

Multiple Stories: Urbanism, Interpretation, and the Historic House Museum

by

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To Kevin, thank you for supporting me throughout every twist and turn life has taken. You are my rock and my fellow history nerd. I am forever grateful for you.

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ABSTRACT

Historic buildings are integral to telling the story of a place. Yet, the prevailing conversation around house museums in recent years has centered around the idea that these dwellings are no longer relevant. While the traditional “roped-off” period room house museum may be a trend of the past, these sites remain useful to understand a deeper history of a place.

My dissertation will focus on what historic house museums can mean for a community. Through adaptive reuse and community engagement, old homes can be powerful tools to educate the public and localize larger historical narratives. When a visitor takes a tour at a historic house museum, they learn not only about the people who lived on the property, but they can also absorb the changing physical and social landscape happening in the region. That synthesis is one of the key elements of contemporary interpretation.

The research presented in this dissertation examines five historic house museums in various stages of development. The John Henry Carothers House demonstrates how a black farmhouse can survive encroaching urbanism and provide a community with the story of farm work in the early twentieth century. The Burwell-Dinkins House disrupts the narrative of poor black southerners, showcasing a home that served physicians, musicians, Civil Rights activists, and educators in Selma, Alabama.

The Sadie Ford Heritage Farm serves as a comparison to the Carothers Farm; both are rural farmhouses in Middle Tennessee, but the Ford family were white farmers and educators. Their land has also faced encroaching urbanism, just like the Carothers house, where the physical changes to the landscape can obscure the important historical narrative. Two Rivers Mansion is the only antebellum property in this dissertation; the conversation is centered around enslaved labor and shifting interpretive strategies. The final case study, Cheekwood Estate and Gardens, also deals with the concept of obscured labor, this time in an early twentieth century home. The craftsmen who built the home and the domestic workers responsible for maintaining it will soon be a larger component of the interpretive conversation. These institutions are all examples of house museums and their need for more encompassing interpretation to tell a larger story, one that encapsulates the entirety of the historic landscape.

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INTRODUCTION

Museums come in a variety of types, locations, functions, and areas of focus. There are science museums, children's museums, fine art museums, and history museums; even zoos and botanical gardens are defined as museums, according to the American Alliance of Museums.¹ Many millions of people seek out these types of institutions every year. Why? Why are we compelled to learn about and from these educational properties in cities and towns across the country and around the world? I think the short answer is we are compelled to learn about the people and things that came before us, and to gain a greater understanding of the world around us.

So where do historic house museums fit in our world of museums? They are typically the ideal places to learn more about local history through the legacy of local families. A house museum provides an unmatched opportunity for immersion into a particular time or place. Moreover, the domestic sphere and family setting offer opportunities for meaningful individual experiences and subversion of the dominant historical narrative. The use of furnishings, wall treatments, china and silverware (among other material culture components) as well as informative interpretation can provide a visitor with an unparalleled experience of the past.

The historiography of domestic spaces is emerging. For much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, only a few domestic spaces were preserved and repurposed as museum sites. These facilities continue to serve primarily to memorialize specific individuals, like Presidents and business leaders, and to explain their contribution to national heritage. Then, homes of all

¹ "About Museums," American Alliance of Museums, accessed July 9, 2021, <https://www.aam-us.org/programs/about-museums/>.

sorts became vehicles to praise and memorialize elite white families. In the later decades of the 20th century, house museums became instruments of social history. In particular, museum professionals used homes to explain the complex social relationships of regions, and not just praise the beauty and taste of a family and their home. The specific social dynamics depend on the period of interpretation. Grand antebellum homes like Two Rivers Mansion in Nashville, Tennessee, provided accessible opportunities for the visiting public to learn about the tenuous position of a planter class dependent on a cash crop, the varied experiences of enslaved individuals, the feminine realm of domestic production, and the impacts of war and reconstruction on individuals and communities.² Architecturally significant post-reconstruction homes like the Burwell-Dinkins Historic House Museum in Selma, Alabama communicate the emergence of a black middle class in a segregated society, not only as a historical fact, but also as a personal reality. The vernacular homes of the inter-war period, like the Sadie Ford property and the John Henry Carothers House, show how individuals and households navigated technological and economic changes of the period. Through the lens of social history, these two historic houses have special importance precisely because of their ordinariness and recency. The interpretation of these properties can communicate the origins of current social and economic relationships, allowing visitors to personally relate to the past.

More recently, in the twenty-first century, the historiography of historic house museums in historic preservation literature has centered on practical concerns, namely, whether there are too many of these sites. Scholars also emphasize ways in which house museums better engage and educate visitors. First and foremost, a historic house museum should serve its community,

² Two Rivers has only recently begun to center part of its interpretation on these social dynamics. However, similar sites have served as pedagogical tools which allow the visiting public to learn about the complexities of the antebellum South.

not only to tell the story of the space, but to enrich the community itself. Contemporary interpretation is often hyper-localized. Additionally, these properties often serve as event spaces with interpretation incorporated into present-day community use of the property. Understanding the day-to-day existence of those who lived before we did, especially the stories that have been marginalized, enables the visiting public to understand historic complexity. It also allows us as a community to alter our current thinking, giving us a broader picture of the past and the present. Telling the stories of those who lived on the land before us gives us a greater appreciation for the cultural and physical landscape that we inhabit today. In the rubric of current historical analysis, the interpretation of these sites constructs a shared narrative.

Museum collections are typically comprised of things. Objects reflect our history and cultural affiliations. They also demonstrate the values a person or group of people hold dear at a given point in time. The things collected by institutions can be useful to museum staff to tell the story of a particular discipline, place, and/or time. Museum curator and historian Sherry Butcher-Youngmans, in her book *Historic House Museums: A Practical Handbook for Their Care, Preservation, and Management* demonstrates the importance of material culture for historic institutions: “the collection and preservation of objects that represent our cultural past are generally agreed to be a museum’s most important functions. It is the collection- the objects exhibited and stored- that are the very essence of the historic house museum.”³ In this case, she speaks directly to collection practices of house museums, but her points are also relevant in the discussion of more traditional museums.

The role of objects in interpreting the past is a central topic on the scholarly historiography of the American museum. Butcher-Youngmans’s examination of the objects found

³ Sherry Butcher-Youngmans, *Historic House Museums: A Practical Handbook for Their Care, Preservation, and Management* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 48.

in a home and how they can tell an intriguing story is a part of a larger conversation about material culture and interpretation. Jessica Foy Donnelly is another important scholar in this subject area. She is a former museum curator who has edited several volumes on American material culture including *American Home Life, 1880-1930: A Social History of Spaces and Services* and *The Arts and the American Home, 1890-1930*.⁴ In these volumes, Foy Donnelly and other scholars identify how spaces and the objects found in them are important artifacts in the understanding of the past. There are several chapters in these works that identify quotidian objects and highlight them as keys to truly experiencing how people of the past utilized spaces. These objects include needlework and other (stereotypically female) handicrafts, musical instruments, books, photographs, and, in the more abstract sense, garden spaces.

The marginalized role of women's work in historiography is related to the devaluation of important objects as ephemera. However, artifacts of everyday life are critical to creating an accessible interpretation of the past for a contemporary public. Laurel Ulrich, in *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth*, discusses a variety of material objects and their impact on the home, the owner, and the stories left behind. She states, "artifacts tell us most when they are imbedded in the rich texture of local history."⁵

In this work, she addresses items related to nineteenth century New Englanders. Ulrich implores her readers to treat objects with the same validity as written documentation, highlighting textiles like stockings, linen tablecloths, and blankets. Most of the things discussed by these scholars are extremely transient, and can shift within spaces inside a home, or leave the

⁴ Jessica H. Foy and Thomas J. Schlereth, eds., *American Home Life, 1880-1930: A Social History of Spaces and Services*, 1st ed (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992); Jessica H. Foy and Karal Ann Marling, eds., *The Arts and the American Home, 1890-1930*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994).

⁵ Laurel Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York: Knopf, 2001), 39.

home entirely. So, therefore, curators and historians are left with a dilemma: how can a museum use ephemeral things in their interpretation? Contemporary scholarship and praxis have evolved to refocus public-oriented interpretation on everyday objects, and by extension, the real lived experience, of the people who came before us.

It is also possible to interpret a space without physical objects of material culture. The Grove Museum (also known as the Call/Collins House) in Tallahassee, Florida, serves as an example. It is the c.1840s home of several Florida governors (Territorial Governor Richard Keith Call and his great grandson-in-law LeRoy Collins). Except for the office of LeRoy Collins, the museum has precious few objects on display. Most rooms are nearly empty, with technology-assisted and static didactic panels placed in the corners for visitor interpretation. The staff have chosen to put the stories of people who were enslaved on the property in the same rooms as those who enslaved them. By employing this take on interpretation, the museum provides visitors with a more complete picture of everyone who lived on the property in the past.

The use of objects in interpretation is slippery and can be misleading. Many historic house museums, like Two Rivers Mansion in Donelson, Tennessee, no longer feature their original furnishings. That museum, and others like it, are reliant on period furnishings that have been donated from various sources. Substitutionary period-piece collections may or may not contribute to telling the holistic story of the families that once lived in the home. These objects can contribute to the broader context of time period and place with interpretation, but the distinction needs to be made clear. As William Seale notes in the introduction to his book *Recreating the Historic House Interior*, "to recreate is to approximate."⁶ In this, he means

⁶ William Seale, *Recreating the Historic House Interior* (Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History, 1979), ix.

restoration is not a cookie cutter replication of a historic space, but more of a (well-researched) best guess on the general setting of an interior.

Interpretation is a key component to telling the story of a house, its objects, and the people in it. Lisa Brochu and Tim Merriman are responsible for several critical books on this topic.⁷ Many of the authors mentioned here have posited in their writings that the essence of material culture and interpretation are inextricably combined. Seale said it succinctly: “In the historic house museum, objects will carry a greater part of the burden of interpretation than words.”⁸ Even Freeman Tilden, one of the “fathers of interpretation,” saw the importance of objects in the education of the public.

His early writings were aimed at interpreting National Park Service sites, yet his treatise on interpretation serves a myriad of diverse institutions today. Tilden defined interpretation as “an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, or by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information.”⁹ He saw the purpose of telling stories at a historic site as meaningful and stressed the need to engage with the public on multiple levels to ensure they were receiving benefit from the experience. Freeman espoused a set of six principles of interpretation, including “the chief aim of interpretation is not instruction but provocation” and

⁷ Lisa Brochu, *Interpretive Planning: The 5-M Model for Successful Planning Projects* (Fort Collins, CO: National Association for Interpretation, 2014); Lisa Brochu and Tim Merriman, *Personal Interpretation: Connecting Your Audience to Heritage Resources* (Fort Collins, CO: National Association of Interpretation, 2015). Both of these books provide practical and invaluable insight into the crafting and implementation of successful interpretive plans for museums.

⁸ Seale, *Recreating the Historic House Interior*, 5–6. He continues: “They will reveal the relative degree of comfort and convenience in which the inhabitants lived. In their materials and means of construction, objects will speak of the technological capabilities of those who made them, whether the user himself, a local craftsman, or a distant manufacturer; their presence will explain what was available to people in a given place and time. The form of the object will express ideas of appropriateness and beauty held by people long since dead. An object, the symbol of its own function, thus symbolizes aspects of living, and many objects, brought together in a room with historical sensitivity, combine with the room itself—the warmth of the hearth, the light from its windows—to create for alien eyes and senses an essay on how life was lived there.”

⁹ Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 16–17.

“the visitor’s chief interest is in whatever touches his personality, his experiences, and his ideals.”¹⁰

These ideas demonstrate the need to not simply instruct a visitor, but to engage them in their own history and interests as well. William T. Anderson and Shirley Payne Low write that “interpretation is both a program and an activity. The program establishes a set of objectives for the things we want our visitors to understand; the activity has to do with the skills and techniques by which that understanding is created.”¹¹ These authors also identify the need for institutions to recognize the flux in interpretation requirements as public audiences shift and change over the course of time. They emphasize that the site was preserved for a reason; it’s a historically significant and valuable asset to the community. The goal is to get the visitor to understand that fact: “[they] must understand what the historical value is today—and the site organization should recognize at the outset that historical value is not something fixed for all time, but something changing with new perspectives and new audiences.”¹²

Noted author and historian, known as the “historian of the historic preservation movement,” Charles B. Hosmer, Jr. wrote several significant works regarding how preservation became what it is today. In his well-known series, starting with *Presence of the Past: The History of the Historic Preservation Movement in the United States Before Williamsburg*, he outlines the progression of the field from volunteerism to a professional workforce, outlining notable historic sites along the way. These sites include Colonial Williamsburg and the Henry Ford site Greenfield Village. In the second book of that series, *Preservation Comes of Age: From Williamsburg to the National Trust, 1926-1949*, he discusses the role of the federal government

¹⁰ Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, 36, 59.

¹¹ William T. Alderson and Shirley Payne Low, *Interpretation of Historic Sites*, American Association for State and Local History Book Series (Walnut Creek, Calif: AltaMira Press, 1996), 3.

¹² Alderson and Low, *Interpretation of Historic Sites*, 22.

as organizations like the National Park Service and programs like the National Trust for Historic Preservation coalesced in this period.¹³ Authors Max Page and Randall Mason challenge the “narrow view of preservation’s undertaking” laid out by Hosmer in his books.¹⁴ They note that the newer movement of preservationists are influenced by shifts in the field, such as social history, an abundance of sub-altern histories, and the proliferation of scholarship and practice in the discipline of public history since Hosmer’s writings in the 1960s and 1980s.

Historian Patricia West, in her work *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of American House Museums*, states it well, “house museums are products as well as purveyors of history.”¹⁵ The editors of *Houses and Homes: Exploring their History* also shed some light on the reasoning for the pursuit of history.¹⁶ It is, they claim, a study of the human condition. The study of history provides the learner with an exposure to the larger themes and movements that surround a historic site, allowing them to gain a greater understanding for the larger historical context that people lived and worked in.

When a visitor takes a tour at a historic house museum, they learn not only about the people who lived on the property, but they can also absorb the changing physical and social landscape happening in the region. An experience like this is one of the key elements of contemporary interpretation. The Two Rivers Mansion in Davidson County exemplifies the trend. This information provides a fuller picture of the house and the surrounding community, now part of the urban landscape. Two Rivers is an antebellum home that was almost certainly

¹³ Charles Bridgham Hosmer, *Preservation Comes of Age: From Williamsburg to the National Trust, 1926-1949* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1981). For more information on the formation of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, please see chapter 10 in this volume.

¹⁴ Max Page and Randall Mason, eds., *Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 7–8.

¹⁵ Patricia West, *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America’s House Museums* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999), xii.

¹⁶ Barbara J. Howe, ed., *Houses and Homes: Exploring Their History*, (Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History, 1987).

built by enslaved labor, and their stories are part of the same landscape as the wealthy planters for whom the principal road in the neighborhood is named. As the editors of *Houses and Homes* explain, “Just as the history of an individual is shaped by broader forces in history, so too is the history of a home. House histories, then, can contribute to the public’s understanding of local and social history.”¹⁷

John A. Herbst begins his chapter “Historic Houses” with the identification of arguably the first two historic house museum preservation groups.¹⁸ These two groups focused on conserving sites associated with America’s first president. They preserved George Washington’s wartime headquarters, the Hasbrouck House in New York, and his home, Mount Vernon in Virginia, in the middle nineteenth century.

Journalist and historian Marc Leepson, in his book *Saving Monticello: The Levy Family’s Epic Quest to Rescue the House That Jefferson Built*, recenters the family responsible for Monticello’s preservation.¹⁹ The Levy’s owned the property for more than eight decades in the time after Jefferson’s death. They took care of the home and put much of their own family fortune into its conservation. *Saving Monticello* is a great example of the whole story of a historic site not being told. The Levy family’s efforts, contributions, time, and money were integral to the continued preservation and restoration of Jefferson’s home, but their story was left out of the narrative of the social history of Monticello until recently. Other authors have written

¹⁷ Howe, *Houses and Homes*, 5.

¹⁸ Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig, eds., *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 98.

¹⁹ Marc Leepson, *Saving Monticello: The Levy Family’s Epic Quest to Rescue the House That Jefferson Built* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003).

about the preservation efforts of historic houses, including historians Drew A. Swanson and James Michael Lindgren.²⁰

The Mount Vernon Ladies' Association and other organizations like the Ladies Hermitage Association (who are responsible for the preservation of Andrew Jackson's Hermitage in Tennessee) were "enmeshed in the cult of domesticity," according to West.²¹ These women, and countless others, were largely responsible for the period room with velvet rope, nationalistic shrines as early house museums were known. Patriotic heroes were memorialized in these spaces, fueling the mythologized past that is now coming to light as flawed and reductive.

Current scholarship, notably Frank Vagnone and Deborah E. Ryan's *Anarchist's Guide to Historic House Museums*, provides a counterpoint to the origins of the house museum movement. Their work demonstrates some of the flaws in these sites and suggests useful changes to be made in house museums, but it can be, at times, provocative simply for the purpose of being provocative. They use the terms "rant" and "evidence" as components of the structure for the book, as well as suggest "Anarchist tags" as a way of receiving visitors' feedback.²² That being said, they are provocative for a reason. Historic houses, by and large, do have issues when it comes to interpretation and creating an inviting and informative visitor experience. Vagnone and Ryan highlight some of the very real complaints of the public when visiting house museums, including lack of access to the home and an inundation of historical information (or house museum orientation).

²⁰ For more information, please see the following works: Drew A. Swanson, *Remaking Wormsloe Plantation: The Environmental History of a Lowcountry Landscape*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012); James Michael Lindgren, *Preserving the Old Dominion: Historic Preservation and Virginia Traditionalism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993).

²¹ West, *Domesticating History*, 1.

²² Franklin D. Vagnone and Deborah E. Ryan, *Anarchist's Guide to Historic House Museums* (Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press, Inc, 2016). "Anarchist's tags" are mentioned throughout the book but described in detail on pages 215–20.

Like *Anarchist's Guide*, other recent scholarship is interested in shaking up the historic house museum world. The idea behind academic work in the last few decades includes decentralizing the narrative of the museum. The concept of decentralization is certainly not limited to historic house museums, but it is glaring, and needed, especially in the antebellum Southern landscape. There is a near avalanche of scholarship aimed at discussing the devastating history of slavery at house museum sites, and how that has typically been ignored in the presentation and interpretation of the space.

Landscape Archaeology: Reading and Interpreting the American Historical Landscape, edited by Rebecca Yamin and Karen Bescherer Metheny, discusses the concept of “human agency” and the need for that topic to be presented at historic sites.²³ Agency clarifies who actually built and maintained these spaces, not just who conceptualized and paid for them. The authors in this volume also emphasize the need for examination of the vernacular landscape. Elite landscapes- places like Monticello, the Hermitage, and Mount Vernon- have been preserved and interpreted for the public, whereas the conversation is just beginning in the everyday, ordinary spaces. These ordinary spaces can be present at elite sites and have started to be included in the public understanding of historic sites. As architectural and preservation historian Max Page shows in his work *Why Preservation Matters*, the early years of the preservation movement in the United States has been almost laser focused on preservation of elite and “celebratory” history.²⁴ In his estimation, it is a very recent trend to also focus on the more “difficult” aspects of history; topics such as slavery, segregation, and racial violence have largely been overlooked in the early years of preservation. Interestingly, Page notes the “U.S.

²³ Rebecca Yamin and Karen Bescherer Metheny, eds., *Landscape Archaeology: Reading and Interpreting the American Historical Landscape* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996).

²⁴ Max Page, *Why Preservation Matters*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 11–12.

preservation movement has done a lot to save old buildings and other monuments but surprisingly little to tell their stories.”²⁵ In this, he is clear that interpretation is needed to experience a historic site in its entirety.

In their edited volume, *Cabin, Quarter, Plantation: Architecture and Landscapes of North American Slavery*, architectural historians Clifton Ellis and Rebecca Ginsburg detail the importance of slavery’s impact on the landscape: “it is our contention, and that of the contributors to this volume, that we cannot fully understand the built environment of North America without taking slavery into account.”²⁶ Included in this volume is an intriguing chapter about slave housing in antebellum Tennessee by Michael Strutt. His focus on extant dwelling spaces for enslaved individuals in Tennessee includes living quarters both inside the “big house” and separate outbuildings. He discusses the concepts of security and convenience when comparing the placement of living spaces by antebellum enslavers. Observations like this provide further evidence that the story of the enslaved is complicated, complex, and deserving of scholarship.

Several authors address the need for the topic of slavery, interpretation, and the house museum to coalesce into a more holistic public history approach to visitor experiences. *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites*, *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, and *Place, Race, and Story: Essays on the Past and Future of Historic Preservation* all provide discourse on the convergence of slavery and public history.²⁷

²⁵ Page, *Why Preservation Matters*, 12.

²⁶ Clifton Ellis and Rebecca Ginsburg, eds., *Cabin, Quarter, Plantation: Architecture and Landscapes of North American Slavery* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 2.

²⁷ Kris Gallas and James DeWolf Perry, eds., *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015); James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, eds., *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* (New York: New Press, 2006); Ned Kaufman, *Place, Race, and Story: Essays on the Past and Future of Historic Preservation* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

Another important volume in the literature surrounding the much-needed emphasis on the African American story on the landscape is *“We Shall Independent Be”: African American Place Making and the Struggle to Claim Space in the United States*, edited by Angel David Nieves and Leslie M. Alexander.²⁸ While not focused exclusively on house museums, several chapters in this book are relevant to the context of African Americans, space, place, and agency. Historian Mary Hoffschwelle, in her chapter “Rosenwald Schools in the Southern Landscape,” discusses the formation and short history of the school-building program.²⁹ She shows how rural African American communities utilized the funds offered by philanthropist Julius Rosenwald to establish their own places on the landscape. By creating these buildings, they employed agency in the process, and claimed a place for themselves.

Michelle R. Scott examines the buildings that comprise a commercial district in late nineteenth/early twentieth century Chattanooga.³⁰ Also of relevant and notable importance in this collection is the chapter “Sacred Spaces of Faith, Community, and Resistance: Rural African American Churches in Jim Crow Tennessee” by public historian Carroll Van West.³¹ His chapter elaborates on the rural church as an integral component of the black identity. Not only did these buildings serve as a space for worship, but often also performed double duty as a schoolhouse as well. All these chapters demonstrate the resiliency of African American communities throughout the country as they navigated a society fraught with political, cultural, and social challenges to create their own places and spaces in the landscape.

²⁸ Angel David Nieves and Leslie M. Alexander, eds., *“We Shall Independent Be”: African American Place Making and the Struggle to Claim Space in the United States* (Boulder, Colo: University Press of Colorado, 2008).

²⁹ Nieves and Alexander, *“We Shall Independent Be”*. Please find Dr. Hoffschwelle's article on pages 275–304.

³⁰ Nieves and Alexander, *“We Shall Independent Be,”* 393–411.

³¹ Nieves and Alexander, *“We Shall Independent Be,”* 439–61.

John H. Arnold, in his work *History: A Very Short Introduction*, discusses the need to examine all voices in a historical narrative.³² He notes that in a quest for the “right” story or for the “truth” in history, that often one single narrative is held aloft while everything else is drowned out as “lesser,” “bad,” or “wrong.” In the chapter “The Telling of Truth,” Arnold emphasizes the challenges of telling the stories of those typically marginalized in history, including women and people of color.³³

The sheer volume of scholastic literature demonstrates that the landscape is trying to tell us the story of its history, we just need to look and listen. We are capable and responsible as historians to tell the full story of a place and time within its context.

Patrick H. Butler III identifies another issue in house museums: interpretation. A historic site is typically very complex, with multiple stories existing and overlapping on the landscape. The challenge is to showcase the importance of all these stories in equal measure. Butler notes that often the focus of house museum interpretation is on the domestic sphere of the home. That information is useful and necessary, to be sure, but to focus solely on that is to neglect other topics like work, religion, and social activities. To only interpret a small amount of daily life is to isolate the house museum from the present-day visitor. “It is imperative,” Butler states, “that house museums expand their range of interpretations.”³⁴

In the same volume, two other authors discuss the necessity of a thorough interpretive plan for the landscape of a historic house. Catherine Howett's chapter “Grounds for Interpretation: Landscape Context of Historic House Museums” and Rex M. Ellis in

³² John Arnold, *History: A Very Short Introduction*, Very Short Introductions (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

³³ Arnold, *History: A Very Short Introduction*, 110–23.

³⁴ Jessica Foy Donnelly, ed., *Interpreting Historic House Museums* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002), 40.

“Interpreting the Whole House,” engage with the discussion of holistic interpretation. Ellis was responsible for the creation of “The Other Half” tour at Colonial Williamsburg in the 1980s. The information given on the tour and the physicality of the tour itself led to a very different visitor experience and was a departure from the usual visit. As he states in his chapter, “providing diverse perspectives is still one of the most important qualities of successful interpretation.”³⁵ Controversial subjects exist in most cultural and historical landscapes, and Ellis suggests that museums should lean into these conversations. Ideally, the museum should be well-informed before doing so.

Howett identifies a similar issue, while highlighting the need to look outside of the house itself and absorb the experience of the landscape.³⁶ She demonstrates that historical interpretation should include an important and oft overlooked primary source: the physical landscape. This can include formal designed gardens, but the fuller picture also needs to examine the quotidian on the site. The vernacular can include swept yards, kitchen gardens, agricultural fields, and outbuildings. Importantly, the conversation of these spaces also needs to include the people who created and used these spaces on a daily basis.

My research revolves around the southern historic house museum and its place in the community. The five properties I will be using in my dissertation are located in two Southern states, Alabama and Tennessee. Each of these historic buildings have survived numerous challenges for a hundred years or more. All of them have ceased their functions as private homes- some much more recently than others. But then what is to be done with them? Should every historic building be a historic house museum? Many scholars in the field would answer with a resounding “no.” I concur, with a caveat. Not all old buildings should be museums,

³⁵ Donnelly, *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, 69.

³⁶ Donnelly, *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, 112–20.

certainly. However, many are still useful, even vital, in their individual communities. It has been shown that investment in preservation projects can provide invaluable support to local communities by providing jobs and opportunities for craftspeople and other workers in the area.³⁷ These projects also stimulate the local economic and social activities, allowing for dynamism that might be absent otherwise.

