Home Demonstration Club, and Mattie Burnett of the Peach Farm was a

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<sup>75</sup> Linwood Farm Century Farm Application, Tennessee Century Farms Program, Murfreesboro, TN.

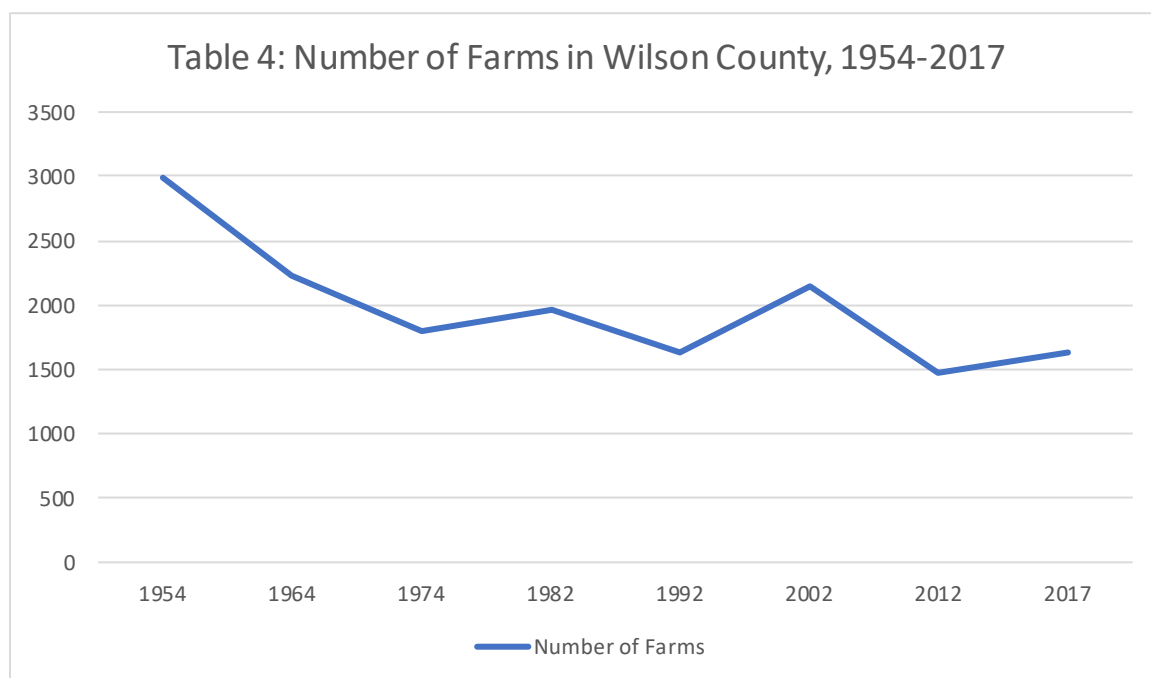
<sup>76</sup> Sundale Farm Century Farm Application, Tennessee Century Farms Program, Murfreesboro, TN. Unfortunately, the exact location of the building could not be identified.



member of the Hamilton Hill Home Demonstration Club and a member of the Wilson County Farm Bureau and Wilson County Livestock Association.<sup>77</sup>

#### Commercialization of Agriculture: 1945-2021

Agriculture in Wilson County and across the country changed as farming lost ground to other industries or careers as the predominant economic activity in the area. The Census of Agriculture captures this change from 1954 to 2017. It is a testament to the tenacity of Century Farms in Wilson County that even in the face of such widespread change, they are still operating. The agricultural census shows an overall decline in both the number of farms and the number of acres being farmed across Wilson County. At the same time, the average size of farms has risen. Concurrently, agricultural diversity also disappears from 1945 to 2021. This is demonstrated in the following graphs.



<sup>77</sup> Halbert Farm and Peach Farm, Tennessee Century Farms Program, Murfreesboro, TN.

Table 5: Acres in Farms, Wilson County, 1954-2017

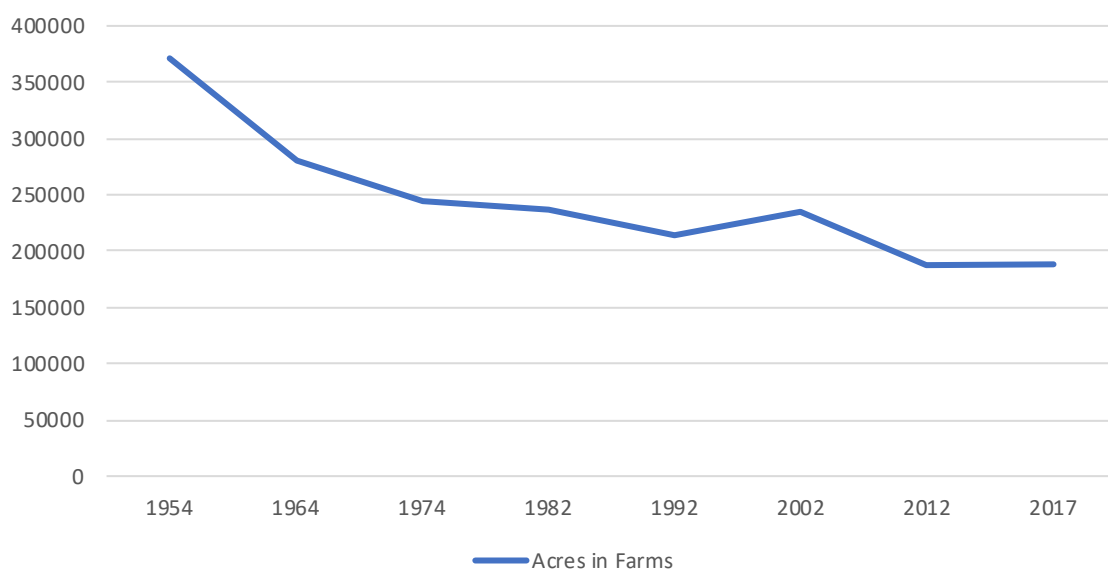
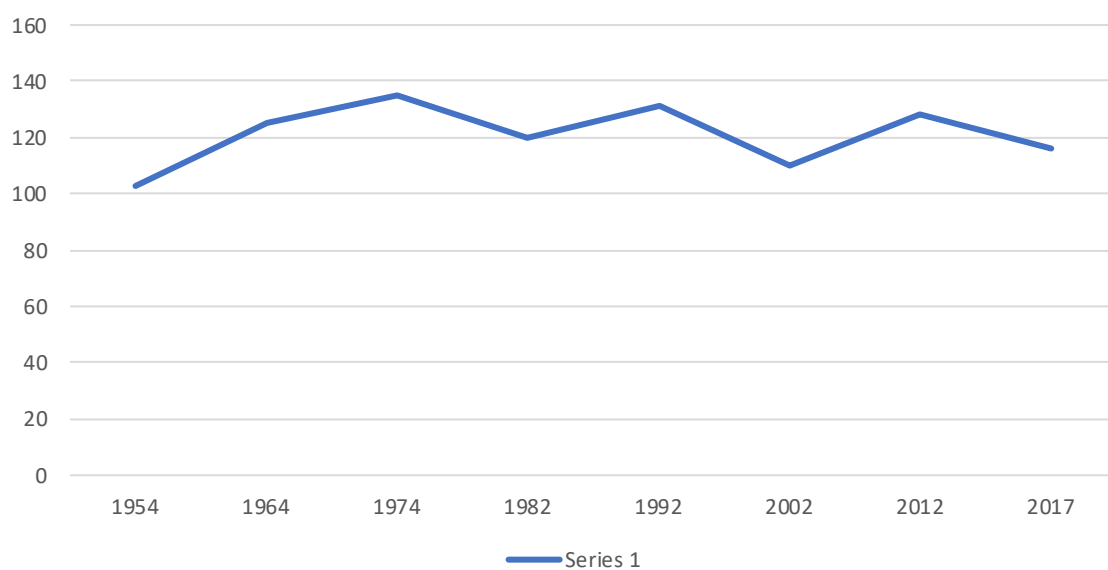


Table 6: Average Farm Size, Wilson County, 1954-2017



These trends reflect both the decline of farming as a way of life in the county and the commercialization of agriculture. As larger farms continue to grow due to continued subsidies and the role of supply-side economics, they are able to produce agricultural products at levels and prices that small and medium farmers cannot compete with.

Although the data for average size shows a relatively small farm size, looking at the 2017 Census of Agriculture closely reveals an interesting trend. Though there are 1,372 farmers listed in the Census who own 179 acres or less, there are 190 that are listed as owning 180-499, fifty-seven farmers listed as owning 500 to 999, and seven farmers listed as owning 1000 or more acres. It would be interesting to determine what percentage of the county's total acreage is owned by the largest landowners.

The Agricultural Census records also reveal the decline of diversified agricultural production in favor of livestock and hay to the exclusion of most other crops. In the 1954 Census, 2,246 out of 2,990 farms were classified as cattle farms. However, 2,245 and 1,846 farms were also classified as poultry and hog farms, respectively, in addition to 1,601 being classified as burley tobacco farms. What data suggests is that several farms were growing tobacco and raising livestock and poultry.<sup>78</sup> However, by 2017 those numbers had changed. Out of 1,626 farms in 2017, 796 were classified as beef farms and 336 were classified as hay production, or nearly 69% of all farms. The next closest is tobacco, with 368 farms being classified as tobacco farms.<sup>79</sup> The shift towards livestock can be attributed to several things. First, Wilson County and Middle Tennessee have a

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<sup>78</sup> United States, Census of Agriculture, 1954, <http://agcensus.mannlib.cornell.edu/AgCensus/censusParts.do?year=1954>, accessed April 7, 2022.

<sup>79</sup> United States, Census of Agriculture, 2017, <https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/>, accessed April 7, 2022.

rich heritage of breeding and raising livestock, and the agricultural climate is perfect for such activities. In addition, the increased consumption of beef by Americans and populations abroad since the 1950s has created a demand for livestock raised for slaughter. Finally, increasing regulation and the cheap availability of agricultural products such as vegetables, tobacco, and dairy makes them unprofitable for farmers. Fieldwork also revealed that many Wilson County Century Farms are now renting or leasing their land for others to run cattle or grow hay on. It remains to be seen the impact this trend will have on Tennessee's agricultural landscape.

Despite the commercialization of agriculture, the decline in number of farms in Tennessee, and the reduction of agricultural diversification, Wilson County Century Farmers continued to adapt and provide leadership. Hale Moss, the third-generation owner of Knobblehurt Farm (1909), for example, had an illustrious career in agriculture and was well known in the community. In 1966, he was elected as the Future Farmers of America president, and was eventually appointed as the Director of Fairs and Livestock shows for the Tennessee Department of Agriculture. Beginning in 1973, Moss served as president of the Wilson County Fair for thirty-eight years. The Hale Moss Livestock Scholarship was established in 2011 to honor him, and in 2017 he was inducted into the Wilson County Agricultural Hall of Fame.<sup>80</sup> Additionally, as will be described in the following section, Century Farms have embraced movements such as the farm-to-table movement and participated in agricultural production outside the scope of cattle and hay.

### Preservation Concerns and Recommendations

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<sup>80</sup> Knobblehurst Farm Century Farm Application, Tennessee Century Farms Program, Murfreesboro, TN.

The Wilson County Century Farm Survey provides useful information on the farm preservation practices and challenges at family farms. Farmers shared their use of tax programs, the networks they accessed for preservation and running their farms, and advice they would give to future Century Farmers. The first major concern, and one that was nearly universal, was the hard nature of farm work and the limited returns gained from agricultural production. Many of the Wilson County Century Farmers I visited were older farmers, and many of the families derived a sizeable income from a secondary job. As more than one owner pointed out, as you age, the physical work that farming demands becomes increasingly difficult. During tours of the farms, owners pointed to large fallen trees, ponds, fence rows, barns, equipment, and livestock, to name a few things, as needing work that they did not have the time or the physical capacity to do. Compounding the issue is the limited return from agricultural production. One farmer cited government regulations and taxes as impeding agriculture's profitability, while others noted that only large farming operations were able to make money. The result is that a sizeable number of Wilson County Century Farms rely, as was true for the generations before, on money that comes from outside farming operations, usually through either the owners having a full-time job outside the farm, or one owner farming while the other maintains a full-time job.

Intimately related to these preservation concerns is the role of corporate farms and their impact on small farmers, which most Century Farmers are. The shadow of corporate farms looms large in the imagination of many of the farms, and they are often the first target for why agricultural production is not profitable for small operations. There is an immense body of literature that supports this finding, and recently the expansion of

Tyson Foods into West Tennessee is causing concern for the ability of West Tennessee poultry farmers to be able to make a living in the shadow of the corporate giant.<sup>81</sup>

However, it should be noted that Wilson County is home to no corporate farms, as all the existing farms are owned by families. Additionally, there were only two farms, both dairy, that provided agricultural products to larger corporate businesses.<sup>82</sup>

Corporate farms or not, the limited monetary returns is a significant preservation challenge because if farms are not productive, they are less likely to be preserved. Indeed, census numbers indicate that the number of farms and acreage in farming in Wilson County since 1945 is slowly decreasing. Conversely, as Wilson County continues its explosive growth, both the land value and land taxes continue to rise. Indeed, to invoke a famous phrase, many farmers are finding that their most valuable crop is now the land

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<sup>81</sup> This is explored in great depth and detail in a May 3, 2021 article in the *Tennessee Lookout* by Anita Wadhvani titled “Tyson Food’s expansion in west Tennessee is pitting longtime farmers against one of the nation’s biggest protein suppliers.” In the article Wadhvani details how the expansion of Tyson’s chicken operations in West Tennessee are affecting locals by putting large chicken houses and operations in people’s backyards. The ability of Tyson to expand, Wadhvani writes, was preempted by the elimination of legislation and regulation, such as Concentrated Live Animal Feed Operations, to allow for the construction of Tyson plants. Additionally, Tennessee Governor Bill Lee is reported as offering millions of dollars in economic incentive packages to attract Tyson meat processing plants. In addition to environmental and livability concerns, locals are also concerned about the monopoly on poultry production that Tyson might achieve in the area. For more information on Tyson in West Tennessee and the impacts of corporate farming, see Adam Friedman, “The impact of chicken houses and new facilities as Tyson Foods expands across West Tennessee,” *Jackson Sun*, <https://www.jacksonsun.com/story/news/2020/12/10/tyson-foods-looks-take-over-west-tennessee/3859092001/>, accessed April 7, 2022. Tyson has already garnered criticism from its home state of Arkansas for its effects on the poultry industry. Two articles that explore this further are Nina Lakhani, “‘They rake in profits-everyone else suffers’: US workers lost out as big chicken gets bigger,” *The Guardian*, August 11, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/aug/11/tyson-chicken-industry-arkansas-poultry-monopoly> and Olivia Paschal, “Tyson has a stranglehold over Arkansas’s poultry industry,” *The Counter*, August 3, 2021, <https://thecounter.org/economist-q-and-a-tysons-stranglehold-over-arkansas-poultry-industry/>.

<sup>82</sup> This information was gathered from a phone call with the Director of the Wilson County University of Tennessee Extension Office, Lucas Andrew Holman on October 27, 2021. The dairy farm in question provides half of its milk to Purity, while the other half is used to produce ice cream and other milk products for their local business in Shop Springs.

under their feet. Farmers who can no longer farm their land or who cannot turn a profit told me they would consider selling their land, particularly as land prices continue to rise.

Two more preservation issues intimately related to the decrease in value of agricultural production is that of inheritance and increasing development pressure. As mentioned, although a few farmers were younger, many of the farmers in the survey were over the age of fifty. One of the major concerns they all expressed was what would happen to the farm after they died. Many of the Wilson County Century Farmers had children or descendants who planned on keeping the land. A few Century Farmers also stated that they were putting their land in the Land Trust for Tennessee. However, five of the thirteen farms I visited had no idea what would happen to their farms after their tenure was over. Though a few had children who were interested in continuing to farm, others reported that none of their children were interested in farming. The hard physical labor, limited monetary return, and sheer amount of time, commitment, and loss of freedom that farming entailed did not appeal to their children, many of whom held professional, full-time jobs or had moved with their families to different parts of the state. While the owners themselves were unlikely to sell the farm (despite all these very real pressures) because of their connection to the land, it is not hard to see how their children, who would not have the same kind of connections to the farm, would consider selling the property. Indeed, those owners not involved with the Land Trust expressed that they wanted their children to profit from the land and, if that meant to sell, then they did not mind. One owner said that just as the farm was a gift to them from their parents, they want it to be a gift to their children.

The Century Farmers also expressed concerns about development pressure. Many of the farmers report receiving letters or phone calls frequently from developers wishing to buy their land. Indeed, an owner in Mt. Juliet told me they get calls multiple times a week, and that such frequent contact “gets old.” In some areas, development has changed the surrounding landscape so much that farmers find their community unrecognizable, as was the case with the Everett Farm in Mt. Juliet and the Harris Lannom Farm near Wilson Central High School.

Development pressure brings with it high prices for land that agricultural production cannot begin to compete with, which encourages the selling of property resulting in higher land prices as other people sell and new subdivisions, commercial businesses, or other types of development move into the area. Finally, as revealed by a conversation with the owners of the Walker Farm near Alexandria in southeastern Wilson County, development pressure also affects the community the farmer is surrounded by. One of the defining characteristics of farming is neighbors working together to bring in the crop, share equipment, or provide social support. When those ties are severed, a vital network formed by the people of an area is also affected. Farmers who find themselves surrounded by development with little to no community left may themselves be unable to justify continuing to farm. While some may think of farmers and farms as independent fiefdoms, my fieldwork with owners in 2020-21 shows that, much like in urban areas threatened by gentrification, there is a network of community that stretches from the front door of each farmhouse to the next.





*Figure 10: This image taken of the old homestead remains with commercial development in the background on October 9, 2020 at the Everett Farm in Mt. Juliet demonstrates both the development pressure and erosion of traditional networks Wilson County Century Farms.*

An additional concern of farmers is the lack of farm-friendly infrastructure that often accompanies new development. One farmer mentioned that for decades they lived and worked in a strongly rural area, but now faced a road that had development in both directions. Traffic increased and few followed the speed limit signs. Because the farmer had to run the tractor on the road for some of his operations, he said that he did not feel safe with the drivers that were around him. Many honked their horns around him, drove aggressively, or held up at their middle fingers in a derogatory manner when they drove by.

Though the physical nature of farming, the limited monetary return from agriculture, the issue of succession, development pressure, the loss of traditional community, the high value of land, and the lack of farm-friendly infrastructure shaped the majority of the owners' preservation concerns, three did mention concerns about the built environment of the farm. Wilson County Century Farms are home to an incredible variety of buildings, structures, and open spaces. Old homeplaces and barns reside in mature fields, modified historic dwellings shelter Wilson County Century Farm families, and hewn-log corncribs are located alongside two-story center aisle barns and concrete block dairy barns. However, farmers expressed concerns that these historic resources are hard to preserve. One farmer in Mt. Juliet, whose two-story center-aisle barn is a point of pride, expressed disappointment at the price of what it might take to restore it. Additionally, he had a hard time locating anyone who would do historically accurate repairs. Farmers who were not interested in making historic repairs to their outbuildings did their own work with a variety of materials, including things like repurposed vertical board from other farm structures, pressed tin or sheet metal, plywood, and generally any





*Figure 11: The Everett Farm barn, a point of pride for the owner, 10.9.2020. Image Courtesy of the author.*



*Figure 12: The Cragwall Farm family house, 11.24.20. Though not continuously occupied, it is still maintained by the owner and is used the family for family reunions. Image courtesy of the author.*





*Figure 13: Some farm outbuildings face significant preservation challenges, like this barn on the W.B. Walker Farm near Watertown. Trees and other types of underbrush grew up once the barn stopped being used. Now its owners face the challenge of repairing the barn. Photo taken 10.24.2020. Image courtesy of the author.*





*Figure 14: Cemeteries also face preservation challenges. This cemetery on the Smith Farm is overgrown, and several tombstones have been knocked over by cows or falling trees. Such spaces are critically important to the owners, though they have no idea how to begin restoration work. Photo taken 10.1.2020. Image courtesy of the author.*



*Figure 15: An example of a fallen tombstone in the Smith Farm family cemetery, 10.1.2020. Image courtesy of the author.*

other thing that the farmer had on hand. However, much like with farming, they expressed how difficult repair work was, and that they did not have the physical ability, money, or help they needed to conduct the repairs.

Indeed, the price and availability of historic restoration is both high and outside the reach of most Wilson County Century Farmers. Compounding the issue is that, for the most part, many of the agricultural outbuildings no longer serve a real, functioning purpose on the farm beyond a storage space for equipment or other farm implements. An overwhelming shift from varied agriculture production to mostly hay and cattle production has rendered many agricultural buildings' functions irrelevant. Corn cribs, old dairy barns, and old chicken coops no longer serve their original purpose. Indeed, even the use of the venerable center-isle barn is decreasing, as most livestock and hay farmers have constructed elaborate lots to drive their cattle through or large, side-gabled pole barns to store round bales and equipment in. Farmers are an adaptable group of people who change their built environment to meet their current needs and their main crop. Further, many farmers do not even farm themselves, with eight of the thirteen farms visited during the fieldwork renting out their property to others. Thus, not only do these historical agricultural outbuildings face an uncertain future due to the money and time needed to fix them, they also face the simple test of practicality. Why spend money and time on something if it is not a vital part of an agricultural operation, particularly considering the limited income the farm itself generates?

While many Century Farmers were not overly concerned with the fate of their outbuildings, they were worried about the fate of their historic family cemeteries. During

my visit to one Century Farm, an owner expressed that the cemetery was an “incredibly important” place to them, and treated the space with reverence. The status of cemeteries as sacred spaces, and their importance to the community and families who bury their dead there, is represented in a rich historiography. This historiography frames not only their value to public, but the value in their study. Richard Francaviglia provides both a method to date and observe cemeteries and describes their importance.<sup>83</sup> Francaviglia demonstrates in his article that cemeteries are “in fact miniaturizations and idealizations of larger American settlement patterns.” He also argues for cemeteries as cultural landscapes that can be read, and identifies four periods of cemetery evolution and the characteristics of each on the cemetery landscape. Terry G. Jordan further explores cemeteries as cultural landscapes while also engaging in dialogue with Francaviglia.<sup>84</sup> Jordan emphasized the African American influence on burial practices in Texas and across the South. Whether that be scraping cemeteries or grave ornamentation, Jordan traces these practices to African or other international influences. Jordan’s work lends an international perspective on small, folk cemeteries. D. Gregory Jeane combines Francaviglia and Jordan’s observations into a new explanation of folk cemeteries, their characteristics, and how to read them.<sup>85</sup> Acknowledging Jordan’s argument about African American influence, Jeane revisits Francaviglia’s four periods of evolution and streamlines them going forward.

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<sup>83</sup> Richard Francaviglia, “The Cemetery as an Evolving Landscape,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* Vol. 61, No. 3 (September 1971): 501-509

<sup>84</sup> Terry G. Jordan, “The Roses so Red and the Lilies So Fair: Southern Folk Cemeteries in Texas,” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol 83, No 3 (January 1980): 227-258

<sup>85</sup> D. Gregory Jane in “The Upland South Folk Cemetery Complex: Some Suggestions of Origin” in *Cemeteries and Gravemarkers: Voices of American Culture* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989).

Recent works have focused less on tracing history on the physical landscape and instead exploring the way that memory and landscape interact. Elizabethada Wright's "Reading the Cemetery, Lieu de Memoire par Excellence," is an object lesson in mapping the landscape of memory on the cemetery.<sup>86</sup> Wright demonstrates that cemeteries are the ideal memory site. Within a cemetery, the process of memory making is on display for all to see. It is shaped by ideals of mixed people, representing a post-modern history in which others write their own histories or ascribe their own meanings to markers and physical landscapes. Cemeteries are also where forgetting takes place, the omission of tombstones or information effectively silencing elements of history while raising up others. David Charles Sloan builds on this point, particularly as it applies to modern approaches to burial.<sup>87</sup> Whereas earlier cemeteries were designed to be places of remembrance in touch with nature, now modern cemeteries are divorced from nature, preferring to turn a cemetery in a suburban yard that people rarely visit because they do not want to be exposed to, or remember, death.

As with their outbuildings, Wilson County Century Farmers either lacked the money, time, physical ability, or expertise to restore and preserve their historic cemeteries. In addition, because some of the small family cemeteries were closed for burial some time ago, the farmers did not see as pressing a need to maintain the cemeteries. As a result, overgrowth is the number one preservation threat to historic family cemeteries, with livestock and wild animal damage right behind it.

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<sup>86</sup> Elizabethada Wright's "Reading the Cemetery, Lieu de Memoire par Excellence," in *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Spring 2003): 27-44.

<sup>87</sup> David Charles Sloan in "Memory and Landscape: Nature and the History of the American Cemetery" in *SiteLINEs: A Journal of Place*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Fall 2010): 3-6.