What role do house museums play in communities' formation of identity and historical narrative? In what ways do historic homes shape the ways in which people orient themselves in relationship to the past and make sense of past events and lived experiences? How do former residences function as both a place for individuals and communities to create history in the present, and at the same time, a place to learn about and interpret the past? I will give special attention to the ways in which present experiences in historical homes allow for individuals and communities to reconcile contemporary narratives and identities with incongruous and difficult realities of historical social structures.

Old buildings can become recreation centers, parks, event centers, restaurants, or other small businesses through adaptive reuse. These places can uplift a neighborhood or town, providing much needed spaces to the community. More traditional historic house museums are also capable of hosting events on their campuses, contributing to community outreach and accessibility. While the public attends these events or goes to a small business in a converted old house, the history of the place and its spaces can be imparted. How is this done? How can an old building, specifically a historic home, tell the fullest story possible to its public? How can it reach out to a community that can be aloof to the history surrounding it? How can these (occasionally) crumbling old places remain relevant in the communities of the twenty-first century? As preservationist and historian Max Page states in *Why Preservation Matters*, “only

³⁷ Page, *Why Preservation Matters*, 80–81.

when we place a comprehensive understanding of history and communal meaning at the center of preservation work will the movement tell the full story of a diverse world.”³⁸

My five selected southern historic houses will help to answer these questions. Chapter One will examine the John Henry Carothers House in Williamson County, Tennessee. The building and the adjacent land are currently owned by an out-of-state private developer with the aim of eventually turning the house into a city park. The home was vacant for a few years before the developers acquired it, leading to vandalism, theft, and neglect of the building and the objects inside. Fieldwork consisted of assessing the material culture left inside the home over the course of several days. Several classmates and I worked alongside the developer and staff from the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation to examine the items and determine what was salvageable. We also researched the Carothers family and placed them within their historical context of an African American farm-owning family in the early twentieth century South. The pandemic has delayed the completion of this project, but new work is finally underway.

Chapter Two addresses the Burwell-Dinkins Historic House, a potential house museum, in Selma, Alabama. A private foundation that is still in the formation process will lead the preservation effort. Fieldwork for this site commenced shortly before the pandemic in February 2020. I was part of a MTSU Center for Historic Preservation effort to assess and catalogue primary objects in the home, including furniture and artwork. I performed research into the objects we discovered as well as collections management software for the burgeoning house museum. In 1920, The Burwell-Dinkins home was included along with fifteen other notable African American homes throughout the country in a special article that W.E.B. DuBois published in *The Crisis*, the monthly magazine of the NAACP. I had the opportunity to dive deep into the other homes on the list and establish who owned the homes and whether they were still

³⁸ Page, *Why Preservation Matters*, 16.

extant. That research provided valuable context for the Burwell-Dinkins Home; not only was it still extant (few on the list remain standing), but it is in the process of becoming a house museum.

Sadie Ford Heritage Farm and Cultural Art Center will be covered in Chapter Three. The property is in Wilson County, Tennessee, and is administered by the Cedars of Lebanon State Park. The Ford family, local educators and farmers, had the home built for them in the 1920s. Encroaching urbanism in the area has displaced many of the adjacent farms and homesteads, leaving the Sadie Ford Heritage Farm as an important symbol of the past landscape of Wilson County. The home stands witness to the myriad changes that have occurred in the immediate area, including the WPA-era construction of the state park and the performance of the “Tennessee Maneuvers” during World War II directly in front of the home. Sadie Ford is a relatively new historic center, having been purchased by the state in 2018. It serves the community as not only a house museum, but also as a heritage farm where the public can get a glimpse of early twentieth century farming life. Interpretation and programming continue to expand as the cultural center continues to mature.

Chapter Four will address Two Rivers Mansion in Donelson, Tennessee. I have served as an interpreter at this site for the last two summers and I became a board member in the beginning of 2022. Enslaved workers built Two Rivers as an antebellum mansion for David and “Willie” McGavock in 1859. The Metropolitan Government of Nashville & Davidson County Parks Department acquired the property in the 1960s. It is currently an event venue and historic house museum under the purview of the Friends of Two Rivers group. Interpretation and engagement for this historic site is in place but continues to need refinement as more research and

documentation occurs. Various spaces in the home and on the landscape provide an opportunity for telling the fuller story of the African American experience at this Southern antebellum home.

Cheekwood Estate and Gardens will provide the fifth and final case study for this dissertation as Chapter Five. Originally built as a country estate for the wealthy Cheek family in the 1920s and the early 1930s, this estate now serves as an important community asset for Nashville and the surrounding area. Cheekwood is arguably the most established historic site out of all my case studies, having become a museum and botanical garden in 1960. Cheekwood Estate and Gardens served as my residency project, and I continue to have an ongoing relationship with the staff. The Interpretive Plan, the goal of my project, is likely a year or more from completion. The residency year has certainly served as a great example of process over product, and I have learned much working with the executive staff. Another component of the project is research into the staff and craftsmen who were responsible for the construction and maintenance of the property. There is a noticeable overlap between Two Rivers and Cheekwood in the discussion of labor on the respective properties. Obviously, the conversation of labor at Two Rivers encompasses the topic of enslavement, while Cheekwood is a twentieth century construction and built without the institution of slavery. These two historic sites will allow me to bring the stories of labor to the forefront, giving me the opportunity to highlight the craftsmen who built them, as well as the domestic staff who cleaned, maintained, and largely ran these places.

All these homes are essential in helping me demonstrate the necessity of historic buildings in communities around the South. I chose these sites to highlight a variety of buildings in a variety of communities in various stages of development. Some of the homes, like Burwell-Dinkins, are under development as house museums and are not yet open to the public for

interpretation. Others, like Two Rivers and Cheekwood, have been toured by the public for decades, but need to enter the twenty-first century standards of interpretation. Every home examined in this study is integral to the deeper understanding of the communities in which it resides. They tell the stories of black and white, enslaved and free, wealth and hardship across the South and throughout the last two centuries. It is important for communities to understand who and what existed on the land before the present, and how those stories shaped the landscape that is visible today. These homes can provide that opportunity, while also serving as assets to the places where they sit. Through interpretation and community engagement, these and other Southern historic house museums can serve as long-term cultural resources to their neighborhoods and cities.

**CHAPTER ONE:
JOHN HENRY CAROTHERS HOUSE, CITY PARK/PRIVATE DEVELOPERS,
FRANKLIN, TENNESSEE**

House museums are unique tools of public history which interpret intimate spaces into teaching tools and community assets. The process of transforming the private realm into a public facing is multifaced and at times arduous. The process begins by identifying a site as culturally significant, ensuring its physical preservation, and transferring custody of the property to some kind of public-spirited institution. The degree of institutionalization varies according to the manner through which the property transitions from private to public space.

The John Henry Carothers House is currently a construction site. The building was formerly the home of the Carothers family, small-scale African American farmers from Franklin Tennessee. The house, constructed by John Henry and his son Ezeal in 1937, represents rural black landownership in early twentieth century Tennessee. John Henry purchased 26 acres from the white Carothers family and sought to become a farmer on his land. He and Ezeal cultivated tobacco on the property over the course of several generations. Their descendants inherited land that became infinitely more valuable as the landscape around it developed. The John Henry Carothers House is in the initial phase of its transformation into a teaching tool. It shares many of the same practical challenges and opportunities as the Sadie Ford Heritage Farm and Cultural Art Center (Chapter 3) and Burwell-Dinkins-Anderson Historic House (Chapter 2).

Franklin has urbanized over the last nearly 100 years, allowing the Carothers descendants to monetize this phenomenon when they sold the property to a developer, providing generational wealth to John Henry's heirs. As people move into the multifamily development that now encompasses the Carothers House, it would be easy to miss the multigenerational story that

exists on the property. It is the hope of the developer Goldberg Companies Inc. (GCI), the city of Franklin, a local African American historical group, and the Middle Tennessee State University Center for Historic Preservation that through preservation and interpretation, this important farmhouse can illustrate rural black homeownership throughout the twentieth century.

The interpretive opportunities at the site are similar to the Sadie Ford Heritage Farm (Chapter 3); both sites provide a view of a disappearing landscape of Middle Tennessee. Both sites also provide tangible connections to the daily lives of small-scale farmers in the upper south during the mid-twentieth century. Contrasting the sites is also informative. The Carothers were black, the families that lived on the Sadie Ford Farm were white. Both sets of families lived through the final decades of segregation and the beginning of the Civil Rights movement. That difference, in light of the similarities between the farmsteads, reveals the role of race and legally prescribed separation in the private lives of families trying to make a living and a life in a disappearing agrarian economy. Interpretation of the Carothers site also presents opportunities to understand class divisions among black Southerners during the twentieth century through contrasts with the Dinkins House (Chapter 2), which is in a similar stage of transitioning from a private home to a house museum. However, before the Carothers property can be used as an interpretive tool, public historians must first secure the home and its contents while respectfully cataloging and memorializing the private lives of the people who lived there.

Center for Historic Preservation Fieldwork and Project

In the Fall of 2019, a team of researchers, students, and volunteers visited the Carothers property to sort and secure its contents. The house and outbuildings were adjacent to a building project site and in major disrepair. For a week in October 2019, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation staff and students, along with students from Columbia State Community College,

began to parse through and organize the material culture in the home. The team discovered personal correspondence, furniture, farm equipment, school records, and many other important items left behind by the Carothers family.

Organizing and cataloguing the mementos left behind by three generations of Carothers allows public historians to tell their story within the context of rural black landownership in Tennessee. After sorting through the objects that remained in the home, the team roughly organized smaller items and documents to be accepted into the Williamson County Archives. The larger objects were maintained by the owner on site. The items collected and catalogued include pieces of bedroom furniture, a sewing machine, handheld farming implements, and the original mailbox with the Carothers name painted on the side.



Figure 1.1. The author (R) and colleague Dr. Victoria Hensley sorting through objects during fieldwork in Fall of 2019. Photograph by Savannah Grandey Knies, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection.

Currently, the home is an island amidst a sea of development; a multifamily development is under construction on land adjacent to the farmhouse. The erasure of the historic landscape is

an important attribute shared by the John Henry Carothers House and the Sadie Ford Heritage Farm in Lebanon, Tennessee (Chapter 3). Both sites are the last extant physical manifestation of a landscape of small-scale farms which is no longer visible. The remaining outbuildings which were part of the twenty-six-acre purchase are no longer extant. A garage, storage shed, and tobacco barn have been demolished since fieldwork began in 2019. All these structures were in varying states of disrepair when the land still belonged to the Carothers family. There is also a well on the property; it is unclear the status of that historic feature given the changing landscape due to construction.

The research team revisited the property a few times since the initial fieldwork, including walking the property in search of burials. That endeavor was unsuccessful; however, we did locate several abandoned pieces of farm equipment and some dry stack stone walls around the property. I also participated in the work of drafting the Heritage Development Plan for the Carothers House. I focused on the earlier history of the family and property, but the document is comprehensive in the historical assessment of the land.

Carothers Family Material Culture

Several generations of Carothers called this property home throughout the twentieth century. John Henry and his wife Carrie Carothers bought the land in April 1933 from W.A. Sweeney and his wife Sallie S. Sweeney.³⁹ The Carothers bought the twenty-six-acre plot for a cost of \$675. It appears that this purchase of land is the first instance of land ownership in this direct Carothers line. Most of this land was rocky, making it difficult to cultivate crops.

³⁹ “Williamson County Archives,” accessed October 1, 2019, <https://archives.williamsoncounty-tn.gov/indexes/about>.



Figure 1.2. Undated aerial photograph of the Carothers Farm. Photograph from the Heritage Development Plan prepared by the Center for Historic Preservation, 2020.

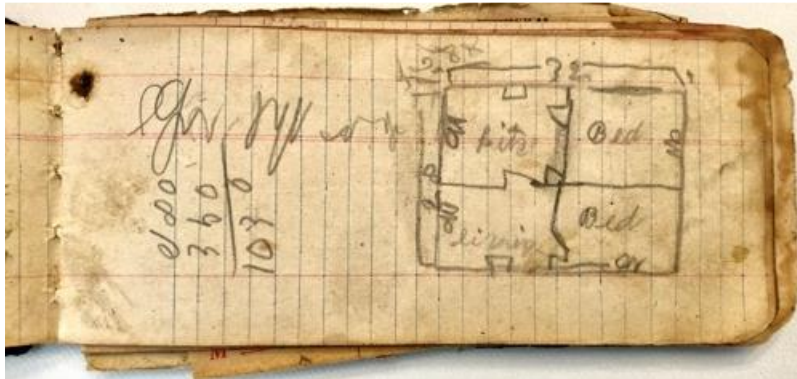


Figure 1.3. Floorplan sketch found in a notebook owned by John Henry Carothers. The layout is similar to the floorplan of the Carothers House, but not exact. Photograph by Savannah Grandey Knies, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection.

John Henry and his son Ezeal constructed the home built on the property in 1937. Ezeal quarried the limestone to build the house from the land.⁴⁰ The home was built from stock house plans purchased by John Henry. A local man named C.B. Barnes assisted in the construction of the home by cutting the windows and advising the Carothers men during building.⁴¹ More

⁴⁰ Straw, Elizabeth A., "John Henry Carothers House," National Register of Historic Places Nomination, Tennessee Historical Commission, (1989).

⁴¹ Straw, "John Henry Carothers House," 4.

structures were added over time: a tool shed, a tobacco barn, a detached garage and buggy house.⁴²

The Carothers family farmed the land, growing tobacco and hay, as well as owning chickens and six cows. They also had a “large kitchen garden” on the property.⁴³ According to Ezeal, in paperwork to place the property on the National Register of Historic Places more than 50 years later, much of the land proved to be unusable for farming.⁴⁴ The land and buildings remained in the Carothers family for more than eighty years, with several generations of the family living on the property.

Carothers Family History

Several generations of Carothers are responsible for the construction of this home as well as living in and maintaining the property up through the 2010s. John Henry Carothers was responsible for the initial purchase of land and house plans in the 1930s. John Henry was born on February 15, 1888, to Rebecca Jordan Carothers and Alex Carothers. Both of his parents were born in the final days of the institution of slavery. Alex Carothers, John Henry’s father, likely took the surname of a local slave-owning family of the same last name, Carothers.

⁴² “Correspondence between the National Register Program at the Tennessee Historical Commission and Ezeal Carothers,” 1986-1989. That documentation states that a barn for livestock and harvest grain was built onsite in 1933. A smokehouse was extant on the property when John Henry purchased the land. The tobacco barn has a construction date of 1950, and the detached garage was built in 1958. The tool shed and buggy house construction dates are unlisted.

⁴³ “Correspondence between the National Register Program at the Tennessee Historical Commission and Ezeal Carothers.”

⁴⁴ Straw, “John Henry Carothers House,” 4. According to the National Register nomination, “from 1933 to 1937, the family farmed fourteen acres (the other twelve acres were unsuitable) of the twenty-six acres while living in a small frame house nearby.” Rebecca Schmitt, Historic Preservation Specialist over the National Register Program at the Tennessee Historical Commission provided the file of correspondence between the Commission and Ezeal Carothers as he was working to get the property listed. The correspondence file is another valuable resource for information about life in the Carothers home at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In the 1840s, the white Carothers family, specifically William B. and Martha Smith Whitsitt Carothers, owned land in the area where the John Henry Carothers House stands today. William died at the age of 32, leaving his wife and two young children behind in 1850. Other members of the Carothers family also owned land nearby, including William's uncle James C. Carothers and his father Robert Carothers Jr. William's grandfather, Robert Carothers Sr., a Revolutionary War veteran, moved his family to Tennessee from North Carolina in the 1790s, possibly due to a Revolutionary War Land Grant.

It is unclear which white Carothers family member originally owned the land that John Henry Carothers purchased to build his home, or which branch of the family his father, Alex Carothers, derived his surname from. One of William Carothers's children, James Robert Carothers, fought in the Civil War at the age of fourteen and inherited the land from his parents after his mother dies just six years after his father. James marries his first cousin Martha Palmira "Polly" Jordan in 1872 and died six years later. His wife inherited the land and expanded her landholdings to 280 acres, managing the farm with the assistance of African American paid and tenant labor.⁴⁵

In the 1900 Census, Martha "Polly" Carothers is listed as living next door to the parents of John Henry Carothers and their then 12-year-old son. The African American Carothers family lived in a rented house with Polly and her son William and daughter-in-law India Carothers as neighbors.⁴⁶ The land that these two families resided on in 1900 is in the 8th District, close to where John Henry purchased land to build his home a few decades later.

⁴⁵ Grandey, Savannah, Carroll Van West, et al, *The Carothers Farm: Telling the Stories of an African American Landmark*. Heritage Development Plan, Center for Historic Preservation, Middle Tennessee State University. (Murfreesboro: Center for Historic Preservation, 2020), 6-7.

⁴⁶ Grandey and West, *The Carothers Farm*, 7.

From Tenant Farmers to Owner-Operators

The white Carothers family was prevalent in this area and this time period. According to the Center for Historic Preservation-produced Heritage Development Plan *The Carothers Farm: Telling the Stories of an African American Landmark*, several branches of the white Carothers family enslaved several of the African American Carothers during the antebellum period. Dr. Thomas Flagel, one of the contributors of the Heritage Development Plan, notes that the 1850 and 1860 Slave Schedules indicate the white slave-owning Carothers were concentrated in the 8th District, situated to the northeast of Franklin, Tennessee. A DeBeers map of Williamson County from 1878 indicates that the white Carothers stayed in roughly the same area in the postbellum era.⁴⁷ One example is James (Jim) Carothers who owned the Pleasant Exchange Plantation which was in the present-day area around Cool Springs, Tennessee, near to the location of the John Henry Carothers House.

John Henry married Carrie Giles in 1907. Carrie was the daughter of Jessie and Lee Scales Giles, a local renter farmer and a laundress.⁴⁸ The couple has their first child, a son, Ezeal (or alternately Ezell) Carothers the following year, in 1908. A few years later, in 1911, a daughter is born to the family, but Estelle L. Carothers dies at the age of six.⁴⁹ There was a great pride taken in the purchase and construction of the Carothers farmhouse. Carrie was known to keep in regular correspondence with Aunt Beulah, a member of the Carothers line, and she shared the exciting news of the purchase with her aunt through letters. Carrie wrote “Listen, we are about to buy us a home about three miles from Franklin now.”⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Grandey and West, *The Carothers Farm*, 7.

⁴⁸ Grandey and West, *The Carothers Farm*, 8.

⁴⁹ Estelle’s life dates are 1911 to 1917.

⁵⁰ Grandey and West, *The Carothers Farm*, 10.

Ezeal grew up and helped his father build the family home in the 1930s in his late 20s. He met and married his wife Viola Howse Carothers sometime between 1930 and 1940. The 1930 Federal Census lists Ezeal as single and living at home with his father John Henry, his mother Carrie, and his grandfather Alex Carothers. At that time, he is listed as employed as a chauffeur for a private family, earning wages, and living on a rented farm with his parents and grandfather. Like the families that lived at the site of the Sadie Ford Farmstead (Chapter 3), and other small-scale farmers throughout Middle Tennessee, the Carothers supplemented their farming income with other work. His father is employed as a farmer under “general farmer” and both Carrie and Alex are listed as having no occupation.

The next Census in 1940 sees Ezeal and Viola married with a six-and-a-half-year-old daughter named Ruby Jean Carothers. The entire family is oddly categorized as “white” under the heading for race in this census. Ezeal is listed as a farm laborer with an income of \$420. Carrie Carothers dies in May of 1948, and John Henry combines households with his son and daughter-in-law. The 1950 Census shows Ezeal as the head of the household, living with his wife Viola, his daughter Ruby Jean, a son named John Eddie (born in 1941) and his father John Henry. Both men in the house have the occupation of farmer, with Ezeal noted as working for a private employer and John Henry as an owner.

Tennessee Black Farmers in the Larger Historical Context

John Henry Carothers was an African American landowning farmer in the Jim Crow era of Tennessee history. At the beginning of the twentieth century, more than seventy percent of the African American population of Tennessee “earned their livelihood from the soil.”⁵¹ Due to the

⁵¹ Lester C. Lamon, *Black Tennesseans, 1900-1930*, Twentieth-Century America Series (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977), 110.

interrelated systems of economic, political, and social discrimination that attempted to keep African Americans from achieving any notion of equality such as land ownership, the percentage of African American farm owners was in the minority, with around 22% owning their land in 1900. These circumstances meant the other roughly 75% were tenant farmers or sharecroppers for typically white landowners.⁵² Lester Lamon, in *Black Tennesseans 1900-1930*, paints a rather bleak picture of African American farming in the early part of the century. It was, to be sure. As Lamon notes, “Security was a scarce commodity among black farm workers in Tennessee.”⁵³

Given the crops farmed by the Carothers family, there was likely less anxiety over their ability to bring crops to market. In Middle and East Tennessee, black farmers of hay and livestock had less seasonal work than that of farmers with other crops like cotton.⁵⁴ Because their crops were less seasonal, they were likely able to deal with “distant markets and unscrupulous merchants” on a less frequent basis, allowing for increased security as African American landowners.⁵⁵ The state of Tennessee had 34,395 nonwhite operators of farms in the 1935 Agricultural Census. The number five years later decreased by more than 6,000.⁵⁶

Williamson County, where the Carothers farm is located, had 546 nonwhite operators in 1935, two years after John Henry bought the land. In the same year Williamson County had 3,022 white operators. Of the 546 nonwhite operators, there were 160 full owners, 44 part

⁵² Lamon, *Black Tennesseans*, 111.

⁵³ Lamon, *Black Tennesseans*, 113. The insecurity of land ownership and sustenance for black farmers was especially notable when discussing cotton crops. “The cotton culture, involving over 50 percent of all black farm labor in Tennessee and stretching eastward almost to Nashville, produced the lowest level of black landowning and was thus especially insecure.”

⁵⁴ Lamon, *Black Tennesseans*, 114.

⁵⁵ Lamon, *Black Tennesseans*, 114.

⁵⁶ United States Department of Commerce. “Farms, 1940, 1935, and 1930; farm acreage, and value of land and buildings, 1940 and 1935; value of buildings and implements and machinery, 1940; and cropland harvested, 1939; by tenure of operator,” accessed October 12, 2019.

<http://usda.mannlib.cornell.edu/usda/AgCensusImages/1940/01/31/1266/Table-02.pdf>. The number of nonwhite farmers in 1935 was 34,395, and the number of nonwhite farmers reported in 1940 was 27,975. That is a loss of 6,420 farmers in the state of Tennessee over those five years.

owners, 342 tenants and 205 croppers.⁵⁷ In this breakdown, John Henry would be considered a full owner, because he was working land that he owned. He and Ezeal would build the Carothers home two years after this Agricultural Census report.⁵⁸

The Black Farmhouse and Rural Living in a Developing Community

The Heritage Development Plan for the John Henry Carothers House highlights the importance of this particular home; the fact that John Henry was able to ascend the economic and “agricultural ladder” is significant. The ascension of the African American Carothers from renter and tenant farming to owning and operating his own farm is impressive and meaningful. It is also noteworthy that John Henry and Ezeal built their farmhouse, a one-and-a-half story limestone clad building, in the midst of the Great Depression. It is “a powerful testament to the commitment to a better future for their family and their community.”⁵⁹



Figure 1.4. Façade/West elevation of the Carothers House. Photograph by Savannah Grandey Knies, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection.

⁵⁷ “Farms, 1940, 1935, and 1930; farm acreage, and value of land and buildings, 1940 and 1935; value of buildings and implements and machinery, 1940; and cropland harvested, 1939; by tenure of operator,” 190-191.

⁵⁸ According to the National Register nomination, “from 1933-1937, the family farmed fourteen acres...while living in a small frame house nearby.”

⁵⁹ Grandey and West, *The Carothers Farm*, 5.



Figure 1.5. North elevation of the Carothers House. Photograph by Savannah Grandey Knies, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection.

Despite their successes, they were in a time and place that sought to see them fail. The land John Henry was able to purchase was marginal in comparison to land that would have been available to white buyers. The Carothers purchased twenty-six acres of farmland, but due to large limestone deposits present throughout the property, a significant portion was unusable for row-crop farming. In order to survive in the early twentieth century as Tennessee farmers, the Carothers focused on a “mixed agriculture” system on their farm; they had limited livestock, a wide range of crops that were labor intensive, and they produced dairy and other agricultural products to sell. The family also worked away from their own land; Ezeal farmed the land of a neighboring white farmer and John Henry labored with stone masonry and homebuilding in addition to farming their own land.

In *The Promise of the New South*, Edward Ayers identifies the “agricultural ladder” that aspiring farmers of both races sought to climb.⁶⁰ On this hoped-for upward trajectory, a farmer would begin working as a landless laborer, either for their own family or for another local

⁶⁰ Edward Ayers, *The Promise of the New South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 195-196.

farmer. Through hard work and dedication, a man could prove himself worthy of the opportunity to sharecrop land. The practice of sharecropping involved “taking responsibility for the labor on a piece of land and drawing credit at the local store for the crop he put into the ground.”⁶¹

Sharecropping led to transiency in the Southern workforce. According to Ayers, most share tenants lived on one farm for less than a year, and farm laborers moved around even more frequently.⁶²

From sharecropping, the goal was ideally to move into renting a farm. Through working and saving, the sharecropper could move into an agreement with a landowner to rent farmland. That meant that he “paid a fixed rate for a farm and provided his own work animals and tools; what he chose to grow on that farm was his business and the profits (or losses) he made were his alone.”⁶³ These circumstances gave the renter more autonomy in the decisions about what to farm, but still left them in the debt of a landowner. Tenant farming and sharecropping was largely a system where white landowners could continue to exploit black labor after the Civil War abolished slavery. It was a difficult system to escape for many reasons. Due to the constant debt cycle it created, dishonest white landowners, and the inability of a black person to challenge any dishonesty against him, many African Americans remained in this unfair system.

Victor Perlo writes of an epidemic in the South: aspiring black farm owners could not find suitable land in the early and middle parts of the twentieth century to buy.⁶⁴ Typically, the African American farmer would be able to purchase the least high quality land in an area, often

⁶¹ Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 195.

⁶² Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 197. Given this information, Ayers states that “race cut across these patterns of mobility in surprising ways: white share tenants were the most mobile of rural Southerners and black landowners the least likely to move.”

⁶³ Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 195.

⁶⁴ Victor Perlo, *The Negro in Southern Agriculture* (New York: International Publishers, 1953), 27-30.

with undesirable components to the property.⁶⁵ That could mean the land quality could range from poor soil to rocky and uneven ground. The Carothers family property was nearly fifty percent unusable because of all the limestone scattered throughout the landscape.⁶⁶

Access to productive land at the time of acquisition distinguished the Carothers from the Ford family (Chapter 3). Race clearly affected the opportunities available to otherwise similarly situated Middle Tennessee farming families. Legal and extralegal components of society also contributed to the disproportionately low rates of Southern African American farm ownership. The crop-lien system and debt peonage, combined with restrictive voting rights negated much of the influence of southern African Americans.⁶⁷ W.A. Sweeney, a white landowner, sold John Henry land of poor quality, given that only half of the land was suitable for farming. The Carothers farmed their land and Ezeal and his wife Viola Carothers worked for another farmer to make ends meet for their family. That farmland, located adjacent to the Carothers property, was owned by a Nashville businessman, Mr. L.V. Huffines.⁶⁸ The road the Carothers property sits on is now named for him, Huffines Ridge Road.

John Henry and Ezeal built the Carothers home from stock building plans, completing the property in 1937.⁶⁹ Using native materials, notably the limestone quarried from the land, these men adapted stock plans to the vernacular architecture of Williamson County. According to the

⁶⁵ Perlo, *The Negro in Southern Agriculture*, 29-30. Perlo references statistical information from South Carolina in the 1940s. Marshall Harris from the US Department of Agriculture at the time noted the statistics are “an indication that many colored farmers who have climbed the ladder to ownership have done so at the expense of locating on poor land in out-of-the-way places.” Perlo concludes with his general conclusion: “the best land, owned by the white plantation landlords; medium quality, by the white ‘independent’ farmers; and the worst, marginal land, by the Negro farmers.”

⁶⁶ Straw, “John Henry Carothers House,” 2.

⁶⁷ Stewart E. Tolnay, *The Bottom Rung: African American Life on Southern Farms* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 2-4, 13.

⁶⁸ Straw, “John Henry Carothers House.” The National Register nomination states that “while the Carothers were able to build a house and use about half of their land for subsistence agriculture, they were still dependent upon outside farm work for additional income.” The nomination also states that the land owned by Huffines consisted of 355 acres.

⁶⁹ Straw, “John Henry Carothers House,” 4, 7.

National Register nomination, John Henry went on to build two other stone homes from similar plans.⁷⁰ One home was already demolished at the time of the nomination in 1989, and no other information is provided. John Henry constructed the other home in 1941, and it was located on Jordan Road; it has since been torn down, as well.⁷¹

The Carothers home off Liberty Pike was modified many times over the decades. Its initial construction was modest in form. Fireplaces and mantels found in the home are original to the initial design. Ten years after its construction, a back porch was added. In 1953, electricity was added to the farmhouse. John Henry died on April 6, 1980, leaving the farm to Ezeal. In 1984, nearly fifty years after the construction of the home, running water and a bathroom were installed.⁷² All of these changes in the physical structure of the farmhouse indicate modernization of the farm. There are various pieces of farm equipment scattered around the landscape from various eras in farming technology. Tractors, mowers, and devices used to seed the ground are demonstrative of the advancements the farming industry has achieved, as well as the Carothers family.

⁷⁰ Straw, "John Henry Carothers House," 7-8.

⁷¹ Straw, "John Henry Carothers House," 7-8. According to the nomination, both of the other homes were constructed of limestone quarried on the Carothers property, and both have been demolished. That means the only extant stone building constructed by John Henry is the Carothers House on Huffines Ridge Road.

⁷² "Correspondence between the National Register Program at the Tennessee Historical Commission and Ezeal Carothers."

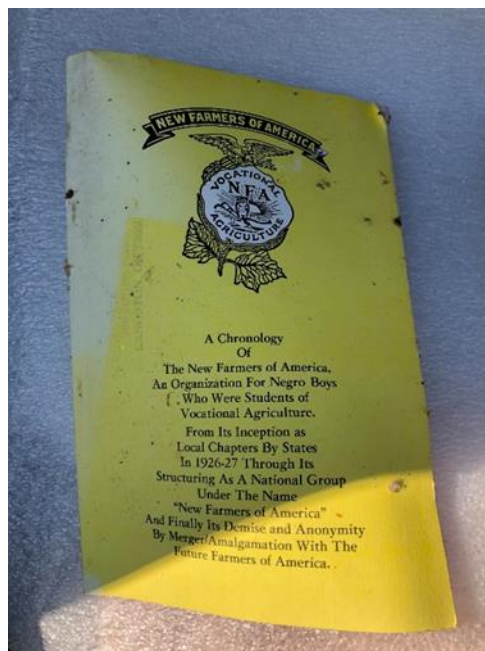


Figure 1.6. The New Farmers of America booklet found in the Carothers House during fieldwork. Photograph by Savannah Grandey Knies, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection.

The New Farmers of America (NFA), a segregated association to teach African American youths the trade of farming, provided valuable education and assistance in the early and middle twentieth century South.⁷³ The Carothers family owned a copy of a booklet they released in 1993. The NFA booklet provides information about membership tallies in the NFA and the white Future Farmers of America (FFA) before their merger in the mid-1960s. The FFA had a membership count of 18,487 and the NFA had 1,886 members.⁷⁴ These numbers demonstrate the support available to both black and white farmers in the South.

Current Status of Project and Interpretation Goals

The project is currently in a construction phase, with all of the outbuildings removed. The Carothers House will ultimately sit amidst numerous multifamily buildings, leaving little

⁷³ New Farmers of America Records, 1929-1965, Ruth Lilly Special Collections and Archives, IUPUI University Library, Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis, Indianapolis. Accessed November 29, 2019. <https://special.ulib.iupui.edu/special/nfa>. The NFA merged with the Future Farmers of America (FFA) in the 1960s as the era of segregation came to an end.

⁷⁴ New Farmers of America booklet, 1993. Owned by the Carothers family.

physical evidence behind demonstrating what existed before. The idea is to provide some static interpretation in and around the home after the restoration of the building and establishing an arboretum/walking trail around the Carothers House. It is unclear as to the current status of the project. Several of the multifamily buildings have been constructed and are now occupied.

These new buildings alter the physical and narrative landscape, making the interpretation of the Carothers family more difficult. There is an imperative to preserve and interpret this important African American farmhouse. The surrounding area, and indeed a large portion of the Carothers farm itself, is being subsumed by development. To understand the historic landscape of Franklin, Tennessee, the community has a vested interest to protect and preserve the extant buildings that can provide a physicality to that interpretation.

How will the Black Carothers Family be Memorialized and Discussed in Interpretation?

While the interpretive plan for the Carothers Home is not finalized at the writing of this dissertation, several interpretation themes were identified during the research and writing of the Heritage Development Plan. There have been delays in the progression of the project due to the COVID 19 virus and the subsequent disruptions in nearly every facet of preservation, therefore the current status of the project is in flux, and these interpretive themes within the suggested plan are subject to change as more work continues on the property.

The Heritage Development Plan suggested interior and exterior interpretive panels. While some of the suggestions in theme overlap, this is a purposeful measure taken by the Center for Historic Preservation in their proposed theming. Once GCI gives the farmhouse and the surrounding park to the City of Franklin, there may be restricted access to the interior of the home, except for private rentals, or seasonal hours. The exterior panels provide visitors with the

opportunity to learn about the Carothers family and their historic farm if they are unable to enter the home itself.

Interior Panel Themes

African American Land and Home Ownership

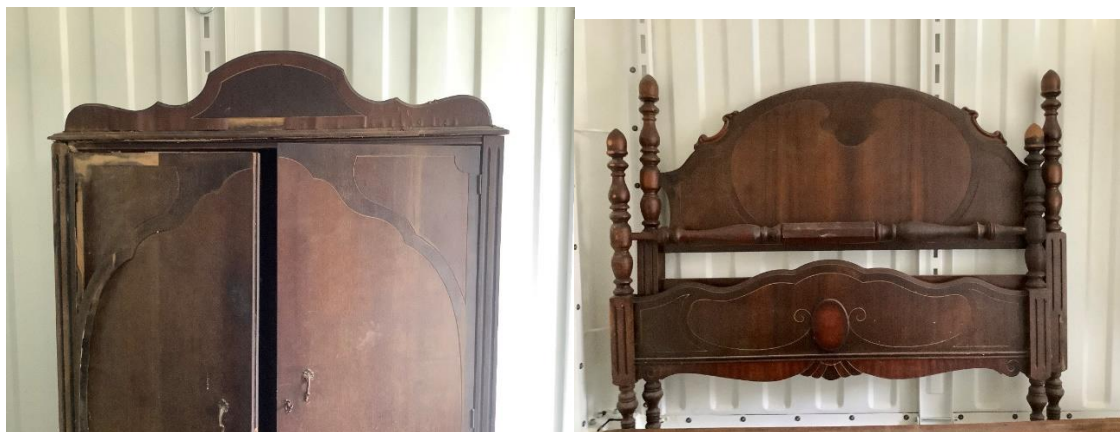
At the beginning of the twentieth century, more than seventy percent of the African American population of Tennessee “earned their livelihood from the soil,” yet fewer than a quarter of African American farmers owned their land in 1900. The rest worked the land in sharecropping or tenant farming relationships with typically white landowners. Despite the challenges of living in the Jim Crow South, John Henry and Carrie Carothers were able to buy property in Williamson County. They built a home on the land and began farming, all during the Great Depression.

While they purchased twenty-six acres, only half proved suitable for farming. Limestone covered much of the remaining land. The Carothers family turned their inhospitable land into opportunity; Ezeal quarried the limestone for the house from the property. John Henry would use this resource to help build several other homes in the area in the 1930s and 1940s. The vernacular architecture present in the home demonstrates the craftsmanship of John Henry and Ezeal (notably the stone fireplace mantel and the datestone on the exterior of the home).



Figure 1.7. The Carothers mailbox. Photograph by Savannah Grandey Knies, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection.

The mailbox, chifforobe, its matching headboard/footboard, and the composite portrait of John Henry and Carrie Carothers can tell the story of this African American family's journey in land and home ownership. These artifacts, and others mentioned later, are the result of fieldwork conducted in Fall 2019 with the Center for Historic Preservation. All of these objects were significant to the family; they chose to hold on to them throughout the generational ownership of the property.



Figures 1.8 and 1.9. Chifforobe and matching headboard/footboard found in the Carothers home during fieldwork. Photograph by Savannah Grandey Knies, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection.



Figure 1.10. Undated composite portrait of John Henry and Carrie Carothers. Photograph by Savannah Grandey Knies, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection.

Women in Agriculture, Farmsteads, and the Domestic Sphere

Carrie Carothers and her daughter-in-law Viola lived in this home and on this property as African American farming women. They raised families and worked the land alongside their husbands, while creating and maintaining the domestic homestead. These women experienced Franklin in the early and middle twentieth century in a fundamentally different way than the male members of their family, and the objects left behind demonstrate that. The items from the home that help tell their story are the sewing machine, chicken feeder, and curling iron. These objects exist within the realm of the domestic economy, operating as tools for the women in the household to function within their own home and community. The tasks associated with these objects would have fallen into the purview of the women in the Carothers household, and therefore would be objects mostly used by only female hands on the property.



Figure 1.11. The Carothers sewing machine. Photograph by Savannah Grandey Knies, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection.



Figure 1.12. Chicken feeder. Photograph by Savannah Grandey Knies, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection.



Figure 1.13. Curling iron. Photograph by Savannah Grandey Knies, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection.

The Carothers Property as an Intergenerational Home

Several generations of the Carothers family have called this house home. The Carothers built on to the home several times over the twentieth century, including adding a back porch (1947), electricity (1953), a bathroom and running water (1984). The property was also a farm and saw significant changes in domestic and farming technology over the decades. Equipment on the farmstead transitioned from a horse drawn buggy to midcentury tractors. There is an immense pride in the accomplishments of different members of the family, and many important and everyday events are documented in and around this house.

Education was of obvious importance to the Carothers family. Ruby Jean Carothers, Ezeal and Viola's daughter, attended Franklin Training School in Franklin, Tennessee in the 1950s. Ruby's brother, John Eddie Carothers, was a student at Franklin Public School. Ruby went on to college at Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State University to study education,

where she submitted her senior project on Speech Therapists in March on 1961.⁷⁵ Tennessee A & I, formed in 1912, is one of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) in the region.

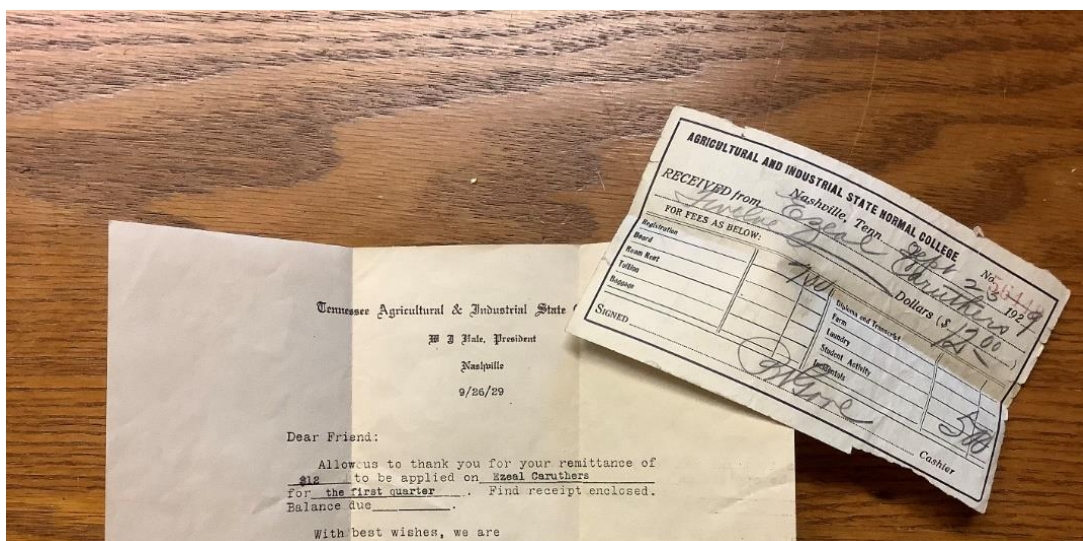


Figure 1.14. Tennessee Agricultural & Industrial School information for Ezeal Carothers from 1929. Photograph by Savannah Grandey Knies, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection.

Tennessee A & I changed its name to Tennessee State University in 1968, and it still functions as an important HBCU for Middle Tennessee through present day.⁷⁶ Ruby Jean and John Eddie were not the first generation to receive a formal post-secondary education in the Carothers family. Ezeal also attended Tennessee A & I in Nashville during the 1920s and 1930s.⁷⁷ Due to the hard work and successes on the family farm, the Carothers family had the opportunity to send their children on to higher education in multiple generations.

⁷⁵ Documents from the Carothers House in Franklin, retrieved October 28-30, 2019. We recovered report cards for Ruby Jean and John Eddie Carothers, as well as schoolwork and reports from their time at each of these institutions.

⁷⁶ For more information about Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State University's history, including their consolidation with University of Tennessee Nashville during integration, please see: http://www.tnstate.edu/about_tsu/history.aspx.

⁷⁷ Documents from the Carothers House in Franklin. We found a campus Blue Book from Tennessee A. & I. State College for Ezeal Carothers. It is dated May 29, 1930, for second year Biology with Mr. McCellan.

There are many accolades (diplomas and awards), photographs of the home and its members from the 1950s through to the twenty-first century, and items like the child's wagon to showcase the longevity of the family here. The ephemera kept by several generations of the Carothers family and discovered during fieldwork will allow the developer and the city of Franklin to utilize the recommendations for interpretation provided by the Center for Historic Preservation in the Heritage Development Report.



Figures 1.15 and 1.16. Photographs of the Carothers family on the property from 1958. Photographs by Savannah Grandey Knies, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection.



Figure 1.17. A child's wagon. Photograph by Savannah Grandey Knies, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection.

Exterior Panel Themes

There will be some overlap of thematic panels between the interior and exterior interpretation to allow the public to experience as much of the Carothers family story as possible. For example, a recurring theme for suggested interpretation is the Carothers House. The information covered in this panel would relate the physical construction of the house itself, likely pointing to important exterior features of the home, such as the foundation stone with the year of construction carved in it. The exterior panels would serve the proposed greenway and arboretum, which is intended to encircle the home. The use of physical objects would be markedly reduced compared to the panels/cases found inside the building. Keeping most of the physical objects inside allows for decreased concerns involving theft, vandalism, and atmospheric issues surrounding object preservation.



Figure 1.18. The foundation stone on the exterior of the Carothers House indicates the date of construction. There is currently graffiti on the interior and exterior of the home. Photograph by Savannah Grandey Knies, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection.

A Local Historic Landmark

A timeline of the preservation process surrounding the home would be well suited to the exterior interpretation. Presenting the Carothers House from its National Register of Historic Places listing in 1989 through the process of procurement and preservation via the developer involved with the project, Goldberg Companies Inc. (GCI). Another facet of this panel can include the larger picture story of historic black landownership in Williamson County, Tennessee.

Layout of Original Farm

The farm has certainly changed over the last nearly 100 years of existence. Moving from private ownership to its purchase by a developer as developable land for apartment buildings, the physical landscape bears little resemblance to its 1930s appearance. Many of the outbuildings have been removed over the course of time, and the large tobacco barn used by the Carothers has

been demolished in the last few years. Through this panel, visitors to the property will gain a wider understanding of the historic landscape on which the farm was situated and will be able to compare what was present on the property historically and what can be seen today.

Changes on the Farm and Witness to History

The Carothers family built the farm during the Great Depression, relying on the technology available at the time to cultivate and harvest the land. The mechanization of farming can be understood in the context of the Carothers Farm and the family that worked the land; they went from animal labor to the use of tractors during their ownership of the property. Also included in this panel could be the improvements seen inside the Carothers home. For example, highlighting when the family added electricity, indoor plumbing, and the use of automobiles to the homestead.

The John Henry Carothers House is an important legacy for the story of black landownership in Tennessee. The work of securing the property and its contents is ongoing. The current stage of this process requires public historians to transition private space, and the intimate artifact of a private home, into a public realm. That work requires sensitive and respectful handling of personal histories and is a critical aspect of the process. It is ongoing at other sites like the Burwell-Dinkins-Anderson Historic House (Chapter 2) and the Sadie Ford Heritage Farm (Chapter 3).

The Carothers home now stands as a link to a former landscape amid new construction and urbanization in Franklin, Tennessee. The John Henry Carothers House also provides a unique interpretative opportunity to provide a demonstration of the accumulation of generational wealth that occurred during the twentieth century for some black families engaged in small-scale

farming. The familial home of generations of the Carothers family will now help visitors gain a greater understanding of the historic landscape of the twentieth century African American farmer, and how it has drastically changed over the last century.

CHAPTER TWO: BURWELL-DINKINS HISTORIC HOUSE MUSEUM, PRIVATE FOUNDATION, SELMA, ALABAMA

The Burwell-Dinkins-Anderson House in Selma, Alabama is a vital component of the historical narrative of the Civil Rights Movement in the Black Belt region of the state. The home is also linked to iconic figures of the national movement for political equality. It is known as the “the most architecturally impressive extant private dwelling in Selma’s African American neighborhoods,” according to a recent report compiled by the Center for Historic Preservation at Middle Tennessee State University. Areas of significance associated with the house, as identified in the National Register of Historic Places nomination, include African American Heritage, Civil Rights Social History, Education, Health and Medicine, and Architecture.

House museums are private homes which public historians have transformed into instruments of pedagogy and praxis. They become community assets and public places that link the lived experience of the past to that of present-day visitors. The metamorphosis from an intimate family space to a public asset is complicated. As a case study, the creation of the Burwell-Dinkins Historic House Museum highlights the challenges and opportunities which emerge during this transition.

Constructing a Critical Narrative

Researching and interpreting the stories of the past, while respecting the private legacy of those who participated in events of significant social importance, is delicate work. The individuals who lived in the home played a prominent role in the community; some participated in momentous events of the Civil Rights movement. Due to their prominence, the Burwell-

Dinkins home has often had a semi-public place in the social life of Selma. In this way, it is similar to the Cheekwood Estate and Gardens (Chapter 5) in Nashville.

However, it was primarily a private residence. It remains the property of Burwell-Dinkins descendants who experienced the house as the home of their relatives. Like the John Henry Carothers House (Chapter 1), and Sadie Ford Heritage Farm and Cultural Art Center (Chapter 3), a partnership of community members and practicing public historians identified the property as part of a shared heritage which should be preserved. The ongoing transition from private residence to house museum involves the challenge of transferring custody of a house, and its contents, to a foundation. It also presents the opportunity to reframe anecdotes of personal heroism into a relatable critical narrative.

The narrative is meaningful to Alabama history and will impact how people understand the history of the state. The Burwell-Dinkins House is essential to interpreting and communicating the historical record of Selma and Dallas County. Multiple generations of the prominent Burwell, Dinkins, and Anderson families have called this property home. They include doctors, musicians, educators, and clergy who were important figures in the community. In the mid-twentieth century, these same families played prominent roles in the Civil Rights movement. The house is also architecturally important. The architect was Wallace Rayfield, the first licensed professional black architect in Alabama. In October of 1920, W.E.B. DuBois featured Burwell-Dinkins among a dozen notable African American homes throughout the country for an article in *The Crisis*.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ “Modernist Journals.” *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races*, (Volume 20, no.6, 1920)” accessed May 4, 2021, <https://modjourn.org/issue/bdr513261/>.

A new generation of the Dinkins family is now seeking to preserve and interpret the legacy of the home and the people who have lived in it. Meanwhile, Selma's fortunes have risen and fallen. The city has passed through phases as a moderately prosperous regional hub, a center for learning, and the place where the Civil Rights Movement culminated in tragedy and triumph. As time has marched on, the regional economy has declined, and the population of Selma has contracted.⁷⁹ Recently, however, these various themes have coalesced into a burgeoning heritage tourism effort focused on African American historical sites, the Civil Rights movement, and Southern history more generally.

Visitors to the home will eventually learn about the individuals who lived in the home, the city of Selma, and the American South. However, not all of these stories can be told at once. The home must contribute to Selma's next chapter while providing a sense of its past. It must at once be part of the landscape and stand apart as an artifact of the past. My research focuses on these interpretive decisions and how they impact visitors' understanding of the home and its context. The final product will provide useful insights to inform the practice of public history.

Center for Historic Preservation Project

In 2016 the Dinkins family reached out to the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation for assistance in creating a historic house museum. The Center pledged to assess the material culture inside the home, as well as drafting a nomination for the National Register of Historic Places. Fieldwork at the home in December 2019 and February 2020 began the process of documentation, assessment, and analysis. I worked on an inventory of the collections, as well as providing some deeper research into the items we uncovered; I also provided research into

⁷⁹ The US Census Bureau reports that the population of Selma declined by 13.5% between 2010 and 2020. The incidence of poverty in the city is more than double that of Alabama as a whole.
<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/AL,selmacityalabama/PST045221>.

collections management software to assist the board in choosing the right software for the museum. The Center for Historic Preservation team compiled a collections inventory, created a floor plan, and assessed the preservation needs of the building. All these materials informed the eventual National Register nomination for the home.



Figure 2.1. The author sorting through sheet music found in the Burwell Dinkins Home during fieldwork in February 2020. Photo by Savannah Grandey Knies, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection.

Burwell-Dinkins-Anderson Family History

Burwell Family

The story of this home and its generations begins with the prominent black physician Dr. Lincoln Laconia Burwell, a “key leader in the growing Black professional class of Alabama.”⁸⁰ Born in Marengo County, Alabama on October 25th, 1867, to Charles and Amanda Burwell, L.L. was one of five children.⁸¹ The family lived as sharecroppers on the land where they were formerly enslaved. As a young child Lincoln spent time under his brother Charles A. Burwell Jr.’s care due to the financial hardships endured by his family during this era. In his late teens he

⁸⁰ Savannah Grandey Knies, Carroll Van West, “Burwell-Dinkins-Anderson House,” National Register of Historic Places Nomination, Alabama Historical Commission, 2021, 13.

⁸¹ Keith S. Hébert, “Lincoln Laconia Burwell,” in *Encyclopedia of Alabama*. Accessed September 1, 2022. <http://encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-4308>.

enrolled in Alabama Baptist Normal and Theological School (now known as Selma University). Burwell graduated as valedictorian of his class in 1886; in the same year he began working towards a medical degree at Leonard Medical College at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina.

After graduating with a double major in medicine and literature, he moved to Selma to open a medical practice. According to the National Register nomination for the home: “African American physicians began receiving licenses to practice medicine in Alabama either through the Medical Association of the State of Alabama or through county level Boards of Censors in the 1880s. Burwell’s certification in 1889 places him among Alabama’s first generation of African American physicians licensed under the Alabama Medical Practice Act of 1877, a law that regulated and strengthened qualifications for medical practice within the state.”⁸²

After returning to Selma and starting his practice, Dr. Burwell opened a drugstore, which filled prescriptions for the local black community while also serving a social function as a place to “get soda water without embarrassment.”⁸³ Fires of unknown origin destroyed the business on two separate occasions, one occurring in 1895 and another in 1913. Dr. Burwell rebuilt after each fire; the third iteration of his drugstore is no longer extant. He also advocated for greater accessibility of healthcare for African Americans on a national platform. He belonged to the National Negro Business League (later called the National Business League), the National Medical Association (NMA) and was a charter member of the state-level arm of NMA, the Alabama State Medical Association. He wrote articles published in the NMA journal and spoke before the National Business League in 1900.

⁸² Knies and West, “Burwell-Dinkins-Anderson House,” 14.

⁸³ Knies and West, “Burwell-Dinkins-Anderson House,” 14.