Small farms like those in the Wilson County Century Farm community are the last safe havens for these cemeteries. The historical information in the cemeteries is valuable for reconstructing the history of the farm and surrounding community. Family farms are often defined by the relationship of their dwelling, outbuildings, and nearby cemetery to each other. Maintaining, much less restoring, a family cemetery can be a daunting task. It requires time and attention, as mowing and weed-eating in a cemetery can cause more damage than good if not done with caution. Additionally, resetting monuments and repairing broken ones often requires a level of expertise and specialized equipment that many farmers do not have access to. Finally, in the case of the land being sold, there is little guarantee that the cemetery will be saved by whoever is developing the property.<sup>88</sup> For those Wilson County Century Farmers who want to save the final resting place of their family and ancestors, cemeteries present a major preservation challenge.

### Preservation Recommendations

The preservation concerns are many, and encompass an incredibly wide variety of issues and unique circumstances. The original survey report addresses each of these preservation concerns in kind, whether it be how to replace damaged weatherboard siding, reset a tilting/sunken tombstone, or sign up for state programs such as the Greenbelt. As such, the information for those concerns can be found there, and it is not

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<sup>88</sup> According to Tennessee Code Annotated §46-8-103(a), a new owner is required to take care of a known cemetery that is shown on a deeds map. However, §46-4-103(a) allowed for a developer to ask a judge to remove the cemetery if it's "abandoned." This is where an issue can occur. What is considered a abandoned can be a subjective term, and judges tend to rule in favor of developers more times than not. For more information, see this website: [https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/environment/archaeology/documents/TCA\\_Cemeteries.pdf](https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/environment/archaeology/documents/TCA_Cemeteries.pdf)), accessed date April 7, 2022.

the purpose of the dissertation to address each one of those in the same depth and specificity as the original report. Instead, we will look at some of the key preservation recommendation findings that come from my report, and analyze how these findings align with already existing rural preservation scholarship in addition to how they can contribute to our understanding of rural preservation.<sup>89</sup>

Perhaps the most important finding of the entire report, and one that was reinforced at almost every point, is the importance of keeping and preserving the land rather than the buildings for the farmers. A key component of a rural setting is the land, and a rural resource's significance is often drawn from its relationship with the land and the integrity of its rural context. Likewise, when considering agricultural production and the growth of rural communities, such an observation makes sense. In many ways, the rural built environment, particularly as it relates to agricultural production and farms, is ephemeral.<sup>90</sup> Outbuildings were constructed, changed form, demolished, and repurposed as the needs of agriculture changed over time. Central-aisle barns have given way to pole barns that provide farmers a more efficient way to store round bales of hay or shelter

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<sup>89</sup> Though these findings are in dialogue with scholarship within the United States, this same conversation is occurring internationally and is seeing results. One example is the "World Heritage Papers Series No. 26: Cultural Landscapes," published United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The goal of this publication is to help those preparing nominations for cultural landscapes to the World Heritage List, and those managing cultural landscapes already inscribed on the World Heritage List. The document is free for download in its entirety, and can be found here: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/588>, accessed date April 7, 2022.

<sup>90</sup> This idea is explored in greater depth in Bernard Herman and Gabrielle M Lanier's *Everyday Architecture of the Mid-Atlantic: Looking at Buildings and Landscapes* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), particularly the chapter titled "Farm Outbuildings and Plans." In addition to describing common farm outbuildings' forms and variations, the chapter also emphasizes the ephemeral nature of farm outbuildings. Because they are such practical structures, the authors argue, their preservation is often quite difficult. This is compounded in some cases by the materials chosen to construct said outbuildings, which is often not intended to be permanent.

cattle in. Springhouses are frequently abandoned, repurposed, or deconstructed for materials need elsewhere due to the effects of rural electrification.

Even, perhaps especially, historic dwellings are not exempt from the process. Traditional building forms, such as the I-house, gable-L, and Folk Victorian, gave way to Ranch-style houses built in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, which remain one of the most popular rural houses. Those traditional dwellings that survived have been altered. Shed roof additions on the back speak to rural electrification, while others have multiple additions on both back and side to accommodate higher standards of living. To view the process as a callousness or obliviousness towards the past is a dangerous assumption. Instead, it is part of the practical mindset of those who own rural resources. If something is not currently serving a purpose, or the building could be improved to serve its purpose better, expediency demands it does so. The built environment of the farm is fluid, because the survival of farming families depended on their ability, willingness, and perhaps predilection to change.

To say the process limited to farms is also to overlook the same process taking place in other rural institutions, especially rural schools and churches. Though fieldwork was primarily limited to agricultural sites, viewing the Meeting House at Foxwood Farms in Mount Juliet, Tennessee, reveals this process with the preservation of churches. The Meeting House used to be an active church. However, as the community around the church died out, moved, or were forced out with the coming of the Old Hickory Lake, the church fell into disuse. Though the church stopped being used, that did not mean that the congregation died out completely. Those that once attended that church found other

places of worship to attend. Indeed, traveling the backroads of Tennessee today, one will find small rural churches that still house active congregations. In other words, the construction of rural institutions is fluid. Churches are built to serve the needs of the community, and as the needs and composition of that community changes, new churches or rural resources are constructed. Though some may last longer than others, it is an inevitable process of birth, life, and death. It is a practical approach, and once again is representative of the rural predilection towards expediency, fluidness, and practicality.

Thus, there is only one constant, one crucial element, that unites this system of death and rebirth in the rural built environment, and that is the land itself. It lends a sense of permanence to an environment that is more fluid than outsiders perhaps give it credit for, and satisfies both the economic and cultural needs of those who live upon it.

Abundant pasture, good hayfields, swathes of timber stands, vital creeks, and fertile soil are all critical to maintaining a farm, and without the land you simply do not have a farm.

However, the WCCFS revealed that, in many ways, it is the cultural value and the way that the land meets the cultural needs of the farmers that is the true worth of it. Such a nebulous concept and definition are hard to understand unless experienced firsthand.<sup>91</sup>

Indeed, without fieldwork, this observation would have been impossible. Riding in an

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<sup>91</sup> The article “What is Intangible Cultural Heritage” published by UNESCO does provide a working definition of these intangible cultural landscapes. It is defined as the “traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants,” and includes oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, and the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts. The article underscores that the importance of these landscapes is not the physical or cultural manifestations of the landscape, but instead the knowledge, skills, and experiences that are transmitted from one generation to the next. In the case of these farms, it is the memories, skills, experiences, and family lore (which are intimately related to the land) that are of great value to the farmers.

ATV or side-by-side made the cultural landscape visible. Thus it only seems appropriate to explain an example.

On a fieldwork trip to The Wright Place Farm, the owner of the farm invited her sister and her brother-in-law to attend the meeting. After we sat at the kitchen table inside, we went out to the garage where the owner pulled her side-by-side ATV out, and her brother-in-law and sister hopped on their own individual four-wheelers. We went out on a tour of their fields and farms. The first stop was near some heavy underbrush, grown up with bramble bushes and bodock trees. Just visible on that fall day were four piers in a roughly rectangular formation, perhaps 20 ft x 30 ft. Everyone gathered round and talked about the site, saying that family lore stated it used to be an African American school built by the white owners of the farm following the Civil War. Driving further into the farm, we encountered trenches that the owners informed us were used during the World War II maneuvers, and a dry-stack rock wall that stretched nearly one hundred yards along a scenic creek. The old barn site and original homestead site were pointed out, though by the time of the survey they were grown up and had disappeared, ghosts whose existence relied on photographs present in the application and the retelling of the stories.

The way in which the owner and her family related to the landscape really drove home the cultural value of the land and the way it meets the cultural needs of those who live upon it. When talking about the school, the historical context of it was secondary to their memories of hearing the stories from their parents. The trenches and tank traps were contextualized not by the amount of soldiers who came through or their ultimate destination, but the stories of their family bringing picnics out to the soldiers, and the

owner as a kid finding mess tins and artifacts scattered around the farm. The rock wall was described as a place where they could play, the old homesite field cleared out for four-wheeler rides with grandkids. Each and every time the owners left their house they communed with the cultural landscape imprinted on a physical landscape. It was not the built environment that they cherished, though its presence (or absence) on the landscape sparked memory and conversation. It was the landscape that they cherished, for it was the constant thread that united all of them, that gave the areas meaning, and provided a deeper connection with their past than perhaps anything else could.

My own personal experiences reinforce the observation. As someone who lives and works on a family farm, one of my favorite spots is tied to the land. The spot is a small rock shelf in a creek towards the back of the farm. The creek remains dry most of the season due to severe erosion and also to cows, who have disrupted the flow from years of crossing the muddy parts. One day while working on the farm, my grandmother pointed to that shelf and said that it was where she used to play kitchen with her cousin. They would sit cross-legged in front of the shelf and serve each other “food” which they would prepare nearby out of hedgeapples or mud and place on the shelf. She then went over there and recreated the situation, complete with theatrics. Every time I pass by that rock shelf while on the farm, I think about that moment and make sure to tell her I thought about her when I got back. It is a very important place to me now, and in the future when she is gone I am sure that it will become even more important.





*Figure 16: The Wright Place dry-stack stone wall, an object of family remembrance. Photo taken 11.3.2020. Image courtesy of the author.*



*Figure 17: Though difficult to make out, the divots and recesses in the ground are, according to the family, trenches dug for the World War II reenactments. Photo taken 11.3.2020. Image courtesy of the author.*

Thus it makes sense that farmers are more interested in preserving the land rather than the built environment, but maybe not for the reason that people think. How does this focus on preserving land interact with existing, and new, approaches to rural preservation? In the first, it reinforces what others have said about memory and landscape. Second, it suggests that the emphasis on the built environment undermines the real resource of rural preservation: that of the land. If a preservationist is only focused on the built environment, then there is a real possibility that the historic value of a farm, and thus its need for protection, is underplayed because the farm does not have unaltered historic buildings that are so highly sought after in surveys. The result is that cultural landscapes that are important historically are not identified and thus not provided the tools, opportunities, or protection they need to preserve the land and the landscape.

Furthermore, the primacy placed on the built environment can often hinder a rural resource or agricultural landscape's active preservation attempts. Many farmers do not understand why their barn is historic, or why the overgrown dwelling in the back field is important historically. They certainly do not understand why repairs to each of the structures need to be historically accurate, or if they do understand they have larger more pressing concerns. After all, the barn was constructed from reclaimed pieces of wood from other buildings on the farm, and the additions on the house came from a need for additional living space and an appliance room. Why money, effort, and time should be diverted from running the farm to restoring these resources is a hard sell. Those things are secondary to the primary purpose of the farmers, which is keeping the land.



The survey also revealed that rural resource owners are affected by “rural gentrification.” Here, rural gentrification refers to the displacement of traditional rural communities and their associated rural institutions by a new demographic, one that is frequently composed of young to middle-aged working professionals who are tied to employment in nearby large cities. Rural gentrification is traditionally accomplished through the subdivision of rural land into sprawling subdivisions or planned communities, and the replacement of community institutions such as churches, schools, and local businesses with larger institutions that serve the new demographic or replace existing economic infrastructure with impersonal, large chains. The end result of rural gentrification is a permanent alteration to the physical, economic, and cultural landscape of an area.

While very few farmers described their experiences as “rural gentrification”, it was their observations during fieldwork visits that demonstrated their awareness of it. The owner of the Harris Lannom Farm pointed towards the road during fieldwork. His farm, located on a very busy road in a booming part of Wilson County, is divided by a two-lane highway. When we were outside, he said that it was a hazard to cross the road, as people drove too fast. Another farming owner pointed towards subdivisions all around them. These subdivisions used to be farms, they said, and they recounted who the owners were. Now they didn’t know anyone, they explained, and it made it hard for them to feel as much community as before and, by extension, make them want to continue living in the same area. Another farming couple on the Walker Farm in Watertown also articulated a similar point. During fieldwork, they commented that once the community was gone,

when the owners changed and the land was divided, developed, or switched hands, they lost a part of the network that held everything together.

Rural preservationists must recognize that this invisible network of community must also be preserved, and that doing so is much harder than simply preserving buildings. Indeed, a focus on the built environment will entirely miss the point of the exercise, though buildings and structures do play an important part. Instead, a holistic approach must be taken. Questions such as how subdivisions placed in the middle of a largely agricultural community affect the composition of the community; what are the long-term effects of moving a large corporation, such as Tyson Foods, into a rural area; and how do you balance responsible growth with the vitality of an entire community must be considered. The Wilson County Century Farm Survey demonstrates that these questions are relevant, timely, and of great interest to parts of the rural population. Furthermore, the survey also highlights, quite clearly, the rich heritage that hangs in the balance.

### **CHAPTER 3: AFRICAN AMERICAN CENTURY FARMS: SIGNIFICANCE AND PRESERVATION**

Within the Tennessee Century Farm program, there are nine African American Century Farms, with an average founding date of 1885. Two of those nine farms are listed on the National Register. Rutherford and Haywood County have the largest concentration of African American Century Farms, each containing two. African American Century Farms are also located in Sumner, Williamson, Giles, and Hardeman Counties. While the total number of listed African American Century Farms is low, it is likely that a larger number actually exist who have simply not completed the application.

The founders and subsequent generations of African American farmers were instrumental in building rural African American communities, spaces, and support networks. Whether it be community baseball fields, providing transportation for African American students in segregated school districts, or providing low interest loans for prospective African American farmers, black Century Farmers did it all. African American Century Farmers also had to navigate a segregated and racially charged environment. Such an environment produced threats of violence, unequal lending practices, and a bias towards white farmers. Despite these challenges, African American farmers continued to prosper, a testament to the owners and their decedents' resiliency. Thus, the stories of African American Century Farmers reflect broader trends in rural African American history, while also demonstrating how they adapted locally to their own situations.

Tennessee's African American Century Farm families collectively present a story of land acquisition, empowerment, and agriculture that counters dominant narratives and perceptions of farming in the South. Most White Tennesseans remember the Civil War as a destructive force. African Americans understand the war as an engine of change that eventually resulted in Emancipation. Newly freed African Americans were able to start the process of accumulating land and establishing their own farms, an option precluded to them in slavery. Together they constructed a new landscape as freedmen and women, a process that, while fraught with perils and challenges, forever altered traditional Tennessee landscapes. In that sense, each of the nine Century Farms act as their own unique markers on Tennessee's agricultural and rural landscapes. This chapter explores their stories to highlight the processes by which these freedmen and women worked together to construct a "freedman's landscape" in Tennessee. The farms analyzed in the chapter include the Butler Farm, the Drake Farm, the Luster Farm, the Matt Gardner Farmstead, the McDonald Craig Farm, Nelson Bond's Oakview Farm, the Robertson Farm, the Shaw Farm, and the Tony Angus Farm. Their founding dates range from 1871 to 1906.

The freedman's landscape was a contested one.<sup>1</sup> The legacies of institutionalized racism and discrimination affected Tennessee African American farmers well beyond the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Despite these obstacles, black farmers were not only able to acquire land and keep it, but also engage in community building by utilizing their resources and status as landowners. Through the construction of schools, churches, cemeteries, and

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<sup>1</sup> Carroll Van West, "Historic Family Farms in Middle Tennessee," National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, Tennessee Historical Commission, 1994.

recreational areas on their property, African American families shaped the physical and cultural landscapes of their communities. These themes of trials, community, leadership, and empowerment mark these farms as part of a unique landscape in Tennessee.

### Acquiring the Freedman's Landscape

The ending of the Civil War brought with it massive changes to Tennessee's physical and cultural landscapes. Slavery, long the pillar of Tennessee's state economy and the cornerstone of Tennessee culture and society, was no more. African Americans viewed emancipation and the war's end with "joy and expectation," whereas whites frequently reacted with anger or anxiety.<sup>2</sup> Regardless of their views, all Tennesseans knew that their post-war world would look drastically different than the world they had known, and many began to articulate their own vision of a post-war Tennessee. The vision that took root in Tennessee and shaped reconstruction in the state was that of Nashville newspaper editor and agricultural reformer Joseph Killebrew.<sup>3</sup> Killebrew advocated for the increased use of fertilizer and crop rotation in addition to calling for the establishment of multiple smaller farms rather than larger plantations, all of which he distilled in his influential and widely distributed publication, *Introduction to the Resources of Tennessee* in 1874.

Killebrew's vision for the reorganization of agriculture and industry in Tennessee, when applied, created a new system of sharecroppers and tenant farmers which, in time,

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Tracy McKenzie, "Reconstruction," *Tennessee Encyclopedia*, Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 2017, <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/reconstruction/>.

<sup>3</sup> Carroll Van West, "New Economies, New Communities: 1865-1915," *Trials, Triumphs, and Transformations: Tennesseans' Search For Citizenship, Community, and Opportunity*, Middle Tennessee State University, 2017, accessed 4.9.2019, <http://dsi.mtsu.edu/trials/west>.

would obtain the title of the South's new "peculiar institution." White landowners rented out small plots to laborers who worked the land and harvested the crops. In turn, laborers received fixed rent from the landowners or a portion of the harvested crop's proceeds. The new agricultural system doubled the number of farm units in Tennessee between 1860 and 1880, halved the average farm size across the state, and increased the number of tenant farmers, who constituted one-third of all farm operators by 1880.<sup>4</sup>

The sharecropping system affected African Americans at a much higher rate than white farmers. African American sharecroppers and tenants farmed smaller and poorer plots of land than their white counterparts, a trend that would translate from sharecropping into land ownership.<sup>5</sup> Black Tennesseans also formed a disproportionate percentage of total wage laborers in Tennessee. As late as 1880, between one-half and three-fifths of rural freedmen continued to work as wage laborers, a position that constituted the lowest position on the agricultural ladder.<sup>6</sup> Prospects for African American land ownership immediately following the Civil War and Reconstruction was also bleak. Though Emancipation freed African Americans in Tennessee and the South, it did not end racial oppression at the hands of white Tennesseans. Economic, legislative, and cultural prejudice made it difficult for prospective landowning African Americans to obtain land.<sup>7</sup> Though the total amount of farms in Tennessee may have doubled between 1860 and 1880, whites were able to purchase their own land and establish their own

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<sup>4</sup> McKenzie, "Reconstruction," *Tennessee Encyclopedia*

<sup>5</sup> Louis M. Kyriakoudes, "Southern Black Rural-Urban Migration in the Era of the Great Migration: Nashville and Middle Tennessee, 1890-1930," *Agricultural History* Vol. 72, No. 2 (Spring 1998): p. 343.

<sup>6</sup> McKenzie, "Reconstruction," *Tennessee Encyclopedia*

<sup>7</sup> Carroll Van West, "Continuity and Change in Tennessee Agriculture: The Century Farmers of Tennessee," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (Fall 1988): p. 163.

farms at a much higher rate than African Americans. Retaining land likewise proved difficult, as nearly 32% of black landowners in 1870 lost their farms within the next ten years. The number climbed higher in the 1880s, with black landowners being three times more likely to lose their land than white owners.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, nearly 70% of whites farmed land they owned in the year 1900.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, as Carroll Van West notes in his article, “Continuity and Change in Tennessee Agriculture: The Century Farmers of Tennessee,” the small number of African American Century Farms in the current database owes much to the systematized discrimination of African Americans in Tennessee, and land ownership for blacks was often only a reality after decades of “struggle, sacrifice, and hard work.”<sup>10</sup>

Tapp Craig, the founder of the McDonald Craig Farm, was brought to Perry County in 1843 during his enslavement to Andrew D. Craig of Williamson County.<sup>11</sup> After the Civil War, Craig began working on the nearby Guthrie Farm to raise money to purchase land of his own. On Christmas Day 1871, Craig made a down payment on 110 acres of land in Perry County with \$150 cash and a yoke of oxen. With that purchase, Tapp Craig and his wife Amy Craig became the first African Americans to own land in Perry County.<sup>12</sup> Together with his wife Amy and his son William, Craig participated in the thriving timber and peanut industries that characterized Perry County’s agricultural

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<sup>8</sup> West, “History Family Farms in Middle Tennessee,” National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form.

<sup>9</sup> Kyriakoudes, “Southern Black Rural-Urban Migration,” p. 344.

<sup>10</sup> West, “Continuity and Change in Tennessee Agriculture,” p. 163.

<sup>11</sup> Jaime Woodcock et al, “Craig Family Farm,” National Register Nomination Form, Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, June 28, 2005, p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> Caneta Skelley Hankins and Michael Thomas Gavin, *Plowshares and Swords: Tennessee Farm Families Tell Civil War Stories* (Murfreesboro: Center for Historic Preservation, 2013), p. 118.

output.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Craig's ability to tap into the peanut industry ensured that his family could retain their land when so many other African Americans throughout the state could not.<sup>14</sup>

George Bullock, a former slave and the founder of Drake Farm in Sumner County, shares a similar story to Tapp Craig. Like Craig, Bullock also travelled to Tennessee from an outside state during his enslavement. Family oral histories state that Bullock was brought to Castalian Springs as a "gift" to the owner's wife's half-sister.<sup>15</sup> After the Civil War, Bullock purchased 160 acres of land in Castalian Springs in January 1876.<sup>16</sup> Family oral histories suggest that the land Bullock acquired, much of it from his former owner, was of poor quality. Descendent Frances Malone in an interview with *The Tennessean* references the poor quality land, saying that that they "put black people on the land because they thought they would starve to death, but we're not a people known to starve to death."<sup>17</sup> Despite the land quality, the Bullocks grew corn, wheat, vegetables, fruit, and raising cattle and horses.

The Robertson Farm encapsulates the challenges African Americans faced economically in purchasing land for farming. Born a slave in Arkansas, Crawford

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<sup>13</sup> J. B. Killebrew, *Introduction to the Resources of Tennessee* (Nashville: Tavel, Eastman, and Howell, 1874), pp. 876-877.

<sup>14</sup> Woodcock, "Craig Family Farm," National Register Nomination Form, p. 15.

<sup>15</sup> Hankins and Gavin, *Plowshares and Swords*, p. 119.

<sup>16</sup> Darke Farm Century Farm Application, Tennessee Century Farms Program, Mufreesboro, Tennessee.

<sup>17</sup> Esan Swan, "For century farm owners, blood runs deep," *The Tennessean*, 2014, accessed 4.10.2019, <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/local/sumner/2014/10/23/century-farm-owners-blood-runs-deep/17794345/>, accessed April 7, 2022.





*Figure 18: Picture of George Bullock, the founder of the Drake Farm. Unknown date. Image courtesy of the Drake Century Farm Application.*

Robertson migrated with his mother and sister to Hardeman County after the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation.<sup>18</sup> Crawford married Cora, who had also been enslaved. Robertson acquired a total of 181 acres over three separate purchases from 1888-1905.<sup>19</sup> These purchases are significant because Robertson would have likely had to have the cash on hand, as many white banks would not give loans to African Americans.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, oral tradition from Norman Rhodes, a tenant farmer who worked for the Robertsons, said that then local bank president Robert Bass would not loan African Americans money to purchase land, instead telling them that “you don’t need to own your own farm, just go and work for a good white farmer.”<sup>21</sup> Perhaps this interaction motivated Robertson to construct a tenant home on the farm in 1933. The home allowed tenant farmers in Robertson’s community to “live, establish themselves and finally purchase their own farms” while working for the Robertsons.<sup>22</sup> For much of its early existence, the Robertson Farm was a general farm, and together with his family Crawford harvested corn, cotton, hay and raised cows, hogs, and mules.<sup>23</sup>

While the stories of Craig, Bullock, and Robertson touch on issues of economic and cultural discrimination, the Matt Gardner Farmstead reveals the ways in which racial violence and the threats of racial violence also impeded African American farmers. The

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<sup>18</sup> Linda Higgins, et al., “Robertson Family Farm,” National Register Nomination Form, Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, September 21, 2007, p. 9.

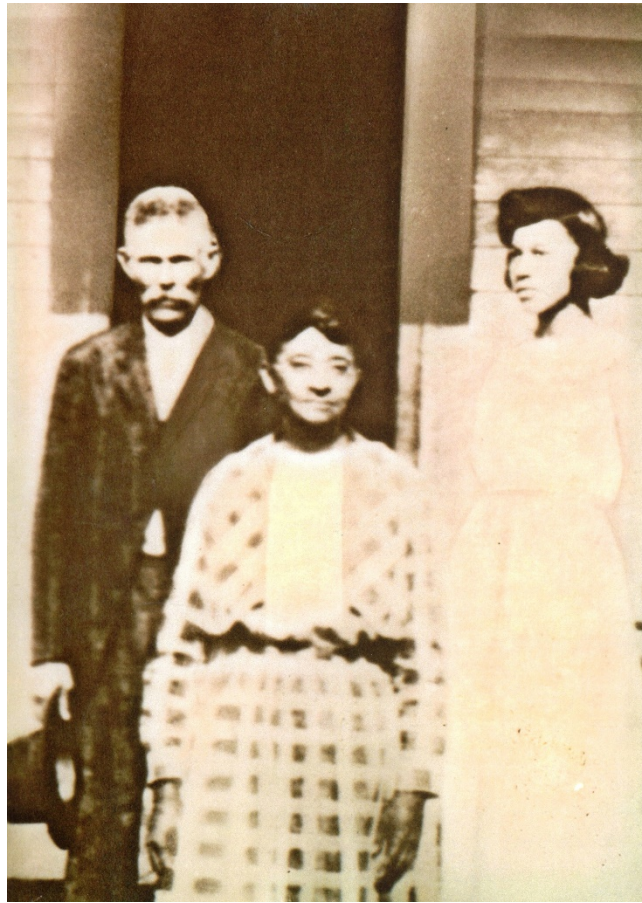
<sup>19</sup> Robertson Farm Century Farm Application, Tennessee Century Farms Program, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

<sup>20</sup> Higgins, “Robertson Family Farm,” National Register Nomination Form, p. 10.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, p. 12.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5.