In his presentation “The Negro as Druggist,” he implored black medical professionals to enter careers in medicine not for financial gains, but to “help his profession promote and protect the people, and to delve down into the hidden mysteries of medical science and add to the already long list of medical preparations. He enters the field as an adjudicator of the public welfare and a searcher after pure food, pure drugs and pure water.”⁸⁴

By serving in these roles as a champion of black rights in Alabama, Burwell brought attention and much-needed healthcare into Selma at a pivotal moment in its history. In the 1910s, he expanded his medical practice to include the Burwell Infirmary, as well as receiving a degree in gynecology and surgery from Howard University. The Infirmary was a fourteen-bed facility and the first black-owned, staffed, and operated medical center in the Black Belt.⁸⁵ Even after Burwell’s death, the Infirmary continued to serve the black community in Selma. Dr. Marius J. and Minnie Anderson purchased the business from Dr. Burwell’s estate, and they expanded the facility. The Burwell Infirmary served as a significant care center for victims of the Bloody Sunday violence in March of 1965.⁸⁶ Unfortunately, the structure that once housed the Infirmary is no longer extant.

When he returned to Selma after his initial education in the 1880s, Burwell married Lavinia Richardson and they had two children- Almedia L. Burwell and Elezora L. Burwell. Lavinia was an important figure in the story of early twentieth century Selma, as well. She helped found the Progressive Culture Club, the local member of the State Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs. The organization aimed to “improve themselves among literary and social lines

⁸⁴ National Negro Business League. *Proceedings of the National Negro Business League: Its First Meeting Held in Boston, Massachusetts, August 23 and 24, 1900*, (Boston: J. R. Hamm, 1901), 68.
<https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/005999534>.

⁸⁵ Keith S. Hébert, “Lincoln Laconia Burwell.”

⁸⁶ Knies and West, “Burwell-Dinkins-Anderson House,” 16.

and to do charitable work.”⁸⁷ As a branch of the larger institution, Lavinia and the Progressive Club sought to improve their community by supporting nurseries, children’s homes and reformatories, as well as creating a reading room for black readers. As the *National Register* nomination states: “clubs like these that focused on organized community action helped form the foundation that supported the long civil rights movement in Selma and the rest of the South.”⁸⁸ The Burwells were active congregants in the Tabernacle Baptist Church in Selma. Tabernacle has a long history of involvement in middle class black life in Selma, as well as with the civil rights movement in Alabama. Several other members of the family throughout the generations were also strongly tied to the Tabernacle congregation. Dr. Burwell preceded Lavinia in death by a decade; their deaths occurred in 1928 and 1938, respectively. Both Burwells are buried in Lincoln Cemetery.

Dinkins Family

After the deaths of L.L. and Lavinia, Almedia, with her husband William H. Dinkins, inherited the home. Dinkins, a professor at nearby Selma University, married Almedia at the Burwell home in 1919 and they moved in shortly afterwards. The couple lived with the Burwells until their deaths while raising their three children in the home, William, Pauline, and Charles. Almedia graduated from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music in Ohio, then took a teaching position at Florida A&M University (FAMU), a historically Black college in Tallahassee, Florida’s capital city. She stayed at FAMU teaching music and serving as the head of the music department until her marriage to William Dinkins. After her marriage and return to Selma, she continued to teach piano to the community in Selma.

⁸⁷ "The Progressive Culture Club," *Selma Advocate*, May 22, 1915.

⁸⁸ Knies and West, "Burwell-Dinkins-Anderson House," 16.

Almedia was not the only gifted musician in the history of this house, however. The Dinkins's daughter, Pauline Dinkins Anderson, recalls her parents, Almedia and William, playing duets on one of the three pianos in the home as a child.⁸⁹ Her aunt, Ethel Dinkins, also played and taught piano in the home, including to Coretta Scott King as a child. That piano, as well as one other, remains in the home today. The Dinkins era of musicians also includes musical accompaniment at the Tabernacle Baptist Church. William served as a deacon in the church, starting in the 1930s. In the 1940s, the congregation's minister oversaw the installation of a pipe organ into the church; there is some evidence that the Dinkins family would have been playing this instrument during services and events at the church.

William H. Dinkins, as mentioned above, served at Selma University in several capacities, including a professorial role, as well as Dean of the University's Literary Department, and ultimately as President of the University beginning in the 1930s. His father, Reverend Charles Spencer Dinkins, also served as president of Selma University. According to Reverend J. J. Pipkin's 1902 book *The Negro in Revelation, in History, and in Citizenship: What the Race Has Done and is Doing*, Charles Dinkins served as a pastor and teacher after receiving the degree of D.D. (Doctor of Divinity) from the State University in Louisville, Kentucky, becoming the president of the Alabama Baptist Colored University at Selma (later Selma University) in 1893.⁹⁰ William served in the military during World War I. He graduated from both Selma and Brown Universities, as well as receiving a master's degree from Columbia University.⁹¹ Dinkins served as the president of a local branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Dinkins resigned from his presidency at Selma University in 1950

⁸⁹ Knies and West, "Burwell-Dinkins-Anderson House," 21.

⁹⁰ James Jefferson Pipkin, *The Negro in Revelation, in History, and in Citizenship: What the Race Has Done and Is Doing* (N. D. Thompson Publishing Company, 1902), 400.

⁹¹ Knies and West, "Burwell-Dinkins-Anderson House," 20.

due to conflict with the college trustees regarding the continuation of Selma as a comprehensive school which provided education from elementary school through college. He had served in various capacities at Selma University for thirty-five years at the time of his resignation. After he left the University, Dinkins taught lessons to local students and started the Dinkins Specialty House, running both of these businesses out of the Burwell Dinkins House. He also regularly contributed to regional newspapers and the National Baptist Publishing Board in Nashville, Tennessee.

The Dinkins Specialty House served the Selma community as a way for black residents to access a wider variety of goods. The store boasted an assortment of items, including a myriad of books and pamphlets, calendars, business supplies, guest towels, and wood burning heating stoves, as well as services such as bookkeeping analysis.⁹² The books offered by Dinkins ranged from the Bible and Christian themed material to works written by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Other advertisements from the Specialty House included a 1952 ad in *The Tuskegee Herald* for the Estey Organ.⁹³ Dinkins aimed this ad towards “churches, schools and homes” and offered four different styles ranging in price from \$185 to \$1134 without tax or freight. Dinkins provided numerous black families, churches, and other institutions the ability to add items of value, like a wood burning stove or an organ, into their daily lives through this store.⁹⁴ As the National Register nomination states: “opening the Dinkins Specialty House opened more retail options to African Americans, provided access to various literature, supplemented Dinkins’ income, and

⁹² “Dinkins Specialty House” advertisement, *Selma Times-Journal*, October 19, 1950.

⁹³ “Churches, Schools and Homes: Dinkins Specialty House” advertisement *The Tuskegee Herald*, February 19, 1952.

⁹⁴ As noted in the 1952 advertisement for the Estey Organ in *The Tuskegee Herald*, the “Dinkins Specialty House, 700 Small Avenue, Selma, Alabama, will be glad to have your inquiries. If you wish terms and can provide one-third the purchase price, I will pay the interest on the remainder at legal rates for six months, thus giving a time purchaser the advantage of a cash price.”

aligned with his philosophy that ‘such co-operation [within the black community] would be the means of giving us a fuller share in the determination of the course of events.’”⁹⁵

Anderson Family

The third surname associated with the house is that of the Anderson family. Pauline Dinkins, one of the Dinkins’s daughters, married Reverend Louis L. Anderson in 1962, and just like her parents in the previous generation, the newlyweds moved into the home with her parents until their deaths; Almedia died in 1967 and William followed a decade later in 1977. Both of Pauline’s parents are buried in Lincoln Cemetery in Selma.

Pauline Dinkins Anderson was born in the Burwell-Dinkins House in 1922, as were both of her brothers. She received her basic education from Selma University and went to her mother’s alma mater, Oberlin College, where she studied music, completing her degree at Oberlin Conservatory. She also attended graduate school at the University of Minnesota. According to a 2008 *Selma Times-Journal* article about Pauline, “when she returned home [from graduate school] her father was president of Selma University, and both her mother and her grandmother were teaching music. When her father’s four sisters (none of whom married) completed their educations and returned home, they were also education and music teachers.”⁹⁶ Pauline goes on to mention each aunt by name and what they did upon their returns to Selma: “Mabel Dinkins became mother of the family; Daisy Dinkins a pharmacist who opened a small pharmacy; Ethel was a music teacher and opened a studio; and Pauline Dinkins was a physician, graduating first from Meharry and later transferring to Philadelphia Medical College.”⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Knies and West, “Burwell-Dinkins-Anderson House,” 21.

⁹⁶ “Memories Kept in Photographs,” *The Selma Times-Journal*, November 23, 2008.

⁹⁷ “Memories Kept in Photographs,” *The Selma Times-Journal*, November 23, 2008.

Pauline Dinkins Anderson, a fifth-generation piano teacher, after leaving graduate school, went to work at Benedict College in Columbia, South Carolina to teach in their music department. She later returned to Selma University to head their music department. Shortly after her return to Selma, she met Reverend Anderson, the new preacher at the Tabernacle Baptist Church, when she took over as the children's choir director. They married in 1962, and she became an important part of the Civil Rights struggle percolating in Selma. Tabernacle Baptist Church became a critical component of the voting rights crusade as a meeting place for the leaders of the marches and protests. Reverend Anderson, being the pastor at Tabernacle, was deeply involved, but so too was his wife.

Pauline played music occasionally during these meetings and went to some of the marches, but she identifies her greatest involvement with the Civil Rights Movement as "hostess to the visiting leaders who came to the house, some staying there."⁹⁸ She took over as the Tabernacle congregation's Minister of Music after her mother Almedia's death in 1967 and held that position until a stroke in 1990 caused her to relinquish her duties. Pauline continued to teach music through the early 2000s, living in the home until her death in 2013. Her nephews inherited the property upon her death, where one lived until his death in 2016.

Reverend Louis Lloyd Anderson received his education from the University of Pittsburgh and the University of Chicago, where he earned a degree in divinity. After receiving his education, he served as the North Baptist Church in Montgomery as their pastor, following the death of his father who served in the role until his death. In 1955, Anderson took the pastoral position at Tabernacle Baptist Church in Selma, Alabama, where he met Pauline Dinkins. In his

⁹⁸ "Memories Kept in Photographs," *The Selma Times-Journal*, November 23, 2008.

forty-year turn as the pastor for Tabernacle, he established himself as one of the most prominent Civil Rights activists in Selma.

His path to that title was not easy. In 1957, two years after he became Tabernacle's pastor, the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) established a chapter in Selma, and the White Citizen's Counsel (WCC) relocated their headquarters to the city. Anderson, two years later, was convicted of manslaughter by an all-white jury in the death of a black pedestrian following a car accident. Attorneys for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) defended him, but he was still given a ten-year sentence. In 1961, the ruling was overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court due to the exclusion of black jurors in the jury pool.

During this time, there was also disagreement between some of Tabernacle's deacons and Anderson, leading to a split in the church. The deacons formed Providence Baptist Church. Anderson chose to take Tabernacle in a more radical direction, actively engaging with Civil Rights meetings and protests. These gatherings include hosting the "Memorial Service for Samuel Boynton and Voter Registration" event in the church on May 14, 1963. The gathering in Tabernacle on this day served as the first mass meeting in Selma organized for voters' rights. The National Register nomination indicates the significance of this moment: "the meeting helped the movement gain momentum and church buildings became important places for strategy meetings and workshops during the Civil Rights Movement there."⁹⁹ Tabernacle was no different; Anderson continued to host meetings and workshops in the church, including several where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Knies and West, "Burwell-Dinkins-Anderson House," 24.

¹⁰⁰ Knies and West, "Burwell-Dinkins-Anderson House," 24–25.

Tabernacle was not the only haven for activism in Selma; the Burwell-Dinkins-Anderson Home became an important gathering place during this time, as well. The Home served as a “strategy center where other leaders and activists discussed political reactions with Rev. Anderson, and had a safe place to stay during an especially turbulent time.”¹⁰¹ In an article, Pauline Dinkins Anderson recalls hosting leaders such as John Lewis, Jesse Jackson, and Ralph Abernathy in her familial home during this era in the home’s history.¹⁰² Reverend Anderson also served as president of the black activist group Dallas County Progressive Movement for Human Rights (PMHR). In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Anderson ran for public office, first for Selma mayor, and later for the 14th district seat of the Alabama Senate; he won neither race.¹⁰³ He died in 1999, just over three weeks after the city of Selma changed the name of the street the home sits on, from Small Avenue to L.L. Anderson Avenue. Anderson’s funeral services were held at Tabernacle Baptist Church, and he was buried at Lincoln Cemetery. Pauline Anderson survived him by fourteen years. She lived in the Burwell-Dinkins-Anderson House until her death in 2013, after which she was buried in Lincoln Cemetery next to her husband.¹⁰⁴

Burwell-Dinkins Objects Assessment

A team from the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation has begun to catalog the contents of the home. Dr. Lincoln L. Burwell had the home built in 1889 and his descendants lived in the home until the late 2010s. The families acquired and protected a substantial collection, documenting a professional middle-class black family in Selma for over 100 years. There is sheet music dating back to the nineteenth century as well as a Starr Baby Grand teaching piano, where Coretta Scott King learned to play in her youth from Ethel Dinkins.

¹⁰¹ Knies and West, “Burwell-Dinkins-Anderson House,” 25.

¹⁰² Richie Jean Sherrod Jackson, *The House by the Side of the Road: The Selma Civil Rights Movement*, First Edition (University Alabama Press, 2011).

¹⁰³ Knies and West, “Burwell-Dinkins-Anderson House,” 26.

¹⁰⁴ Knies and West, “Burwell-Dinkins-Anderson House,” 27.

Michael Windover and James Deaville, in their book chapter “Setting the Tone in Early 20th-Century North American Living Rooms: The Parlor Piano” discuss the complexities of modernity in the early 1900s, using the piano as a lens. The manufacture of pianos in the United States peaked in the first decade of the twentieth century, with more than 350,000 of the instruments produced here in 1909.¹⁰⁵ The piano assists in creating a domestic atmosphere in the home, as well as denote culture, personality, and work ethic.¹⁰⁶

It was one of many items of furniture that would be considered household art around the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁰⁷ As Windover and Deaville note, a parlor room with a piano could “become a place of cultural work or tedium (practicing, music lessons), a ritual site of family or community performance (as solo or accompaniment), or a space for informal entertainment (singalong, dancing).”¹⁰⁸ The analysis in this scholarship seems especially fitting, given how the pianos were used in the Burwell-Dinkins home. They served as both teaching tools and objects of performance for the Burwell and Dinkins families.

¹⁰⁵ Michael Windover and James Deaville, “Setting the Tone in Early 20th-Century North American Living Rooms: The Parlor Piano,” in *The Sound of Architecture: Acoustic Atmospheres in Place* (Leuven University Press, 2022), 46.

¹⁰⁶ Windover and Deaville, “Setting the Tone in Early 20th-Century North American Living Rooms,” 45–46.

¹⁰⁷ Martha Crabill McClaugherty, “Household Art: Creating the Artistic Home, 1868-1893,” *Winterthur Portfolio*, Spring, 1983, Vol. 18, No. 1.

¹⁰⁸ Windover and Deaville, “Setting the Tone in Early 20th-Century North American Living Rooms,” 48.



Figure 2.2. Starr Baby Grand teaching piano. Photograph by Dr. Carroll Van West, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection.

The oldest piece of furniture identified in the inventory is a mid-nineteenth century plantation desk, located in the hallway on the second floor. Desks could often be found in hallways and parlors of homes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and were status objects, indicating the owner was involved in business affairs requiring access to documents, books, and other correspondence.¹⁰⁹ Desks were found in wealthy households as early as the sixteenth century, becoming more prevalent around the beginning of the nineteenth century, as literacy became more widespread.¹¹⁰ The plantation desk, as it became known in Southern states, is a desk and bookcase combination, occasionally also referred to as a fall-front, secretary, or postman's desk.¹¹¹ Storage for documents can be found in many of these objects, including shelves, vertical dividers, drawers and pigeonholes. Various craftsmen are credited with

¹⁰⁹ Rosemary Troy Krill, *Early American Decorative Arts, 1620-1860: A Handbook for Interpreters* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 70.

¹¹⁰ Nick Engler and Mary Jane Favorite, *American Country Furniture: Projects from the Workshops of David T. Smith (American Woodworker)* (Fox Chapel Publishing, 2009).

¹¹¹ Jonathan L. Fairbanks and Elizabeth Bidwell Bates, *American Furniture, 1620 to the Present* (New York: R. Marek, 1981), 331; Steve Gordon, "Tichner-Stowe Desk Comes to McGuffey," <https://sites.miamioh.edu/visualarts/2016/09/tichner-stowe-desk-comes-to-mcguffey/>, accessed March 7, 2023.

producing plantation desks, including Thomas Lincoln, the father of the 16th President, as well as black craftsman William Howard.¹¹² Born a slave, Howard made two plantation desks for the former Governor of Mississippi and owner of Kirkwood Planation, where Howard was enslaved before Emancipation.¹¹³



Figure 2.3. Plantation Desk. Photograph by Dr. Carroll Van West, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection.

The collection has numerous pieces of Eastlake style furniture. English designer Charles Lock Eastlake wrote the book *Hints on Household Taste in Furniture, Upholstery, and Other Details* in 1868, first published in the United States in 1872.¹¹⁴ In this work, he detailed a vision for furniture and architecture that rejected high relief carvings, classical elements, and strong curves from previous furniture trends, namely the French Baroque Revival and Second Empire styles. Instead, he claimed furniture should be “functional, nonostentatious, simple and rectilinear in form, honestly constructed ‘without sham or pretense,’ and ornamented with

¹¹² “Presidential Library Displaying Furniture Made by Lincoln’s Father,” *The State Journal-Register*, June 14, 2017. <https://www.sj-r.com/story/entertainment/2017/06/14/presidential-library-displaying-furniture-made/20592470007/>, accessed March 9, 2023.

¹¹³ “A Tale of Two African American-Made Plantation Desks,” <http://www.artsobserver.com/2012/01/24/a-tale-of-two-african-american-made-plantation-desks/>, accessed March 10, 2023.

¹¹⁴ McClaugherty, “Household Art: Creating the Artistic Home,” 3.

respect for the intrinsic qualities of the wood as well as the intended uses of the furniture.”¹¹⁵ The mid-nineteenth century saw a rise in Gothic revivalism and reform in domestic manufacturing in England, championed by British textile designer William Morris, among others. These changes in aesthetics directly influenced the style and writings of Eastlake. In his book, Eastlake denounced the styles previously championed, declaring them ostentatious and overly ornamented; in his estimation, these design choices led to a separation of art from the process of manufacturing objects. He preferred the nature of hand-crafted, solid wood furniture without the disdain shared by his contemporaries for mass production.

He condemned the practice of using varnishes to disguise inexpensive woods, calling instead for staining as an appropriate finish.¹¹⁶ Decorative elements of furniture, according to Eastlake, should serve a purpose and fulfill a function for the owner. Decorative elements featured on furniture in *Hints on Household Taste* included “shallow carving, marquetry, incised or pierced geometric designs, rows of turned spindles, chamfered edges, brass strap hinges, bail handles, and keyhole hardware inspired by Gothic forms.”¹¹⁷ Even though Eastlake served as an arbiter of taste in design, much of the furniture bearing his name was not designed by him. An 1878 reprinting of *Hints* leads with a disclaimer, disavowing poorly made furniture bearing his name.¹¹⁸ Despite his fame during the end of the nineteenth century, Eastlake has fallen into relative obscurity in comparison to some of his contemporaries, like Morris.

There are many examples of Eastlake or Eastlake-style furniture in the Burwell Dinkins home (numbers indicate the location in the home as reflected in the dimensional floor plan found

¹¹⁵ Mary Jean Smith Madigan, “The Influence of Charles Locke Eastlake on American Furniture Manufacture, 1870-90,” *Winterthur Portfolio*, 1975, Vol. 10, 1.

¹¹⁶ Madigan, “The Influence of Charles Locke Eastlake on American Furniture Manufacture,” 10.

¹¹⁷ Mary Jean Madigan, *Nineteenth Century Furniture: Innovation, Revival and Reform*, (New York: Art & Antiques, 1982), 55.

¹¹⁸ Madigan, “The Influence of Charles Locke Eastlake on American Furniture Manufacture, 1870-90,” 13.

in the National Register nomination). These objects include: set of two Eastlake chairs (102), Eastlake chair (103), Eastlake style small table (106), Eastlake-style hall tree (107), Eastlake basin with mirror and Eastlake dresser with mirror (109), Eastlake-style bed, Eastlake-style chiffarobe, Eastlake-style dresser, and Eastlake-style wash table (203).



Figure 2.4. Two Eastlake chairs (102). Photograph by Dr. Carroll Van West, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection.



Figure 2.5. Eastlake-style hall tree (107). Photograph by Dr. Carroll Van West, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection.



Figures 2.6 and 2.7. Eastlake basin with mirror and Eastlake dresser with mirror (109). Photographs by Dr. Carroll Van West, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection.



Figures 2.8 and 2.9. Eastlake-style bed and Eastlake-style chifforobe (203). Photographs by Dr. Carroll Van West, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection.



Figures 2.10 and 2.11. Eastlake-style dresser and Eastlake-style wash table (203). Photographs by Dr. Carroll Van West, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection.

One of the residents of the home in the twentieth century brought several interesting Craftsmen style objects into the home including a Mission Oak Convertible Table Chair, a Morris Chair, and a pair of Viko Furniture chairs. The pair of Viko chairs are from the

Baumritter Furniture Company. Two brothers-in-law, Nathan S. Ancell and Theodore Baumritter, formed the company in 1932. The company they started would eventually become Ethan Allen. Viko Furniture was a midcentury line from the company with 150 pieces and was manufactured in the 1950s to 1960s.¹¹⁹



Figure 2.12. Mission Oak Convertible Table Chair. Photograph by Dr. Carroll Van West, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection.



Figures 2.13 and 2.14. A pair of Viko Furniture chairs. Photographs by Dr. Carroll Van West, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection.

¹¹⁹ Dana Perez, "Baumritter Corporation," *Mid2Mod*, September 26, 2011, <http://mid2mod.blogspot.com/2011/09/baumritter-corporation.html>, accessed May 7, 2020.

Various objects in the home date to the use of the house as a medical office like the Telefunken Dictation machine (1965) and several Smith Corona typewriters. The Telefunken company was formed in Germany. In 1903 two companies, Siemens and Halske and the Allgemeine Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft (AEG), merged to form the Telefunken Company. In 1967, the company merged again, creating AEG-Telefunken.¹²⁰ The company continues to produce electronics today.



Figure 2.15. Telefunken Dictation machine. Photograph by Dr. Carroll Van West, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection.

Brothers Leroy and L.C. Smith began manufacturing typewriters in the 1870s. Post-World War II, the company produced the “world's first portable electric typewriter.” Due to the decline in popularity of typewriters in the later twentieth century, the Smith Corona company transitioned to making and selling thermal labels in 2010, which they continue to produce today. The company maintains a virtual typewriter museum on its website.¹²¹ Smith Corona

¹²⁰ Telefunken Company, “History,” accessed July 21, 2020, <https://telefunken.com/company/?anchor=history>.

¹²¹ “Smith Corona Typewriter Museum,” accessed July 1, 2020, <https://www.smithcorona.com/blog/gallery/>.

manufactured more than 100 styles/models in its history.¹²² These artifacts and other business-related objects document how the house was both a home and an office.



Figures 2.16 and 2.17. Smith Corona typewriters. Photographs by Dr. Carroll Van West, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection.

These objects, as well as the house itself, disrupt the narrative that black southerners were poor. Each generation involved in this home showcased affluent, well-respected members of the African American community. Dr. Lincoln L. Burwell, for whom the house was built, was a black physician who also ran a pharmacy out of his home. Ethel Dinkins taught piano to many people in the neighborhood, including a young Coretta Scott King. Reverend L.L. Anderson crusaded for Civil Rights alongside other notable activists, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

There remains a significant collection of books, papers, photographs, and other smaller objects that were outside my scope during this initial inventory. We briefly assessed the sheet music in the home, finding that some of the collection was more than a hundred years old, and likely used by a few of the musicians in the family. A continued examination of the material culture in the home could lead to an enhanced understanding of all of the family members of the

¹²² “Smith Corona Typewriter Model Serial Number Database,” accessed July 29, 2020, <https://typewriterdatabase.com/smithcorona.86.typewriter-serial-number-database>.

Burwell-Dinkins-Anderson House who contributed to the story of this meaningful home and the larger Selma history.

Architectural Significance of the Burwell-Dinkins-Anderson House



Figure 2.18. Exterior of Burwell-Dinkins-Anderson House (North Elevation). Photograph by Dr. Carroll Van West, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection.

The Burwell Dinkins Home in its initial construction was a one-story Folk Victorian wing and gable home constructed for Dr. Burwell around 1889. He had this home built for him shortly after returning to Selma and opening his practice in the city. Twenty years after the first iteration of the home, Burwell hired Wallace Rayfield to substantially renovate and expand the extant building. Later, there would be minor additions made, including a rear utility room and entrance.

Wallace Rayfield, the architect responsible for the c.1909 addition onto the Burwell Dinkins House grew up in Macon, Georgia, where he received his early education. Rayfield attended Howard University in Washington, D.C., where he apprenticed with a prominent

architectural firm.¹²³ After graduation in 1896, he earned a graduate certificate from Pratt Polytechnic Institute and a bachelor's degree in architecture from Columbia University in 1899.¹²⁴ After his graduation, Booker T. Washington recruited him to become director of the Department of Architectural and Mechanical Drawing at Tuskegee Institute, where he worked until establishing his own practice.



Figure 2.19. Exterior of Burwell-Dinkins-Anderson House (South Elevation). Photograph by Dr. Carroll Van West, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection.

Rayfield is known as the second African American architect in the country and the first black architect to set up practice in Alabama. He established his firm W.A. Rayfield & Co. in Birmingham, Alabama in 1908. The renovation done for Dr. Burwell was likely one of the first commissions taken on by Rayfield's firm. As is noted in the National Register nomination: "Rayfield's talent is seen in the substantial expansion of the home and his use of Craftsman

¹²³ Alabama African American History, "Wallace Rayfield," accessed August 24, 2022, <https://alafricanamerican.com/2012-honorees/wallace-rayfield/>.

¹²⁴ Knies and West, "Burwell-Dinkins-Anderson House," 17.

details such as the deep, masonry supported porch; stained glass windows; projecting bay; and interior finishes.”¹²⁵

Ultimately known for his church buildings, Rayfield designed more than four hundred buildings in at least twenty states during his career. Around three hundred still stand today. He also designed commercial buildings, fraternal structures, private homes, and college buildings, including a building at Selma University.¹²⁶ Other Alabama commissions include additional institutions of higher learning; Miles College, Payne University, Alabama A&M, Tuskegee Institute, and the West Alabama Normal and Industrial Institute.¹²⁷ Rayfield’s projects extended into other states, as well, including Tennessee, Texas, Florida, Ohio and Pennsylvania.¹²⁸

One of his most well-known church buildings is the 1911 Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. It became an important Civil Rights Movement site in the 1960s as a locus for meetings of activists. Unfortunately, white supremacists bombed the church in 1963, killing four young girls. The church was immediately repaired and is now part of the Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument.¹²⁹ Despite his successes in the early decades of

¹²⁵ Knies and West, “Burwell-Dinkins-Anderson House,” 17. The nomination expands on this description on page 18: “extant character-defining details expressive of the home’s sophisticated Craftsman style include deep overhangs with decorative beams under the eaves; deep half wraparound porch supported by masonry columns; mix of painted weatherboard and buff-colored brick on the exterior; stained glass windows; large buff-colored exterior chimney; corbelled chimney stacks; and dormers with Prairie-style windows below shingled pediments. Interior Craftsman characteristics include fireplaces with brick mantels and tile hearths; built-in bench in the living room; exposed ceiling beams; built-in bookcases; paneled wainscoting in the dining room; and the use of colonettes around a primary doorway.”

¹²⁶ Alabama African American History, “Wallace Rayfield.”

¹²⁷ Alabama African American History, “Wallace Rayfield.”

¹²⁸ The list goes on: Georgia, Louisiana, Kentucky, Maryland, West Virginia, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and North Carolina.

¹²⁹ Logan Ward, “The Legacy of Pioneering African-American Architect Wallace A. Rayfield,” National Trust for Historic Preservation., accessed May 6, 2020, <https://savingplaces.org/stories/the-legacy-of-wallace-a-rayfield-pioneering-african-american-architect>. The National Trust for Historic Preservation’s website describes the Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument as: “On January 12, 2017, President Obama announced the creation of Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument in Alabama. The monument, which honors the activists who struggled for social justice throughout the Civil Rights era, aims to inspire hope and tolerance in generations of Americans to come.”

the twentieth century, his business fell as a casualty to the Great Depression, and Rayfield died in 1941. Allen Dorough, a white Baptist preacher who was demolishing an old barn on his land in the 1990s discovered a collection of more than four hundred of Rayfield's architectural drawing plates, floor plans, business advertisements, and art pieces. Dorough eventually published a book on Rayfield, including biographical information as well as photographs and drawings of Rayfield's architectural designs and documents he had found on his property.¹³⁰

The Crisis Article and its Significance to the Burwell-Dinkins House

W.E.B. DuBois' October 1920 article on African American homes in *The Crisis* examined sixteen homes across the country, including the Burwell-Dinkins House, as evidence of black achievement, taste, and sophistication. The beauty of the Burwell-Dinkins House, as well as the other homes mentioned by DuBois in the article, provided a compelling challenge to the typical historic narrative of the poor African American in Alabama throughout the early twentieth century United States. *The Crisis* article included an image of a weathered, rough cabin as an example of a "stereotype that whites had of African American housing at the time."¹³¹

DuBois countered:

We are publishing a very few examples of modern American Negro homes. Of all the constituents of our cosmopolitan population, the Negro demands the best homes if we consider relative income. When he begins to rise he insists on a beautiful home: he invades Harlem, Druid Hill, and Hyde Park and instead of encouragement he meets laws, curses and bombs. But what does he care! He seeks a Home!¹³²

Interestingly, the Burwell-Dinkins House is constructed in a more modern style than many of the other homes present in *The Crisis*. Rayfield, in his molding of the c.1909 addition to

The designation—which includes eight of Birmingham's most significant civil rights sites—recognizes the city's pivotal role in the larger Civil Rights movement and will help visitors grasp the significance of what took place here." The 16th Street Baptist Church is one of those eight sites described above.

¹³⁰ Alabama African American History, "Wallace Rayfield." The University of Alabama Press published Dorough's book in 2010.

¹³¹ Knies and West, "Burwell-Dinkins-Anderson House," 18.

¹³² National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, "Homes," *The Crisis* 20, no.6 (October 1920).

the home, chose to create a Craftsman style for the home, which is a notably twentieth century-style, while many of the other homes highlight a Classical Revival or Victorian style, popular at the close of the nineteenth century. Examples of this style can be seen at the A.H. Herndon Home, as evidenced by the strong columns flanking the entrance. The Victorian influence can be seen on the exterior of the Alexander Hughes Home, with its steep gabled roof, turned woodwork, and quasi-bay windows.



Figure 2.20. The Dr. L.L. Burwell Home in *The Crisis*, October 1920.

DuBois situated the L.L. Burwell House in the strata of African American success stories with fine homes. Less than half of the homes remain extant, but some have been landmarked as National Historic Landmark or National Register of Historic Place properties.¹³³ They are located in Massachusetts, Alabama, Georgia, Virginia, New York, and California. As context for the Burwell-Dinkins House, here is a summary of a selection of the other houses.

¹³³ Several of these important black-owned homes are extant today, including the Burwell-Dinkins-Anderson Home, Villa Lewaro, the Maggie L. Walker Home, and the Herndon Home.

J.H. Blodgett Home—Jacksonville, Florida

Joseph Haygood Blodgett was born into slavery and worked on farms in his youth in Georgia and Summerville, South Carolina as a laborer. He eventually made his way to the northeast coast of Florida to work on the railroads for \$1.05 a day. According to *The National Cyclopedia of the Colored Race, Volume 1*, Blodgett went into the “drayage business” after six months of saving his wages.¹³⁴ He also ran a farm, wood yard, and restaurant before settling into building contracting by 1898. Blodgett owned several buildings in downtown Jacksonville that were destroyed by the Great Fire of 1901. He received a large loan from the State Bank of Florida to rebuild.¹³⁵

Blodgett built his own home in 1902 in addition to 258 homes constructed in the African American section of the city. He designed and constructed shotgun homes for the working class as well as grander homes for the expanding middle-class African Americans in Jacksonville. The neighborhood, Sugar Hill, contained many impressive homes designed by Blodgett. Urban renewal and gentrification have decimated this upscale black neighborhood. Many of Blodgett’s buildings were demolished during the construction of Interstate 95 and the Shands Medical Center expansion in the 1960s.¹³⁶

The house is not extant, but it was described in *The National Cyclopedia* as “one of the show places of Florida. It is a fine two story brick residence, beautifully finished inside and out and is elegantly furnished in the best of taste. His home is one of the finest owned by colored

¹³⁴ Clement Richardson, *The National Cyclopedia of the Colored Race* (National publishing Company, Incorporated, 1919), 435.

¹³⁵ Richardson, *The National Cyclopedia of the Colored Race*, 435. The loan was for the sum of \$5,000, payable after 5 years.

¹³⁶ Ennis Davis, “Erasing the Past. What Sugar Hill Was,” Metro Jacksonville, accessed April 30, 2020, <https://www.metrojacksonville.com/article/2015-feb-erasing-the-past-what-sugar-hill-was>.

people anywhere.”¹³⁷ Several sources record that Blodgett entertained many notable people in this home, including Booker T. Washington.¹³⁸ Blodgett is identified as one of the first black millionaires in Florida and one of the first architects in Jacksonville.¹³⁹



Figure 2.21. The J.H. Blodgett Home in *The Crisis*, October 1920.

The Jacksonville Housing Authority has a property in its portfolio named Blodgett Villas, named in Blodgett’s honor. It is the second generation of Blodgett Homes, which was a 654-unit public housing project built in 1942.¹⁴⁰ It was demolished in 1990, and the replacement 159-unit Blodgett Villas was constructed.

¹³⁷ Richardson, *The National Cyclopaedia of the Colored Race*, 435.

¹³⁸ Wheeler, Edward Jewitt, Isaac Kaufman Funk, et al., eds, *The Literary Digest*, (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1913), 914; Richardson, *The National Cyclopaedia of the Colored Race*; Ennis Davis, “The Architectural Works of Joseph Haygood Blodgett,” accessed April 30, 2020, <https://www.thejaxsonmag.com/article/the-architectural-works-of-joseph-haygood-blodgett/>.

¹³⁹ Davis, “The Architectural Works of Joseph Haygood Blodgett.”

¹⁴⁰ Ennis Davis, “LaVilla: The Rise & Fall of a Great Black Neighborhood,” accessed April 30, 2020, <https://www.thejaxsonmag.com/article/lavilla-the-rise-fall-of-a-great-black-neighborhood-page-3/>.

T.H. Hayes Home—Memphis, Tennessee

Thomas Henry Hayes, his wife, and their two sons, Thomas Jr. and Taylor, formed T. H. Hayes and Sons Funeral Home in 1902 at 245 Poplar Avenue in Memphis.¹⁴¹ In 1918, the business moved to 680 S. Lauderdale Street to allow for expansion and living quarters. Until its demolition in the twenty-first century, this funeral home was the oldest African American business in Memphis.¹⁴² Thomas Sr. attended Memphis Howe Institute while working assorted jobs. He attempted to start several grocery stores before coming to the mortuary trade in the beginning of the twentieth century. The Hayes family participated in several important civic institutions, including the National Negro Business League, National Funeral Directors and Morticians Association, and Union Protective Live Insurance Co.



Figure 2.22. The T.H. Hayes Home in *The Crisis*, October 1920.

¹⁴¹ Historic Memphis, “Historic T. H. Hayes & Sons Funeral Home,” accessed April 22, 2020, <http://historic-memphis.com/biographies/hayes-funeral/hayes-funeral.html>. It appears that the address of the original location changed several times before the business moved to 680 S. Lauderdale Street. The advertisements created by T.H. Hayes list the address as: 172 Poplar Street in 1904; 308 Poplar Avenue in 1910; 247 Poplar Avenue in 1916.

¹⁴² Historic Memphis, “Historic T. H. Hayes & Sons Funeral Home.”

The last member of the family, Thomas Senior's daughter-in-law Frances Lasiter Hayes, died in 2010 at the age of 103.¹⁴³ The building was demolished the following year. There is a vacant lot at 680 S. Lauderdale Street in Memphis today. It is flanked by two different church properties, the First Baptist Church Lauderdale and the Mother Temple Church of God in Christ.

Mr. Hughes Home—Springfield, Massachusetts

Alexander B. Hughes was born into slavery four years before the start of the Civil War in Virginia. He continued to work on the John B. Young Plantation in his youth before leaving to work for a tobacco farmer in his teens. Hughes worked as a wagon driver upon moving to Springfield in his early twenties. In 1888 the Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company hired Hughes as a shipping clerk and he stayed with the company for 38 years.¹⁴⁴ He and his wife, Pauline Simms Hughes, also had a side business as caterers for the Springfield elite. According to an article about him in the *Southern Workman*, Hughes served as a caterer “when wealthy people want[ed] extra good service.”¹⁴⁵ The *Workman* article also includes an image of the Hughes home that looks identical to the *Crisis* image.

An earlier edition of the *Crisis* from February 1914 briefly mentions Hughes was an avid gardener.¹⁴⁶ He received the first prize from the *Springfield Union* for “best kept lawn and most beautiful flower garden” several years in a row. George W. Blount writes in the *Workman* article that Hughes was “so intensely interested in beautifying lawns and flower gardens that he has formed the delightful habit of including with his own the vacant and neglected lots of his

¹⁴³ Historic Memphis, “Historic T. H. Hayes & Sons Funeral Home.”

¹⁴⁴ George Blount, “Alexander Hughes: A Helpful Negro Citizen,” *The Southern Workman*, January 1913, 685–86.

¹⁴⁵ Blount, “Alexander Hughes,” 685.

¹⁴⁶ National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, “Music and Art,” *The Crisis* 14, no.7 (February 1914), 164.

neighbors.”¹⁴⁷ He was known for distributing his flowers to hospital patients, strangers, and “those having no friends in the immediate vicinity.”¹⁴⁸



Figure 2.23. Alexander Hughes Home in *The Crisis*, October 1920.

Hughes was also involved with the civic and church community of Springfield. He was an early participant with the YMCA and worked with several churches in the city: St. John’s, Third Baptist, and Hope Congregational. Hughes is also said to have entertained Booker T. Washington when he visited Springfield.¹⁴⁹

His home in the *Crisis* article is listed on the Springfield Property Appraiser as constructed in 1915. The address is 16 Monson Avenue in Springfield.¹⁵⁰ The dwelling remains extant; however, the exterior has replacement siding, some window replacements and few of the gardens remain.

¹⁴⁷ Blount, “Alexander Hughes,” 685.

¹⁴⁸ Blount, “Alexander Hughes,” 685.

¹⁴⁹ Western Massachusetts Genealogical Society, “The Early Black Experience,” 10–11, accessed May 5, 2020, <http://pahmusa.mysite.com/The%20Early%20Black%20Experience.pdf>.

¹⁵⁰ Property Appraiser Records, City of Springfield, Massachusetts, accessed May 4, 2020, <https://www.springfield-ma.gov/finance/assessors/assessors.php?parcel=087750001>.



Figure 2.24. The present-day Mr. Hughes Home, Google Earth, 2020.

“Villa Lewaro”—Irvington-on-the-Hudson, New York

Madam C. J. Walker was born Sarah Breedlove in Louisiana in 1867. She was the first in her family to be born free. Her parents died in her youth, and she went to live with a sister and brother-in-law in Mississippi. Walker worked picking cotton and as a washerwoman in her younger years. She had a daughter at the age of 14, A'Lelia (later Lelia). After her first husband's death, she and her daughter moved to St. Louis to live with her brothers. She met her second husband, Charles J. Walker, who worked in advertising and helped her promote her new business.¹⁵¹ Walker developed a line of beauty and hair care for African American women, called “Madam Walker's Wonderful Hair Grower” with \$1.25.¹⁵² Along with her husband and daughter, Walker travelled around the country promoting the products. After a few years she was successful enough to open a factory and beauty school in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.¹⁵³ Her daughter also worked in the business during her lifetime, ensuring its long-lived existence. The

¹⁵¹ Erica L. Ball, *Madam C.J. Walker: The Making of an American Icon* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), 76.

¹⁵² Debra Michals, “Madam C. J. Walker,” National Women's History Museum, accessed March 11, 2023, www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/madam-cj-walker.

¹⁵³ Ball, *Madam C.J. Walker*, 48.

company ceased operations in 1981, more than six decades after Madam C. J. Walker's death.

According to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Walker was America's first, self-made female millionaire.¹⁵⁴



Figure 2.25. Madam C. J. Walker's Home "Villa Lewaro" in *The Crisis*, October 1920.

Walker hosted many notable figures at Villa Lewaro. Zora Neale Hurston, W. E. B. DuBois, and Langston Hughes, key figures of the Harlem Renaissance, were guests of Walker. The home was designed and built by well-known African American architect Vertner Woodson Tandy between 1916 and 1918.¹⁵⁵ Walker died eight months after completion, and the home went to her daughter. After Lelia Walker Robinson's death in 1931, it was given to the NAACP, per Madam Walker's request. Due to financial difficulties, the NAACP sold the property in the

¹⁵⁴ National Trust for Historic Preservation, "Villa Lewaro (Madam C. J. Walker Estate)," accessed April 28, 2020, <https://savingplaces.org/places/villa-lewaro-madam-c-j-walker-estate>.

¹⁵⁵ National Trust for Historic Preservation, "Villa Lewaro (Madam C. J. Walker Estate)."

same year. It was sold at auction and became the Anna E. Poth Home.¹⁵⁶ Villa Lewaro was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1976. It was held in private ownership from 1993 to 2018 by Ambassador Harold E. Doley, Jr. and Mrs. Doley. In 2018, the Doley's sold the home to the New Voices Foundation. The foundation, "which helps women of color entrepreneurs achieve their vision through innovative leadership initiatives, will spearhead the stabilization of the structure and planning for future uses."¹⁵⁷ The present-day address of the home is Villa Lewaro, Irvington, NY 10533.



Figure 2.26. Present-day Madam C. J. Walker's Home "Villa Lewaro," National Trust for Historic Preservation website, 2020.

Maggie L. Walker Home—Richmond, Virginia

Maggie Lena Mitchell Walker was born to Elizabeth Draper, an enslaved woman, in 1864.¹⁵⁸ She grew up in Richmond, Virginia, and later became a prominent businesswoman in

¹⁵⁶ Lynn Gomez Graves, National Register of Historic Places, National Historic Landmark, Villa Lewaro, Irvington, Westchester County, New York.

¹⁵⁷ National Trust for Historic Preservation, "Villa Lewaro (Madam C. J. Walker Estate)."

¹⁵⁸ Elsa Barkley Brown, "Constructing a Life and a Community: A Partial Story of Maggie Lena Walker," *OAH Magazine of History* 7, no. 4 (1993): 28–31. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25162909>.

the city. In 1902, Walker established a newspaper, *The St. Luke Herald*; a year later she founded the St. Luke Penny Savings Bank. Her achievement earned her the distinction of being the “first African American woman to charter a bank in the United States.”¹⁵⁹ After several mergers, the bank was known as The Consolidated Bank and Trust Company and operated until 2009. At the time of its closing, it was the oldest continually African American-operated bank in the country.¹⁶⁰



Figure 2.27. Maggie L. Walker Home in *The Crisis*, October 1920.

Walker was involved in many civic organizations throughout her life. In her teens, she joined the Independent Order of St. Luke, which she was involved with until her death. She also served on the boards of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) and the Virginia Industrial School for Girls. She was the local vice president of the National Association for the

¹⁵⁹ National Park Service, “Maggie L Walker National Historic Site,” accessed April 28, 2020, <https://www.nps.gov/mawa/index.htm>.

¹⁶⁰ Arlisha Norwood, “Maggie Lena Walker,” National Women's History Museum, accessed March 1, 2023, <https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/maggie-lena-walker>.

Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and served on the Virginia Interracial Commission.¹⁶¹



Figure 2.28. The present-day Maggie L. Walker Home, National Park Service website, 2020.

The Maggie L. Walker Home is now a National Historic Site, located at 110 1/2 East Leigh Street in Richmond. Originally built in 1883, Walker purchased the home in 1904 and modified the property to accommodate her family and staff. The home initially had nine rooms; Walker expanded to twenty-eight.¹⁶² She added electricity and central heating, and in 1928, an elevator. It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places and simultaneously became a National Historic Landmark on May 15, 1975.¹⁶³ The home remained in the family until 1979, when the National Park Service purchased it. Many of the furnishings in the house are original to the family and date to the 1904-1934 period when Maggie lived in the home.

¹⁶¹ Norwood, "Maggie Lena Walker."

¹⁶² National Park Service, "Maggie L Walker National Historic Site."

¹⁶³ National Park Service, "Maggie L Walker National Historic Site."

L.M. Blodgett Home—Los Angeles, California

Louis Matthew Blodgett travelled to California in 1906 at the age of 28 to work for the Southern Pacific company.¹⁶⁴ He quickly transitioned to the construction industry due to the building boom in California at the beginning of the twentieth century with several of his brothers. In 1928, Blodgett became the contractor along with architect James H. Garrott to build the first headquarters of the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company. A few years earlier, in 1924, members of the local African American community founded the Liberty Savings and Loan Association. Blodgett and his brother Charles were among the founding members, with L.M. serving as president for much of that time.¹⁶⁵

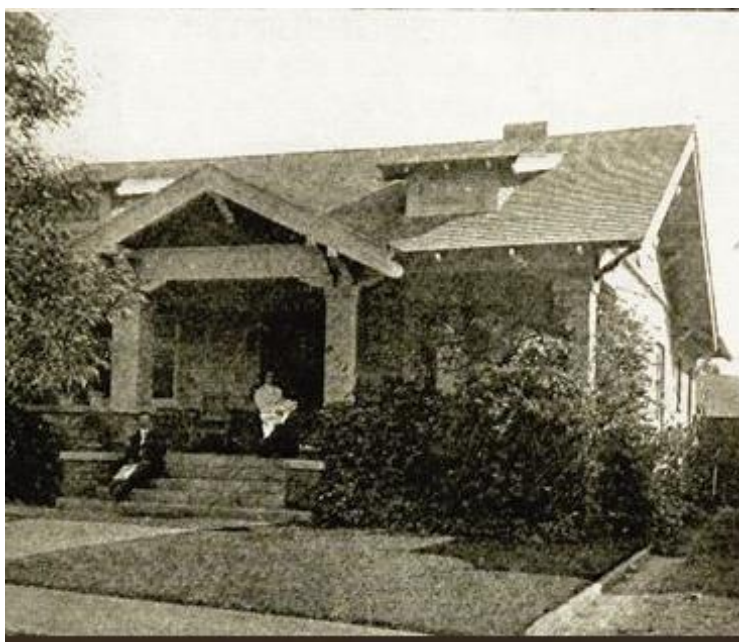


Figure 2.29. The L.M. Blodgett Home in *The Crisis*, October 1920.

In 1937, the Savings and Loan took over a construction project when another local bank failed. These events led to the formation of Blodgett Tract, a 185-home community over forty acres in South Los Angeles. The Blodgett Tract development is described as the “first group of

¹⁶⁴ Louie Robinson, “Richest Negro Family,” *Ebony*, December 1962, 153–54.

¹⁶⁵ “Louis M. Blodgett (1878-1965),” accessed April 28, 2020, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/190916611/louis-m-blodgett>.

Negro homes granted Federal Housing Administration financing in the U.S. Houses had individual designs; deeds which prohibited shacks in the area.”¹⁶⁶ Blodgett relayed the story to *Ebony* in 1962, “The FHA wasn’t building homes for Negroes anywhere in the United States then...we were the first ones to get it.”¹⁶⁷ He owned property in and around Los Angeles until his death in 1965. Blodgett’s home depicted in the *Crisis* article is located at 978 Dewey Avenue in Los Angeles. The building still stands but appears to be in declining condition. It is identified in a 2018 citywide African American Historical Context Statement prepared for the City of Los Angeles planning department as a potential historic resource.¹⁶⁸

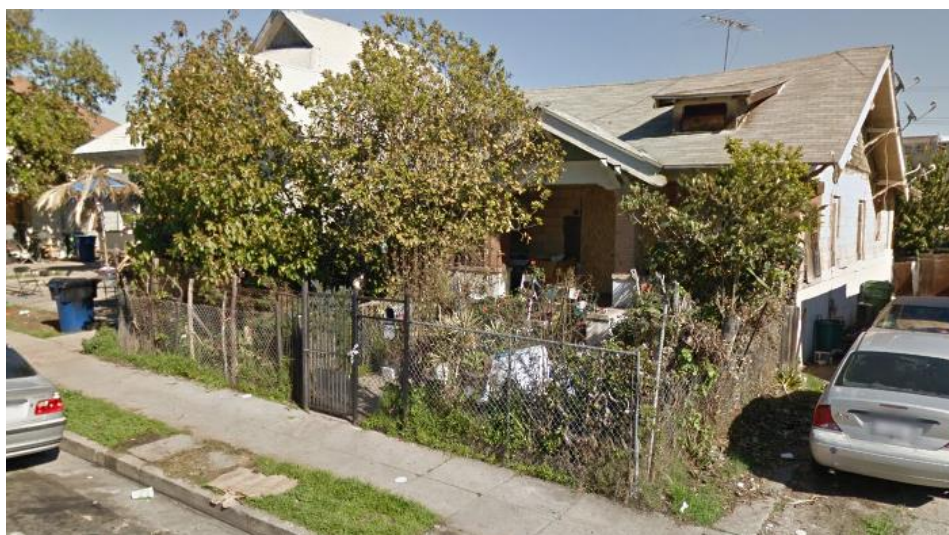


Figure 2.30. The present-day L.M. Blodgett Home, Google Earth, 2020.

A.H. Herndon Home—Atlanta, Georgia

Alonzo Franklin Herndon was born into slavery in 1858. His father, Frank Herndon, was a white planter and his owner; his mother Sophenie was enslaved. The black Herndons were emancipated after the Civil War and worked in Social Circle, Georgia, as sharecroppers in

¹⁶⁶ Robinson, “Richest Negro Family,” 153.

¹⁶⁷ Robinson, “Richest Negro Family,” 160.

¹⁶⁸ “Historic Resources Surveys | Los Angeles City Planning,” accessed April 27, 2020, <https://planning.lacity.org/preservation-design/historic-resources-survey>. The survey is called Los Angeles Citywide Historic Context Statement: African American History of Los Angeles from SurveyLA- Los Angeles Historic Resources Survey. L.M. Blodgett’s home is listed on page 66.

Alonzo's youth. At the age of 20, Herndon left Social Circle with a small amount of savings, travelling to the town of Senoia, Georgia, where he learned the barbering trade. He moved on to Jonesboro, where he opened his first barbershop. By 1904, he had moved to Atlanta and opened three barbershops. These were thriving businesses with many influential white customers, including judges, lawyers, politicians, and other prominent Atlanta businessmen. With the success of his barbershops, Herndon used the proceeds to acquire land in Georgia and Florida. These acquisitions included more than 100 homes and commercial real estate.¹⁶⁹

Later, he ventured into the world of insurance. In 1905, he purchased a failing insurance company, renaming it Atlanta Mutual Insurance Association. Less than twenty years later, the business had more than \$400,000 in assets and was reorganized under the name Atlanta Life Insurance Company. With the company's success, Atlanta Mutual expanded into a half dozen other states in the 1920s.¹⁷⁰ His son, Norris B. Herndon, continued to expand the business after his father's death. According to the museum's website: "Today, Atlanta Life Financial Group is the only African-American owned and privately held stock company in the country with a financial services platform that includes asset management and insurance."¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ The Herndon Foundation, "The Herndon Home Museum," Herndon Home, accessed May 4, 2020, <https://www.theherndonfoundation.org/about-the-foundation/>.