*Figure 19: Picture of Crawford and Cora Robertson with their daughter Myrtle on the porch of their circa 1906 farmhouse. Unknown date. Image courtesy of the Robertson Century Farm Application.*



*Figure 20: Picture of the Crawford dwelling, built circa 1906. Unknown date. Image courtesy of the Robertson Century Farm Application.*

founder, Matt Gardner, was born into enslavement on a Chester, North Carolina plantation owned by the Gardner family on July 18, 1848.<sup>24</sup> His mother, Rachel Gardner, was born in Virginia in 1817 before she was sold to the Gardner family at the age of ten in 1827. Following the death of Gardner's father, Rachel, Matt, and her other children were sold to the Vasser family who lived in Elkton, Tennessee. Matt and his mother Rachel were house slaves, which kept them from some of the hardships that accompanied manual labor on the plantation's fields. Such hardships did not lessen the Gardner's and other enslaved African American's desire for freedom from slavery. An excerpt from Rachel's personal account of enslavement reveals her yearning for freedom in vivid detail:

...when old master and misses went to sleep, all of us [domestic and field slaves] would get together in the slave quarters and have a ball. We'd kick up our heels in jigs and shuffles and do the whole floor. We'd dance to the rhythms beat out by bones sticks, rocks, or our hands and bare feet. When the celebration became thunderously loud, we'd fill up a tub with water so that the dead to the world sleeping white folk would remain just that, dead to the dreams that were in us. We'd celebrate despite the conditions that were placed upon us by slavery.<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps these celebrations, or his mother's recollection of them, inspired young Matt Gardner to begin his quest for freedom. The dream became reality when Gardner purchased his own freedom from the Vasser family on February 22, 1865 for \$100. He had acquired the money by taking care of the slave master's son on days that the son was too drunk to make his way home.<sup>26</sup> However, the date fell after the abolition of slavery in

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<sup>24</sup> Trina Binkley and Carroll Van West, "Matt Gardner House," National Register Nomination Form, Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, January 27, 1995, p. 11.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> "History," *Matt Gardner Homestead Museum*, accessed 2.9.2019, <https://www.mattgardnerhomestead.org/>.

Tennessee, meaning that Matt Gardner was tricked into buying something that he already had.

Following his freedom, Matt began raising his family, acquiring land, and creating a community for African Americans in Elkton. In 1887, Gardner posted a \$1,250 marriage bond to marry Henrietta “Ritta” Jenkins, with whom he had eleven children. Gardner’s first venture into land ownership came when he and John Dixon, the oldest living black man in the area, created a four-year note to purchase 106 acres of land from E. W. Copeland in January of 1889. By 1896, Gardner had paid the note off and became the sole owner of 106 acres. Local tradition states that Gardner named the community of



*Figure 21: Picture of the Matt Gardner dwelling and farm. Unknown date. Image courtesy of the Matt Gardner Century Farm Application.*

Dixontown after John Dixon.<sup>27</sup> On January 1, 1917, Gardner paid \$3,261.50 to purchase 181.2 acres of land from Charles E. Bull. The purchase brought Gardner's total acreage of prime farm land to 300 acres.<sup>28</sup> Gardner's ability to not only accumulate land, but expand and retain it, is significant because many African Americans were not able to do so due to racial violence and Jim Crow.

However, he did not do so without opposition. Gardner lived near Pulaski, the birthplace of the Ku Klux Klan. The Klan had a very active presence in the area. An article from *The Pulaski Citizen* written by the Great Grand Dragon of the KKK and published on July 24, 1868, underscores the threat the Klan presented to African Americans in Giles County. The article begins by claiming the KKK was not an institution of lawlessness or aggression, but instead one of protection. African Americans should not expect violence "as long as they behave themselves." But, as the article goes on to say, "if they deceive themselves, or permit others to deceive them...we accept the issue, and they must abide by the lawful retribution that will follow. We want to avoid this and have peace and it lies with them to say, by their obedience or disobedience, whether or not we shall avoid it."<sup>29</sup> These veiled threats in the newspaper became reality for many African Americans both in Giles County and across the South. Indeed, it would seem that not even Matt Gardner, a respected community member, escaped the attention of the Klan. An article by Tony Gonzalez titled "Cradle of the Klan, Pulaski looks to

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> "The Ku Klux Klan First General Order of the Great G. D. A Highly Important and Significant Document Words of Warning to the Deluded Blacks The Real Nature and Purposes of the Klan," *The Pulaski Citizen*, July 24, 1868, accessed 2.9.2019, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85033964/1868-07-24/ed-1/seq-2/>.

reclaim its past,” published in the *Tennessean* in 2014, recounts an incident between Gardner and the clan in 1914. During that incident, the Klan scared Gardner off his front porch (which faced the federal highway) by firing several warning shots, which, according to Gonzalez, “forced him [Gardner] to keep to the backyard for the last several decades of his life.”<sup>30</sup> While Gonzalez acknowledges that the story comes from local tradition, there can be little doubt that the Klan created an atmosphere of unease for African Americans in the county.

Land acquisition did not come easy, and it never came quickly, and many African Americans were forced to wait decades before being able to purchase their own farms. The Tony Angus Farm in Rutherford County is representative of the difficulties African Americans faced purchasing land. Jessee Landrum and his wife Cora McClain, both former slaves, established the Tony Angus Farm in 1891. Despite Jesse’s renown as a skilled blacksmith, a skill likely gained during his time in slavery, it still took the Angus family twenty-five years to save up enough money to purchase forty acres and start the Tony Angus Farm.<sup>31</sup> The Nelson Bond Farm also underscores a different theme of how African American landowners frequently had to rely on whites in the purchasing of their farms. Located in Giles County, Nelson and Harriett Bond founded the Nelson Bond Farm in 1887. Both Nelson and Harriette were former slaves, and like many newly freed African Americans they had to rent land or sharecrop following reconstruction. However, Nelson was able to purchase land in a partnership with white neighbors P.H. and Richard

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<sup>30</sup> Tony Gonzalez, “Cradle of the Klan, Pulaski looks to reclaim its past,” *Tennessean*, Sept. 28, 2014, accessed 2.19.2019, <https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/2014/09/27/cradle-klan-pulaski-looks-reclaim-past/16301007/>

<sup>31</sup> Hankins and Gavin, *Plowshares and Swords*, p. 123.

Mann, with the neighbors relinquishing all claims to the property when Nelson made the final payment in 1891.<sup>32</sup>

The Luster Farm demonstrates that the descendants of newly emancipated African Americans also fulfilled the dream of land ownership that eluded their parents. Grant Luster Sr. established the Luster Farm in 1906 in Williamson County. Grant's father, Nelson Luster, was born a slave in North Carolina in 1834 and Grant's mother, Betsey, was a Virginia native. By 1870, Grant's parents were living in the 21<sup>st</sup> District of Williamson County with their four children, including Grant. His parents likely worked as sharecroppers.<sup>33</sup> In 1906, Grant purchased eighty acres near Franklin, Tennessee, thus starting his own farm. He and his first wife Anna worked the farm along with their four children. Descendants of the owners continue to work the farm today, an important

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<sup>32</sup> News and Media Relations at MTSU, "African American Farm in Haywood County Joins Ranks of States' Century Farm Programs," For Release, April 25, 2013.

<sup>33</sup> Hankins and Gavin, *Plowshares and Swords*, p. 125.





*Figure 22: Picture of Jesse Landrum, the founder of the Tony Angus Farm. Unknown date. Jesse was an accomplished blacksmith. Image courtesy of the Tony Angus Century Farm Application.*



*Figure 23: Picture of Cora McClain. Unknown date. Image courtesy of the Tony Angus Century Farm Application.*

tradition to the family. Anthony Luster, grandson of founder Grant Luster, said in an interview that the farm has “meant a lot to the family. It’s a fun ride, hard work, but rewarding and part of the heritage.”<sup>34</sup>

### Constructing the Freedman’s Landscape

Once African American farmers acquired land, they utilized their resources and status as landowners to create the freedman’s landscape. The school and church were critical features of the freedman’s landscape. Despite Tennessee’s 1834 state constitution’s stating that education was a public good, the state provided minimal schooling for whites, while education for African Americans was generally nonexistent. In 1867, the Tennessee General Assembly opened public schools to all children, though black students had to be separated from the white students.<sup>35</sup> The segregation of black and white students resulted in inferior facilities for African American students. In 1901, Tennessee passed a law banning teachers from teaching students of a different race. In 1920, African American school attendance in the state rose to 65%, compared to white attendance at 78.71%. Despite being close in percentage, the numbers do not adequately highlight the disparity in education between the two races, as 9.58% more white students than black students attended school in 1879, whereas by 1920 that figured had increased to 13.71%.<sup>36</sup> However, segregation did not lessen African American commitment to training quality educators and teaching their children.

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<sup>34</sup> Vicky Travis, “Celebration will honor two families who have deep roots in the county,” *The Tennessean*, January 20, 2012.

<sup>35</sup> Mary S. Hoffschwelle, “Public Education in Tennessee,” *Trials and Triumphs: Tennesseans Search for Citizenship, Community, and Opportunity*, website, MTSU, 2014. Web.

<sup>36</sup> Hoffschwelle, “Public Education in Tennessee.”

Black Century Farmers in Tennessee placed a large emphasis on education and usually worked to establish a school or educational facility in the community as quickly as they could. Their emphasis on education came from the founders' experiences as slaves. During their enslavement, African American Century Farmers never learned to read or write. By denying African Americans an education, whites established a paternalistic society in which slaves, and consequently freedmen and women, depended on whites and other educated members of society to navigate the economic and social aspects of life. With Emancipation and the end of the Civil War, many freedmen saw education as the key to overcoming a history of oppression.<sup>37</sup>

Because of their status as landowners, many African American Century Farmers utilized their land and resources to establish schools for their communities. McDonald Craig, Tapp's great-grandson, acquired the family farm on September 15, 1958.<sup>38</sup> Before taking over the family farm, McDonald Craig served in the Korean War, during which he received the Bronze Star for training the men of his squad with "resourcefulness and determination" and imparting his "extensive combat knowledge and experience" to the unit.<sup>39</sup> Upon returning from Korea, McDonald Craig purchased a 1954 Chevrolet school bus to drive local African American students to nearby Montgomery High School. Though *Brown v. Board of Education* desegregated schools in 1954, desegregation did not occur all at once, as was the case with Perry County. Instead of desegregating, Perry County posted a hiring notice for an employee to bus African American students to

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<sup>37</sup> Carroll Van West et. al., "Promise Land School," National Register Nomination Form, Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, September. 26, 2006.

<sup>38</sup> Perry County Deed Book Y-25, 15 September 1958, Perry County, Tennessee, p. 563.

<sup>39</sup> "Craig Awarded Medal," *The Nashville Tennessean*, Nashville, Tennessee, September 24, 1953.

segregated Montgomery High School in Lexington, Henderson County. McDonald Craig saw the job notice and purchased a Chevrolet school bus with his own money to bus African American students to the high school. For ten years McDonald Craig drove fifteen young African American students to high school, during which time he obtained his own high school degree. With the passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the full integration of schools, McDonald Craig parked his bus and began focusing on the family farm.<sup>40</sup> McDonald Craig and his bus route are representative of the ways in which African Americans sought education, and equality, when these opportunities were precluded from them by the state.<sup>41</sup>

Hardeman County, like so many others in Tennessee, was also a very segregated place when Crawford Robertson established his farm in 1888. Twenty years later, Crawford pushed for the building of the Hardeman County Training School, a Rosenwald School later renamed the Allen-White School. The Hardeman County Training School was the first Rosenwald School and the first African American school in Hardeman County. Family tradition states that Robertson and his daughter Myrtle Robertson travelled throughout the Whiteville community in a buggy to help drum up support and funding for the construction of the Rosenwald School. Following the completion of the school in 1918, the community listed Robertson's name on the cornerstone as treasurer in recognition of all his work in seeing the Rosenwald school through.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Woodcock, "Craig Family Farm," p. 18.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>42</sup> "Robertson Family Farm," National Register Nomination Form, p. 11; Carroll Van West, "Allen-White School," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, 2005) pp 8-2 to 8-4



*Figure 24: Picture of McDonald Craig and his wife Rosetta Craig. McDonald Craig is an accomplished musician and folk yodeler. Together, he and his wife have kept the McDonald Craig farm running and productive. Image courtesy of the McDonald Craig Century Farm Application.*



*Figure 25: Picture of the McDonald Craig farm, including the dwelling and outbuildings. Unknown date. Image courtesy of the McDonald Craig Century Farm Application.*

Robertson's commitment to education did not stop with the construction of the Rosenwald School. He sent his children to Nashville and Memphis to complete their high school educations. Two of his children in turn attended college at Tennessee State University in Nashville. His daughter Myrtle graduated with a degree in Home Economics and his son Evelyn Senior graduated with a degree in Agriculture. Another daughter, Vivian, attended Lane College in Jackson.<sup>43</sup> Both Myrtle and Evelyn Senior became teachers, and Myrtle taught Home Economics in Hardeman County schools for forty-two years, forty of which were in the Rosenwald School that her father helped to found.<sup>44</sup> The Robertsons strong tradition of education continued, with three future generations of Robertsons attending and graduating from Tennessee State University.<sup>45</sup> Tennessee State University also connects with broader trends in African American education. Before it became TSU, it was known as Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial Normal School. The college sent African American teachers to different schools across Tennessee. These teachers were so effective in some cases that it raised the literacy rate of black children above those of white children.<sup>46</sup>

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Perry Henderson and his wife Alice Henderson Butler, also the daughter of former slaves, founded the Butler School and Butler Chapel on the Butler Farm in Rutherford County. These two institutions spanned multiple generations of the Butler Farm, with Perry Butler's daughter serving as a teacher at the

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<sup>43</sup> Robertson Farm Century Farm Application.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Center for Historic Preservation, "Free Hill Community Center: Preservation Needs Report," Murfreesboro: Center for Historic Preservation, December 2007.

Butler School.<sup>47</sup> Butler Chapel operated until at least 1920.<sup>48</sup> The influence of the Butler Farm on the freedman's landscape extended beyond Rutherford County. Oscar Perry, Sr., the great-grandson of founder Josiah Butler, attended high school at Pearl Cohn in Nashville, Tennessee. During his time in Nashville, Oscar Perry, Sr. also participated in the Nashville Sit-Ins of the 1960s. Perry Sr. would go on to serve in the Korean War, receive his M.A. and Ph.D., and serve as the Vice President of South Carolina State College in Orangeburg, where he would also participate in the South Carolina sit-ins.<sup>49</sup> The current owner, James L. Butler, Sr., a great-grandson of founder Josiah Butler, also furthered his education by attending Bradley Academy and Holloway High in addition to serving in leadership roles in his community as a Freemason and Shriner.<sup>50</sup>

In Sumner County, George and his wife Maria Drake also donated portions of their land to establish a church and school for the African American community in Castalian Springs.<sup>51</sup> While George and Maria were uneducated, they valued education and sought to provide education for both their children and their community. Their son, Henry Bullock, attended Wilberforce College in Ohio, and their grand-daughter Alice M. Drake became a school teacher in the area.<sup>52</sup> The willingness and commitment of these freedmen and women to donate portions of their land to provide educational and religious opportunity for their communities is a defining feature of Black Century Farmers in Tennessee.

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<sup>47</sup> Butler Farm Century Farm Application, Tennessee Century Farms Program, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> The history of the Butler family and farm is available in the book *Holding On to the Homestead*.

<sup>51</sup> Drake Farm Century Farm Application.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

The Bond family likewise used their status as landowners to adopt community leadership roles and add to the freedman's landscape in Haywood County. Around 1900, Bond contributed aide and provided the land for the founding of the Oakview Baptist Church. Nelson's great-grandson Lawrence and his wife Nola Walker Bond were not only influential in their community, but also participated in the Civil Rights Movement. Nola served on the Haywood Branch of the NAACP and was highly regarded as an educator and business-woman in the area. As a result, a scholarship for Haywood County students was named after her. Both Lawrence and Nola Bond attributed ownership of their farm as undergirding their ability to participate in the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>53</sup>

Matt Gardner financed the first school for Elkton African Americans in the late 1880s, and became a minister in 1902 and later the pastor for the New Hope Primitive Baptist Church in 1911. He also assisted in raising funds for the Elkton Rosenwald school in 1930 after the first school burned down. Gardner also provided mortgage loans for African Americans, and some whites, in the community. Matt Gardner in 1918 also helped to establish the Elkton Negro Army Comfort League. The League sent knitted sweaters and other support and provisions to African American soldiers fighting in World War I.<sup>54</sup> Matt Gardner's descendants likewise continued to serve as community leaders and community builders. Raymond Gardner, Matt and Henrietta's son, owned twenty-five acres of the farmstead before traveling to the Tuskegee Institute to become a teacher.<sup>55</sup> Before completing his degree, Raymond pastored in churches near and around

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<sup>53</sup> News and Media Relations at MTSU, "African American Farm in Haywood County Joins Ranks of States' Century Farms Programs," For Release, April 25, 2013.

<sup>54</sup> Matt Gardner Century Farm Application, Tennessee Century Farms Program, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.



Elkton like his father. Indeed, Raymond's devotion to the church and community building was such that he donated land in Dixontown for the construction of St. Elizabeth Presbyterian Church in 1958.<sup>56</sup> Yet another descendant, Budford Gardner, continued the legacy of community building. Son of Walker Gardner, Budford served as Mayor and Alderman from 1984 to 1999, making him one of the longest serving aldermen in addition to being the second African American alderman in Elkton. To honor his services, the community named the bridge on U.S. Highway 31 and Dixontown Road the Budford Gardner Bridge.<sup>57</sup>

The owners of the Tony Angus Farm, though they did not construct a school or church, illustrate how landowning African Americans could use their status to engage in community building in other ways. The founders' daughter Beulah became the next owner of the farm alongside her husband Charles Lanier, who played baseball in the Negro Leagues. It was under Beulah's leadership that the family established what has been referred to as a "kind of community park" on the farm. A baseball diamond and picnic area were located on the property, which reflected the owners' desire to provide recreation for their community using their landowning status as a means to do so.<sup>58</sup>

Despite all the challenges presented, Tennessee African American Century Farmers utilized their status as landowners to engage in community building through supporting and funding schools, churches, and recreational areas. The freedman's landscape also contributed to, if not directly gave rise to, the Civil Rights Movement in

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Hankins and Gavin, *Plowshares and Swords*, p. 123.

their respective areas, with the descendants and farms of those newly freed African Americans standing at the center of the Civil Rights activities. The story of McDonald Craig and his Chevrolet school bus speak to the importance of him and his farm in contributing to the grassroots Civil Rights Movement of Perry County. Likewise, the advocacy of Lawrence and Nola Bond, who directly attribute their ability to participate in the Civil Rights Movement to their land-holding status, speak to the freedman's landscape as a foundation for Civil Rights advocacy.

However, the freedman's landscape is fragile, perhaps moreso than the majority of Tennessee's agricultural and rural landscape. It is well documented that farms across the state are feeling the pressures of development that have accompanied Middle Tennessee's explosive growth, and African American farmers are not exempt from these pressures. Indeed, many African American farmers find themselves in the path of new development. Even institutions like the Butler Farm are under threat from development. In 2008, James L. Butler, Sr., who once ran twenty-five head of Angus cattle, sold most of them. Butler told the *Daily News Journal* he sold them due to the construction of the John Bragg Highway, which ran through Butler's farm, and the lack of help in raising the cattle. The remainder of the cattle were sold when his daughter got married, with Butler saying he did so because he "didn't have anyone to look after the cows while I was gone." Butler's thoughts on the fate of the farm reveal an openness to adaptation in the

future. Butler is open to the idea of the land becoming something else besides a farm as long as it goes along with the Butler's family history.<sup>59</sup>

More recently, the Luster Farm in Williamson County faces an uncertain future as development continues to affect the area. A petition on Change.org by Kendra Luster, a descendant of the Luster family, brought the issue to public attention. In the petition, Kendra outlines how much the farm means to her, writing that the Luster Farm is not just a farm, "but our home, and our heritage." Her father, one of several brothers and sisters that are part owners, wants to keep the land, but there is some uncertainty on the part of the other owners on whether the farm should be kept or sold. As a result, Kendra asks that her aunts, uncles, and the State of Tennessee keep the farm from being sold and turned into a subdivision.<sup>60</sup> The value of the land is likely what is enticing to both developers and members of the family who want to sell or who are on the fence. An article published in January 2022 states that the farm is valued by the Williamson County Assessor of Property at nearly \$1.3 million. The money involved in development means that even those who love the land and respect its heritage find selling an attractive option, particularly because selling often creates the kind of generational wealth most small, African American family farms have not experienced.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Doug Davis, "Butlers are a Century Farm family," *Daily News Journal*, Dnj.com, June 9, 2008, accessed June 9, 2008.

<sup>60</sup> Kendra Luster, "Save Our Family Farm that We Have Sustained for Generations!!!," Change.org, <https://www.change.org/p/save-our-family-farm-land-that-we-have-sustained-for-generations?signed=true>, accessed February 22, 2022.

<sup>61</sup> "African American woman fears her family's 115-Year-old farm on Arno Road could become a housing development," WGNS Radio.com, January 18, 2022, <https://www.wgnsradio.com/article/72742/african-american-woman-fears-her-family-s-115-year-old-farm-on-arno-road-could-become-a-housing-development>, accessed February 22, 2022.

### Preservation Concerns and Contribution to Rural Historic Preservation

Preserving African American rural landscapes and farms is often different from preserving white landscapes. One major issue that African American farmers face that white farmers do not is heir's property. African American farmers can have difficulty establishing legal ownership. Many black landowners were suspicious of, or were deliberately misled by white lawyers during the Jim Crow period. As such, most black landowners did not write or file official wills for what should happen to the land following their death. Without a will, the land in question becomes what is known as "heir's property." In short, heir's property is defined as family owned land that is jointly owned by the descendants of a deceased person because the deceased person's will never cleared probate.<sup>62</sup> The issue is compounded if two or more generations have proceeded in such a manner. Theoretically, the farm could belong to many different people, some of whom might have no connection to the farm. On a practical level, heirs property makes establishing ownership difficult because just one person dissenting from an action can complicate or halt the entire process.

Heirs property causes problems for African American farms because the United States Department of Agriculture and other national/state assistance and programs can only be taken advantage of by the legal owners or operators of a farm. Such restrictions severely limit the money and resources that black farmers have access to that their white counterparts, with marketable titles and clear wills, do not face. Furthermore, because

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<sup>62</sup> "Guidance for Heir's Property Operators Participating in Farm Service Agency (FSA) Programs," United States Department of Agriculture, July 2020, [https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdafiles/FactSheets/guidance\\_heirs\\_property\\_operators\\_participating\\_in\\_fsa\\_programs-factsheet.pdf](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdafiles/FactSheets/guidance_heirs_property_operators_participating_in_fsa_programs-factsheet.pdf), accessed 11.11.2021.

heir's property means that the land is not owned by the person that farmed it, that land cannot be used as an asset when securing loans. Indeed, the individual living and working on heir's land cannot even apply for disaster relief funds because of the lack of clear ownership.<sup>63</sup>

Navigating the process for establishing land ownership can be crippling for a farmer to navigate. Many of the standard rural preservation recommendations mentioned in previous chapters deal primarily with taking advantage of government programs and resources while simultaneously engaging with agricultural production, agri-tourism, or heritage tourism. Such an approach involves no small amount of capital and carries with it all the drawbacks of starting a business. Black farmers who find themselves in an heir's property situation cannot access these governmental programs, and without their farm as an asset are less likely to secure a fair loan. The USDA is even aware of the problem. Since 1910, the USDA estimates that the heirs property system was responsible for the loss of nearly 80% of African American-owned farming land by previous generations. Furthermore, the USDA discovered that the system is worse and most prevalent in the South. In the Southern United States alone, a third of the land owned by African Americans, amounting to nearly 3.5 million acres, is currently held in the heir's property system.<sup>64</sup>

The unfairness of the system has its critics, and there have been efforts to mitigate the issue. One such effort is the Uniform Partition of Heir's Property ACT (UPHA). The

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid

<sup>64</sup> Steve Dubb, "Preserving Black-Owned Land: Why New Policies are Needed," July 19, 2019, *NPQ: Non Profit Quarterly*, <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/preserving-black-owned-land-why-new-policies-are-needed/>, accessed 11.11.2021.

act aims to make it easier and more streamlined for those whose land is tied in the heir's property system to establish ownership for the purposes of acquiring federal/state support and other legal purposes. In short, state governments that passed UPHA agree that ownership of a farm can be claimed if 1) a court order is issued that verifies the land in question meets the definition of heir's property and 2) certification exists from a local Recorder of Deeds that the initial landowner is deceased and at least one heir has initiated a procedure to retitle the land. While ownership is not automatically granted, it does allow the person farming the land the ability to take advantage of programs, resources, and other elements that depend on proving ownership of the land while the process plays out.<sup>65</sup>

Unfortunately, not every state has adopted even this effort towards fixing the system of heir's property. Only fourteen states have adopted the measure, excluding Tennessee. The consequences for farmers dealing with the heir's property system in the excluded states are dire. Instead of the two steps listed above, African American farmers in Tennessee must choose at least one of the following criteria to be considered owners of the land and thus qualifying for the aforementioned resources:

1. A tenancy in common agreement, approved by a majority of owners, that gives the individual the right to manage and control a portion or all of the land.
2. Tax returns from the previous five years showing the individual has an undivided farming interest.

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<sup>65</sup> "Guidance for Heir's Property Operators Participating in Farm Service Agency (FSA) Programs," United States Department of Agriculture, July 2020, [https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdafiles/FactSheets/guidance\\_heirs\\_property\\_operators\\_participating\\_in\\_fsa\\_programs-factsheet.pdf](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdafiles/FactSheets/guidance_heirs_property_operators_participating_in_fsa_programs-factsheet.pdf), accessed 11.11.2021.

3. Self-certification that the individual has control of the land for purposes of operating a farm or ranch.
4. Any other documentation acceptable by the FSA county office, that establishes that the individual has general control of the farming operation, including, but not limited to, any of the following:
  - a. Affidavit from owner stating that the individual has control of the land;
  - b. Limited power of attorney, giving the individual control of the land;
  - c. Canceled checks and or receipts for rent payments and/or operating expenses.<sup>66</sup>

These requirements pose a unique difficulty for African American farmers. As mentioned, one of the major problems of farming is dealing with others who have a vested interest in the land, and getting an agreement from the majority of owners of the land may prove difficult, particularly if the selling of such land brings a high price. Tax returns may prove useful for those that have already started farming, but many farmers do not start full-time farming until the previous generation has either passed or is no longer able to do so. In that example, the farmers do not have the five years' experience needed to meet that requirement. Compounding the issue is the inherent legal costs in gathering evidence to meet the criteria, which is something that many small African American operators may struggle to finance.

Systemic discrimination within the USDA towards black farmers for decades created other barriers for the preservation of black farms. In *Pigford vs Glickman* (2000),

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

black farmers filed a class action discrimination lawsuit against the USDA after the department failed to properly investigate and address claims of bias and discrimination from 1983-1997. Judge Paul L. Friedman of the U.S. District Court of the District of Columbia approved a settlement agreement that yielded nearly 1.06 billion dollars in cash relief, tax payments, and debt relief for black farmers. As other cases came to federal courts, judges ruled in *Pigford II* (2010) for an additional 1.25 billion dollar settlement. Though the settlements helped farmers who were able to participate, many more were not able to meet either of the deadlines due to the restrictive deadlines and the burden that was placed upon them to provide sufficient documentation that they were the target of discriminatory practices by the USDA.<sup>67</sup>

Evidence remains of bias in the USDA's lending practices. Ximena Bustillo argued in *Politico* on July 5, 2021 that the agency granted loans to only 37% of African American applicants in 2020 for a program that helped farmers pay for land, equipment, and repairs. In contrast, the agency granted loans to 71% percent of all white applications for the same program. Furthermore, a grant program designed to alleviate the burdens placed on farmers by COVID only awarded less than 1% percent of the entirety of payments to African American farmers. Direct loans provided by the USDA to black farmers amount to less than 2% of all the loans approved during same 2020 fiscal year.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Tadlock Cowan and Jody Feder, "The Pigford Cases: USDA Settlement of Discrimination Suits by Black Farmers," Congressional Research Service, May 29, 2013.

<sup>68</sup> Ximena Bustillo, "'Rampant issues': Black farmers are still left out at USDA," *Politico*, July 5, 2021, <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/07/05/black-farmers-left-out-usda-497876>, accessed November 11, 2021.



The court cases unfortunately have not brought much relief to African American farmers. Roxana Hegeman and Allen G. Breed's "Black US farmers awaiting billions in promised debt relief," published in the *AP News* on August 31, 2022, addressed the Biden administration's desire to provide billions of dollars in debt forgiveness to African American farmers as part of the COVID-19 pandemic relief package.<sup>69</sup> However, a judge put a hold on the money being released after white farmers filed a lawsuit claiming "reverse discrimination" and touting that the program was unfair. The funding was intended to remedy past discrimination by the USDA towards African Americans and other farmers of color. It would do so by providing one billion dollars for outreach and technical assistance for "socially disadvantaged" farmers, of which African Americans, Hispanics, Native American, and Asian farmers are included. In response, white farmers in Florida, Wisconsin, Tennessee, Texas, Wyoming, Illinois, and Minnesota have all filed lawsuits.<sup>70</sup>

Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller, supported by America First Legal, which is itself a nonprofit started by senior members of former President Donald Trump's

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<sup>69</sup> For more reading on the subject, see Roxana Hegeman, "'We are facing extinction': Black farmers in steep decline," ABC News, February 2, 2021, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/facing-extinction-black-farmers-steep-decline-75626464>, accessed November 11, 2021; Abril Castro and Caius Z. Willingham, "Progressive Governance Can Turn the Tide for Black Farmers," CAP, April 3, 2019, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/progressive-governance-can-turn-tide-black-farmers/>, accessed November 11, 2021; Ximena Bustillo, "'Rampant issues': Black farmers are still left out at USDA," Politico, July 5, 2021, <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/07/05/black-farmers-left-out-usda-497876>, accessed November 11, 2021. Daniel Aminetazah et al, "Black farmers in the US: The opportunity for addressing racial disparities in farming," November 10, 2021, <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/agriculture/our-insights/black-farmers-in-the-us-the-opportunity-for-addressing-racial-disparities-in-farming>, accessed November 11, 2021.

<sup>70</sup> Roxana Hegeman and Allen G. Breed, "Black US farmers awaiting billions in promised debt relief," AP News, August 31, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/Battle-for-Black-Farms-e1034c6701f55a3a5362447e0354c4cd>, accessed November 11, 2021.

administration, led the Texas lawsuits. Miller argues that the proposed debt relief is unconstitutional because it excludes white farmers from participating based on their race and ethnicity. Because the USDA is no longer discriminating against African American farmers, Miller adds, the loan forgiveness is a “backhanded way” of offering reparations. Miller also says that “It is just flat wrong. Us Republicans and old white guys, we get accused of being racist all the time, but this is racist by the administration. It couldn’t be a plainer case of racist.” The results of Miller’s and the other states lawsuits is the temporary, perhaps permanent, halt of vital aid money to African American farmers.<sup>71</sup>

Though national and state legislation can be powerful in their ability to influence rural preservation, Miller’s comments demonstrate the unreliability of such programs in being sustainable and dependable methods of preservation. The answer for preserving African American farms lies more closely in the forming of alliances, education, and organization to achieving the goal of sustainability. Indeed, one such organization, the Black Family Land Trust, provides a template by which any organization or rural preservationist can work towards preserving African American land and other rural resources.

The idea for the BFLT began in 2002 when African American farmers, land advocates, community development practitioners, land conservationists, and academics met in Salter Path, North Carolina. Incorporated in 2004, the Black Family Land Trust is a land trust designed to protect African American farm and rural land. As such, it is

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<sup>71</sup> Roxana Hegeman and Allen G. Breed, “Black US farmers awaiting billions in promised debt relief,” AP News, August 31, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/Battle-for-Black-Farms-e1034c6701f55a3a5362447e0354c4cd>, accessed November 11, 2021.

focused on the preservation issues that face African American farmers, such as heir's property and financial and estate planning. To help African Americans preserve their land, the BFLT has the Wealth Retention and Asset Protection Program (WRAP). The WRAP program is a comprehensive educational plan that the BFLT offers to African American farmers. Its subjects include: educating landowners about heir's property and estate planning; intergenerational financial management; and how to use and take part in conservation easements. In addition to these valuable tools, the BFLT also educates African American farmers on different areas of agricultural production. Subjects include teaching farmers how to engage in cultural tourism and agri-tourism, how to develop their own business, or simply how to pursue crops that are not sustenance-based but instead geared towards market production. The BFLT frequently partners with Historic Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in addition to leading community workshops.<sup>72</sup>

Examining the preservation activities of the McDonald Craig Farm is beneficial for seeing how Black Tennessee Century Farms are adapting to the challenges listed above. The McDonald Craig Farm's preservation efforts began with the listing of the property in the National Register of Historic Places and partnering with the Tennessee Century Farms Program. Listing in the National Register carries with it some benefits. If a National Register property is affected by a federal project, the State Historic Preservation Office and then the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation have the opportunities to comment on the project's impact on the historic property before the

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<sup>72</sup> "Who We are," Black Family Land Trust, Inc, <https://www.bflt.org/who-we-are.html>.

project begins. The project should then take these comments into consideration and attempt to mitigate the damage to the National Register property. However, it cannot be stressed enough that the National Register confers no absolute protection over any building or place. Though the Advisory Council can comment on the project, it cannot stop the project. Furthermore, review happens when a project receives federal money or assistance. Likewise, changes made to a National Register property are allowed, unless of course a local historic zoning ordinance prohibits such change. A listing in the National Register will not keep a property from being bulldozed or developed if it is a private action. National Register properties are also eligible for certain tax provisions and can qualify for federal grants for historic preservation, if they are available.<sup>73</sup>

In 2008, TNCFP partnered with the owners of the McDonald Craig Farm, Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area, and MTSU Audio/Visual Services to produce a DVD about the farm titled *Memories and Music on the McDonald Craig Farm*. The DVD captures the history of the farm and features interviews from the Craig family, photographs, recordings of McDonald Craig singing, and interviews with historians like Carroll Van West.<sup>74</sup> The film was first premiered at the Heritage Center of Murfreesboro

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<sup>73</sup> “National Register of Historic Places: FAQs,” *National Park Services*, May 6, 2020, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/faqs.htm>, accessed April 24, 2021. The Tennessee Historic Commission is one such organization that gives out grants. Many of their grants are matching grants, meaning that the THC will cover some percentage of the restoration work while the remainder must be covered by the owner or interested group. Any restoration work must be done to the U.S. Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. The THC usually awards this grant to those properties that are representative of different parts of Tennessee history. An example of one particularly helpful grant is the Heritage Preservation Fund grant. Funded through the federal government, the application for this grant is due at the beginning of a calendar year. It is a matching grant, with the THC reimbursing up to 60% of the costs of approved work. The remaining 40% must be paid out of pocket by the organization.

<sup>74</sup> *Memories and Music on the McDonald Craig Farm* (Murfreesboro, TN: Middle Tennessee State University Audio/Visual Services, 2008).

on October 2, 2008. McDonald and Rosetta Craig were in attendance, and one of the highlights of the ceremony was the performance of McDonald Craig's original song "My Home Tennessee" by the Select Choir of Hobgood Elementary School in Murfreesboro.<sup>75</sup>

Due to the farm's history as the oldest African American property in Perry County, and the national reputation of McDonald Craig as a folk singer, agri-tourism and heritage tourism are also potential preservation strategies. However, long term preservation probably lies in either the Land Trust for Tennessee or the Black Land Trust. In addition to managing the natural beauty of the farm, putting the land in a land trust would keep the land from being divided for development. Another preservation recommendation for the McDonald Craig Farm is to encourage the owners to engage in inheritance planning and continue with agricultural production in the form of either timber or another agricultural sector that is prevalent in the area.

### Final Recommendations

The examination of the McDonald Craig Farm supports the argument that preserving black rural resources carries with it all the same problems as other rural resources, while also carrying with it their own unique issues. Rural historic preservationists must educate themselves about the individual challenges that African American farmers face. What may be viable for white farmers in Wilson County may not work the same way for black farmers in Shelby County. Understanding the unique challenges African Americans farms face needs to be a conscious part of the rural

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<sup>75</sup> "Century Fam Film Series Premier," pg. 4, Tennessee Century Farms Program, Center for Historic Preservation, Murfreesboro TN, Winter 2008, Vol. 5, Issue 2.

preservationists' work, and a core part of how they approach solving individual issues. For example, while an African American farm could be a valuable and important part of an agri-tourism landscape, obtaining the capital needed to create such an asset is going to be more difficult than for a white farmer. Finally, rural preservationists need to understand the support networks and policies available to African American farmers, ones that are familiar with their needs and not just general agricultural networks, though these are important too. Provinciality is not the friend here, and more so than any other time there needs to be a concerted effort by rural preservationists to protect and preserve the few historic African American farms left today.

## CHAPTER FOUR: CASE STUDY, AMIS FARM

This case study focuses on one rural landscape with an established preservation and sustainability plan. The Amis Farm, also known as the Thomas Amis Historical Site, is a National Register-listed rural landscape with a chronologically deep historical significance. Thomas Amis, a Revolutionary War veteran and frontiersman, acquired the land upon which the Amis Farm is located in 1781, when Tennessee was a part of North Carolina. Under Amis and his descendants leadership, the Amis Farm became a commercial, industrial, cultural, and agricultural locus for Rogersville and the surrounding area. In 2019, the current property owners, Wendy Jacobs (a descendent of Thomas Amis) and her husband Jake Jacobs, met with Liz McLaurin, the executive director of the Land Trust for Tennessee, and Carroll Van West, Tennessee State Historian and director of Middle Tennessee State University's Center for Historic Preservation, to discuss preservation of the site. Following an initial site visit with McLaurin, West, and the Jacobs, the CHP and Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area produced a joint report for the owners. A subsequent visit by CHP staff and students resulted in the publishing of a report titled, "The Amis Farm: 240 Years as a Tennessee Landmark" in 2020.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The goal of the report was to emphasize why the property mattered and what the preservation needs of the house and outbuilding were. With the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Revolutionary War and Declaration of Independence on the horizon, this report would position TAHS to evaluate their preservation needs and streamline their story to present the importance of the site for that anniversary. As a result, the report focused on the history and preservation needs of the site. Additionally, the owners requested a separate report on potential business opportunities and ways to generate revenue for the property. The report was completed by Savannah Grandey, the CHP Fieldwork coordinator and lead on the project; Ethan Holden, a Ph.D. student who drafted the site's historical narrative; Mandy Hamilton and Robert Kurtz, Ph.D. students who carried out an assessment of the property's buildings; Steph McDougal, a Ph.D. student who authored the "Potential Business Opportunities in Support of Sustainability" portion of the report; and Carroll Van

The Amis Farm case study is important for what it can tell us about the processes and challenges that come with utilizing heritage tourism to preserve rural landscapes. Since the Jacobs assumed operation of the site, they have been involved with developing the Amis Farm into a heritage tourism destination in addition to strengthening the heritage tourism network in Rogersville and beyond. By analyzing the Jacobs' approach, including the strengths and weaknesses, the case study demonstrates that heritage tourism and private business ventures can be highly effective methods by which to preserve rural resources.<sup>2</sup> However, these same methods provide their own set of not-insignificant challenges and are not appropriate for application to any rural resource. To be effective, heritage tourism is completely dependent upon the owner's time, money, and energy. While the monetary and emotional payoff of successful heritage tourism is potentially large, heritage tourism also carries all the inherent risks of starting and maintaining a personal business.

The Amis Farm case study serves as a model for heritage tourism best practices in addition to underscoring areas of improvement and vital points to consider when starting a heritage tourism venture. The historical significance of the property and its preservation needs are addressed in the earlier Center for Historic Preservation report and need not be repeated here. However, examining the Amis Farm is useful to address the effectiveness of heritage tourism and private business ventures in preserving rural landscapes, and to

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West, who edited and prepared the final report. This report can be found in its entirety on the CHP's "Partnership Projects Database" page at the following url: <https://www.mtsuhistpres.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Amis-Farm-Report-2020.pdf>, accessed April 7, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> This theme is also explored in Chapter 5: Case Study, Fowler's Mill & Farm. Indeed, these two chapters provide a look at how heritage tourism, agri-tourism, farm-to-table, and private business ventures are both similar and radically different for various rural landscapes.



illustrate that even properties associated with pivotal historic periods in American history are not immune to the preservation concerns facing more “common” rural landscapes.

### Heritage Tourism at the Amis Farm

The Jacobs family turned to heritage tourism in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. The work horse of the Thomas Amis Historical Site (TAHS) and the thing most central to the Jacobs’ heritage tourism and sustainability plan for the site is the Amis Mill Eatery. Jake, Wendy, and their son Clay were the original co-owners of the Amis Mill Eatery. The Eatery is a modern one-story, side-gabled log building with a metal roof. Guests can wait on the front porch while a table is prepared for them. Though the inside of the Eatery is small, a large exterior deck provides most of the seating for the restaurant. The exterior deck also overlooks the Amis Mill, offering the diners a spectacular view of the scenic historic resource. The Jacobs turned the Eatery into an economic driver for the property and a culinary destination of its own. In 2016, the Amis Mill Eatery was voted number one in the state of Tennessee by *Only in Tennessee*, a website that rates neighborhood restaurants across the entire state. When interviewed for an article discussing the achievement, Jake said that it caused quite the stir in the community. Indeed, according to the article, locals came up to him in public within hours of the article dropping, commenting on the Amis Mill Eatery’s award.<sup>3</sup> Though the Eatery had long been a local staple, the award marked a recognition of the hard work the Jacobs put into the business venture. The award also marked the Eatery out as a successful business and the main

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<sup>3</sup> Bill Jones, “VOTED #1 IN THE STATE! Amis Mill Eatery named by website as being best ‘neighborhood restaurant’ in Tennessee,” *The Rogersville Review*, September 8, 2016, [https://www.therogersvillereview.com/rogersville/article\\_e5df4e38-8453-5ef2-9c00-16854afde73b.html](https://www.therogersvillereview.com/rogersville/article_e5df4e38-8453-5ef2-9c00-16854afde73b.html), accessed September 21, 2021.

driver of the TAHS, with the article itself even citing the eatery as the “centerpiece” of the Amis Farm.<sup>4</sup>

The Jacobs also tried different heritage tourism approaches in their quest to make the site self-sustaining. That same year as the Eatery’s award, an advertisement in *The Rogersville Review* announced that the Thomas Amis Historic Site would host a “colonial Christmas” in December 2016. Visitors would get a tour of the Thomas Amis House, guided by Jake and Wendy Jacobs. The article also highlighted the presence of Stonewolf, a member of the Cherokee nation, and others who would sell Cherokee Christmas gifts at the event. There would also be people dressed up in colonial garb, and visitors could expect to eat standard colonial fare, such as venison, chili, elk stew, and elk burgers. The price for admission was ten dollars, and all the proceeds generated from the event would go towards the restoration of the Amis dam.<sup>5</sup>

The Jacobs also expanded their heritage tourism efforts away from the house to include the area around the historic dam. One such effort, which might also be one of their most successful efforts, is the picnic area located near the dam and along the creek. The Jacobs own the property near the dam and along the creek. Rather than fencing it in, the couple left it open, and even constructed picnic tables and small drives where visitors can park their car. The area is also free and open to the public. Visitors do not have to pay an entry fee, or buy anything from the Eatery. Wendy and Jake simply ask that visitors do not litter. Though the picnic area does not generate money for the site, the buy-in that it

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<sup>4</sup> Jones, “VOTED #1 IN THE STATE!”

<sup>5</sup> Bill Jones, “Experience a Colonial Christmas at Thomas Amis Historic Site,” *The Rogersville Review*, December 6, 2016, [https://www.therogersvillereview.com/rogersville/article\\_1a21f9fc-659d-5560-8460-7746d76e632b.html](https://www.therogersvillereview.com/rogersville/article_1a21f9fc-659d-5560-8460-7746d76e632b.html), accessed September 21, 2021.

generates from the community and visitors far outweighs any monetary gains made from charging admission. Indeed, the author witnessed several individuals enjoying the scenery at the picnic tables during his visit to the Amis Farm in 2020.

Yet another heritage tourism venture undertaken by the Jacobs is the Big Creek Visitor Center, located in the Miller House downstream from the dam. The Miller House was built circa 1860 for the mill manager. It is a two-story, side-gable, frame structure with a single brick exterior end chimney and full length shed roof porch. A large, covered screened-in porch is located on the back of the Miller House. The Jacobs remodeled the building in 2016, replacing damaged sub facia, installing a new roof and new windows, replacing the siding, and repairing the front porch. Interior features such as the original floors, wood paneling, mantels, and boxed staircase are all still intact. The Jacobs' installed a variety of educational and interpretive panels in the Miller House, which now functions as the visitor center to the Thomas Amis Historical Site. While the materials inside generally focus on the history of Thomas Amis and his family, a small room to the side pays tribute to the Amis' friend, Stonewolf, who passed away in 2019. Like the picnic area, access to the Visitor Center is free. A short walk from the site will take the visitor to the ruins of the Amis mill.

The twin approach of business venture and heritage tourism formed the foundation of the Jacobs' approach in the years to come. However, by 2019, their approach, or at least their focus, began to change. A *TimesNews* article published in April of 2019 chronicles the change. The article revealed that Jake Jacobs was stepping away from the day-to-day operation of the restaurant to focus on preservation efforts for the

historic property. In addition to promoting preservation, Jacobs also became involved in promoting heritage tourism marketing in the region. The departure seemed sudden, and the interviewer asked him about the reason for the sudden departure. In the candid interview, Jake admitted that he and his wife, both in their seventies, were reconsidering their roles and the future of the Thomas Amis Historic Site. He begins by saying that it was time as the “old man in the group” to step aside and let “young, fresh minds take over the operation of the Eatery.” In addition to providing new blood and new ideas for the Eatery, stepping away allowed Jake to focus on pursuing heritage tourism more actively. He envisioned creating a “coalition of historic sites” in the Rogersville area, with the TAHS being at the center of the web. Additionally, the interview also provides insight to the Jacobs’ original desire for the site, and information on how their approach to site sustainability, centered around the Eatery, worked out for them:

Our original plan was to grow this place to where we’d have the blacksmith and the wheelwright, and the store, all of those craftsmen and artisans back in place the way it was here in 1782. But we haven’t been able to do that. I ran out of personal capital. We built this restaurant hoping it would generate enough revenue to support the whole place, but my plan didn’t work. We know by virtue of electronic payment, only about 10 percent of our customer base is from Hawkins County. The rest is from a five-state surrounding area. It’s all about tourism and bringing people into this county. That’s my focus.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Jeff Bobo, “New Chef, new management, same mission at Rogersville’s Amis Mill Eatery,” *TimesNews*, April 21, 2019, [https://www.timesnews.net/new-chef-new-management-same-mission-at-rogersvilles-amis-mill-eatery/article\\_9d361d3f-396a-5e77-a991-5a3e954b59a1.html](https://www.timesnews.net/new-chef-new-management-same-mission-at-rogersvilles-amis-mill-eatery/article_9d361d3f-396a-5e77-a991-5a3e954b59a1.html), accessed September 21, 2021.



*Figure 26: The Thomas Amis House, November 25, 2019. Image courtesy of the Center for Historic Preservation*



*Figure 27: The Amis Cemetery, located on the property near the Thomas Amis House, November 25, 2019. Image courtesy of the Center for Historic Preservation.*





*Figure 27: The Amis Dam, located on the property near the Thomas Amis House, November 25, 2019. Image courtesy of the Center for Historic Preservation.*



*Figure 29: The ruins of the old Amis mill, November 25, 2019. Image courtesy of the Center for Historic Preservation.*





*Figure 29: This is the Amis Mill Eatery, the Main Economic Driver for the Thomas Amis Historic Site, November 25, 2019. Image courtesy of the Center for Historic Preservation.*



*Figure 31: The renovated Visitor Center, known historically as the Miller House, November 25, 2019. Image courtesy of the Center for Historic Preservation.*

Jake's quote reveals very clearly the struggles and challenges that face owner/operators in their quest to preserve rural resources. In the case of the Jacobs, the spending of personal capital in the form of historic restoration and energy/time in the running of the Eatery was not proving to be sustainable in the long run.

One of the options that the Jacobs considered for the preservation and sustainability of the TAHS was the possibility of turning the farm into a state park. The Jacobs' interest in the TAHS becoming a state park is expressed in a June 2019 article, also from *TimesNews*. In it, Jake expresses some anxiety and doubt over what will happen to the farm after he and his wife pass. Their sons all have their own careers, and as such cannot be tied down with the everyday preservation of the farm. Likewise, Jake says that the Eatery is not going to generate enough income to support upkeep of the site and make a living for the person operating it. Thus, turning the site into a park would make the most sense to Jake, especially considering its historic significance and natural beauty. The article makes clear that the real concern for the Jacobs isn't necessarily making a lot of money, it is the preservation of the Amis Farm and the site as a whole.<sup>7</sup>

Tragedy struck that same year when an important friend of the Jacobs and an ally of the TAHS passed away. Stonewolf Moore, a Chickamauga Cherokee and member of the Kituwah Band, first met the Jacobs at the Crockett Tavern in Morristown in 2016. Stonewolf and the Jacobs talked, resulting in a site visit by Stonewolf to the Amis Farm. Moore was a direct descendant of Chief Dragging Canoe, who owned the land the Amis

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<sup>7</sup> Jeff Bobo, "Should the Thomas Amis historic site near Rogersville become a state park?," *TimesNews*, June 4, 2019, [https://www.timesnews.net/news/local-news/should-the-thomas-amis-historic-site-near-rogersville-become-a-state-park/article\\_22c3b5e9-73e8-552e-8c09-85a34c1b080c.html](https://www.timesnews.net/news/local-news/should-the-thomas-amis-historic-site-near-rogersville-become-a-state-park/article_22c3b5e9-73e8-552e-8c09-85a34c1b080c.html), accessed September 21, 2021.