¹⁷⁰ Alexa Benson Henderson, "Alonzo Herndon," New Georgia Encyclopedia, accessed May 4, 2020, <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/business-economy/alonzo-herndon-1858-1927>.

¹⁷¹ The Herndon Foundation, "The Herndon Home Museum."

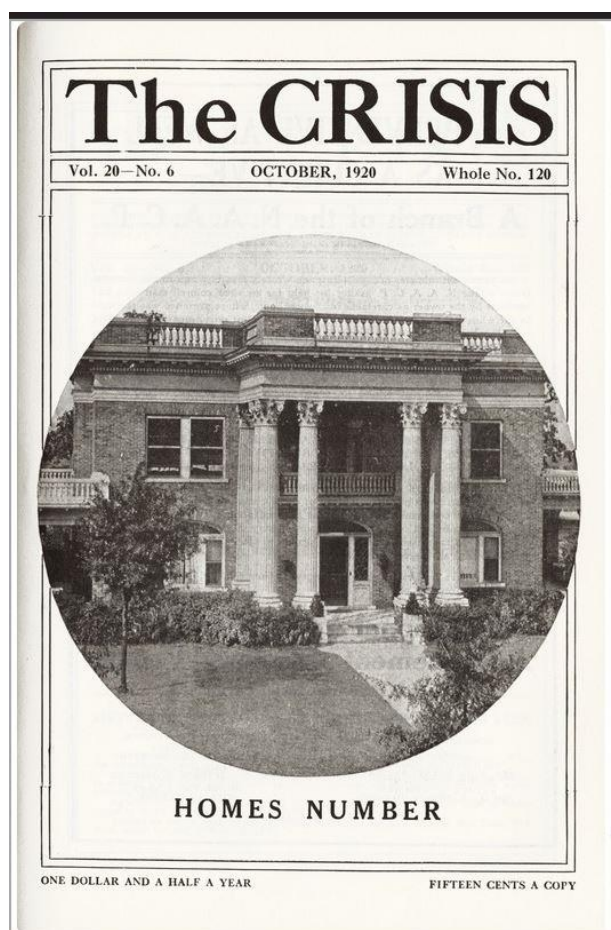


Figure 2.31. The front cover of *The Crisis*, featuring the A.H. Herndon Home, October 1920.

Herndon, like many other figures on this list, was civic minded and involved with numerous institutions. He was present at the founding meeting of the National Negro Business League, as well as the Niagara Movement. He also supported the YMCA, Atlanta University, First Congregational Church, South View Cemetery Association, and several orphanages.¹⁷² At the time of his death, Herndon was identified as “Atlanta's wealthiest black citizen, owning more property than any other African American.”¹⁷³

¹⁷² The Herndon Foundation, “The Herndon Home Museum.”

¹⁷³ Henderson, “Alonzo Herndon.”



Figure 2.32. The present-day A.H. Herndon Home, Herndon Home Museum website, 2020.

Herndon's grand home was chosen to grace the cover of the Homes special issue of *The Crisis*. The Herndon Home was listed as a National Historic Landmark in 2000. According to the National Park Service: "The home was primarily designed by Adrienne Herndon, Alonzo's first wife and a teacher at Atlanta University."¹⁷⁴ In 1950, Alonzo's son Norris formed The Alonzo F. and Norris B. Herndon Foundation, Inc., which was the basis for long-term preservation of the house. The property is now the Herndon Home Museum. The address is 587 University Place, NW in Atlanta.

A detailed description of the home follows: "The Herndon home is a two-story, 15-room Beaux Arts mansion built by local black craftsmen. The formally composed building is constructed with multi-colored brick, and features a two-story entry portico supported by Corinthian columns. One-story porches to each side of the building echo this theme in brick piers and wooden capitals. An elliptical fanlight over the main entrance and the balustrade above the

¹⁷⁴ Frank J. J. Miele, "Herndon Home," National Historic Landmark Nomination, National Park Service, 1998.

full entablature of the building's cornice add a distinctly Georgian Revival flavor to this imposing residence.”¹⁷⁵

The Crisis special Homes article emphasizes the tastes and styles of more than a dozen important black figures throughout the United States in the early twentieth century. Though a significant portion of the buildings no longer stand, they were each meaningful to their owners and communities at the time. With the photographic and biographic emphasis placed on these homes by W.E.B. DuBois, the narrative of the poor black Southerner is inherently disrupted.

How will the Family's Stories be Told in the New Museum?

The African American people who lived in this home throughout the twentieth century were physicians, pharmacists, educators, Civil Rights activists, preachers, musicians, and veterans. The Burwell's, Dinkins's and Andersons persevered to become important figures in their community and state. All their stories disrupt the essentializing one-dimensional poor black Alabaman narrative. The interpretation that will eventually become a component for this burgeoning museum should seek to highlight the individuals of the generations of this home.

Several of the descendants of the home are committed to seeing this remarkable space turned into a historic house museum. The house itself being placed both in the 1920 *Crisis* article by W. E. B. DuBois and the National Register of Historic Places in 2022 is a testament to the continued significance of both the home and the family that lived in it.

Judge Richard H. Dinkins and Charles Dinkins II inherited the estate and are the ones who sought out the partnership with the Center for Historic Preservation to ensure the property was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. They are invested in seeing their ancestral

¹⁷⁵ Miele, “Herndon Home.”

home preserved and interpreted to tell the story of generations past and how the different members of their family made an impact in Selma, Alabama.

**CHAPTER THREE:
SADIE FORD HERITAGE FARM AND CULTURAL ART CENTER, CEDARS OF
LEBANON STATE PARK, LEBANON, TENNESSEE**

The use of domestic space to interpret the past and educate the public about changing landscapes begins often begins by simply identifying a private home as a culturally significant site. That is the first phase of a continuous process of interpretation and reinterpretation illustrated through these case studies. In 2018 Tennessee State Park officials established the Sadie Ford Heritage Farm and Cultural Art Center as a way to recognize and interpret the lives of middle-class white farmers, who lived on the land before the state and federal governments created the Cedars of Lebanon State Park and Forest in the 1930s. During this era, in the midst of the Great Depression, governmental agencies advanced massive public works projects in order to stimulate the economy across the United States. The Resettlement Administration (RA), housed within the U.S. Department of Agriculture, was one of the first agencies created as part of what would become the New Deal. The RA purchased underproductive farmland, relocated farmers, and transitioned depleted farmland into more productive uses.¹⁷⁶

The State of Tennessee applied for a portion of funding set aside for the soil reclamation project, and in 1934, a county extension agent surveyed parts of southern Wilson County for possible sites to include. The Wilson Cedar Forest Project (called the Lebanon Cedar Forest Project after 1935), aimed to reforest an area of land to serve the logging industry. The aim of this project was to “develop a cedar forest through reforestation techniques of the glady land,

¹⁷⁶ Sandy Suddarth, “Cedars of Lebanon State Park,” in *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, accessed March 7, 2023, <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/cedars-of-lebanon-state-park/>.

place the forest development under government control, and provide employment for citizens in the economically depressed area.”¹⁷⁷

Just a few months after the federal government approved the project, work began on what would become the Cedars of Lebanon State Park, one of the first state parks in Tennessee. The RA, combined with the Works Project Administration (WPA), constructed buildings, built roads, installed power lines, and cultivated and planted more than 750,000 cedar seedlings over the course of two years. The park opened to the public in 1937. Eighteen years later, in 1955, the federal government transferred ownership of the property to the state of Tennessee.

Planning for the Sadie Ford Heritage Farm preceded the planning for the Carothers Farm in Williamson County (Chapter 2) by two years. Not surprisingly, the two parks, still under development, share similarities despite the difference in race. Both parks and their objects introduce visitors to the complex social and economic processes of mid-twentieth century agricultural transformation in Middle Tennessee.

Small Family Farms in Tennessee's Central Basin

The Ford family and the Carothers family both established their farms on submarginal land-rocky and forested. They both built bungalow-styled farmhouses, but the Fords built a frame house while the Carothers clad their home with locally available stone. The Ford family lived in a rural portion of Wilson County, about 14 miles south of Lebanon, Tennessee. Both families encountered the opportunities and difficulties of small-scale farmers in rural Middle Tennessee. Importantly, the patriarchs of both families supplemented farm income with another vocation.

¹⁷⁷ Sandy Suddarth. “Cedars of Lebanon State Park.”

Subsequent generations of each family transitioned away from agriculture and faced the challenge of conserving their agrarian heritage as their lives and their properties were drawn into the orbit of Nashville's sprawling metropolitan area. Both farm sites have witnessed subsequent population growth and urbanization in their respective communities, leading to the threat of erasure of this component of the land's history.

Identifying the Cultural Significance of Old Houses

Cedars of Lebanon State Park purchased the Sadie Ford property in 2018, saving this historic farm site from the fate of similar farmland in the region. The growth of Nashville's regional economy has created immense pressure on the legacy of small-scale agriculture; like the Carothers Farm, as ownership passes from one generation to another, the opportunity to realize financial windfalls through the sale of inherited land is a challenge to preservation. Fortunately, in both cases, heirs of the most recent occupants sought out buyers who could preserve the physical form of the landscape and provide public interpretation of the properties' significance.

Cedars of Lebanon is using the Heritage Farm to enrich visitors' understanding of the lifeways for early twentieth century farmers in eastern Wilson County. Both original owners, Sadie and Delta Ford, were not only farmers- they were also educators who served as teachers for the Major School, a local school in their community. The Sadie Ford property provides programming that includes information about traditional foodways, broom making demonstrations, and early 1900's local history.



Figure 3.1. Aerial view of the Sadie Ford Heritage Farm and Cultural Art Center including outbuildings. Image from Google Earth, March 2023.

The House and Farm

Byron Quarles constructed the vernacular structure in the 1920s for schoolteachers Delta and Sadie Ford. Quarles, a local farmer, was a relative of the Fords. The home is a modest bungalow-influenced rectangular structure with one and a half stories, and a side gable. The house is an excellent surviving example of a middle-class farm home in what was once a rural part of Middle Tennessee. The home retains many historic features that speak to the era in which it was originally built, including the intact chimneys, stone foundation, and original wood windows with diamond encasement design.



Figure 3.2. Image of original wood windows with diamond encasement design. Photograph taken by author, 2020.



Figure 3.3. Northeast oblique elevation of the Ford House, where the original wood window with diamond encasement detail and original chimney are both visible. Photograph taken by author, 2020.



Figure 3.4. Southwest oblique view of the Ford House with stone foundation visible. Photograph taken by author, 2020.



Figure 3.5. Undated photograph of the Sadie Ford Home in its original form (eastern elevation). Photograph from the Cedars of Lebanon State Park archives.



Figure 3.6. Present day façade (eastern elevation) of the Sadie Ford Home, with 1950s addition visible on the south side of the building. Photograph by Savannah Grandey Knies, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection, 2020.

Early twentieth century farming practices are evident in the farm's outbuildings, including several barns. Retaining the barns and other structures helps convey the historic farm setting to visitors. The Fords (and later the Reeds) raised livestock, grew crops like corn, wheat, tobacco, and sorghum. Both families also had a vegetable garden to support the household and created various handicrafts important to a rural farm family.



Figure 3.7. One of the original Ford family outbuildings. Photograph taken by author, 2020.



Figure 3.8. Image of the two barns behind the home that were original to the Ford family's ownership of the property. Photograph taken by author, 2020.



Figure 3.9. View looking towards the rear of the home with several outbuildings visible. Photograph by Savannah Grandey Knies, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection, 2020.

Park officials also moved additional buildings to the property, enhancing interpretation of traditional farm ways. The chicken coop, grist mill, broom shop, corn crib, and the Harris Cabin have been built or added to the property since 2018 for programming purposes. More buildings continue to be added to the property, including the dogtrot building in figure 3.11. The state park has also modified the kitchen and added an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)-accessible ramp to the rear of the home for increased ease of access to enter the building.



Figure 3.10. Chicken coop. Photograph taken by author, 2023.



Figure 3.11. Dogtrot building with the original large red barn in the background. Photograph taken by author, 2023.



Figures 3.12 and 3.13. Images of the exterior of the Harris Cabin. The photograph on the left is from 2020, and the photograph on the right is from 2023, same angle, showing the restoration process of the building. Both photographs taken by the author, 2020 and 2023.

According to the farm's interpretation plan, the original footprint of the home was four rooms and a large attic space as a single-family farmhouse. The house evolved to meet the needs of a twentieth-century family like many farm homes in the era. After purchasing the house at auction in 1949, Ella Reed and her family modernized the kitchen at the rear of the home, added a bedroom to the side of the house, and an attached garage. There is a porch on the front of the home that runs the entire length of the original structure's front. It is unclear whether that was an original feature of the home, or if it was a later addition.



Figure 3.14. View of the kitchen, modified by the Reeds during their ownership and later modified by State Park staff. Photograph by Savannah Grandey Knies, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection, 2020.



Figure 3.15. North elevation of the Ford House, showing the garage addition added by the Reed family in the 1950s. Photograph by Savannah Grandey Knies, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection, 2020.

The property abuts the State Forest, comprised chiefly of cedar glades. It is said by the park rangers on the property that this is the largest cedar glade in the world. The configuration of the property was a factor in purchasing the land; the hope was to preserve a historic farmhouse with access to the State Forest. The site, comprised of more than seventy-acres, provides ample

space to use as an interpretive site for teaching early twentieth century lifeways in rural middle Tennessee.

House Museum Collections Link the Daily Lives of the Past and Present

Inside the home, some of the furniture assists in telling the story of the rural early twentieth century farm family. A piano, antique desk, sewing machine, and kitchen items, among other objects, provide a glimpse into the lives of those who lived in the home. There is a pie safe, as well as an antique radio, playing speeches by FDR in the dining room.

One of the bedrooms has a bed and several pieces of bedroom furniture; this is also where the looms are kept. The furniture is not original to the Ford family, but some of the items are original to the Reed family who lived in the home after 1949. A loom, added by park staff, is also located inside the home, demonstrating one of the handicrafts practiced onsite. Other crafts demonstrated at the Sadie Ford Heritage Center include blacksmithing, candle making, basket weaving, and broom making.



Figure 3.16. Sewing machine in the home. Photograph by Savannah Grandey Knies, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection, 2020.



Figure 3.17. Piano in the home. Photograph by Savannah Grandey Knies, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection, 2020.



Figure 3.18. Antique desk in the home. Photograph by Savannah Grandey Knies, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection, 2020.



Figure 3.19. Loom located in a bedroom. Photograph by Savannah Grandey Knies, MTSU Center for Historic Preservation Collection, 2020.

The Ford Family: 1920s to 1949

Sadie Virginia Ayers Ford came from a family of farmers. Her father, Lawrey “Ras” Rastus Ayers, was a well-known farmer in Cainsville, a rural community in southern Wilson County.¹⁷⁸ He served as a board member of the Wilson County Board of Equalization, which serves as “the first level of administrative appeal for complaints regarding the assessment, classification, and valuation of property for tax purposes.”¹⁷⁹ Sadie’s mother, Henrietta Ellen Quarles Ayers, was Lawrey’s second of three wives. Sadie, born in 1887, grew up on her family farm. She married Delta Ford in December of 1917, at the age of 30, and census records record her as a housewife, though she also worked as a schoolteacher for many years. She died of cancer at age 48 in September 1934.

¹⁷⁸ “Funeral is Held for L.R. Ayers, 78,” *The Daily News-Journal*, Murfreesboro, Tennessee, March 3, 1938.

¹⁷⁹ Wilson County Property Appraisal & Assessment Department, accessed November 29, 2022, <https://www.wilsoncountyttn.gov/302/Appraisal-Assessment>.



Figure 3.20. Delta Ford Jr., Mary Ellen Ford, and Delta Ford Sr. posing on the family car, c.1940. Photograph from the Cedars of Lebanon State Park archives.

Delta Moses Ford was born in 1882 in DeKalb County, Tennessee, to parents Nancy Catherine Turney Ford and James Cantrell Ford. He appears to have had several job titles throughout his lifetime. Delta was listed on his death certificate as a farmer. His draft card, filled out in September of 1918, lists his occupation as “rural carrier” in the town of Statesville in Wilson County, meaning he worked part-time for the United States Postal Service.¹⁸⁰ Both Sadie and Delta are listed as public-school teachers in the 1920 Census.¹⁸¹ In the 1930 Census, Delta’s occupation is listed as public-school teacher.

The Fords had two children, Delta Moses Ford, Jr, and Mary Ellen Ford, born in 1926 and 1929 respectively. Delta Jr. served in the United States Navy during World War II and graduated from Middle Tennessee State College in 1949.¹⁸² After his death in 1991, he was

¹⁸⁰ Delta Moses Ford Registration card, accessed March 12, 2020, <https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/25996042:6482?tid=&pid=&queryId=dfff9b8fb1e8f98152d8f5f9168b54c1&phsrc=ini267&phstart=successSource>.

¹⁸¹ U.S. Census Bureau, 1920 and 1930 Census.

¹⁸² “Largest Class Yet to Receive Degrees at TSC,” *The Rutherford Courier*, April 5, 1949.

buried in the Chattanooga National Cemetery.¹⁸³ Mary Ellen “Polly” Ford graduated from Lebanon High School and Draughon’s Business College of Nashville.¹⁸⁴ In 1949, she married her husband Edmon A. Barber and moved to Rutherford County, where she worked for the Murfreesboro Bank and Trust (now SunTrust Bank). She lived to the age of 88, passing away in Murfreesboro in 2017. Mary Ellen was survived by her daughter and son-in-law.

Sadie and Delta Ford served their community as educators and farmers. The 1920 census lists Delta and Sadie as public-school teachers living on a rented farm in Statesville. Both later worked as educators at the Major School in Wilson County. The couple purchased farmland and had their house constructed sometime in the 1920s. By the 1930 census, the Fords are recorded as owning their own home on Murfreesboro Pike with a home value of \$3,000.¹⁸⁵

The Fords experienced the hardships of the Great Depression in the early 1930s, but Sadie died in 1934 before the state and federal government began the transformative state forest project. Her husband Delta directly experienced the New Deal reclamation of the land, then the use of that same land, and that of his farm, during the Tennessee Maneuvers of the 1940s. He died in 1945. Byron Lavada Quarles, Sadie’s maternal uncle, and builder of the Ford house, cared for the Ford children for several years before the farm was sold at auction in 1949.

The Reed Era: 1949 to 2016

The new owners, the Reeds, continued the work of the Ford family, running a farm on property, including raising cattle and cultivating tobacco on site. There is no evidence to suggest that either family used tenant farming on the property. The Reeds were responsible for several physical changes made to the home: the garage and a back bedroom were added during their

¹⁸³ “Delta Moses Ford Jr. (1926-1991),” accessed November 9, 2022, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/2980303/delta-moses-ford>.

¹⁸⁴ “Miss Mary Ellen Ford’s Engagement to Edmond A. Barber is Made Known,” *The Rutherford Courier* 29 Nov 1949, Page 4,” accessed November 29, 2022, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/674754586/>.

¹⁸⁵ Please see the 1930 Census. Delta is listed as a farmer and Sadie is listed as having no occupation.

ownership. The Reeds also remodeled the kitchen, according to Park Ranger Sarah Geeslin.¹⁸⁶ Ella Owen Major and Christopher Reed married in 1936 in Lebanon, Tennessee.¹⁸⁷ They are documented as the owners of the former Ford home in the 1950 census; Chris W. is recorded as a farmer and Ella O. as an elementary teacher at a country school.¹⁸⁸ Ella received her Elementary Education degree from Middle Tennessee State in 1956.¹⁸⁹ She, like the Fords, also worked as a teacher at Major School during her career. The Reeds owned the home until 2016, when Ella Owen Major Reed died at the age of 104.

The Major Community and School

As landscapes change over time, house museums can serve as tangible reminders of an otherwise invisible past. The Sadie Ford Heritage Farm educates the public about the small crossroads settlements which once dotted Middle Tennessee but have been subsumed by a changing landscape. The Major Community functioned as a small tight-knit hamlet before the state and federal governments created Cedars of Lebanon. As described previously, both of the Fords and Ella Owen Major Reed worked as educators in Wilson County in order to supplement their farm income. They all taught at the Major School, the most visible public institution of the Major Community.

In an unpublished recollection of the time period entitled “Sounds of Childhood,” Katherine Major Vickers (sister of Ella Owen Major Reed) details her experience growing up in the Major Community. She notes that this “small family oriented area consisted of many families. Some of the family names were Lannom, Smith, Major, Robinson, Jordan, Bond, Alsup

¹⁸⁶ Email correspondence with Park Ranger Sarah Geeslin, April 2, 2021.

¹⁸⁷ “Eagleville,” *The Rutherford Courier*, May 15, 1936.

¹⁸⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, 1950 Census.

¹⁸⁹ “500 to Get MTSC Degrees; Clement Will be Speaker,” *Nashville Banner*, May 22, 1956.

and others.”¹⁹⁰ By all accounts, this community was small and tight knit. Katherine continues: “this was a wonderful community. Everybody loved their neighbors [who were] always there to help one another. A good school and several churches to attend. No crime, no locking doors just trusted one another. A Happy Major Community.”¹⁹¹ The Ford family home is one of the last physical artifacts of the Major Community.

The settlement, formed in the late 1800s, was named for Alex Major, who also served the community as Major postmaster. The Major family’s ancestors came to America from England originally, first settling in Virginia in the seventeenth century before coming to Wilson County in the nineteenth century. The Major School, dated to 1919, when “Will Major, Sam Major, John Major, Tal Major, Bill Ingram, and Howard Hancock worked diligently to establish a school. Sam Major donated four acres for the campus. It opened in 1920.”¹⁹²

A newspaper article about the Major Community found in the Wilson County Archives describes the community as “developed by early settlers along streams and country roads. Businessmen in the area built mills, shops, doctors’ offices, stores and post offices. The people who lived in the area also built churches and schools.”¹⁹³ Local women formed the Major Home Demonstration Club in 1917. These clubs were a program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Cooperative Extension Service, and popular throughout the mid-twentieth century, providing education to farm women in rural America. Home Demonstration Clubs taught skills like canning and sewing, as well as providing information about nutrition and gardening.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁰ Katherine Major Vickers, “Sounds of Childhood,” unpublished typescript and handwritten pages, 2002. Archives. Cedars of Lebanon State Park. Wilson County, TN.

¹⁹¹ Katherine Major Vickers, “Sounds of Childhood,” 2002.

¹⁹² “The Major Community,” news article, unknown paper and date. Archives. Cedars of Lebanon State Park. Wilson County, TN.

¹⁹³ “The Major Community,” news article, unknown paper and date.

¹⁹⁴ “Home Demonstration Clubs,” in *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*, accessed March 1, 2023, <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/home-demonstration-clubs-5387/>.

According to her 2016 obituary, Ella Owen Major Reed participated in the Major Demonstration Club.¹⁹⁵

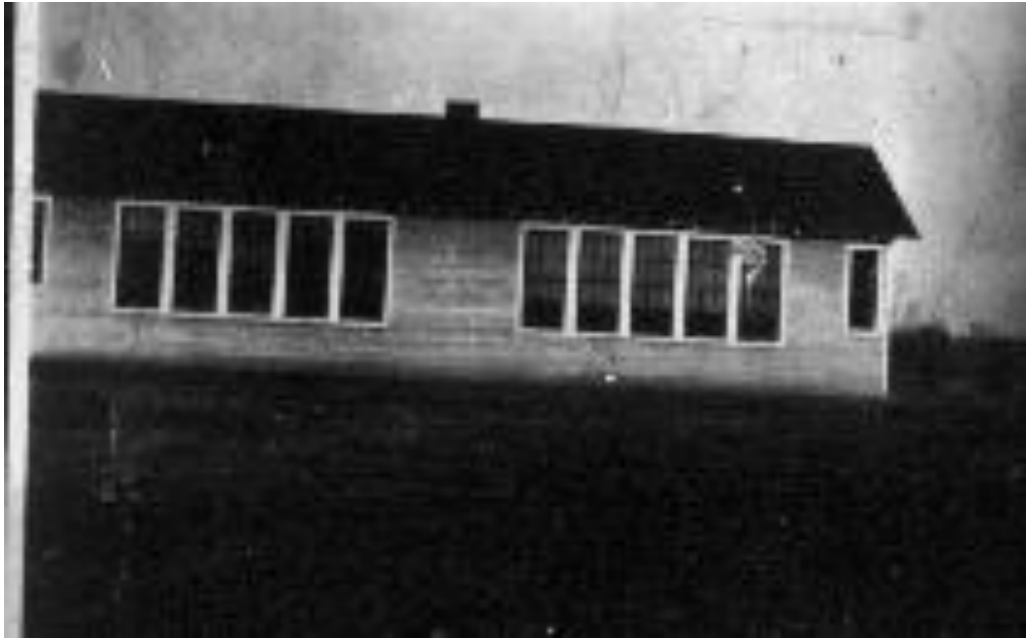


Figure 3.21. Undated image of the Major School where Delta, Sadie, and Ella Owen Major Reed taught in the early twentieth century. Photograph from the Tennessee State Library and Archives.

Some neighboring schools were closed, and their students were transferred to this newly constructed school. They came from Forest Hill, Oak Point, Friendship, Carmel, and Wetmore Schools. During the first three years, the Major School taught through the tenth grade. Local students would matriculate to another school in the county to complete their secondary education. The two-room schoolhouse served as primary education for many students in Wilson County. Graduates of the school went on to further education, becoming doctors, lawyers, and finding work in many other professions. The Major School taught students for forty-six years, closing in 1966.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ "Ella Owen Major Reed," <https://partlowchapel.com/obituaries/ella-reed-2016>, accessed March 17, 2023.

¹⁹⁶ "Americana on Almadale Agenda," *The Daily News-Journal*, September 6, 1989.