Farm sits upon now. After their initial visit, the Jacobs and Stonewolf became good friends. Moore then founded the Native American Gathering in October of 2016, an event held yearly on the grounds of the Amis Farm. Stonewolf, his brothers, and his sons all attended the gathering and other events on the Amis Farm, bringing with them goods to sell and educational materials that shared the stories of their people.<sup>8</sup> In honor of their friendship with Stonewolf, the Jacobs named a room in the Thomas Amis house after him, and decorated the room with Cherokee items. Then, following the 2019 Native American Gathering, Stonewolf had a massive heart attack and died at his home in Morristown, Tennessee, at the age of sixty-three. His sudden death left the Jacobs, and Stonewolf's family, in total shock.<sup>9</sup> In a subsequent interview, Jake talked about how Stonewolf's loss affected the site, stating that Moore was one of the driving factors in the festivals and events that held there.<sup>10</sup>

### Preservation Recommendations

The preservation recommendations generated for this case study reflect both the aforementioned preservation and heritage tourism strategies enacted by the Jacobs, and the Amis Farm's focus on heritage tourism over agricultural production. The Amis Farm

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<sup>8</sup> Allison F. Goley, "Fourth annual American Indian Gathering this Saturday at Amis Mill," October 2, 2019, [https://www.therogersvillereview.com/article\\_65a5668a-2cc6-53b0-b445-1e98eaf78d05.html](https://www.therogersvillereview.com/article_65a5668a-2cc6-53b0-b445-1e98eaf78d05.html), September 21, 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Jeff Bobo, "Founder of Rogersville Native American Gathering Stonewolf Moore dies," *TimesNews*, December 16, 2019, [https://www.timesnews.net/living/features/founder-of-rogersville-native-american-gathering-stonewolf-moore-dies/article\\_ec7b94a5-6f67-58a5-920e-d3f5b566c00b.html](https://www.timesnews.net/living/features/founder-of-rogersville-native-american-gathering-stonewolf-moore-dies/article_ec7b94a5-6f67-58a5-920e-d3f5b566c00b.html), accessed September 21, 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Jeff Bobo, "Watch now: Jake's Back, which means Amis Mill is about to get busy again," *TimesNews*, May 21, 2021, [https://www.timesnews.net/living/arts-entertainment/watch-now-jakes-back-which-means-amis-mill-is-about-to-get-busy-again/article\\_145cf622-b9c5-11eb-a574-9b6b2f411707.html](https://www.timesnews.net/living/arts-entertainment/watch-now-jakes-back-which-means-amis-mill-is-about-to-get-busy-again/article_145cf622-b9c5-11eb-a574-9b6b2f411707.html), accessed September 21, 2021.

is not a farm in the traditional sense of the term, in that income from heritage tourism dominates income gained from crop and livestock production. Agricultural production does take place on the farm, though it is small scale. Instead, the focus of the Jacobs, and the site, is on the Eatery and the Thomas Amis House. Those two elements are what drives the TAHS business and are the focus for all the preservation recommendations, concerns, and discussions to follow.

The Amis Farm is one of the most complete, and complex, rural landscapes covered in this dissertation. Not only is the site steeped in historical importance, but it is also home to incredibly rare natural and man-made rural resources that retain their original context and integrity. The site is also operated by owners who have both established a successful on-site business and developed their site into a heritage tourism destination. How then does one evaluate the case study's contribution to rural preservation scholarship, when there is so much to be learned? In essence, the Amis Farm illustrates that heritage tourism is a powerful tool in preserving rural resources. However, it also illustrates quite starkly the challenges facing those who would attempt to emulate the Jacobs and their operation. Not only does this method of preservation rely heavily upon the success of the business and heritage tourism marketing, it also demands an incredible amount of money, time, and energy that most farmers just do not have. Additionally, the intense pressure placed upon the individuals in rural preservation reveals yet another weakness: if that individual is no longer able to carry on, the plan and the site can face an uncertain future. Combined with the steep learning curve, heritage tourism remains just that: a powerful tool for preservation that, if wielded indiscriminately or without focus, is detrimental rather than helpful. Finally, the Amis

Farm case study also underscores the scant protection that being on the National Register provides.

The business and heritage tourism plan crafted by the Jacobs demonstrates how an abandoned, neglected rural property can be turned into a vital site over the period of fourteen years. Both locals and tourists alike pack the Eatery on Friday nights and Saturdays and the Facebook page for the Eatery has a substantial following and engagement with the surrounding community.<sup>11</sup> Though tours of the Thomas Amis House are much less common, the opportunity for those who eat at the restaurant or for heritage tourists to tour the grounds is a part of the entire process. Additionally, one of the most impressive things about the site is the open grounds near the dam and the community support that experience generates. Both parts of this heritage tourism are important. While dollars and cents are, unfortunately, the main driver of rural preservation, community support cannot be understated. Indeed, it is hard to separate commercial success from creating a sense of place, and though the Jacobs and TAHS need more revenue streams, their model is providing early success and should be considered by rural preservationists and rural resource managers.

The Amis Farm reinforces beliefs about the positive effects of heritage tourism on agriculture while also highlighting the negatives of the approach. Much has been made of the rising stars of agri-tourism and heritage tourism in Tennessee. The Amis Farm is an example of the power that heritage tourism brings to bear on rural preservation, and

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<sup>11</sup> Bobo, "Watch now: Jake's back."

should be viewed as a success and model, both for imitation and for improvement.<sup>12</sup> By generating a steady stream of income from agri-tourism and heritage tourism, farmers and rural resource managers can find a sustainable way to keep their rural resource in production and engaged with the community, thus ensuring its preservation for a time. However, it is not a silver bullet, and in many ways heritage tourism is entirely inappropriate for the preservation of some rural resources. The sheer amount of money, time, energy, and planning needed to get the heritage tourism plan started is enough to cut out many farmers and rural resource managers from the very beginning, to say nothing of the continued effort needed to keep it up. Furthermore, these demands are placed squarely on the shoulders of individuals, most frequently the owners. While the Jacobs were able to share the burden with friends and create a network of support, for other farmers and rural resource managers this support is not an option. Even the most motivated individuals, like the Jacobs family, will eventually find themselves worn down. Also, as demonstrated by the Jacobs family, heritage tourism still faces the same amount of uncertainty for the continued survival of the resource.

The TAHS and the Jacobs are entering a new period. After a two-year break in which they celebrated the birth of a grandchild, the Jacobs are returning to their full-time status. The Eatery is no longer under the purview of the Jacobs and has instead been handed over to new owners Kamran and Shannon Aliabadi. During a taped interview with Jeff Bobo of *TimesNews* in May of 2021, Jake talked about what was next for him and Wendy. The biggest things, he reports, is the return of festivals and events to the

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<sup>12</sup> Indeed, we will see how the heritage tourism and agri-tourism process is applied to a smaller, less well known rural resource in the following Chapter on Fowler's Mill.

Amis Farm. In addition to the return of the Native American Gathering, Jake also has other new festivals and events lined up to take place at the TAHS. In the interview, Jake states that,

I'm going to be a bigger presence on the grounds with the festivals and events. That's where Wendy and I will place our energy. I'm helping them occasionally in the eatery to help them get off to a good start, but really, we want to get this property active again, and find new and exciting ways to tell the fascinating stories about the history of this property.<sup>13</sup>

The Jacobs' approach signals a shift from a focus on the Eatery to building the heritage tourism and sustainability of the site. Either way, Jake and Wendy Jacobs remain a huge part of the future of the site. With any luck, the Thomas Amis Historical Site will be around for 240 more years.

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<sup>13</sup> Bobo, "Watch now: Jake's back."

## CHAPTER 5: CASE STUDY, FOWLER’S MILL & FARM

Tennessee family farms are home to an incredibly wide variety of rural cultural resources, both natural and man-made. This case study focuses on one such farm, the Fowler Farm. The Fowler Farm is a Tennessee Century Farm that Charles and Elizabeth Wiley Kelso established in 1824 in Monroe County. Bill Alexander, the current owner of Fowler Farm, approached the Center for Historic Preservation (CHP) in 2019 for assistance in the preservation of Fowler’s Mill, a circa 1875, National Register-listed saw and grist mill located on the Fowler Farm.<sup>1</sup> Fowler’s Mill is in many ways, representative of well-established challenges that face rural preservation. Issues such as financial viability, accessing and developing agritourism and heritage tourism, and identifying outside sources of funding from government agencies at all levels are present here. However, Fowler’s Farm also adds the challenge of how to preserve an old mill, a building type whose function has largely been made obsolete by the rise of commercial agriculture, alongside a working family farm. Compounding the challenge is the physical isolation of the mill and its location in an economic “at-risk” county, as defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The National Register nomination for the mill and the William J. Fowler House, also circa 1875, can be found in its entirety here: <https://npgallery.nps.gov/GetAsset/84ad290e-1a76-43f8-b2c9-95819c1cdeb2>. The current owner’s mother, Rhea Ghormley Alexander, was the driving force behind the completion of the National Register nomination. The nomination was entered into the National Register in 1983.

<sup>2</sup> The Appalachian Region Commission (ARC) uses an index-based county economic classification system to monitor the economic status of Appalachian counties. The classes in the system include, in order from worst to best: distressed, at-risk, transitional, competitive, and attainment. To be an at-risk county is to rank between the worst 10 percent and 25 percent of counties in the United States. This index uses three indicators to determine the rankings: per capita market income, poverty rate, and three-year unemployment rate. As of 2021, Tennessee has 9 distressed counties, 30 at-risk counties, 50 transitional counties, 5 competitive counties, and 1 attainment county. For more information on distressed counties in Tennessee and the ARC, see “Classifying Economic Distress in Appalachian Counties,” Appalachian Region

### A Legacy of Milling for the Community

Fowler's Mill is still a functional mill. Mills used to be found on many farms in East Tennessee that owned land next to streams or rivers. Mill buildings and their operators formed a vital part of the communities they occupied and often served as a focal point for the establishment of a decentralized rural community. Indeed, as Carroll Van West notes in *Tennessee Agriculture: A Century Farms Perspective*, a mill was often the first sign that the local farmers intended to settle in an area permanently.<sup>3</sup> Mills did not often commit to one type of production alone, instead engaging in multiple enterprises, with the most popular type being saw and grist mills. Saw and grist mills were critical to the survival of any rural community. Sawmills provided farmers rough cut lumber with which to build their homesteads and agricultural outbuildings, while grist mills processed grains such as corn and wheat for farmers to take to market.<sup>4</sup>

The appearance of a mill depended on location, type of production, and the wheel used to power the mill itself. There are six primary types of mill wheel: undershot, horizontal, overshot, pitch-back, breast, and flutter wheels. These wheels remained popular until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century when turbines replaced wheels in mills because turbines were more efficient. For many people, the image that comes to mind when they think of a mill is a two-story, picturesque structure with either an undershot or overshot

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Commission, <https://www.arc.gov/classifying-economic-distress-in-appalachian-counties/>, and "Distressed Counties," Transparent Tennessee, <https://www.tn.gov/transparenttn/state-financial-overview/openecd/openecd/tneecd-performance-metrics/openecd-long-term-objectives-quick-stats/distressed-counties.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Carroll Van West, *Tennessee Agriculture: A Century Farms Perspective* (Nashville: Tennessee Department of Agriculture, 1986) p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> West, *Tennessee Agriculture*, p. 13.

wheel. However, many mills are simple utilitarian structures that are little more than long rectangular buildings. This was especially common for mills that were built in the 19th century or served as a sawmill.<sup>5</sup>

Hugh Kelso, the father of the founder Charles Kelso, started the family tradition of milling in the Kelso and Fowler families. Not much is known about his early life except what can be reconstructed through genealogical records. Hugh Kelso was born in Augusta County, Virginia, in 1760.<sup>6</sup> His tombstone is in Robertson Cemetery, the family cemetery of the Kelso/Fowler families. The cemetery is located near Fowler Farm and Fowler's Mill on Loudon Road. The tombstone indicates that Kelso served as Captain of the Washington County North Carolina Militia during the Revolutionary War.<sup>7</sup> After the conclusion of the war, Hugh Kelso received a land grant on May 25, 1810. The land grant allocated to him 252 acres in Blount County, Tennessee.<sup>8</sup> Here the records differ, as by the time he received the land grant in Blount County, Hugh had already been living in Jefferson County, Tennessee, since 1800 with his son Charles.<sup>9</sup> Charles was born in March 1786, and his mother Katherine died three years after he was born in 1789.<sup>10</sup>

Though the records may present a confusing timeline, it is known that Hugh began his first milling operation while living in Blount County. In May of 1800, Hugh

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<sup>5</sup> For a more complete treatise on mills, see David Larkin, *Mill: The History and Future of Naturally Powered Buildings* (New York: Universe Publishing, 2000). Larkin covers the history of mills and discusses in significantly more depth how these buildings work, what they look like, and where you can find representative examples of each type of mill in the United States.

<sup>6</sup> Ancestry.com, "U.S., Find a Grave Index, 1600s-Current," *Ancestry.com Operations, Inc.*

<sup>7</sup> Ancestry.com, "U.S., Find a Grave Index, 1600s-Current," *Ancestry.com Operations, Inc.*

<sup>8</sup> North Carolina and Tennessee, Early Land Records, 1753-1931, roll 57, book 2, *Ancestry.com Operations, Inc.*

<sup>9</sup> Tennessee, Early Tax List Records, 1783-1895, p 149, *Ancestry.com Operations, Inc.*

<sup>10</sup> 1850 United States Federal Census, District 4, Monroe, Tennessee, roll M432\_891, p 30a, image 64, *Ancestry.com Operations, Inc.*



purchased 640 acres at the mouth of Baker's Creek. Family tradition suggests the family constructed a mill on land near Baker's Creek in Morganton, Tennessee, between 1793-1801.<sup>11</sup> Blount County Court Minutes provide weight to this claim in a 1799 entry that allowed Hugh Kelso to "build on Baker's Creek at or near the mouth thereof, he being the owner of the land on each side of said creek."<sup>12</sup> Though not much is known about the early milling operation, an advertisement published by the *Knoxville Register* on January 11, 1820, may provide a clue. The advertisement refers to a mill, tannery, and accompanying homestead listed for sale by Charles Kelso:

For Sale: The subscriber has for sale, in Morganton, Blount County, a tan yard, with one pool, one bait, and six vats, together with a good framed bark house, and bark mill. Also, a new framed house two stories high with good brick chimney, which he will sell low for cash down, or on a short credit. Any person wishing to purchase can apply to Charles Kelso in Morganton or myself. John Torbet, Dec. 14<sup>th</sup>.<sup>13</sup>

A bark mill is a mill constructed for the purpose of grinding and preparing bark for the leathermaking process.<sup>14</sup> The presence of a bark house, tan yard, pool, bait, and vat all reinforce that Hugh Kelso's early milling operation dedicated itself to the production of leather. Though perhaps not as central to the community as a saw or grist

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<sup>11</sup> Rhea Ghormley Alexander and Lloyd Ostby, "William J., Fowler, Mill and House," National Register Nomination Form, Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, 1982.

<sup>12</sup> Loretta Ettien Lautzenheiser, "The Brainerd Mill and the Tellico Mills: The Development of Water Milling in the East Tennessee Valley" (PhD dissertation, University of Tennessee Knoxville, 1986), p 48. It should also be noted that a photograph linked to this first mill uploaded to Ancestry.com suggest that it was built in 1796 and was located on the Tennessee River.

<sup>13</sup> *Knoxville Register* (Knoxville, TN), January 11, 1820.

<sup>14</sup> This process of tanning is an ancient one. First the tanner would obtain bark from trees. The type of bark obtained often depended upon the tanner's needs, availability, and desired color. After the bark is ground up, it is submerged in boiling water. The tanner would then stir the water and let it sit for a couple weeks. The water will naturally draw out the tanning from the wood. This mixture is then drained through a strain, which separates the bark mixture from the tannin. This tannin is then used during the leatherworking process.

mill, the production of good quality leather would have been very important for those settling in and around the Baker's Creek area.<sup>15</sup>

At some point Hugh decided to move from Blount County to nearby Monroe County. On September 14, 1814, Hugh and Charles Kelso sold thirty-one acres that now contain the town of Morganton for \$10,000, making quite a profit given that he only paid \$600 for the full 640 acres in 1800.<sup>16</sup> The exact sale date of the mill and the homestead is unknown. In her dissertation, "The Brainerd Mill and the Tellico Mills: The Development of Water Milling in the East Tennessee Valley," Loretta Ettien Lautzenheiser states that the Kelsos sold the mill to persons named Cobb and Pain in 1818 for \$2,000.<sup>17</sup> Lautzenheiser's information contradicts the *Knoxville Register* article, which indicated that the mill remained unsold in January of 1820. Though the exact sale date remains unknown, the 1830 U.S. Census shows that by 1830 Charles Kelso, now forty-four, lived in Monroe County.<sup>18</sup> Hugh Kelso died a year prior in 1829 and was buried in Robertson Cemetery.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Peter C. Welsh, "A Craft that Resisted Change: American Tanning Practices to 1850," *Technology and Culture* Vol. 4, No. 3 (1963): pp. 299-317. The importance of leather crafting and tanning to early Americans is explored in great detail by Peter C. Welsh. Welsh describes how good tanners and leather crafters were in high demand in America, particularly prior to and immediately after the Revolutionary War. Therefore, gifted tanners were able to accumulate wealth and became fixtures of their communities, particularly if they are located in a city. In the South, many of the best tanneries were located on plantations, though the best leathers were produced in England and then brought to America. Interestingly, the author argues that "do-it-yourself" books such as Edward Hazen's *Panorama of Professions and Trades*, the *Book of Trades* (1807), and Thomas Martin's *Circle of the Mechanical Arts* (1813) were one of the primary vehicles that transported the process of tanning to America. The other primary vehicle being of course, firsthand experience. It is likely that Kelso brought firsthand experience with him and that, due to his relatively isolated location, likely never saw the same degree of success that a tanner in a city might see.

<sup>16</sup> Lautzenheiser, "The Brainerd Mill and the Tellico Mills," p 49.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> 1830 United States Federal Census, Regiment 67, Monroe, Tennessee, series M19, roll 175, p 101, family history library film 0024533, *Ancestry.com Operations, Inc.*

<sup>19</sup> Ancestry.com, "U.S., Find a Grave Index, 1600s-Current," *Ancestry.com Operations, Inc.*

Charles Kelso and his wife Elizabeth Hall were already involved in milling before the death of Charles' father in 1829. Family tradition states that the family constructed a new grist and saw mill on Fork Creek sometime between 1793 and 1801.<sup>20</sup> Fork Creek is the same creek that provides power to the current Fowler's Mill. However, local newspapers or other sources do not refer to a Kelso mill in Monroe County. Indeed, little documentation of Charles and Elizabeth's milling activities exists. In contrast, their status as landowners and agricultural producers is documented through the Century Farm application for the Fowler Farm. The application lists Charles and Elizabeth as owning four to five thousand acres.<sup>21</sup> They and their eight children lived on the property and produced corn, wheat, hay, oats, cattle, horses, mules, and hogs.

Like many others in the southern United States, Charles Kelso and his family enslaved African Americans and used their labor to run the farm. The 1850 U.S. Federal Census Slave Schedules document the lives of the enslaved people who worked on the Kelso farm. In the 1850 Census, Charles Kelso owned a total of eight slaves, including a forty-four-year-old female, a forty-three-year-old male, a forty-year-old male, a twenty-year-old female, a nine-year-old male, an eight-year-old female, a seven-year-old female, and a three-year-old female.<sup>22</sup> The death of Charles Kelso on April 25, 1854, and his last will and testament further documents the lives of the enslaved on the Fowler's Mill and surrounding property:

I give and bequeath unto my wife Elizabeth five negros named Peter, James, Maria, Bill, and a child Elick during her natural life and at the

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<sup>20</sup> Alexander and Ostby, "William J., Fowler, Mill and House," National Register Nomination Form.

<sup>21</sup> Fowler Farm Century Farm Application, Tennessee Century Farms Program, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

<sup>22</sup> 1850 United States Federal Census – Slave Schedules, *Ancestry.com Operations, Inc.*

death of my wife I desire all said negros be equally divided among all my children ...<sup>23</sup>

Following Charles's death, his wife Elizabeth and daughter Mary J. Kelso inherited the enslaved people listed in Charles' will and subsequently increased the total number of people enslaved by the family. The 1860 U.S. Federal Census Slave Schedule reveals that Elizabeth enslaved eight people, including a fifty-eight-year-old male, a fifty-six-year-old female, a thirty-year-old female, a twenty-one-year-old male, a twelve-year-old male, an eleven-year-old female, a four-year-old female, and a baby boy. In the same schedule, Mary J. Kelso is listed as owning a nineteen-year-old male, a nineteen-year-old female, and an eleven-year-old female.<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately, not much is known about the enslaved on the property beyond their ages and some of their names. Comparing the ages listed in the 1850 and 1860 Slave Schedule with Charles's will seems to indicate that Peter, James, Maria, Bill, and Elick remained on the farm and were not separated following Charles's death. Though it is unclear if it was the case with the Kelsos, enslaved African Americans often constructed farm buildings and ran their owners' businesses, such as milling or blacksmithing.

Charles, Elizabeth, and their children experienced first-hand the destruction caused by the Civil War. For four years, the Civil War divided the nation and American families, and many rural farming families saw violence and conflict. The owners of the Fowler Farm and their families were no exception, as made apparent by an article from the *Madisonville Democrat* on April 1, 1942. The article details an episode involving a

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<sup>23</sup> Tennessee, Wills and Probate Records, 1779-2008, Will Books, 1825-1869, Monroe County, Tennessee, *Ancestry.com Operations, Inc.*

<sup>24</sup> 1860 U.S. Federal Census - Slave Schedules, *Ancestry.com Operations, Inc.*

certain John Duncan, a “notorious bushwacker” in the Monroe County area. Duncan and a group of men raided the home of Mary J. Kelso and her husband, William J. Fowler. Wiley Kelso, the brother of Mary and the son of Charles and Elizabeth, wrote the Union general headquartered at Loudon about the incident. The article described Wiley as a “union man.” After receiving the letter, the general sent a squad of men out to Piney where Duncan lived and killed him. The article says that Duncan “fell in the lap of a woman who was wearing one of Mother Fowler’s [Mary J. Kelso] silk dresses, stolen the night the band had entered the house.”<sup>25</sup> The story illustrates the violence and complex nature of the Civil War as it unfolded on farms and in rural communities across the South. The Fowler Century Farm application reinforces the point: “A good bit of trouble with people who took no stand in the war, but who threatened, ravaged and plundered landowners.”<sup>26</sup>

With the death of Mary J. Kelso’s mother Elizabeth in 1869, Mary and her husband, William J. Fowler, became the next generation of millers to own and operate the farm.<sup>27</sup> William J. Fowler was a somewhat prominent person in the surrounding community. Though he previously lived on his family’s farm, Fowler relocated to Mary Kelso’s farm after their marriage in 1839. William served as a member of the Tennessee State Legislature in 1874 and again in 1886. William also strongly supported prohibition.<sup>28</sup> In addition to his time as a statesman, William J. Fowler helped found

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<sup>25</sup> “GEORGE MONTGOMERY MURDERED,” *Madisonville Democrat* (Madisonville, TN), April 1st, 1942.

<sup>26</sup> Fowler Farm Century Farm Application.

<sup>27</sup> Tennessee, Wills and Probate Records, 1779-2008, Miscellaneous Probate Records, 1853-1941, Monroe County, Tennessee, p. 110, *Ancestry.com Operations, Inc.*

<sup>28</sup> *Goodspeed History of Tennessee, Containing Historical and Biographical Sketches of Thirty East Tennessee Counties* (Nashville: The Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1887), p. 998.

Tulogahler College, which was located on the southern bank of Fork Creek, in 1878. Fowler donated the site and erected the first building.<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, the site of the college could not be confirmed during fieldwork, though one would surmise that it should be located fairly close to the mill and the William J. Fowler House, which are also located on Fork Creek.