The Works Progress Administration and the Cedars of Lebanon State Park

Domestic spaces which transform into institutions of public history allow contemporary visitors to relate to the lived experience of major historic events like the New Deal and wartime mobilization. The Cedars of Lebanon State Park and Cedars of Lebanon State Forest contain more than 9,000 acres. While the park preserves natural habitats and provides recreation opportunities thirty-two miles from Nashville, its creation displaced the area's small farming communities. As the only remaining “pre-park” farm in the area, the c.1920s Ford-Reed home has witnessed incredible change that has reshaped the landscape of southern Wilson County. The first major change occurred during the New Deal with the creation of Cedars of Lebanon State Park across the road from the Ford House. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Congress established the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1935. The WPA created work for skilled and unskilled labor, namely constructing public works projects throughout the United States.

The state proposed the “Lebanon Cedar Forest Project” in 1933 with the purchase of Wilson County land from ninety-four families with the intention of “relocating farmers from sub-marginal lands to better producing lands; establishing a wildlife refuge; creating a recreational center for approximately 200,000 people within a fifty mile radius; and to serve as a conservation demonstration neighboring farm families.” The project also included transforming 8,000 acres of gladelike soil into a cedar forest. The federal government approved the project proposal in 1935.

The Cedars of Lebanon State Park’s “built environment of roads, trails, structures, and buildings largely dates to the era of its initial construction by the Civilian Conservation Corps

and the Works Progress Administration during the late 1930s.”¹⁹⁷ The Cedars of Lebanon State Park officially opened on September 25, 1937, with a ceremonial laying of the cornerstone for the Cedar Forest Lodge.¹⁹⁸ On March 23, 1939, The United States Department of Agriculture leased the “Lebanon Cedar Forest Project” to the Tennessee Department of Conservation, and it received its current name of Cedars of Lebanon State Park.



Figure 3.22. Undated photo of Mary Ellen Ford at the entrance to Cedars of Lebanon State Park. This image depicts the 1930s entrance constructed by the WPA workers who were responsible for building the park. Photograph from the Cedars of Lebanon State Park archives.

The Cedars of Lebanon State Park Historic District, listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1995, contains: “the Cedar Forest Lodge, a stone storage building, a system of trails leading to Jackson Cave, and two Rustic-style overlooks, all built by the Work Progress Administration in 1937, as well as a stone water fountain, added by the State of Tennessee in

¹⁹⁷ Ginger Ramsey and Carroll Van West, “Cedars of Lebanon State Park Historic District, Wilson County, Tennessee,” National Register of Historic Places Nomination, Tennessee Historical Commission, 1995, 5.

¹⁹⁸ Ramsey and West, “Cedars of Lebanon State Park Historic District,” 11.

1944.”¹⁹⁹ The Cedars Park was also included in the 1986 multiple property National Register Nomination: State Parks in Tennessee Built by the CCC and WPA between 1934-1942. Other parks involved in this nomination include Standing Stone, Fall Creek Falls, Booker T. Washington, Chickasaw, and Natchez Trace. In this nomination, the notable components of the design are demonstrated by the use of native materials and rustic style park architecture. The rustic style is indicative of using appropriate scale for buildings, native materials (as mentioned above), and the unifying elements of trails, landscaping, and low stone walls throughout the man-made elements of the parks.²⁰⁰ The resulting experience within the parks is a harmonic blend between the natural and the man-made.

Before the Great Depression, Tennessee was one of twenty-nine states without state parks. By the end of the 1930s, federal agencies were responsible for improving or establishing seventeen Tennessee State Parks.²⁰¹ Historian Bevley R. Coleman examined the state park system in 1962, and divided the parks into several categories, depending on their origins within Depression-era New Deal programs: Recreation Demonstration Areas, Tennessee Valley Authority Areas, Land-Use Areas, and Miscellaneous Federal Projects.²⁰²

In order to prioritize conservation and reclamation projects, the U.S. Department of Agriculture established Land-Use Areas to target land in need of replanting and revitalization. Often, these projects were larger in scale to account for their dual purposes of conservation and recreation. The Cedars of Lebanon was one of four Land-Use Areas chosen to become a

¹⁹⁹ Ramsey and West, “Cedars of Lebanon State Park Historic District,” 5.

²⁰⁰ James B. Jones and Claudette Stager, “State Parks in Tennessee Built by the CCC and WPA between 1934-1942,” National Register of Historic Places Nomination, Tennessee Historical Commission, 1986, 17.

²⁰¹ Carroll Van West, *Tennessee’s New Deal Landscape: A Guidebook* (University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 149. West notes that “the history of the Tennessee state park system-widely viewed today as one of the true jewels of the state’s public landscape-is intimately tied to the history of conservation and recreation efforts of New Deal agencies during the 1930s.”

²⁰² West, *Tennessee’s New Deal Landscape*, 149.

Tennessee State Park. They worked in conjunction with the National Park Service and the U.S. Forest Service who provided “supervision over the forests and park design,” the WPA and CCC supervised construction, the Division of Rural Rehabilitation and later the Resettlement Administration who relocated farming families.²⁰³

Many properties in Tennessee also received federal funding, not just the state park system. Other projects funded in the state included road construction, building restoration, and dam creation. Middle Tennessee heritage sites, like Percy Warner Park and the Hermitage, received federal money for building projects and restoration during the 1930s. The formation of entities like the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) also occurred in the state during this era.

The TVA, organized in 1933, provided water control and power generation for Tennessee and six other states. The goals for the TVA consisted of natural resource conservation, improved agricultural practices, lake creation, flooding mitigation, and rural electrification throughout the Tennessee Valley.²⁰⁴ According to historian Carroll Van West in *Tennessee's New Deal Landscape: A Guidebook*, the TVA was “more than a generator of electricity; it also was to be an agent of reform, especially for farm families and town residents throughout the Tennessee Valley.”²⁰⁵ Just thirteen years later, the authority could serve more than half a million households by providing 2.5 million kilowatts of power; they also owned more than 1.1 million acres of land. To own that much property, the TVA had to displace 72,000 people from their homes.²⁰⁶

Historian Douglas Smith writes about how the influx of spending changed the American landscape, notably in the South. He states “the ‘relief’ dollars stimulated building of all sorts,

²⁰³ West, *Tennessee's New Deal Landscape*, 150.

²⁰⁴ W Bruce Wheeler, “Tennessee Valley Authority,” in *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, accessed March 8, 2023, <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/tennessee-valley-authority/>; West, *Tennessee's New Deal Landscape*, 9.

²⁰⁵ West, *Tennessee's New Deal Landscape*, 9.

²⁰⁶ West, *Tennessee's New Deal Landscape*, 11.

which left municipal leaders with a choice of either the rapid, piecemeal expansion of their cities or the establishment and revival of urban institutions to supervise orderly growth.”²⁰⁷ What this means is urban spaces in the South could either be subsumed by this influx of money, or cities could be savvy about the building projects they suggested and executed during this era.

According to historian James Burran, Nashville fell more into the latter category.

The middle Tennessee region during the Depression consisted of many who were out of work and destitute.²⁰⁸ Projects with low material cost that provided many jobs with fair wages were preferred. Road construction, specifically rural routes into the cities of Tennessee, attracted attention from WPA administrators. These projects stimulated the economy all over the state. Projects like the Cedars of Lebanon, as well as others like the restoration of Fort Negley, along with school building construction, library book repairs, and new airports helped revitalize Tennessee.²⁰⁹ These WPA projects demonstrated intentionality to community planning in central Tennessee.

Tennessee Maneuvers, World War II, and the Ford Farm

Most Americans are familiar with the story of wartime mobilization during World War II. However, the impact of the war on the daily lives of civilians is often obscured by the narrative

²⁰⁷ Douglas L. Smith, *The New Deal in the Urban South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 87–88.

²⁰⁸ Roger Biles, *The South and the New Deal*, New Perspectives on the South (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994); James A. Burran, “The WPA in Nashville, 1935-1943,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (1975): 296. Roger Biles examines the entire South and the impact of the Great Depression upon it in his book *The South and the New Deal*; he provides a greater context for the experience of the Depression and the use of Federal relief programs within this region of the country: “[b]y the end of 1930 unemployment in Nashville had increased to 25 percent.”²⁰⁸

²⁰⁹ Thomas H. Coode, “Works Progress Administration,” in *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, accessed March 8, 2023, <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/works-progress-administration/>; James A. Burran, “The WPA in Nashville, 1935-1943,” 297. According to the *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* entry for the Works Progress Administration, some of the biggest projects in Tennessee centered around flight: “WPA workers helped complete landing fields and airports at Jellico, Cookeville, Lebanon, Jackson, and Milan. They built major airports in Memphis, Chattanooga, Knoxville, Nashville, and at the Tri-Cities of Bristol, Johnson City, and Kingsport.”

of the conflict itself. The Sadie Ford property is a teaching tool that facilitates learning and interpretation about the Tennessee Maneuvers. The site was at the center of training and mobilization for war overseas. Hundreds of thousands of young men spent time in the area before heading off to fight in Europe. Interpretation of the domestic space also provides an intimate view of what the experience was like for local civilians who suddenly found themselves living in the middle of massive training grounds.

Between 1942 and 1944, Middle Tennessee served as a training ground for young soldiers preparing to fight in WWII, due to its resemblance to the terrain in Germany, France, and Belgium. The War Department chose Cumberland University, in Lebanon, officially referred to as “somewhere in Tennessee,” to be the Headquarters for the Army Ground Forces, bringing around 850,000 troops to Middle Tennessee.²¹⁰

More than twenty counties in the state were chosen to participate in the maneuvers, largely due to the region’s transportation connectivity via highways and railroads, as well as the similarity of terrain to that of western Europe. The war games were not necessarily welcomed in these communities, however; more than \$4 million in claims were made by municipalities and individuals for destruction of property during the “opposing armies” engagements.²¹¹

Maneuvers ran down U.S. Route 231 (Murfreesboro Road) where the Sadie Ford Heritage Farm and Cultural Art Center sits today. The Cedars of Lebanon State Park also served as a respite site for these soldiers, providing a location for recreation during their time in Wilson

²¹⁰ Patricia Brake, “World War II,” in *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, accessed March 18, 2023, <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/world-war-ii/>.

²¹¹ Patricia Brake, “World War II”.

County; most notably the Cedar Forest Lodge, Jackson Cave, and the scenic overlooks “became the primary focal point of activity and recreation for the soldiers on their off-duty time.”²¹²



Figure 3.23. Governor Prentice Cooper and officials of the Tennessee State Guard touring the Tennessee Maneuver Area. Photograph from the Tennessee State Library and Archives.

The Sadie Ford Home becomes Part of Cedars of Lebanon State Park

The process of converting domestic space into a tool of public history progresses through multiple stages. The initial, and most challenging stage in the process is identifying the site’s cultural value and securing physical custody of the property by some public institution. The Sadie Ford Heritage Farm and Cultural Art Center, along with the John Henry Carothers House (Chapter 1) in Franklin, Tennessee, and the Burwell-Dinkins-Anderson Historic House (Chapter 2) in Selma, Alabama, is passing through this initial stage. After the death of Ella Owen Major Reed in 2016, the land and home went up for sale. The state’s decision to purchase the house and property led to an expansion of the Cedars of Lebanon State Park. The Sadie Ford house is

²¹² Ramsey and West, “Cedars of Lebanon State Park Historic District,” 12-13.

directly across Highway 231 from the entrance to the state park, allowing visitors to locate the property easily. The purchase included a contemporaneous transfer of 4000 acres of woodlands from the Forestry Division to the Parks Division.²¹³

With late twentieth and early twenty-first century population growth and increasing residential development encroachment from the west, few historic properties remain in the area. The Cedars of Lebanon State Park, the State of Tennessee, and the Friends of Cedars of Lebanon State Park acquired the seventy-three-acre property in January 2019 for \$700,000.²¹⁴ Later in 2019, the General Assembly appropriated \$100,000 to the Department of Environment and Conservation for the sole purpose of restoration of the Sadie Ford Heritage Farm at the Cedars of Lebanon State Park.²¹⁵ The Sadie Ford House and Farm preserves a significant place within the everchanging landscape of rural Middle Tennessee.

Turning a Farm into a Heritage Property

In 2019, state park officials asked the Center for Historic Preservation for assistance in creating interpretive panels to present the story of the farm to visitors as they restored the property as a living history farm. My work on the project began in January 2020 and we met luckily several times before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic placed the larger project on hold. In October 2021, the Center for Historic Preservation and the state installed the interpretive

²¹³ Mark Fraley, “Sadie Ford Heritage Farm, with Ranger Sarah Geeslin,” Mark Fraley Podcast, accessed May 21, 2020, <http://www.markfraley.com/podcast/sadie-ford-heritage-farm-ranger-sarah-geeslin/>.

²¹⁴ The Friends of Cedars of Lebanon State Park group put forth their hopes for the sale to be approved in several letters to Brock Hill, Deputy Commissioner Bureau of Parks & Conservation dated June 20, 2017. In this latter they state: “members of the Friends of Cedars of Lebanon State Park wish to express our support for state purchase of this property. Our park and the surrounding forest are more than an island of public recreation in a rapidly changing landscape. They are a refuge for rare plants and animals living in unique ecological systems. They preserve a rich local history of people and communities, their successes and struggles.”

²¹⁵ Tennessee General Assembly, accessed January 22, 2023, <https://wapp.capitol.tn.gov/apps/Billinfo/default.aspx?BillNumber=HB1508&ga=111>.

panels. These informational didactics covered several topics relevant to the farm's interpretive plan, including an overview of the Ford family history.



Figure 3.24. The author photographed with interpretive panels. Photograph by Savannah Grandey Knies, 2021.

Other subjects include the construction of the Cedars of Lebanon State Park and the Tennessee Maneuvers, both historic events that this house would have been witness to. In conversation with park staff, the goal is to ultimately provide Sadie Ford with additional interpretation to accompany the outbuildings present on the property. That will serve as the next step in the interpretive plan process for the park.

Community Engagement Opportunities, Current and Future

The Cedars of Lebanon and Sadie Ford Heritage Farm provide complimentary opportunities for community programming. For more than a dozen years, the Cedars of Lebanon has hosted a WPA Day celebration at the end of summer. According to a newspaper article from

the *Lebanon Democrat and Wilson County News* in 2019, the event “celebrate(s) the history of the state park and the surrounding area,” with no cost to the public.²¹⁶ The event is an engaging opportunity for the public to learn about the Works Progress Administration and its connection to the State Park. The Sadie Ford historic site is also open for tours and demonstrations during these events. The addition of the homesite to the event situates the development of the park in the perspective of residents whose lives were disrupted by the project.

Sadie Ford Heritage Farm provides its own programming separate from the Cedars of Lebanon as well. The space is a combination of traditional arts center, historic house museum, and a site that demonstrates historic agricultural processes. The interior of the home is intentionally preserved as a fluid space, especially useful for some of the programming events held at Sadie Ford. The living room, where the interpretive panels are situated in figure 3.24, is essentially an open space where various crafts and workshops can take place with minimal disruption to interior interpretation.

The Tennessee State Parks website includes the description of the plans for Sadie Ford and its programming and interpretation: “The park plans to partner with Wilson County artists and history-focused festival groups to demonstrate and teach traditional skills and crafts associated with farms of this era, such as riving wood shingles, cooking molasses, milling corn, weaving, gardening, and beekeeping among others. Interpretive programming can highlight the area's agricultural heritage, farming practices, land use patterns, and natural history as well as the story of displaced and relocated families during Roosevelt's New Deal programs.”²¹⁷ The opportunities to experience lifeways on an early twentieth century farm is expansive and can

²¹⁶ “Cedars of Lebanon State Park hosting WPA Day celebration,” *Lebanon Democrat and Wilson County News*, September 28, 2019, accessed November 29, 2022, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/676160382/>.

²¹⁷ Tennessee State Parks, “Cedars of Lebanon - Sadie Ford Heritage Farm,” accessed March 26, 2020, <https://tnstateparks.com/parks/activity-detail/cedars-of-lebanon-sadie-ford-heritage-farm>.

serve many people in the surrounding communities as this interpretive plan continues to mature and expand.



Figure 3.25. Broom shop. Photograph taken by author, 2023.

There are already several live demonstrations being performed on the property with some regularity: Broom maker Tom Jones demonstrates his historic craft in a relocated broom shop. His grandfather, a skilled broom maker named Thomas Tucker Jones, trained him. The elder Jones likely had a shop in Lebanon; his equipment is now located in the broom shop at Sadie Ford. It is estimated that this historic equipment is from 1850-1875. Blacksmithing demonstrations are also provided occasionally on property. With these artisans providing visual demonstrations, the public has the opportunity to learn about traditional crafts of the nineteenth and early twentieth century.



Figure 3.26. Image of the blacksmith shop building, located behind the home. Photograph taken by author, 2023.

The interpretation also includes farming demonstrations. Volunteers and park staff are currently cultivating heirloom crops on the land immediately surrounding the Sadie Ford home. The demonstration includes pumpkins, corn, industrial hemp, cotton, and tobacco under cultivation, as well as an herb garden and flower beds. The property also supports some livestock, including chickens and bees.

All of these operations are managed by the park rangers and other staff responsible for the Cedars of Lebanon and Sadie Ford. A living history farm is invaluable for the community to experience what life would've looked like in this region in the beginning of the twentieth century. Sadie Ford is an especially critical site to use for this purpose, given the encroachment of development into the region in recent years.

CHAPTER FOUR: TWO RIVERS MANSION NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE
METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENT OF NASHVILLE & DAVIDSON COUNTY PARKS
DEPARTMENT

Preserving historic homes and positioning them as house museums creates approachable spaces to interact with the past. In this way, house museums transform domestic spaces into tools of public history. Contemporary visitors to these sites can relate to the lived experience of those who lived in other times. Visitors can also better understand the spatial context of the site and recognize the evolution of the urban landscape. The process of transforming an old house into a didactic tool begins with the identification of the property as historically significant.

Identification extends into physical protection and preservation, as illustrated by the John Henry Carothers House (Chapter 1) and the Sadie Ford Heritage Farm and Cultural Art Center (Chapter 3). As identification and physical preservation progress, the formation of custodial institutions and a basic frame of interpretation refashions the domestic realm into a public space, as in the ongoing development of the Burwell-Dinkins-Anderson Historic House into an interpretive center (Chapter 2). Two Rivers Mansion in Nashville illustrates the next phase in the life of an effective house museum, the maturation of the institution and the introduction of a critical interpretive lens to supplement accepted lore of the site's occupants, history, and landscape.

Two Rivers Mansion sits on a 14-acre Metro Parks property surrounded by other municipal uses, like a school, dog park, and golf course. All of these public uses are built on land that was once part of the McGavock Two Rivers Plantation. There are two historic buildings extant on the park property: the 1802 House and the 1859 Mansion. Both buildings are used to interpret the story of the early nineteenth century and the immediate antebellum time period in

Tennessee. Several generations of the Harding and McGavock families lived on the site from 1819 until the 1960s. The heroic telling of their stories forms the narrative shared with the public as people visit the historic properties within a busy public park.

The Friends of Two Rivers, a not-for-profit governing body, acts as custodian of the property through an operating agreement with Metro Nashville-Davidson County. The organization is currently creating a Strategic Plan as called for in the 2016 Master Plan created for the site.²¹⁸ The strategic planning process opens two related opportunities for the organization.

Friends of Two Rivers must determine what exactly is the role of a house museum as a community resource and an interpretive tool. At the same time, the organization has an opportunity to improve the quality of interpretation and education at the site by applying more rigorous research techniques to the complex lives of the Harding-McGavock families, while extending the focus of interpretation to include the lives and labor of other people who inhabited the property.

²¹⁸ I serve on the Board of the Friends Group and am working in tandem with other Board members to complete that document and subsequently strengthen interpretation. I am also a paid seasonal employee of the Friends of Two Rivers and will serve as President of the organization in 2024.

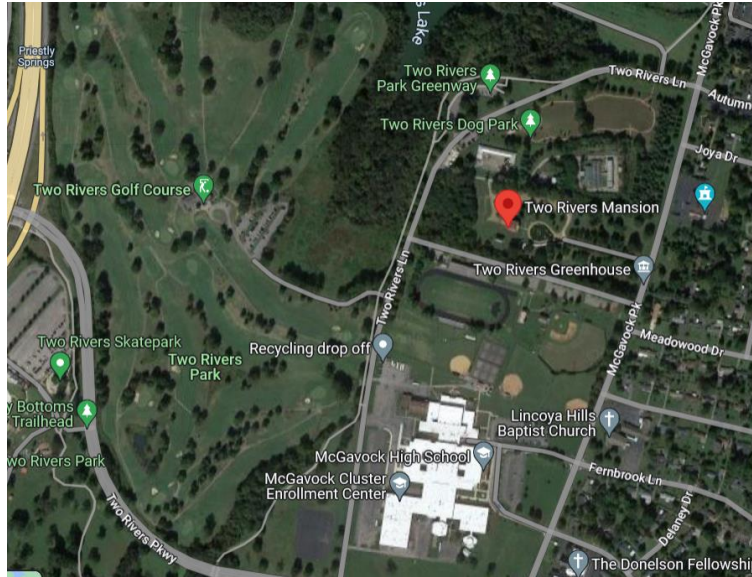


Figure 4.1. Aerial view of modern-day Two Rivers Mansion and grounds. Image from Google Earth, 2023.

History of Two Rivers Plantation

Located at the junction of the Cumberland and the Stones rivers, Two Rivers Plantation took its name from its geographical location. The confluence of the two rivers also yielded some of the richest farmland in the region. The land was first cultivated by Mississippian peoples about 700 years ago. Mississippian peoples occupied the land by the end of the fifteenth century, prior to contact with Europeans.²¹⁹ While little physical evidence of their habitation of the land exists above ground, there has been archeological evidence found on the Two Rivers property.

In the late 1850s David H. McGavock unearthed a large number of burials. In 1858, A.W. Putnam, a writer, lawyer, and public official in Nashville, visited Two Rivers to observe the box graves discovered by McGavock.²²⁰ Putnam, a founding member of the Tennessee Historical Society (THS), recorded his experience in a letter to the Society. In this letter he describes the discovery and subsequent mishandling of the remains. Putnam writes:

²¹⁹ Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, Nashville, TN, (Private, 2016) 22, accessed July 18, 2021, <https://irma.nps.gov/DataStore/Reference/Profile/2238669>.

²²⁰ Tennessee Valley Archaeological Research, "Archaeological Phase I Survey of the Proposed Events Center Location at the Two Rivers Mansion Property in Nashville, Tennessee," (2018), 7.

Mr. McGavock informed us that in making the road through this burying place, he plowed up fifty or a hundred graves, and that at least twenty skulls were placed by himself and servants (as caps) upon the stakes of the fence, where they remained by action of the atmosphere until they crumbled and fell into pieces, -- and that among them all, there was but one grave wherein he thought the body entire, could have been deposited at full length, and this he regarded as the body of a chief, by whose side was the small tomb in which was the skeleton of a woman. As these two graves seemed to have been constructed with much care, and contained each, about a bushel of muscle shells, the position of these bodies was easily discernible and deserve particular notice.²²¹

During the construction of the Two Rivers Golf Course in 1971, more box graves were unearthed. Archeological sites were discovered on the eighth, tenth, and eleventh fairways. With carbon dating processes, these remains were dated to be from c.1250 to 1300 A.D.²²²

Land Grant Era in the Territory of Tennessee

After the Revolutionary War, land grants were a common practice for the fledgling federal government to compensate war veterans in the late eighteenth century. As the 2016 Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan explains, “land grants were a post hoc reward that did not financially burden the government during the war, gave the military the support they needed on the battlefield and provided an incentive for service, especially among those who wavered in their allegiance in the fight between Great Britain and the United States.”²²³

Often veterans sold the land grants to recover some liquid funds; land speculators bought hundreds of grants.²²⁴ There were 1,500 land grants made from the cession of the western land of North Carolina to just over 850 men and women shortly after the American Revolution.²²⁵ In the case of Two Rivers Mansion, land speculation and land grants involve the area called

²²¹ Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 25.

²²² Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 26.

²²³ Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 26.

²²⁴ Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 26. The Master plan notes that “settlement west of the Appalachian Mountains was driven by a combination of speculators and land grants in the western territories... in all, the process was stunted and favored those already on power, such as military officers and land speculators who bought up the grants from desperate veterans who needed money.”

²²⁵ Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 28.

McSpadden's Bend (later renamed Pennington Bend) in the Cumberland River Valley. Nicolas Coonrod, a signatory of the Cumberland Compact in 1780, purchased the original land grant tract of just over 600 acres where Two Rivers sits today. There is no evidence that he ever inhabited the property, and after less than fifteen years, he sold 640 acres of land to David Buchanan in 1794.²²⁶

Two Rivers during the Early Antebellum Period

The 1802 House is thought to have been built for David Buchanan during his ownership of the land, but there is no definitive evidence. It is possible that another structure predated the 1802 House as temporary housing for the Buchanan family while the Federal-style two story brick house was constructed on the property. The authors of the Master Plan speculate that the earlier building could have been situated on the grounds of the present-day building that houses Two Rivers Middle School.²²⁷

Buchanan, originally from Virginia, came to the Nashville area with his wife and children in 1793. He purchased the land from Coonrod the following year. In order to pay debts, Buchanan began selling off parts of his holdings, including the Two Rivers land. In 1808, he sold part of the property to a man named John Edmondson, who eventually traded the land to Andrew Jackson.²²⁸ At some unknown point in history, the 1802 House brick exterior was whitewashed; when the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) visited the site for assessment in the early 1970s, they reported that “the small whitewashed brick house to the left, built in 1802 by

²²⁶ Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 28. Coonrod owned several other tracts of land in Davidson County, but in the early 1790s, he chose to live in Robertson County, where he served as the first Postmaster for the county.

²²⁷ Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 28. The authors note that “no primary source documentation has been uncovered to reveal the exact date of the building’s construction. One secondary reference calls the structure the 1820 House. Another has called it the Harding House.”

²²⁸ Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 28.

William Harding, was the first to be erected on the farm.”²²⁹ The HABS notation mistakenly attributes the home to a later owner of the property.



Figure 4.2. Exterior of the 1802 House. Photograph taken by author, 2022.