William J. and Mary Kelso Fowler built the current mill on Fork Creek. Family tradition states that three prior mills stood on the same site as the current Fowler's Mill building. The current building was only constructed after a severe flood destroyed the last Kelso Mill in 1875. Curiously, no mention is made of either the construction or the destruction of any Kelso or Fowler mills. William J. Fowler and his descendants ran the mill until it the family sold the mill to Samuel E. Ghormley in 1937.<sup>30</sup> William J. Fowler died on October 1, 1916, and Mary J. Kelso died on May 15, 1919.<sup>31</sup> Upon his death, William J. Fowler was described as a "highly esteemed citizen of Philadelphia, Tenn." in the *Chattanooga Daily Times*.<sup>32</sup>

A letter uploaded to TNGenWeb.com and attributed to Bessie Gerding, one of the daughters of William J. Fowler and Mary J. Kelso, sheds some light on the mill and the property after the death of William and Mary. Dated November 16, 1928, and directed to a certain Elisa, Bessie's letter discusses William E. Fowler, the son of William and Mary, and his tenure at the mill and farm. William owned and ran the general store on the Fowler's Mill complex. However, the author indicates that between taking care of his

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<sup>29</sup> *The Republican Chronicle* (Knoxville, TN), May 14th, p 3, *Newspapers.com*.

<sup>30</sup> Alexander and Ostby, "William J., Fowler, Mill and House," National Register Nomination Form.

<sup>31</sup> Ancestry.com, "U.S., Find a Grave Index, 1600s-Current," *Ancestry.com Operations, Inc.*

<sup>32</sup> *Chattanooga Daily Times* (Chattanooga, TN), October 4th, 1916, p 3, *Newspapers.com*.

mother and father, in addition to his own family's feeding and expenses, William became inundated with debt. William's financial problems were further compounded by the burning of the store and the resultant loss of several thousand dollars of goods. The losses and accumulated debt resulted in the farm being mortgaged and the decline of William's health. Indeed, the author goes on to say that "this financial trouble and a chronic stomach trouble of several years standing caused his last illness." William E. Fowler died in 1927.<sup>33</sup> Though the source and authenticity of the letter cannot be proved, the dates and names mentioned in the letter align with Fowler and Kelso family history. The aforementioned letter cites William as having three daughters and two sons. The number of children is an exact match for William E. Fowler's genealogical records. Additionally, the letter indicates that William's oldest daughter was named Sara, which is also a direct match with census records and genealogical research.

In the 1980s, Samuel Ghormley's daughter, Rhea Ghormley Alexander, spearheaded a restoration of the mill to working order. At the time of the National Register nomination written by Rhea in 1982, the mill was under restoration by millwrights "who have worked extensively with historic buildings."<sup>34</sup> The need for restoration began after Fowler's Mill sustained damage from the flooding of Fork Creek.

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<sup>33</sup> Tennessee, Death Records, 1908-1958, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, roll number 3, *Ancestry.com Operations, Inc.*

<sup>34</sup> Alexander and Ostby, "William J., Fowler, Mill and House," National Register Nomination Form.





*Figure 32: Fowler's Mill, August 13, 2019. Image courtesy of the Center for Historic Preservation.*



*Figure 33: The dam at Fowler's Mill, August 13, 2019. Image courtesy of the Center for Historic Preservation.*





*Figure 34: The porch at Fowler's Mill, facing east, August 13, 2019. Image courtesy of the Center for Historic Preservation.*



*Figure 35: Historic machinery within Fowler's Mill, August 13, 2019. Image courtesy of the Center for Historic Preservation.*





*Figure 36: The general store located on the Fowler's Mill complex, August 13, 2019. Image courtesy of the Center for Historic Preservation.*



*Figure 37: The William J. Fowler House, August 13, 2019. Image courtesy of the Center for Historic Preservation.*

After the completion of restoration efforts, Fowler's Mill became one of, if not the only, working mill in Monroe County. Her son, Bill Alexander, is now the owner and operator of the Fowler Farm and Fowler's Mill, with his sister owning the plot of land upon which the William J. Fowler House sits. He currently engages in raising livestock and growing hay.

There can be little doubt that the history of the farm and its family is complex and encompasses many different periods and themes in Tennessee's history. However, the question of "why does this site matter" still remains. Answering this question reveals what makes the site significant, and also informs preservation methods for the site. Fowler's Mill and the Fowler Farm are important historically because they are representative of Tennessee agricultural and milling history. Mills were important fixtures of both the economic and cultural life of the communities they inhabited. They were deemed so important that they were even featured in Tennessee Supreme Court cases. Tennessee adopted a 1777 North Carolina statute about mills that declared "every water-grist mill which shall hereafter be built, that shall at any time grind for toll, shall be held and deemed, and is hereby declared to be a public mill."<sup>35</sup> The court case *Philips v. Stocket* (1806) also reinforces the view of the law that mills are a public good. In the ruling, one judge made the observation that "mills are a public benefit, and we should not therefore discourage the building [of] them."<sup>36</sup> Thus the highest court in Tennessee considered mills in the state to be vital, public resources.

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<sup>35</sup> James W. Ely, et al., *A History of the Tennessee Supreme Court* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2002), p 44.

<sup>36</sup> Ely, et al., *A History of the Tennessee Supreme Court*, p 45.

In her dissertation “The Brainerd Mill and the Tellico Mills: The Development of Water Milling in the East Tennessee Valley,” Loretta Ettien Lautzenheiser also addresses the issue of mills and their importance in Tennessee. Lautzenheiser writes that “the availability of mills, and in the East Tennessee region, of water-powered mills, indicated to some extent the productivity of an area.” Additionally, Lautzenheiser notes that mills often disrupted traditional patterns of settlement. Rather than attracting people to a town, mills attracted people to an area, which led to the establishment of farming communities over towns because settlers, many of whom were farmers, could be “assured of having their grains ground” by the mill.<sup>37</sup> Though the following data is from Blount County, Lautzenheiser also found that “licenses obtained during the period 1793-1804 to operate mills were overwhelmingly granted for grist mills. Permission to construct mills was granted for 12 grist mills, 10 (unspecified) mills, three grist mills and saw mills, and one sawmill.”<sup>38</sup> In addition to guiding settlement and attracting settlers, mills often dictated the advancement of physical infrastructure and were used as points of reference for new roads. Indeed, many county roads throughout East Tennessee are named for the mills that stood along them.<sup>39</sup>

Sources available to us illustrate that Fowler’s Mill is representative of these broader trends of Tennessee mills. An article by the *Tri-Weekly Nashville Union* published proposals for U.S. Postal Service routes in 1842. One of the routes mentions the mill for the once-a-week route between Philadelphia and Franklin.<sup>40</sup> Fowler’s Mill is

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<sup>37</sup> Lautzenheiser, “The Brainerd Mill and the Tellico Mills,” p 7.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p 30.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p 8.

<sup>40</sup> *Tri-Weekly Nashville Union* (Nashville, Tennessee), March 24th, 1842, p 4, *Newspapers.com*.

also mentioned in the Acts of the Tennessee Fifty-Sixth General Assembly of 1909. During the assembly meeting, legislators proposed state routes that needed to be improved or constructed. Fowler's Mill was the recipient of a new road that went directly to it as a result of the hearing.<sup>41</sup> In a time where road improvements were not that common or rarely approved, the approval of the road emphasizes the importance of Fowler's Mill in the area and in the community. Both these sources illustrate that Fowler's Mill served as a prominent place and waypoint in Monroe County.

The mill and its milling family also played an important role in the social life of the surrounding community. As mentioned earlier in the section, the owners of Fowler's Mill took an interest in state politics and the community, with William J. Fowler serving as a Tennessee legislator in addition to helping found Tulogahler College. The actual mill building itself also fostered community development. The *Knoxville Sentinel* reported in 1921 that "several of our young folk attended a dance given at Fowler's Mill on Monday night."<sup>42</sup> More recently, as recollected by current owner Bill Alexander, jazz bands from Chattanooga played at the mill while people danced and socialized.

The Fowler's Mill complex is also significant because it represents an agricultural landscape that illustrates the history and evolution of Tennessee agricultural production and consumption. Hugh and Charles Kelso's founding and subsequent running of several family grist mills, both in Blount and Monroe Counties, are representative of some early settlers' desire to not only meet their own needs, but to make money through commercial ventures. Tennessee's early rural families strove to be self-sufficient and produce as

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<sup>41</sup> *Acts of the State of Tennessee Passed by the Fifty-Sixth General Assembly, 1909* (Nashville, TN.: McQuiddy Printing Company), p 245.

<sup>42</sup> *Knoxville Sentinel* (Knoxville, Tennessee), July 7th, 1921, p 10, *Newspapers.com*.

much everyday-consumption items as they could by themselves. Thus, crops like corn, which required very little work in new fields, and animals like swine, which provided for themselves in the forest, became popular choices for early settlers. Those agricultural products were also good for market exchanges, and settlers soon looked for agricultural opportunities to supplement the family income.<sup>43</sup>

After the Civil War, the operation and production of the mill became crucial. The mill is rare example of a post-Civil War saw and grist mill and an intact landscape of agricultural work and commerce. The National Register nomination for the property completed in 1982 suggested that Fowler's Mill was the only active mill in Monroe County and one of the county's four known surviving mills.<sup>44</sup> In 2021, Fowler's Mill remains the only working mill in Monroe County. The William J. Fowler House, the general store, the mill building, the old William E. Fowler house, and the surrounding natural landscape all convey the context of the place as it would have been during the period of W. J. Fowler's residency.

#### Preservation Concerns for Fowler's Mill and Fowler Farm

There are multiple preservation concerns that threaten the farm and mill's ability to continue operating. Some of these issues are repairs that require little time and money, such as clearing away vegetation from around the mill building or replacing the odd piece of weatherboard here and there. The old general store and nearby residence also need varying degrees of restoration. Perhaps the most expensive, and most specialized, part of

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<sup>43</sup> Donald L. Winters, "Agriculture," *Tennessee Encyclopedia*, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2018.

<sup>44</sup> Alexander and Ostby, "William J., Fowler, Mill and House," National Register Nomination Form.

preserving Fowler's Mill is the inner workings of the mill itself. Though the turbine is much smaller and less conspicuous than the more widely recognized over and undershot wheels, it is by no means easy for the average person to maintain. Maintenance and repair of mills are often conducted by millwrights, that is those individuals who specialized in the building, repair, and maintenance of mills. Indeed, the restoration of Fowler's Mill occurred before the completion of the National Register. However, locating a millwright who can work on the mill may be difficult, largely due to the disappearance of the mill from the cultural landscape of Tennessee. Though identifying someone who is qualified to work on a mill can be mitigated somewhat by the identification of important groups who have access to information on the subject (such as the Society for the Preservation of Old Mills, SPOOM for short), the issue then becomes, how much money would such a repair cost? Are there even parts available, or will they have to be fabricated? If the costs are exceptionally high, it can be a struggle to keep the mill running. In the case of no millwrights and high costs, it is true that the owner of Fowler's Mill could acquire repair knowledge from secondary sources, essentially teaching themselves how to do it. However, such an approach still consumes time, money, and physical labor, something that is already on short supply for a farmer who operates a farm in addition to the mill.<sup>45</sup>

Compounding all these preservation concerns is the isolated location of the Fowler Farm and Fowler's Mill in an "at risk" Appalachian county. Extra planning and

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<sup>45</sup> The owner spent much time discussing the time consumption of basic tasks during fieldwork. He used a hay rake as an example. When preparing to rake hay, the farmer organized his work day around waiting long enough for the hay to dry so that he could rake it. Thus, he spent the morning doing work around the farm until mid-afternoon, when the hay was dry enough to rake. However, thirty minutes in and he lost several rake teeth to a stray branch. As a result, he had to replace the teeth, extending the time it took him to rake the hay and setting him back on farm work. This incidental time cost is one that every farmer faces during the week, but one that cannot be counted upon in a day.

networking are going to be critical for generating business in such an area. The only way to the mill is by highway, with the nearest interstate being roughly fifteen minutes away. However, even here there is an opportunity for Fowler's Mill. By car, the mill is an hour away from Knoxville, and an hour and a half away from Pigeon Forge and Chattanooga. Thus while the property is isolated, its proximity to these population centers and popular tourist destinations offers possibilities.

Climate change is also a preservation challenge.<sup>46</sup> As the severity of weather events continues to grow in Tennessee and across the United States, Fowler's Mill finds itself particularly at the mercy of these weather events.<sup>47</sup> The flooding of Fork Creek carries debris that catches and accumulates on the concrete dam and the creek banks. As evident in the selected photographs, debris can be of significant size. As the debris accumulates, extra stress is exerted on the structure. The debris can also catch even more debris. Significant erosion is also visible on the William J. Fowler House side of Fork

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<sup>46</sup> Climate change has been a part of historic preservation for some years now, though as the climate continues to worsen and preservationists move from a building's first approach to one that considers cultural landscapes and natural conservation, discussion of climate change has become more common. Unfortunately, the reality and severity of climate change continues to be disputed in public despite the preponderance of evidence that suggests it is a real problem that is going to worsen as time goes on. This debate rages as intense weather and other unseasonal weather events continues to escalate in both Tennessee and across the United States. Covering global warming and climate change here is a decision based on organization: Fowler's Mill features a rural resource that 1) demonstrates visibly the effects of climate change and 2) is completely at the mercy of severe weather events, in this case flooding. Thus, it should not be assumed that global warming is not a threat to the other rural resources and farms in this dissertation. Indeed, the long-term effects of global warming are likely to spawn a new, and much more devastating, wave of preservation concerns in the coming years.

<sup>47</sup> Indeed, even as I write this chapter, the flooding of Humphreys County and accompanying devastation on Saturday, August 21st, 2021 continues to reverberate across the state of Tennessee. More than fifteen inches of rain fell on the county, resulting in catastrophic flooding of Humphreys County, with the hardest hit being Waverly, Tennessee. Twenty people died in this flood, with many others missing. The loss of human life was also accompanied by the loss of possession, including houses and personal possessions. As the climate continues to change, severe and extreme weather patterns such as this are more likely to become the norm. For a cultural resource such as Fowler's Mill, the relative commonality of flooding and severe weather cells in Tennessee can spell disaster.



Creek. While the author could not access the headrace and bank next to the Fowler's Mill building, it can be extrapolated that issues of floodwater debris accumulation and erosion are likely present there as well.

Flooding certainly creates issues, but as intense nature related events continue to occur, the stability of the mill itself is also going to be in question. History shows that the original Fowler's Mill building which stood at that site was already swept away by a flood. Of course, it should be noted that flooding can occur at any time, and that it may not happen as a result of a climate change-related event. However, as the effects of climate change worsen, historical buildings located near a body of water may face new difficulties.<sup>48</sup>

#### Preservation Recommendations for Fowler's Mill

The preservation recommendations made for Fowler's Mill are rooted in the singular goal of keeping the mill and farm in operation. The best way to preserve the mill and farm as an operating agricultural landscape is to engage in heritage tourism strategies, promote agritourism, and engage in the farm-to-table movement. The first preservation recommendation is to develop a heritage tourism plan. Though a powerful tool in rural preservation's arsenal, it is also intensely situational and personal to the site. It can be overwhelming thinking about how to start the process, and envision its different

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<sup>48</sup> Though not near a creek, this process is already beginning in places that have historical buildings threatened by rising water levels or intense flooding. In February 2020, Wolfe House & Building Movers lifted a circa 1857, 3,900-square-foot, 360-ton, triple-brick building eight feet in Charleston to reduce the risk of flooding. In 2019, the building flooded 89 times, breaking the record of 58 times in 2015.



*Figure 38: Debris that has accumulated on the Fowler's Mill dam, August 13, 2019. Image courtesy of the Center for Historic Preservation.*



*Figure 39: This image captures some of the erosion taking place on the side of the dam near the William J. Fowler house, August 13, 2019. Image courtesy of the Center for Historic Preservation.*





Figure 40: A group of slides depicting the damage that the Fowler Mill sustained during the flood. Image courtesy of the Alexander family.



Figure 41: Another group of slides depicting flood damage. Image courtesy of the Alexander family.

stages. The University of Tennessee's "Planning today for Tomorrow's Farms," emphasizes that the heritage tourism process (and, for that matter, any other process involving the farm or rural resources) should begin at the kitchen table. Personal disagreements, competing visions, and familial fallouts have spelled doom for many farms and rural resources, a sentiment seen both first-hand and through extensive conversations with farm owners during fieldwork and case studies. The involvement of all interested shareholders at the beginning is the foundation for rural preservation, and forgoing this simple fact will at best cause a headache in the future, and at worst can result in the loss of the rural resource. Questions such as who is interested in preserving the farm, what is the farm's main focus, and what the farm should be in the future need to be asked. Recording these conversations or insights is going to be important, as they will essentially help decide the direction of the farm and any heritage tourism, agritourism, or other rural preservation strategies (such as involvement with land trusts, farm-to-table, or shift in agricultural production).

In the author's experience, the owner should be ready for the complete unwillingness of interested parties to participate. Unwillingness to participate can take the form of the parties excluding themselves from the meeting(s) or objecting unilaterally to any suggested changes. While neither occurrence is pleasant to deal with, the latter poses the greatest danger to rural preservation, particularly if the ones objecting holds a real stake in the farm or the resource. The initial planning meeting is going to be important in determining where to give, and take, with the preservation process, and without input it is going to be impossible to determine the best course of action. Therefore, it is highly recommended that the owner decide what they are going to do if they encounter this issue

before they call the meeting. Here is where personal knowledge is more important than any knowledge the author can offer, because the author cannot know the individual circumstance of each family. Sometimes the problem's solution can be simple, such as shifting the location of a heritage tourism-related building to a different field, or not clear cutting a certain part of the woods for extra money. In other cases, the only way to solve the problem is with a wholesale buyout of the interested party's stake in the farm or rural resource, if they are even willing to sell. It should also be noted that the planning process is made infinitely harder when the main driver behind the preservation of a rural resource is not the owner at all or someone who has no actual legal stake in the property. All that person can do then is follow these steps and understand that in the current state rural preservation is in, ownership will ultimately dictate a rural resource's destiny.

After the interested parties meet (or series of meetings, if need be), the next step in the heritage tourism development process should be evaluating what existing resources you have available to you, beginning locally, and then scaling upwards. Specifically, the owner will need to look at the cultural and economic landscape surrounding them. Most assume that money and assistance from higher levels of government are the answer to rural preservation issues. While legislation can determine benefits and support for rural preservation, it is neither as reliable or consistent a source as the partnerships and networks formed locally.<sup>49</sup>

So how does theory translate into reality in the case of Fowler's Mill and the Fowler Farm? First, it is important to take a look at the cultural landscape. Locally, one

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<sup>49</sup> Samuel Stokes' *Saving America's Countryside* and Randall Arendt's *Rural by Design: Planning for Town and Country* both emphasize this critical component of rural preservation.

of the mill and farm's strongest potential partners is the Tennessee Overhill Heritage Association (TOHA). TOHA began in 1990 when counties in Tennessee, including McMinn, Monroe, and Polk, were selected as pilot areas for the National Trust for Historic Preservation's "Heritage Tourism Initiative." TOHA's vision was to build a tourist program in the area that "honored local history, traditions, culture, and natural resources." The NTHP and Tennessee Department of Tourism administered TOHA for the first three years of its existence. Now, it is a 501-3c non-profit organization.<sup>50</sup>

TOHA's goals are to increase visitation to the region, provide educational tools for a variety of audiences, act as a catalyst for economic development in the area, and strengthen local capacity for historical development and cultural resource management. The organization's work and projects reflect this goal. TOHA has partnered with a number of cultural institutions in the area such as historic sites, natural areas, and even farms and markets. These partnerships take a variety of forms, but perhaps the underlying unifying factor is that TOHA provides an umbrella under which these cultural resources are advertised and provides guidance on possible activities at historic sites.<sup>51</sup>

TOHA is an ideal organization for Fowler's Mill and a valuable resource for the development of its heritage tourism network. TOHA can provide Fowler's Mill and the Fowler Farm some of the most accurate data and outlook on the cultural resource landscape of the area and the ways in which organizations can interface and interact with the local community and tourist population. Equipped with TOHA's information,

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<sup>50</sup> "About," *Tennessee Overhill; McMinn, Monroe, Polk*, <https://tennesseeoverhill.com/about-tennessee-overhill-heritage-association-toha/>, accessed 11.4.2019.

<sup>51</sup> "Mission and Guiding Principles," *Tennessee Overhill; McMinn, Monroe, Polk*, <https://tennesseeoverhill.com/about-tennessee-overhill-heritage-association-toha/mission-guiding-principles/>, accessed 11.4.2019.



Fowler's Mill can then make informed decisions on heritage tourism and agritourism planning. TOHA can also provide a platform by which Fowler's Mill can advertise its presence to the surrounding community, and the organization can put Fowler's Mill in touch with other, similar cultural institutions.

While TOHA is a valuable resource for gauging the cultural landscape of the area and the ways in which Fowler's Mill can fit into that landscape, part of heritage tourism planning is also evaluating the economic landscape of the area. If Fowler's Mill and the Fowler Farm plan on becoming a heritage tourism site, costs incurred will need to be accounted for and factored into the planning process. Here again it is important to view local resources, and for Fowler's Mill those resources are the East Tennessee Development District and the East Tennessee Division of the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development. The ETDD is an association of municipal and county governments located in the mid-east region of Tennessee. The ETDD provides sixteen counties and fifty-six municipalities with planning and development services, in addition to serving as a forum for discussing and solving problems associated with economic development and growth. The East Tennessee Division of the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development, on the other hand, can help Fowler's Mill take advantage of Tennessee's focus on driving tourism-related revenue and traffic into the state.

Agritourism is certainly a viable option for Fowler's Mill, especially given its long association with the Fowler Farm, a Tennessee Century Farm. There are two important considerations, that of time and money. Farming is a full-time job, one that consumes a large amount of money and capital. When starting an agritourism business, the owner of the farm would essentially be adding another full-time job. The question



then becomes, can the owner split his time between farming and running an agribusiness? Equally important is considering the monetary costs of agritourism. Determining how much it would cost to implement the agritourism plan and how much would it cost to market and advertise the owner's agritourism industry is important to understand before implementing the process.

One example of a possible agritourism venture at Fowler's Mill is for the site to host "grinding days." Grinding days take into consideration the farmer's time, the well-being of the resource, and the financial need that faces rural property owners. Unlike other examples of more involved agritourism, hosting a grinding day does not require a large amount of the owner's time except for the day of the event. Likewise, grinding days play to the strength of the site as the only operable mill in the county, and provides an opportunity for additional income. While the income may not initially offset the costs of the agritourism business, over time as the event becomes more popular, the owner may see a sizeable return on investment.

One success story is Prater's Mill in Varnell, Georgia. Prater's Mill is a National Register-listed building. In 1971, Prater's Mill began raising funds for the restoration of its mill. Turning to the surrounding community, owners began the annual Prater's Mill County Fair that same year. Though it started with humble beginnings, the fair now boasts more than two hundred talented artists and craftsmen who create their items by hand from natural materials. Local craftsmen then sell their wares and demonstrate their crafting methods to fair visitors. There is also live music played during the fair. Visitors are taken on tours of the mill and are shown how the mill works. Adult admission is \$7.00 per head. Additionally, Prater's Mill has designated grinding days on which

farmers and other individuals can bring their products to be ground at the mill. The limited availability of these dates ensures that overhead costs are low, that the mill is still being used, that there is some form of income, and that the mill continues to serve the community.

#### Conclusion: Fowler Mill and Farm's Contribution to Rural Preservation Scholarship

The Fowler's Mill and Farm case study is valuable in that it proves many of the tried-and-true rural preservation methods continue to work and provide the best options for those wanting to preserve their rural resources. The use of local networks first, rather than a reliance on state or federal programs and legislation, echoes what Stokes and Arendt say in their seminal works. Likewise, the case study finds that previously published guides and workbooks by organizations like The University of Tennessee's Extension Service on estate planning and agritourism continue to be relevant in rural preservation as guidebooks.

The case study of Fowler's Mill and the Fowler Farm also reveal that the responsibility of preserving isolated rural resources largely falls to the owner of the rural resource. When we visited with the owner of Fowler's Mill, he believed, like many other owners encountered during fieldwork, that there was a large sum of state or federal money sitting somewhere that could be used for the preservation of historic sites across the state, including the mill. The owner's belief came from an assumption that since the building was listed on the National Register, there must be funds and protection allocated to that building. At his behest, research was done to include a grant offered through the Tennessee Historical Commission in the original Fowler's Mill report. The grant most relevant to Fowler's Mill at the time was the Tennessee Historical Commission's annual

Historic Preservation Fund grant. The grant comes from the Historic Preservation Fund funded largely through the federal government, and the application is usually due at the beginning of the calendar year. The grants are matching grants and will reimburse up to 60% of the costs of approved work. The remaining 40% must be provided by the grantee as matching funds, and any restoration of the building must follow the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. Application priorities are based on Tennessee's State Historic Preservation Plan, which prioritizes areas "experiencing rapid growth and development, other threats to cultural resources, areas where there are gaps in knowledge regarding cultural resources, and communities that participate in the Certified Local Government program."

Though the Historic Preservation Fund grant would not be insignificant to a place like Fowler's Mill, the grant is going to be out of the reach of the owner for several years. Not only are grants very competitive, but they also require quite a bit of work and money up front, in this case 40% in total funds and an emphasis placed on a National Register building that is used by the public. The grant could best be taken advantage of after the launch of the heritage tourism, agritourism, and farm-to-market activities. By then, the site would have generated the local networks it needed to sustain itself and fund the 40% matching grant. Additionally, the formation of these networks and the mill's reentry into the community would prove to the THC: 1) the relative permanence of the site and 2) that it remains useful for more than just the owner and serves the community. Thus the grant wasn't the immediate solution to the problem, but was instead a product of the other recommendations that would be taking place much, much earlier than its completed application.

Finally, the case study also reveals the necessity of raising the question of climate change in rural preservation. Rural preservationists should seek to normalize the discussion of climate change in rural preservation and link rural preservation itself with the fight against climate change.<sup>52</sup> When a family farm is saved, that is valuable greenspace not developed into a subdivision. The trees remain standing, the water remains unpolluted and allowed to flow its normal course, and a sustainable source of food is also preserved. Additionally, studies have shown that a move away from industrial farming to sustainable farming methods are a way to combat global warming. Key to the sustainable farming method is the presence of small family farms like the Fowler Farm.<sup>53</sup>

Fowler's Mill has several obstacles towards its preservation. Rural preservation is, at best, a mixed bag, with possibly more suggestions than hard, concrete, actionable recommendations. It is a process often engaged in alone, with little to no rewards or help.

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<sup>52</sup> This is the subject of Amalia Leifeste and Barry Stiefel's *Sustainable Heritage: Merging Environmental Conservation and Historic Preservation* (New York: Routledge, 2018). The authors discuss how preservation, conservation and environmentalism were previously siloed off from one another. They then argue that this arrangement has been to the detriment of all three movements, as effectively managing the built and natural environment share the same goal of enhancing quality of life and encouraging sustainability. Their book provides suggestions on how to merge the movements, and then provides recommendations for how to protect and preserve land and historic resources that are directly threatened by climate change. While their suggestions are not always feasible, the book provides a well-researched and thoughtful jumping off point for preservationists, conservationists, and environmentalists to use in the future as they refine the authors' arguments and suggestions.

<sup>53</sup> That is not to say that family farms and their owners are not new to the fight in preventing climate change. Jennifer Fahy's 2016 article "Family Farmers Fighting Climate Change" on Farmaid.org demonstrates the ways that farmers have been helping in the fight against climate change by increasing the resilience of the soil, raising livestock on pasture, producing and buying and selling local food, engaging in land and water conservation, going organic, and cultivating green energy. John Castellaw wrote a guest column in the August 21, 2020 issue of *The Tennessean* titled "How Tennessee farmers are helping to fight climate change." Castellaw is a Lieutenant General of the United States Marine Corps and the owner of a family farm in Crockett Mills, Tennessee. Castellaw classifies climate change as a security threat to the United States, one that everyone should be concerned about. However, he notes that family farms in Tennessee are already doing their part to combat climate change by using "precision agriculture." Precision agricultural methods include using GPS and other technological innovations to grow crops more efficiently and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

However, by looking into the past of the property, and considering how that past can then affect the future, a rural preservationist can discover both guidance and inspiration. This dialogue between the past and the present is one of the most potent ways that you can look at rural preservation.

## **CHAPTER 6: THE BROADER RURAL LANDSCAPE: PALESTINE METHODIST CHURCH & CEMETERY AND WHEELER SCHOOL AS CASE STUDIES**

This chapter looks at the broader rural landscape and the various rural resources that compose them. The two case studies selected for this chapter are the Palestine Methodist Church and Cemetery, and the Wheeler School.<sup>1</sup> The Palestine Methodist Church is a circa 1890 single-story, frame church building located on Palestine Methodist Church Loop Road in Carroll County, West Tennessee. Across from and next to the church is the Palestine Cemetery, a rather large rural cemetery with burials dating to 1842. Though the church itself is abandoned, the cemetery is still an active cemetery. Wheeler School is a frame, single-room schoolhouse built in 1897 and reconstructed in 1994. An African American school, the Wheeler School is associated historically with the teaching career of W.E.B. DuBois. The Wheeler School has been relocated from its original location on a farm in Alexandria to Fiddler's Grove, an outdoor "museum" located in Lebanon, Tennessee.

The circumstances facing these two rural resources could not be any more different. The Palestine Methodist Church and Cemetery, a historically white church and cemetery, resides in a secluded rural area in Carroll County and has a recent history of

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<sup>1</sup> The information for this Palestine section of this chapter stems largely from the author's report, "Preservation Recommendations for Palestine Methodist Church and Cemetery: Carroll County, Tennessee," published by the Center for Historic Preservation in August 2020. The CHP visited the site following a request from former State Representative Steve McDaniel, who was aware of the condition that the historic site was in following repeated vandalism. After a site visit in January 2020, it was determined a report that presented the history of the site and addressed the preservation concerns of the site would be written. However, shortly after the project began, the COVID-19 global pandemic hit, and in accordance with CDC guidelines, the CHP restricted student travel to the site and archives. The original report can be seen in its entirety here: [https://www.mtsuhistpres.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/PalestineReport\\_Final-reduced-size.pdf](https://www.mtsuhistpres.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/PalestineReport_Final-reduced-size.pdf), accessed April 7, 2022.

vandalism. The cemetery remains an integral part of the lives of those who once attended the church or who have loved ones buried there. In contrast, the church no longer serves its original purpose as a place of worship. Both face significant preservation concerns, most of which stem from their rural, isolated nature and the continued vandalism of the property. Historically, the congregation and community associated with the Palestine Methodist Church are representative of broader trends in Tennessee agricultural and rural history. Indeed, in many ways the Palestine Methodist Church and Cemetery are representative examples of small churches and cemeteries both in Tennessee and across the South.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, the Wheeler School is located in Fiddler's Grove, at the Wilson County Fairgrounds on the east side of Lebanon, Tennessee. The fairgrounds are home to the Wilson County Fair, the largest fair in Tennessee. Both the size and popularity of the Wilson County Fair resulted in its merging with the Tennessee State Fair in 2021. Thousands of visitors flock to the Fairgrounds in August to see the sites, ride the rides, and tour the "authentic pioneer village" that is Fiddler's Grove.<sup>3</sup> Here they are likely to see or interact with the Wheeler School, which itself is well preserved and maintained by the fairgrounds. However, the Wheeler School was not originally located

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<sup>2</sup> The Tennessee and Memphis Conference Archives of the Tennessee United Methodist Church Conference are located in Nashville and housed in The John Abernathy Smith Heritage Center. Original research plans factored trips to this archive in the hopes that more information could be uncovered about the Palestine Methodist Church and its history, including notable members of the congregation or religious leaders. Here again the COVID-19 pandemic made research difficult before the completion of this report and the dissertation chapter. Those interested in learning more about Palestine Church or other Methodist churches in Tennessee should consult this resource. Their website can be found here: <https://www.tnumc.org/cmleadteams/archives-and-history/>.

<sup>3</sup> Kaylin Jorge, "More than 100,000 people attend Wilson County Fair-Tennessee State Fair Saturday," Fox 17 WZTV Nashville, August 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021, <https://fox17.com/news/local/more-than-100000-people-attend-tennessee-state-fair-wilson-county-fair-saturday-event-crowd->, accessed April 7, 2022.

in Fiddler's Grove, nor did it look the way that it does now. It was originally located on a farm in nearby Alexandria, Tennessee. The impetus for preserving the Wheeler School came from its association with W.E.B. DuBois, who mentioned Wheeler School in *The Souls of Black Folk*. However, the current Wheeler School building replaced the original 1860s Wheeler School log cabin, and much of the 1897 building was altered significantly during its relocation. Though it is preserved, it has changed significantly during the move.

These case studies both explore preservation issues facing rural resources associated with the broader rural landscape and consider the role, and importance, of context in rural preservation. When comparing the two, initially it would seem that Wheeler School is better preserved than the Palestine Methodist Church and Cemetery. However, review of established rural preservation practice literature emphasizes the importance of landscape and setting. By this metric, it is the Palestine Methodist Church and Cemetery that are better preserved, in that they remain in their original context and in service to their community. Conversely, the physical integrity of the Palestine Methodist Church and Cemetery is not guaranteed in the same way or to the same degree as the Wheeler School, which also receives many visitors in a given year. If the goal is physical survival and education, the Wheeler School is better preserved. Examining these rural resources illustrate once again the complexity of rural preservation's relationship to context, and the need for tailored approaches to each property.



### Palestine Methodist Church and Cemetery

There is no published history of the Palestine Methodist Church and Cemetery. However, an analysis of the list of cemetery burials located on Rootsweb reveals much about the people who worshipped at Palestine Methodist Church and lived in the surrounding area.<sup>4</sup> The author placed the names listed in the cemetery into a roster that contained information about each person derived from census, birth, and death records found on Ancestry.com, Newspapers.com, and other genealogical websites and information repositories.

According to the information available on Rootsweb, there are 158 burials within the Palestine Cemetery. The earliest burial occurred in 1842, and the cemetery remains active and contains space for several more interments. Indeed, fieldwork to the site revealed that the caretakers of the cemetery were actively replacing some old tombstones with more modern tombstones. The most common cause of death was from either old age or heart-related sickness. The average age of those buried in the Palestine Cemetery is fifty-nine years old, though there are nineteen infants buried in the cemetery that are not counted towards the average. Finally, with the exception of six people, everyone buried at the Palestine Cemetery was either a farmer, farm laborer, sharecropper, or otherwise involved in general farming, and lived nearby in either Cedar Grove or Yuma. The prevalence of farm-related jobs speaks to the area's deep agricultural roots. Indeed, agriculture dominated the county's economy until manufacturing recently replaced it as

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<sup>4</sup> This list can be found at the following website:  
<https://sites.rootsweb.com/~tncarrol/cemetery/PalestineC.html>, accessed April 7, 2022.



*Figure 42: The Palestine Methodist Church building, October 27, 2022. Image courtesy of the author.*



*Figure 43: The associated Palestine Cemetery, located directly across from the Palestine Methodist Church, October 27, 2022. Image courtesy of the author.*

the number one economic driver.<sup>5</sup> The remaining occupations represented in the cemetery include change-room attendant, a custodian for the county schools, highway engineer, night watchman for a local factory, and a file clerk for Sears Roebuck.

The first burial in 1842 shows those who founded the original church and cemetery were among the first to settle Carroll County, which was officially created by the Tennessee General Assembly on November 7, 1821. Those who settled Carroll County would have found abundant game, fertile land, and large forests.<sup>6</sup> According to a survey of extant headstones, Daniel Ross and his family were the earliest marked burials in the cemetery and serve as representative examples of early white settlers in the area. Ross was born in 1790 in South Carolina. By the time of the 1830 census, Daniel and his wife Elizabeth (also from South Carolina) lived in Carroll County.<sup>7</sup> In 1849, Ross acquired 200 acres on Reedy Creek. Daniel, Elizabeth, and their seven children cultivated forty acres of land and kept livestock.<sup>8</sup> There is no evidence of the Ross family enslaving people. Many of Daniel and Elizabeth's children continued in general agriculture after their father's death.<sup>9</sup> In his will, Daniel Ross left his wife Elizabeth the house, all the land, a mare, two cows and calves, sows, a bed, kitchen furniture, a saddle and bridle, and farming tools. The 1850 agricultural census indicates Elizabeth owned three horses, one mule, one milk cow, two oxen, three sheep, and thirty pigs. She grew corn, oats, and beans. Elizabeth farmed the land until at least 1860, after which she lived with her son

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<sup>5</sup> Joe David McClure, "Carroll County," *Tennessee Encyclopedia*, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> McClure, "Carroll County."

<sup>7</sup> 1830 Census, Carroll County, Tennessee, Series M19, Roll 174, Page 159, *Ancestry.com*.

<sup>8</sup> Carroll County, North Carolina and Tennessee, Early Land Records, 1753-1931, *Ancestry.com*.

<sup>9</sup> 1840 Census, Carroll County, Tennessee, Roll 521, Page 68, *Ancestry.com*.



Hiram and his family. After she died, the land was divided between their four sons William, Frederick, Hiram, and Jacob. To the remainder of his children including his daughters Lucinda, Catherine, and Nancy, Daniel left cash (which did not exceed \$12.50), bed furniture, cows and pigs.<sup>10</sup> Many of the Ross children were also buried in Palestine Cemetery.

An analysis of information gleaned from available death certificates indicate the challenges that faced the Palestine Methodist Church and its congregation. One of those challenges was disease and premature death. From 1914 to 1919, there were seventeen burials. Typhoid fever, a disease spread by contaminated food and water, caused five of those seventeen deaths. From 1918 to 1951, there were seven deaths from tuberculosis, or “consumption.” People were infected with tuberculosis through the inhalation of respiratory droplets exhaled from the mouth or nose. Twenty-seven of the burials in Palestine were children aged ten and under, with twenty of those being either stillborn or infant. Though the death certificates do not adequately show or address the tragic reality of these events, there is little doubt that the church and its members were very important for helping the afflicted families deal with their losses.

The Palestine Cemetery also contains many veterans who fought in major wars. Wesley H. Williamson fought in the Civil War on the side of the Confederacy and served with the 11<sup>th</sup> Tennessee Cavalry. Jesse M. Tate also fought in the Civil War but on the side of the Union, and served as a corporal in Company I, 7<sup>th</sup> Regiment in the Tennessee Volunteer Cavalry. Berry D. Wiles, Daniel Boone Collins, and Neil A. Dees all fought in,

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<sup>10</sup> Will Books, 1822-1864, Carroll County, Tennessee, Page 53, *Ancestry.com*.

and survived, World War I. Again, members of the community answered the call during World War II. Brothers Ernest Ray Davis and James C. Davis both served in World War II. Ernest served in the Navy, and his brother James served in the Army. While Ernest survived, his brother James C. Davis was killed in action on June 5, 1944, one day before D-Day.

The examination of each family's genealogy also reveals the extent to which the Palestine Methodist Church influenced the community. Many of the families buried in the cemetery had sons and daughters that would go on to marry members of the other church families. In doing so, they strengthened the bonds of community that were necessary for the survival of rural life. Though the Palestine congregation disbanded in 1956 due to low membership, the Collins and Ledsinger families continue to hold family reunions on the grounds. These reunions, held on the Sunday before Labor Day, have taken place there since at least the 1950s. Thus, the Palestine Methodist Church and Cemetery continues to unite and serve the community around it.

The greatest preservation concern of the Palestine Methodist Church and Cemetery is recent vandalism. The first report that we have of the Palestine Methodist Church vandalism is from September 23, 2013, reported by the *WWBJ7 Eyewitness News*, a Jackson-based news organization that serves West Tennessee. The vandalism itself consisted of the destruction of nearly twenty-four headstones, satanic drawings in the church, and hateful graffiti. Locals interviewed for the story elaborated on what happened. Gail Carr, who has family buried in the cemetery, said that every time she visits the cemetery, there is evidence of vandalism. Carr describes the following as

occurring within the church: “They set the flowers on fire, took the foam and did a hexagon or whatever they do in a cult for devil worshipping and they’ve got all that inside of the church. You can see where they danced around with their bare feet, you can actually see their foot prints.” Groundskeeper Jim Thompson likewise stressed the satanic connections as being particularly disturbing for him: “We found some dolls burned well part of the doll was left. It looked like there was some type of ceremony around it. I just don’t understand why, it makes you want to cry then you get angry.” The desecration of the church and churchyard prompted the Sheriff, Andy Dickson, to comment that what occurred there warranted “felony charges.”<sup>11</sup>

In September 2016 vandals struck again, though this time they left the church building alone and instead vandalized the cemetery. Reactions from the local populace again show anger and frustration. Wesley Collins, a man born and raised in the community with family buried in the cemetery, said: “It makes one mad that it happens, and we don’t see any point in it. We don’t see how it helps anybody in any way. If they are trying to prove a point, then come and tell us what the point is because we are failing to see the point.” Mary Ann Arnold echoes Collins’ sentiment, saying that the vandalism “breaks her heart” and makes her wonder “about the people that would desecrate a church and a cemetery.” The article concludes with the author saying that this “community has had enough.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Natalie Potts, “Cedar Grove Graveyard and Church Vandalized,” *WBBJ 7 Eyewitness News*, September 23rd, 2013, <https://www.wbbjtv.com/2013/09/23/cedar-grove-graveyard-and-church-vandalized/>, accessed 4.3.2020.

<sup>12</sup> Eric Perry, “Residents speak out after Cedar Grove cemetery vandalism,” *WBBJ 7 Eyewitness News*, September 19th, 2016, <https://www.wbbjtv.com/2016/09/19/palestine-church-cemetery-cedar-grove-vandalized/>, accessed 4.3.2020.



*Figure 44: Results of the cemetery vandalism of 2016. Image courtesy of WBBJ7 Eyewitness News*



*Figure 45: This photo shows the extensive vandalism that took place in 2019. Image courtesy of WBBJ7 Eyewitness News.*

The *Carroll County News Leader* reported the most recent vandalism attempt on October 22, 2019. The opening line reads, “For some reason, the long-abandoned Palestine Methodist Church building and the adjacent cemetery on Highway 424 between Clarksburg and Cedar Grove has repeatedly been the target of vandalism over the years.” Deputy Michael Sevarns of the Carroll County Sheriff’s Department received a call on October 16<sup>th</sup> that the Church had been vandalized. Sevarns found that though there was no damage to the cemetery, the church had been vandalized extensively. The vandals had busted the storm windows out, flipped the piano on its side, shattered the back door, knocked holes in the floor, shoved four pews through the church windows, and busted out the windows in the front double doors.<sup>13</sup> An article written on November 13, 2019, and published in the *Carroll County News Leader* reveals that eight suspects had been identified in the vandalism. The vandalism involved four juvenile females, three juvenile males, and one adult male. Only three of the suspects, all local males aged eighteen, seventeen, and seventeen, were charged in relation to the vandalism. The charges include desecration of a venerated object, vandalism over \$2500, and criminal trespassing. At the time of the article, the other five were awaiting possible criminal trespassing charges from the attorney general.

How did satanic connections to the church and the cemetery happen? The church and cemetery has earned a social media reputation for being a paranormal site. The first post the author could find mentioning Palestine Methodist Church as being associated with the paranormal is from 2007 and posted on Waymarking.com. The website

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<sup>13</sup> Ron Park, “Vandals hit Palestine Church again,” *Carroll County News Leader*, October 22, 2019, <https://www.newsleaderonline.com/2019/10/22/vandals-hit-palestine-church-again/>, accessed 4.3.2020.



emphasizes that the “church is not locked and visitors can still get inside.” What awaits them inside, you might ask? According to the author, a person can be seen “sitting at a piano” and that in the corner of the church, “someone wearing a black cloak that is covering their face” can also be seen. Another website, *The Abandoned South*, echoes much the same sentiment. Once again emphasizing that it is abandoned, and even providing coordinates and an address for those brave enough to venture out, the author reiterates many of the same themes. A man can be seen “sitting at the piano” playing “very low notes of a hymn,” and that the visitor should be prepared to feel “watched” the entire time they are there. The final website, and the one that outdoes them all, is the appropriately named *Haunted Places*. The website adds to the paranormal events the shuffling of footsteps, voices talking, screams, cold spots, and doors opening and closing. Additionally, the website claims that the cemetery is also linked to the paranormal, saying that “outside the church in the cemetery, people report hearing things walking around, and seeing shadowy apparitions moving around the gravestones.” In light of this information, it now becomes easier to see how these acts of vandalism could be the result of the church’s presence on paranormal websites, especially when considering that the piano and pews were targeted. For one, the rise of dark tourism in contemporary society encourages engagement with paranormal sites. Though the Palestine Methodist Church is not directly promoting itself as a paranormal site, there is a willingness and desire by the public to engage with sites associated with death.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, the internet travel reviews have also made it easier to find the property and its paranormal history.

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<sup>14</sup> John Lennon and Malcolm Foley explore this in their book *Dark Tourism* (New York: Continuum, 2007). The authors argue that dark tourism is product of the modern world, and that the ability to engage in

### WHEELER SCHOOLHOUSE

To understand the Wheeler Schoolhouse's history, it is important to understand African American education and the history of W.E.B. DuBois. It was in this environment that W.E.B. DuBois (William Edward Burghardt) lived launched his career as an educator. DuBois was born in Barrington, Massachusetts on February 23, 1868. In 1885, DuBois came to Nashville to study at Fisk University, an African American university founded in 1865 and officially incorporated on August 22, 1867.<sup>15</sup> DuBois studied at Fisk from 1885-1888. During two of those summers, DuBois worked as a teacher at Wheeler School in Alexandria, Tennessee. As Kira Duke in her blog post, "W.E.B. DuBois in Rural Middle Tennessee," makes clear, his time at Wheeler School in Alexandria played an important role in his life and the formation of his ideology and educational pedagogy. Alexandria was a community only one generation removed from slavery, with much of the black community still dependent on an agricultural economy in which whites owned most of the land (especially the productive land). African American families depended heavily on the labor of children and young adults to keep the family

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this tourism is the product of a late-industrialism world. The authors argue that dark tourism is only made possible by three major things: global communications technology, which plays a large part in creating initial interest in the dark tourist destination in general; the fact that objects of dark tourism introduce anxiety and doubt about modernity; and that the sites themselves, even if they are educational in nature, are accompanied by elements of commodification that are provided to visitors. For more readings on dark tourism, see: Philip Stone, "A dark tourism spectrum: towards a typology of death and macabre related tourist sites, attractions, and exhibits," *Tourism: An Interdisciplinary International Journal* vol. 54, No. 2 (2006), pp 145-160; Leanne White and Espeth Frew, *Dark Tourism and Place Identity: Managing and Interpreting Dark Places* (London: Routledge, 2013); Glenn Hooper and J. John Lennon, *Dark Tourism: Practice and Interpretation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016); and Debbie Lisle, "Global interventions: contested history and the rise of dark tourism" in *Holidays in the Danger Zone: Entanglements of War & Tourism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

<sup>15</sup> "Fisk University History," Fisk University, accessed January 3, 2022, <https://www.fisk.edu/about/history/>, accessed April 7, 2022.



*Figure 46: The Wheeler School in its original rural context before it was moved to Fiddler's Grove. Image courtesy of Carroll Van West.*



*Figure 47: An additional photograph documenting the School's rural context. Image courtesy of Carroll Van West.*





*Figure 48: The Wheeler School in its new location in Fiddler's Grove. Image courtesy of Carroll Van West.*

afloat, which in turn kept students from attending school regularly. DuBois considered all of these things, Duke writes, as a microcosm of the challenges that faced African Americans nationwide.<sup>16</sup>

DuBois' experiences teaching in Alexandria's community figured heavily into his personal and intellectual development, and he writes at length about his experience there in his influential work *The Souls of Black Folk*, published in 1903. The original Wheeler School was built in the late 1860s on a family farm in Alexandria. The original schoolhouse was an old corn crib, and his salary was twenty-eight dollars a month.

DuBois writes:

There they sat, nearly thirty of them, on the rough benches, their faces shading from a pale cream to a deep brown, the little feet bare and swinging, the eyes full of expectation, with here and there a twinkle of mischief, and the hands grasping Webster's blue-black spelling-book. I loved my school, and the fine faith the children had in the wisdom of their teacher was truly marvelous. We read and spelled together, wrote a little, picked flowers, sang, and listened to stories of the world beyond the hill.<sup>17</sup>

DuBois saw in his students the challenges facing African Americans and the opportunities that could be grasped through education.

After Alexandria and following the completion of his degree at Fisk University, DuBois went on to become the first African American to graduate with a Ph.D. from Harvard University in 1895. After receiving his degree, DuBois became a prominent figure in the early Civil Rights Movement. In 1905, DuBois helped found the Niagara

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<sup>16</sup> Kira Duke, "W.E.B. DuBois in Rural Middle Tennessee," *Southern Rambles*, February 16, 2016, <https://chpblog.org/2016/02/16/w-e-b-du-bois-in-rural-middle-tennessee/>, accessed 10.26.2021.

<sup>17</sup> Ken Beck, "W.E.B. DuBois' first classroom," *The Wilson Post* (Lebanon: Tennessee), February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2017, [https://www.wilsonpost.com/community/w-e-b-du-bois-first-classroom/article\\_cbd6b7c8-1a0f-5f50-a9b6-f95feccaf7b7.html](https://www.wilsonpost.com/community/w-e-b-du-bois-first-classroom/article_cbd6b7c8-1a0f-5f50-a9b6-f95feccaf7b7.html), accessed 4.29.2020.

Movement, in addition to helping cofound the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1909. DuBois also contributed immensely to the scholarship surrounding African American history and the quest for Civil Rights and equal representation. Some examples include his time editing *The Crisis*, the official publication of the NAACP, from 1910-1934, and the publication of *The Philadelphia Negro* and *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*. Some in the early Civil Rights Movement considered DuBois an agitator. DuBois was critical of Booker T. Washington, and argued that desegregation would not be enough because African Americans should not be forced to assimilate totally into white society. DuBois' views on race made him a prime target for the witch hunts of the McCarthy Era. As a result, DuBois joined the Communist party in 1961 and relocated to Ghana, where he became a citizen. DuBois died there on August 27, 1963.<sup>18</sup>

In the years following DuBois' departure from Fisk and the publication of *The Souls of Black Folk*, he returned to Alexandria to see his students, their families, and the Wheeler School. To his sadness, he found that one of his favorite students, Josie, had passed away. The log school he taught in had been replaced in 1897 by the frame building that is now located at Fiddler's Grove. When writing about the schoolhouse, DuBois said that his schoolhouse was gone and in its place "stood Progress; and Progress, I understand it, is necessarily ugly."<sup>19</sup> He found that some members of the Alexandria community had moved to Nashville while others remained, and some had succeeded

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<sup>18</sup> Richard A. Couto, "W.E.B. Du Bois (William Edward Burghardt)," *Tennessee Encyclopedia*, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2017.

<sup>19</sup> Beck, "W.E.B. DuBois' first classroom."

where others had failed. The world that DuBois created, the network he had established with the Wheeler School at the center, had changed irrevocably. He sums up the trip, powerfully, in one paragraph as he leaves Alexandria to make his way back to Nashville:

My journey was done, and behind me lay hill and dale, and Life and Death. How shall man measure Progress there where the dark-faced Josie lies? How many heartfuls of sorrow shall balance a bushel of wheat? How hard a thing is life to the lowly, and yet how human and real! And all this life and love and strife and failure,—is it the twilight of nightfall or the flush of some faint-dawning day?

Thus sadly musing, I rode to Nashville in the Jim Crow car.<sup>20</sup>

Wheeler School, presented through the lens of W.E.B. DuBois in the *Souls of Black Folk*, is symbolic of the tragedies, challenges, and hardships of rural African American communities.

The preservation concerns and preservation journey of Wheeler School is much different than the Palestine property. Harry Watkins, the then Wilson County Civic League vice-president, read the *Souls of Black Folk* in 1990. After reading DuBois' book, Watkins became interested in trying to find the Wheeler School mentioned in DuBois' work. Watkins then discovered that the Black Student Organization at Tennessee Technological University in Cookeville, led by Dr. Wali Kharif, were trying to locate the building. Word soon spread until Alexandria local and a member of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, Mike Corely, heard about the search. Corley got in touch with Watkins and Dr. Kharif, letting them know exactly where the building was. From this came the first site visit in 1993. Next, Watkins contacted Dr. Carroll Van West at the

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<sup>20</sup> "Of the Meaning of Progress," *The Souls of Black Folk*, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/408/408-h/408-h.htm>, accessed April 7, 2022.

Center for Historic Preservation who visited the property, documented it, and discussed preservation alternatives. West advised that the building needed repair, but could be relocated safely.<sup>21</sup>

Watkins then approached the owner of the land and asked if they would be willing to let them move the building from its location. The owner agreed, and plans were put in motion to move the building and reconstruct it at Fiddler's Grove. However, before the removal of the building began, the Tennessee Historical Commission erected a historical marker on Highway 70 near the original location to commemorate the Wheeler School. The Sons of the Confederate Veterans camp and the Black Student Organization raised money to fund the marker. Dr. Khalif remarked that both groups, though they had different purposes, undertook the project for their own motives. The professor reported that the SCV camp wanted the generosity of J.D. Wheeler, a Confederate Captain in the 5<sup>th</sup> Tennessee Cavalry, recognized. On the other hand, Khalif and the BSO wanted the contributions of W.E.B. DuBois recognized.<sup>22</sup>

The historic sign was erected on Martin Luther King, Jr, Day in 1993. During the dedication ceremony, Khalif spoke at length about W.E.B. DuBois, as well as the specific circumstances, and cooperation, that led to the founding of the marker:

Today represents a day of celebration, recognition and commemoration of all those unknown individuals who saw a need for change, and took some positive action to bring about change.

Many of these brave pioneers for change were the products of contrasting environments, and may have been miles apart in their viewpoints and ideologies. Yet some transcended their specific differences and concentrated instead upon

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<sup>21</sup> Beck, "W.E.B. DuBois' first classroom."

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.



those areas where there was agreement, that there was a need for cooperation. It is within this context that the lives of Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois and Captain J.D. Wheeler crossed although the two men never met.

This marker, which we are dedicating here today, is recognition of this distinction and more. For it also represents the contributory efforts of a former Confederate officer, Captain J.D. Wheeler, of the 5th Tennessee Cavalry, Confederate States of America, who provided land for a school that would provide a new generation of African Americans with an opportunity to secure an education.<sup>23</sup>

This marker, now dedicated, stands on US 70 in Alexandria and proudly displays text that emphasizes the importance of DuBois and the Wheeler School.<sup>24</sup>

The building itself was relocated to Fiddler's Grove in 1994. Lebanon carpenters Joe Draper and Benny McCauthern, Jr., conducted the move. One of the major challenges of reconstructing and relocating the property was that much of the structure itself was in bad shape. Draper, when interviewed for an article about the relocation, noted that the process was made even harder because they "wanted to keep as much of the original wood in it as we could." The job took approximately two to three weeks to complete. The current structure is only twenty-eight feet by twenty feet, which is smaller than the original structure. The reduction in size came from parts of the wood being too damaged to use. However, despite the tin roof, the materials used in the construction of the Wheeler School at Fiddler's Grove remain largely original.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> The sign reads Tennessee Historical Marker 2D 30 "Wheeler School for Blacks was established during the Reconstruction period in Wilson County on land donated by Captain J.D. Wheeler, formerly of the 5th Tennessee Cavalry, C.S.A. Renowned black educator W.E.B. DuBois taught at the school during the summers of 1886 and 1887. The original log building was replaced with the existing structure in the late 1890's."

<sup>25</sup> Beck, "W.E.B. DuBois' first classroom."

## Findings

The Palestine Methodist Church and the Wheeler School represent the threats faced by historic, but abandoned, community institutions in rural Tennessee. Both properties suffered from discontinued use, though the specific preservation issues manifested in different ways. The social media writes gave Palestine Methodist Church a reputation as an abandoned “paranormal” site, which in turn made the property a target for vandalism. Repairing the damage to keep the site preserved is also difficult, as the number of people with both connections to the church and an ability to provide money for repairs is rather low. The Wheeler School, without students, parents, or teachers to care if it still stood, also accumulated major preservation issues, to the point that portions of the original building could not be saved in the move to Fiddler’s Grove.

Context matters in rural preservation. Natural, cultural, and built features interact with each other to convey significance and meaning. When a property is relocated from its original position, it loses the natural settings and the community that invested it with meaning and contributed to its significance. However, should the focus on context come at the cost of preserving a rural resource, especially one that faces demolition either through deliberate action or neglect with no viable alternatives? Such a dilemma is one faced by rural preservationists. And the answer to this dilemma is, as with other rural preservation issues, that it depends.

The preservation success of the Wheeler School owes much to the setting in which it is now located. While it is unrealistic to expect the location of Fiddler’s Grove to mimic that of the Wheeler School’s original location, the lack of critical interpretation

and context do not accurately convey the importance of the Wheeler School. In the first, the interpretation of the Wheeler School does little to address the systemic issues of race in education, instead opting for a sanitized version of history and rural life from 1800 to the 1940s. Rural life at Fiddler's Grove is reduced to little one room school houses, small churches, nostalgic general stores with glass bottles, and costumed reenactors showing off how to make things the "old fashioned way." Each building is located next to each other, all advertised as authentic parts of a pioneer village with little context beside the building's provenance. Second, Fiddler's Grove, advertised as a "Frontier town," projects an image of nostalgia that likewise hides the issues of race, education, and the black experience in Wilson County through a Mayberry-like lens. The lack of accurate interpretive context compounds with the lack of physical context to keep the Wheeler School from fully conveying just why such a resource is so important.

In contrast, the Palestine Methodist Church is entirely dependent upon its physical context to effectively communicate its importance. It is the relationship of the entire rural site to the physical, cultural, and historical infrastructure of the area that lends the church its importance. The physical infrastructure refers to both the man-made and the natural resources that the building is in dialogue with. The church faces a historic 19th century road, meaning that travelers would pass by the church and cemetery frequently. Across from the church is the Palestine Cemetery, another man-made resource. The relationship between the church and the cemetery is important. As members of the congregation walked in, they would have seen the cemetery both in arrival and parting moments. Their loved ones were never far from the place where they worshiped. Of course, the physical infrastructure is not just limited to man-made resources. The natural resources are also

just as important. In this case, the rural nature of the area further enhances its significance. Funerary trees and bushes dot the cemetery, representative markers of religious and funerary historical practices. Tall stands of trees extend to the sides and back of the cemetery, while the open fields of cotton on the approach to the church frame its rural context. Such resources are critical for emphasizing the rural nature of the church, and serves to convey how important the place would have been for those early worshippers in West Tennessee.

The final element that this case study encourages rural preservationists to consider is that the broader rural landscape is by its very nature transitory and is hyper responsive to developments within the communities that birthed them.<sup>26</sup> Rural churches were, and in some places still are, encountered with regularity along backroads and old highways. The large number of rural churches is due in part to the multitude of small rural communities that desired separate places to worship, often in congregations no larger than a handful of families. Rural schools also reflected a need by rural communities to educate their children in an era before larger county schools became widely accessible or available. These rural resources were directly connected to a need, a need which was anchored in a specific point in time and expressed by a specific group of people. They became fixtures within the community for those who built them, inhabited them, worshipped in them, and learned in them, thus becoming a critical part of the rural infrastructure.

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<sup>26</sup> Bernard L. Herman and Gabrielle M. Lanier's *Everyday Architecture of the Mid-Atlantic: Looking at Buildings and Landscapes* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997) explores the idea of rural resources being inherently transitory. In their book, both Herman and Lanier discuss how rural resources such as barns and corn cribs are hard to preserve and document because they are not always built as, or even thought of, as permanent structures. Each rural building serves a purpose, and if it no longer served that purpose, it would either take on a new one or be deconstructed for a more current, useful thing.

However, the communities and circumstances that birthed them change. The congregations of the rural church begin to change. One congregation dwindles over two or three generations, the families that made up the church dying off while younger generations move away, attend a different church, or give up religion all together. Conversely, other congregations grow, needing larger buildings for their population and abandoning or demolishing the old building it started with. Rural schoolhouses are emptied as school consolidation buses its students to larger county schools. With the disappearance of that original need and the abandonment/preservation issues that come from a building no longer serving its original purpose, the resources of this rural landscape begin to dwindle. The loss of rural resources through this process is not through the developer, the real estate agent, the bulldozer, or the state. Their loss is both a product of time and the singular truth that rural communities are, despite claims made otherwise, fluid and everchanging.

## **CONCLUSION: RURAL PRESERVATION LOOKING FORWARD**

A cold, rainy Saturday marked my visit to the W.B. Walker Farm near Watertown, Tennessee. The owners informed me that their daughter and son-in-law were interested in tagging along for fieldwork. Their daughter worked as an educator, and therefore could not make it out during the work week. However, as the next generation of owner at the Walker Farm, she wanted to participate, which resulted in fieldwork scheduled on a weekend. When I arrived, they had already set up a socially distanced meeting area in the kitchen. For the first part of the morning, the current and future owners talked about the farm's history, their memories, the buildings, and their plan for the future. The daughter revealed that she and her husband planned on slowly taking over the farm operation in the coming years, and that they planned on putting the farm in the Land Trust and restoring the old home on the property to live in. While the current owners were a little hesitant about the Land Trust, their goals were to keep operating the farm as a livestock farm and preparing it for their daughter. Just before we left to look at the outbuildings and tour the farm, the daughter informed me that she wished other farmers and their descendants knew about options to preserve and keep the land. Though the information is available online, it is sometimes inaccessible, and can be hard to know how to apply that information. If there was a guide, she suggested, then perhaps more people would know how to preserve their rural resources.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The idea for developing an action plan for the Wilson County Century Farm Survey came as a result of this interaction. This action plan distilled the main findings of the survey into a two-page guide. The aim of this guide was to provide farmers with a flow chart of what they can do to preserve their farm, and where to find more information within the WCCFS report.



*Figure 49: A view of the W.B. Walker Farm, a Century Farm in Wilson County, October 24, 2020. Image courtesy of the author.*



*Figure 50: The old home on the W.B. Walker Farm, October 25, 2020. The future owners plan on restoring the house and moving in. Image courtesy of the author.*



This dissertation addresses her need through the case studies, surveys, interviews, and primary and secondary sources explored in the preceding pages. A critical component of the dissertation is the compilation and distillation of rural preservation historiography. In doing so, it is possible to explore the philosophy, organization, and recommendations made by rural preservationists in the past and see if they still apply to modern challenges. The case studies demonstrate that many of these previous approaches remain valid, particularly those that put the emphasis on the power of local approaches to preservation and the importance of vitality in preserving rural resources. Likewise, rural preservation efforts by organizations such as the University of Tennessee Extension Service and Black Family Land Trust also demonstrate that instructional documents, pamphlets, and professional services offered by such organizations are still powerful rural preservation tools. Heritage tourism, agri-tourism, farm-to-table, and conservation easements all continue to play an important role in rural preservation today.

However, the case studies also reveal the need for rural preservationists to reevaluate other approaches/methodologies and develop entirely new ones. Broad strategies tend to be hard to define in rural preservation, as each individual rural resource has its own unique situation and issues that many times do not fit larger and broader themes. One theme uncovered through fieldwork is the importance farmers place on retaining the land, with their historic buildings often playing a secondary role. The farmer's relationship with the landscape is an intimate one, not only because the land produces economically under their care, but also because their memories and lives are often mapped out onto these physical features. Several times during fieldwork, farmers would point out a field, a tree, a creek, or other types of natural features to talk about a



particular memory, or when that parcel of land was bought, or who the original owner was.

Certainly, Stokes and Arendt understood the importance of considering rural landscapes as a whole, with the buildings, land, and people all interacting with each other. Consequently, their case studies and methodologies, particularly those that involve responsible development that utilizes effective planning, seek to preserve the feeling of a place. However, for more traditional preservationists and preservation efforts, the focus on land, not buildings, may come as both a shock and challenge to their preservation approach. High style architecture and buildings associated with famous people no longer dominate conversations about what should qualify as National Register eligible properties, but there is still a bias towards preserving the built environment in preservation. The ongoing marriage of preservation and conservation goes some way towards shifting the existing dynamic, but for many people concerns about preserving land falls into the conservation camp. The result of such a view is that land is very rarely considered a historic resource, which, as demonstrated in the interviews and dissertation, belies the on-the-ground reality. Rural preservationists then need to understand the dynamic, and work towards integrating it into their own work while also normalizing it in standard preservation practice.

Intimately related is the process described in the dissertation as “rural gentrification.” There exists in rural areas a type of physical, cultural, and natural infrastructure that itself supports a web of connections between each rural resource and their rural communities. The physical infrastructure simply refers to the relationship

between community members and physical buildings. These can be as simple as a farmer's relationship to the old farmstead house, or as complex as the relationship between community and passersbys with an old barn on the side of a prominent state route. In turn, the cultural infrastructure refers to the connections between members of the community with each other, i.e. the connection between farm families, and those who operate rural institutions such as grocery stores and restaurants. The final portion, that of natural infrastructure, is the connection and relationships between the two previously listed infrastructures with natural elements, such as the rolling hills that frame the old barn, or the viewshed from the farmstead over the remaining community. Though they are listed individually here, they are all very much interconnected and, often, inseparable. Together they communicate a sense of place, and form the connections that make a rural place, well, a rural place.

Rural gentrification, then, eats away at these institutions, whether it be through direct effect, such as the purchasing of farms for development or the demolishing of old buildings for modern buildings geared towards efficiency or a new purpose, or indirect effect, such as the raising of land prices which can affect the existing community's economic viability or the closing of smaller family-owned restaurants or grocery stores with the arrival of standardized chains. While rural communities are known for their ability to accommodate change to existing infrastructure (contrary to popular belief), the suddenness that accompanies full blown rural gentrification can permanently change and disfigure a rural area's infrastructure. The Wilson County Century Farm Survey reinforces this observation, particularly in areas such as Mount Juliet, the Laguardo community, or the area around Wilson Central High School. As the sense of rural

community continues to deteriorate, it can affect the desire of landowners to preserve their farm. When the owner of a rural resource finds that their farm is surrounded by development, or that their primary hayfield is located across a four-lane highway, or when their downtown community has been replaced with chain businesses and new owners, to them what they wanted preserved is already gone. The vitality and sense of place have not been preserved.

The dissertation also underscores the urgency of protecting and preserving African American rural resources, and the unique circumstances that rural preservationists should consider when strategizing about the best way to preserve these resources. Heir's property rules and the continued racial bias by state/federal organizations like the United States Department of Agriculture affects the options available to African American rural preservation. Whereas obtaining a loan for starting an agri-tourism venture for a white farm might be possible, the same strategy for an African American farm may not work due to issues derived from heir's property or the inaccessibility of a loan. Furthermore, the seeming absence of African American farmers on the agricultural landscape underscores the need for preservation.

Rural preservation has yet to receive the same kind of recognition or general acceptance as a field as mainstream urban historic preservation. Indeed, the existing approach is more akin to conservation for some than as preservation to many. While organizations such as the Center for Historic Preservation at Middle Tennessee State University, the Land Trust for Tennessee, the Black Family Land Trust, and others have made these approaches part of their general preservation approach, a dedicated subfield

could bring additional dialogue and engaged professionals that can address the needs of rural America.

Future developments in rural preservation should focus on the writing and publishing of a rural preservation guide.<sup>2</sup> Such a guide would identify general rural preservation approaches and tools, which themselves would be informed by select rural preservation case studies. Overviews of topics such as the farm-to-table movement, agri-tourism, adaptive reuse, and heritage tourism would be among key topics. Finally, appendices should include relevant contact information for rural preservation organizations and allies, terms, suggested readings, and other resources that could equip existing rural preservationists and new students with additional tools for engaging in preservation.

Future research should also address more fully the connection between rural preservation and the looming global climate disaster. The dissertation briefly addresses the impacts of global warming and advanced the idea of creating a coalition of rural preservationists and their rural constituents. The development of such a coalition would hinge around the importance of preserving rural areas as ways to combat global warming. By keeping these open green spaces, we are not only preserving historic land, but we are reducing energy and emissions by not constructing wastefully large houses on large plots of land, terraforming the Earth and producing effects such as run-off into local streams and creeks. By extension, small farm is incentivized to produce livestock, create a more

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<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the most well-known example of a historic preservation textbook is Tyler Norman, et. al., *Historic Preservation: An Introduction to its History, Principles, and Practice*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2018).

sustainable method by which to produce livestock than that of corporate farms.

Furthermore, as growing seasons and areas in which agricultural production can take place change as the climate worsens, having these green areas left will allow for agricultural production that can respond to future food shortage events.

However, this approach will need substantial research into climate change that is then translated and distilled into existing rural preservation approaches and scholarship. The findings of such research may in and of itself replace or modify existing preservation approaches, while also suggesting new methodologies. Examples might include the installation of solar panel fields. In areas where land is flat, the solar panel fields could produce clean energy for an area and the farmer in question would receive a fee or rate for allowing a field to be used in such a manner. Conversely, future research may demonstrate that this approach is not viable, whether it be because the installation of the solar panels is not energy efficient, or because it may permanently alter the aforementioned infrastructure of a rural area to the point that it is unrecognizable. Either way, conducting the research, complete with the data and numbers to go along with it, will go a long way towards providing a base upon which to make the case for rural preservation's marriage to the global climate justice movement.

On the practical side, further case studies will also be very important for determining how to engage in coalition building. Identifying the potential organizations that are useful in providing assistance and guidance for rural preservation while also merging current thought and best practices about combatting global warming are needed, whether it be local, state, or federal level resources. Dialogue will be important,

particularly because some rural resource owners still do not believe that global warming is real or is an actual crisis, or have other more pressing concerns to worry about, such as running the farm. Learning how to build these coalitions and reach that distinct group of people is a challenge for rural preservation.

Finally, a more specific and focused recommendation is to interview existing Century Farmers and record their conversations with a video camera and transcribe these interviews. As demonstrated in the dissertation, the Century Farm collection is already an incredibly powerful tool for researching the agrarian history of Tennessee. As the TCFP collection continues to grow, the submitted information will grow to incorporate farms founded in the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Adding oral histories of these farms would allow the researcher to examine memory, history, and the agrarian culture. Already, books such as *Hollybush* have demonstrated the power of oral interviews when combined with primary source documentation. Perhaps starting with a manageable sample of farms, such as the African American Century Farms or at a county level, would be the best place to start.

When the fieldwork was finally completed at W.B. Walker Farm, we went back to the front porch. The drizzling rain had stopped, and it was past lunch time. We all stood and talked on the porch for some time when it finally came up that my family and their family knew each other. This of course extended the author's stay. The obligatory "how y'all doin's" were passed around until my stomach informed me that fieldwork was coming to a close, one way or the other. The owner's daughter, son-in-law, and grandkids walked with me to my truck, where we had one last discussion about the Land Trust and

whom they should call to get the process rolling. I wrote the name of the person on the back of one my business cards and handed it to them. The daughter thanked me with a smile, and gestured towards one of the grandkids already sitting in the car. She told me that she appreciated getting the chance to talk to me, and that all she wanted to do was make sure that her daughter and son had the same chance to grow up on the farm as she did because it was such a special place. I simply smiled and nodded my head. Truly, farms are indeed special places.

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## APPENDIX

## Wilson County Century Farm Survey Form

### 1. *Identification*

1.1. Name of Century Farm: \_\_\_\_\_

1.1.1. Other Name(s) for Century Farm: \_\_\_\_\_

1.1.2. Special Recognition (Pioneer, African American, Female, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

1.2. Current Owner(s): \_\_\_\_\_

1.2.1. Different Owners from Previous Application: Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

1.2.1.1. If yes, please provide year you acquired land, your relationship to the  
founder, and spouse's name: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

1.3. Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### 2. *Current Agricultural Production and Farm Information*

2.1. Type of Farm (i.e. general, tobacco, dairy, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2.2. Number of Acres: \_\_\_\_\_

2.3. Crops or livestock produced on the farm during the current owner's time on the farm:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2.4. Engagement with tourism or local markets: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2.5. Number of generations living on the land today: \_\_\_\_\_

2.6. Who works the land today? Give name and relationship to owner of property:

\_\_\_\_\_

2.7. Who is the manager of the farm if other than the owner?: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2.7.1. Is the owner actively engaged in the everyday operation of the farm?: \_\_\_\_\_

2.8. Important events and activities occurring on the farm **during the owner's lifetime**

related to the development of the farm or ranch, the history of the community, and the  
history of Tennessee:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2.9. Additional historical information, including pictures, documents, stories, attachments,  
etc., of previous owners not previously submitted:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### 3. *Cultural Resource Survey*

#### 3.1. Buildings

3.1.1. Total Number of Buildings (including outbuildings): \_\_\_\_\_

3.1.2. List of Identified Buildings with Dates (i.e. wellhouse -1880s, farmhouse - 1920s)

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3.1.3. Assign Buildings to the Following Condition Categories:

3.1.3.1. Good: No visible structural problems, no missing elements

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3.1.3.2. Fair: Shows some evidence of deterioration, some missing elements

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---

3.1.3.3. Poor: Shows evidence of major structural problems, extensive vegetation.

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3.1.3.4. Altered: Obvious signs building has been altered.

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3.1.3.5. Ruins: Collapsed/Collapsing, overgrown, or ruins

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---

3.1.4. Special Notes About Buildings: \_\_\_\_\_

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3.2. Is a cemetery present: Yes\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_

3.2.1. Condition of Cemetery: \_\_\_\_\_

---

3.2.2. Special Notes about Cemetery: \_\_\_\_\_

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3.3. Landscape or special setting features: \_\_\_\_\_

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#### 4. *Preservation Concerns*

4.1. Buildings: \_\_\_\_\_

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4.2. Landscapes: \_\_\_\_\_

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4.3. Owner's Concerns for Preservation (list here): \_\_\_\_\_

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4.3.1. Involvement in tourism: \_\_\_\_\_

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4.3.2. Involvement in local, state, or federal support programs (tax breaks, grants, etc.)

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4.3.3. Involvement with private organizations (Land Trust for Tennessee, Co-Op, etc.)

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5. *Recording Information*

5.1. Name of Surveyor: \_\_\_\_\_

5.2. Date of Survey: \_\_\_\_\_

5.3. Individuals Talked To: \_\_\_\_\_

5.4. Information Filed At: \_\_\_\_\_

6. *Appendices/Additional Information*

*The purpose of this survey is to update and expand on the Tennessee Century Farms Program's existing information on Century Farms in Wilson County. Additionally, this survey will also identify preservation concerns that owners face in maintaining Century Farms. This survey is being conducted by J. Ethan Holden, a Ph.D. student at Middle Tennessee State University and a graduate research assistant at the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, which administers the Tennessee Century Farms Program.*

*Fall 2020*

*Contact Information*

*Phone: (615)-218-0385*

*Email: jeh6g@mtmail.mtsu.edu or ethanholden83@gmail.com*