The next owner of the land that would eventually become Two Rivers Farm was Willie Barrow. Barrow was a prominent figure in Nashville, where he was a plantation owner and businessman. He bought and sold land around Nashville beginning in the early 1800s, and for “more than twenty years Barrow traded in both land and slaves on a consistent basis.”²³⁰ He purchased the Two Rivers land in 1812, naming it Belmont. It is unclear whether he ever lived on the property, and it is possible that he had to sell several enslaved people to facilitate the purchase.²³¹

²²⁹ Massey, James C., Pledger, Roy C., et al., “Mc Gavock House (Two Rivers Mansion),” Written Historical and Descriptive Data, Historic American Buildings Survey, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1970, accessed March 11, 2022, <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/tn0038/>.

²³⁰ Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 31.

²³¹ Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 31. According to the Master Plan, the enslaved he may have sold to purchase the Two Rivers land: “one 21-year-old woman, her child and two other girls age 15. Two years later, possibly after recouping his money, he purchased two other slaves, a man and a woman.”

If he did not in fact live on the property, he may have purchased it to lease it out to other farmers. A common practice in the South at this time, smaller homesteads would be leased by farmers who could not afford to own such a large plantation. Enslaved people were occasionally connected to the lease agreements, leased out as labor to those who would rent farms from larger landowners.²³² Financial difficulties leading up to the Panic of 1819 caused Barrow to divest himself of nearly all his holdings, including his plantations and his property in downtown Nashville.

James Priestley briefly owned parts of the Two Rivers land. He travelled to Nashville to serve as the president of Cumberland College. A few years later, in 1811, Priestley purchased around 320 acres of land from Andrew Jackson in McSpadden's Bend.²³³ Cumberland College briefly closed a few years later due to financial difficulties, and Priestley opened an academy for girls somewhere on the land he purchased from Jackson.²³⁴ When the College reopened in 1820, he resumed his duties as president until his death just a few months later.

The Harding-McGavock Era Begins

The story of how Two Rivers plantation becomes the cultural site it is known as today begins with the final nineteenth century purchase of the land in McSpadden's Bend by William

²³² Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 31. Barrow apparently had several farms for rent in this early nineteenth century period. The Master Plan notes: "an advertisement in the local newspaper in 1812 stated that he had three plantations for rent. Two of the farms were listed as 8 miles above Nashville (the east side of the bend) and consisted of 75 acres each. Two years later, Barrow offered more property for lease. This time he tendered 250 acres in the bend of which 100 acres were cleared for farming. The property had a small house with four rooms downstairs and two rooms upstairs and four fire places."

²³³ Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 32. The land exchanged hands a few times in rapid succession during in this time period. The Master Plan notes: "Priestley purchased 320 acres of land in McSpadden's Bend from Andrew Jackson in 1811. The property was the northwest corner of Coonrod's original 640-acre tract sold to David Buchanan in 1794. Buchanan was forced to sell half of his property to Jackson to settle a debt. Jackson then deeded the tract to Priestley (who never paid Jackson for the purchase)."

²³⁴ Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 32. The "female academy" established by Priestley opened in 1816, "just west of Willie Barrow's plantation near a spring that feeds into the Cumberland River."

Harding in 1819. Harding was born in Virginia in 1788 to Giles and Amidiah (Morris) Harding. He lived in Virginia but purchased 476 acres of land with the intention of moving to the area. He was not the first member of his family to make the westward move into Tennessee. The Harding's are also responsible for Belle Meade Plantation in Nashville, and Belle Air Plantation in Donelson.²³⁵ William Harding's 1819 purchase of the land in McSpadden's Bend is the beginning of the primary familial story that forms the basis of interpretation at Two Rivers Mansion.



Figure 4.3. Drawing of the east façade of the 1859 Mansion. Image from the Historic American Building Survey, 1972.

²³⁵ Belle Meade Historic Site & Winery, "Timeline," accessed August 19, 2021, <https://visitbellemeade.com/history/timeline/>; Belle Air Mansion, "Timeline," accessed November 7, 2022, <https://belleairmansion.com/mansion-rentals-in-nashville-tn/>. Belle Meade was owned by John Harding, William Harding's brother. John purchased the land in 1807, and had his home built in 1819. Belle Air was built for John's daughter, Elizabeth Virginia Harding Clay, and his son in law Joseph W. Clay in 1832.

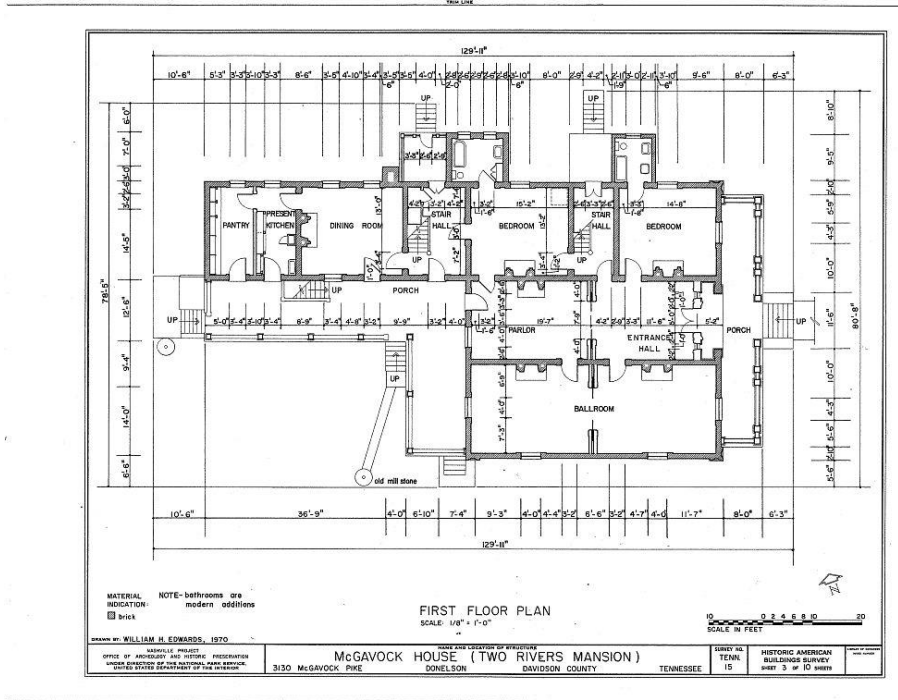


Figure 4.4. First floor schematic of the 1859 Mansion. Image from the Historic American Building Survey, 1972.

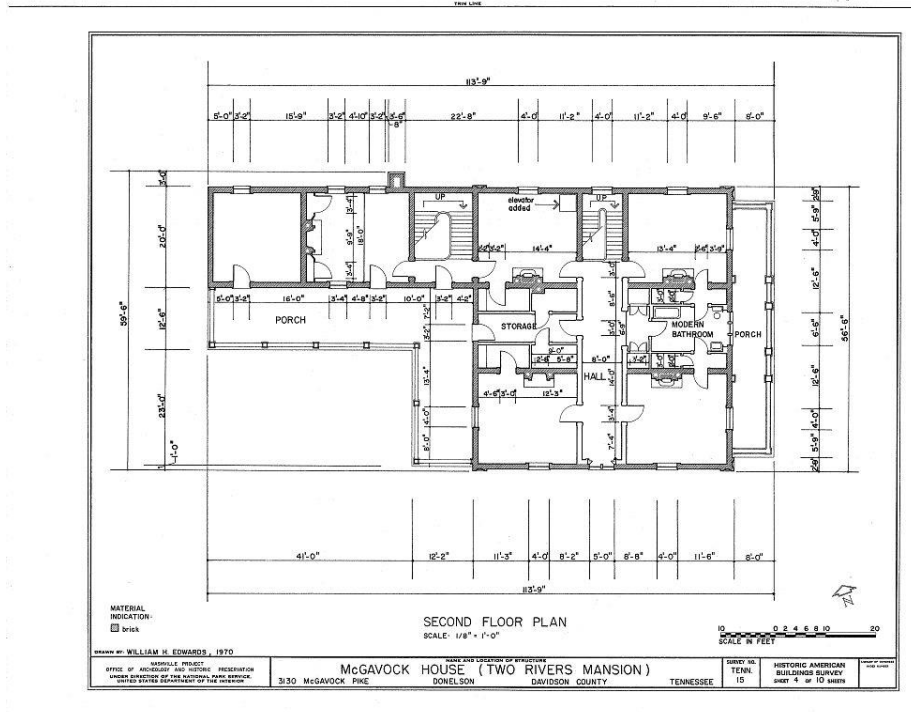


Figure 4.5. Second floor schematic of the 1859 Mansion. Image from the Historic American Building Survey, 1972.

The Harding and McGavock Family History

William Harding relocated from Virginia to Nashville in 1823, four years after purchasing the land mentioned above. Over the course of the next nine years, William accumulated more than a thousand acres and enslaved seventy-seven individuals.²³⁶ He made several purchases of land, along with his brother, John Harding, and his nephew, William Giles Harding.

William married a woman from the neighboring Clover Bottom Plantation (the present site of the Tennessee Historical Commission), Elizabeth Hoggatt Clopton. She was more than two decades younger than William; shortly after their marriage she became pregnant. During the pregnancy, William died of “bilious colic” while travelling back from a trip to downtown Nashville.²³⁷

Upon his death in 1832, his brother, David Morris Harding, acting as executor of the estate, had an inventory made of William Harding’s possessions, including property and goods; this includes the names of more than seventy enslaved people.

²³⁶ William Harding Inventory, 1832, available from ancestry.com; Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 33.

²³⁷ Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 34.

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any to be covered by other party until the present copy is gathered on. Ordered also that said commissioners or any three of them being freeholders do sell to the wife said Mrs Harding one year's support out of the wife of Jameson on hand that is to say her support from the 15th day of May 1832 up to the 15th day of May 1833

Test Henry Ewing clerk of Davidson County Court

Agreeably to the aforesaid order issued from the county court of Davidson at their October Sessions 1832 the undersigned commissioners met at the late residence of Mr Harding dec^d on the 31st day of December 1832 and have proceeded to divide the negroes belonging to the said estate between Elizabeth H Harding widow of J^r William Harding dec^d and her daughter Willie Elizabeth Harding, among which division stands as hereunto reported. By the said division was followed

Abraham 300. Gabriel 300. Solomon 200. Ned 125. Abram 50. George (son) 50. Nelson 40. Major 400. Mose 450. James 400. Sarah 325. Kelly 150. Pennington 100. Ab 50. Henry 500. Lewis 400. Sam 350. Mary 175. Alfred 150. Eliza 125. Sam 100. Frederick 75. Rachel 50. 5725

In W^m Elizabeth Harding daughter of the dec^d the following negroes viz

M^r 425. Jacob 325. Delpha 75. Frederick 125. Ann 325. Sarah 50. Henry 100. Henry 30. Dick 470. Randal 200. Mose 400. Frank 300. Eliza 100. George 425. Isaac 300. Phil 350. David 150. Rebecca 125. Ann 300. Eliza 50. Pottery 350. Robert 125. Aaron 100. Lucy 50. Henry 300. Charles 300. Henry 350. Maggie 125. Caroline 50. Sarah 350. Charlotte 75. Linda 150. Rebecca 300. Dan 100. Ann 300. Feller 325. Susan 70. Hanson 130. Neger 75. Mary 50. Tom 275. Lucy 300. Sarah 150. Lewis 125. Melly 50. Pitt 300. Charles 150. Peter 150. Murrey 300. Mary 300. Sandy 475. J^r 11710

Making this amount said off to said W^m Elizabeth Harding eighty six dollars sixty six and two third cents more than her proper dividend which said sum of eighty six dollars sixty six. View this note the guardian should pay to the widow. As it regards the years furniture the parties have agreed upon that subject themselves which the widow is in possession of given under our hands this day and date above written B. L. Foster

John Thompson, Samuel Meek
Abraham Glasse M^r Thompson.
G. F. Washington

State of Tennessee Davidson County Court January Sessions 1833
Robert L Foster, Abraham Glasse, Gilbert F. Washington, William Thompson, John Thompson and Samuel Meek commissioners appointed by an order of this preceding court to divide between the widow and her at law of William Harding dec^d all the negroes belonging to his estate according to law now make report of having made said division in pursuance of said order which report being examined by the court and by the consent of both parties is in all things confirmed and ordered to be entered of record. And this selection by the parties of John Thompson and Samuel Meek to act as commissioners in making said division is also confirmed by the court with the same manner as if they had been appointed by the former order.

Test Henry Ewing clerk of Davidson County Court

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Samuel Meek Dec^d Sale

An account of the sale of the personal property of the estate of Samuel Meek deceased on the 17th day of December 1832 as follows to wit:

Persons names	Articles	Price	Persons names	Articles	Price
James M. Meek	bedstead & furniture	7.00	James M. Meek	16 chairs & forks	1.00
"	bedstead & furniture	18.00	"	3 glass jars	.30
"	bed & furniture	18.00	"	1 cotton bottles	2.00
"	bed & furniture	12.00	"	two salt cellars	.35
"	bedstead & furniture	20.00	"	two glass dishes	.35
"	bedstead & furniture	5.00	"	Woolen blanket	2.30
"	one table	3.00	"	1 set glass wine	1.50
"	one breakfast table	2.00	"	11 plates	.45
"	one dining table	5.00	"	4 decanters	1.00
"	one do do	5.00	"	2 urinals	1.00
"	one breakfast table	2.00	"	one wash mangle	.35
"	one washstand & toilet set & tub	2.50	"	3 pair fine soap	1.00
"	one washstand	5.00	"	2 sheets & napkins	.50
"	one side board	10.00	"	2 towels	2.00
"	one wash block case	10.00	"	6 towels	.25
"	one wooden clock	5.00	"	8 table cloths	4.00
"	two looking glasses	2.00	"	map of Kentucky	1.00
"	one silver wine cooler	6.00	"	8 silver cases	8.00
"	8 split bottom do	2.00	"	one gun & shot bag	1.00
"	one bureau	5.00	"	one still & iron	1.00
"	one cupboard	5.00	"	one lot of silver	2.00
"	seven dishes	2.25	"	one lot of silver	1.25
"	3 dozen plates	1.25	"	19 spoons	1.00
"	silver cups & saucers	2.00	"	one brown jean	2.00
"	one tea set	.25	"	three spinning wheels	3.00
"	one washstand	.25	"	four pair cards	2.00
"	two silver dishes	.25	"	one fine wheel	1.00
"	6 cup plates	.35	"	one reel	.50
"	one casket	1.50	"	one winding blade	1.25
"	three pitchforks	.75	"	one washbottle	.45
"	6 tea spoons	2.00	"	one coffee mill	.15
"	6 table spoons	18.00	"	one coffee mill	1.25

Figure 4.6. William Harding's inventory listing the division of enslaved people owned by Harding between his wife Elizabeth Harding, and his infant daughter, "Willie" Harding. William Harding Inventory, ancestry.com, 2022.

Willie Harding McGavock & David McGavock: Complex Lives in a Tumultuous Time

After William died, the bulk of his property went to his wife and infant daughter William "Willie" Elizabeth Harding, born a few months after his passing.²³⁸ Many of the objects owned by William at the time of his death were auctioned off. William owned two shares of stock in the Nashville, Murfreesboro and Shelbyville Turnpike, as well as 1,081 acres, seventy-seven enslaved individuals, \$2,100 in cash, a myriad of livestock, and many furnishings including five

²³⁸ Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 34. Interestingly, it is not known where William Harding is buried. According to the Master Plan, "he was possibly buried somewhere on the property. The location of the cemetery is unknown. His name does not show up in the Nashville City Cemetery records."

featherbeds, three pairs of andirons, linens, two dozen silver spoons, and a double-barreled shotgun.²³⁹ Theses holdings equate to substantial wealth for the time and place. The infant Willie Harding was a slaveholder with a significant place in Middle Tennessee planter society at her birth.

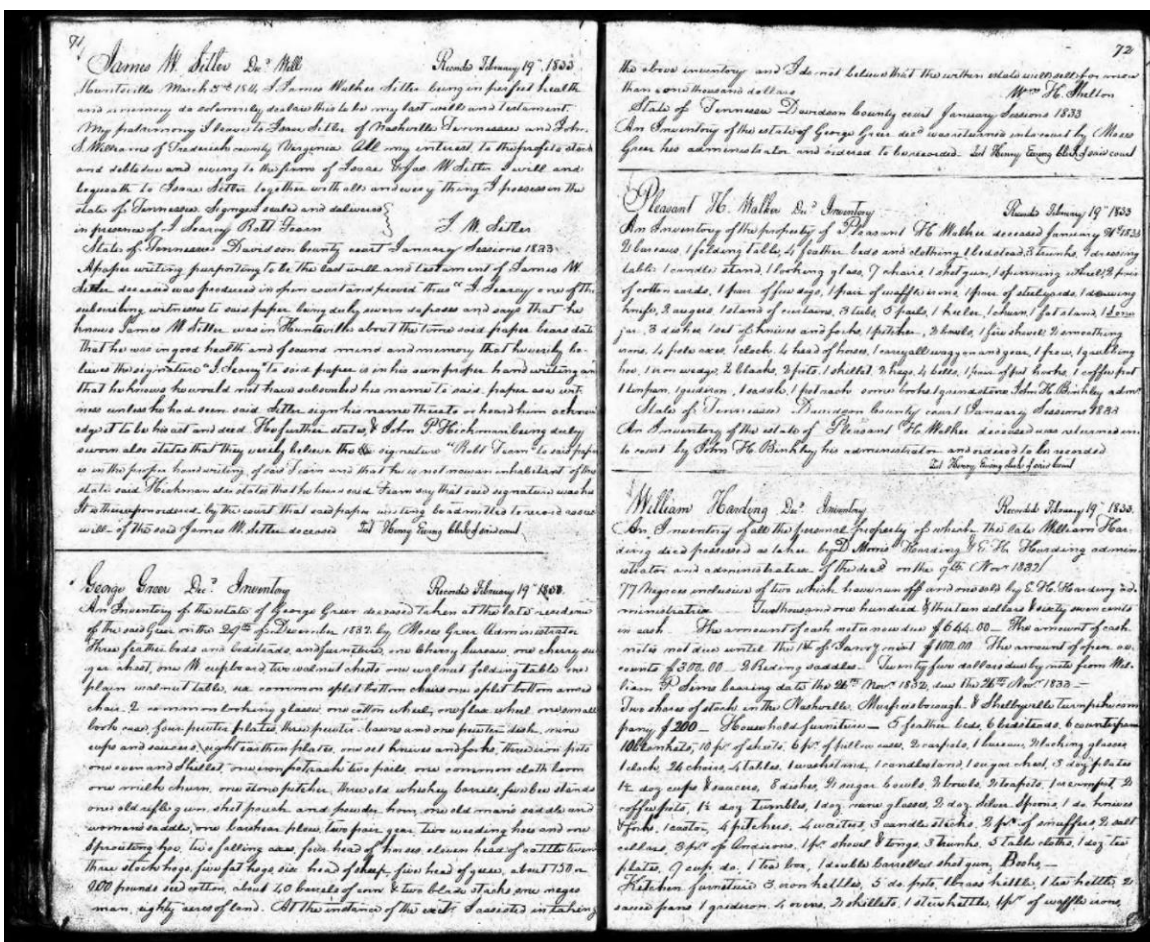


Figure 4.7. William Harding's inventory, listing household and farm items. William Harding Inventory, ancestry.com, 2022.

²³⁹ William Harding Inventory; Encore Interpretive Design, Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan, 34.

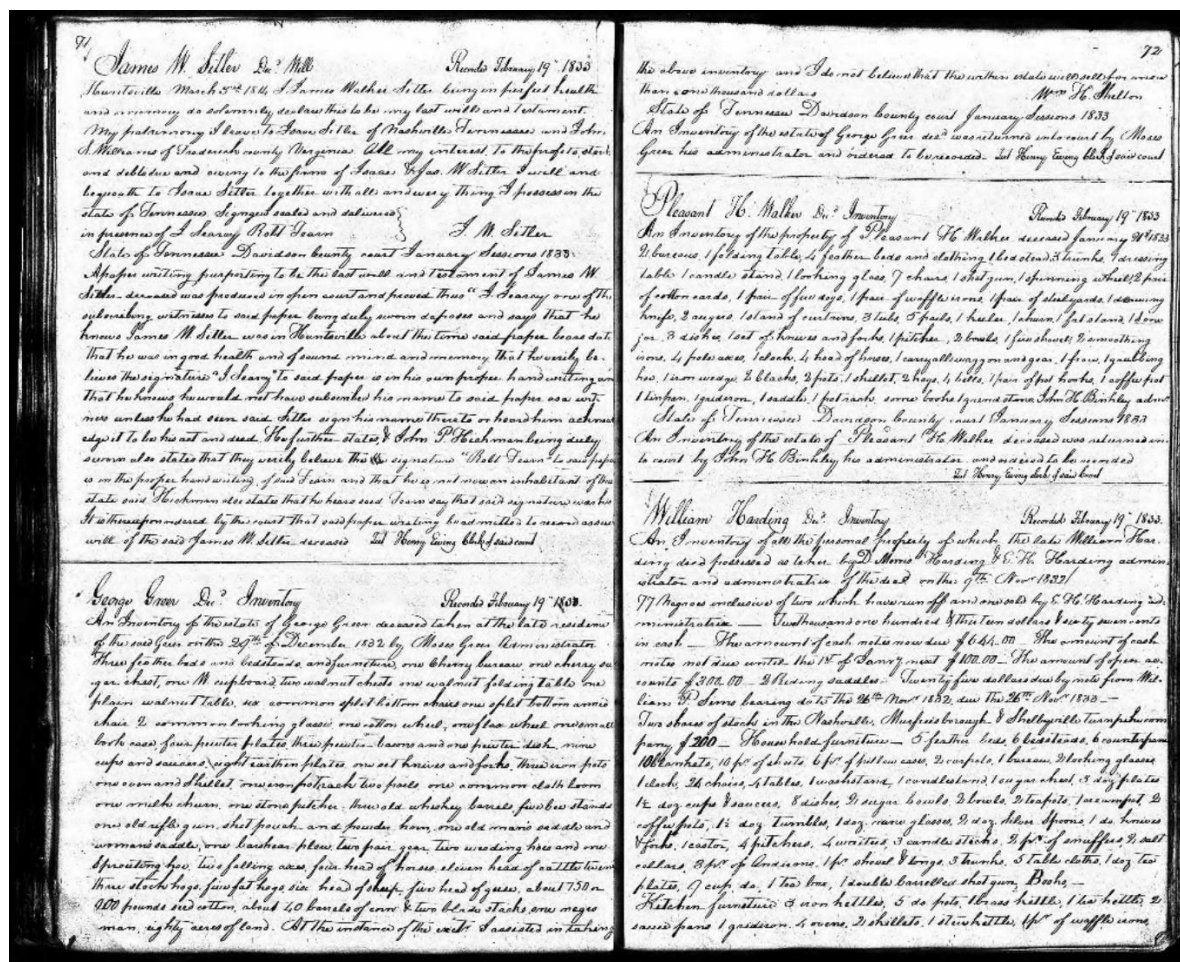


Figure 4.8. William Harding's inventory, listing household and farm items. William Harding Inventory, ancestry.com, 2022.

William's widow, Elizabeth Clopton Harding, received the lion's share of the proceeds from the auction of household goods and livestock. Her brother, John Clopton, purchased some of the objects, as did her brothers-in-law, John and Thomas Harding.²⁴⁰ William Harding's land was divided between Elizabeth and her newborn daughter William "Willie" Elizabeth Harding. Elizabeth received more than 300 acres, the 1802 House, and assorted farm outbuildings. Willie

²⁴⁰ Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 34–35. Elizabeth received 80% of the auction proceeds. There is also an anecdote that John Harding purchased deer from William Harding's estate to move them to his own "plantation on Richland Creek on west Nashville, Belle Meade, and [this] became the origins of the deer park later created at the estate."

received the remainder of the land, to be placed in trust for her eventual marriage.²⁴¹ Her uncle, David Harding, and her cousin, William Giles Harding, managed the property while Willie was a child, leasing out sections of the farmland to various farmers; they also leased out enslaved individuals as well.²⁴² William Harding's widow remarried a few years after his death to a Methodist minister, Frank A. Owen. The family travelled for Owen's ministry, but Willie Harding mostly grew up in Memphis. She returned to Nashville to attend the Nashville Female Academy, as her mother did in her youth.²⁴³

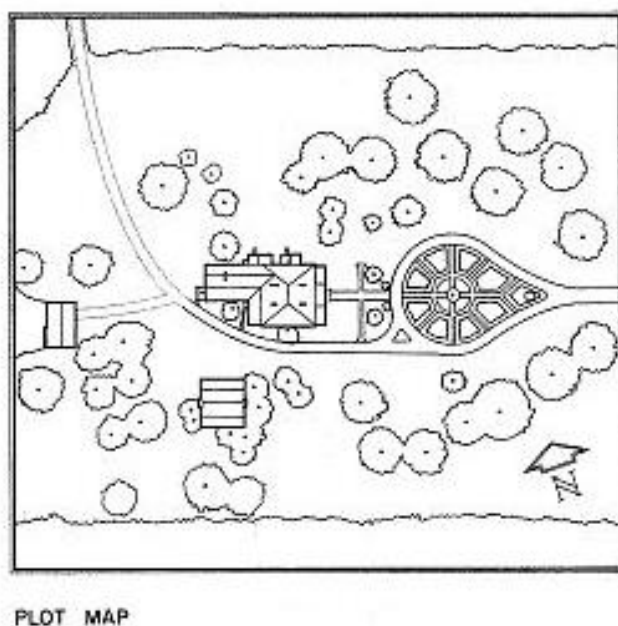


Figure 4.9. Plot map of the Two Rivers property. Image from the Historic American Building Survey, 1972.

David Harding McGavock was born in Nashville in 1826, just a few years before Willie Harding. According to the Two Rivers Master Plan, “little is known about David’s early life except that he graduated from University of Nashville in 1845 along with his older brother John Harding McGavock. John went on to attend Harvard, then moved part-time to Arkansas. After

²⁴¹ Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 35.

²⁴² Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 35.

²⁴³ Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 35.

school, David moved to Arkansas as well where his brother had established a cotton plantation on property given to him by his grandfather, John Harding, at Plum Point Bend in Mississippi County just above Memphis and bordered on the east by the Mississippi River.”²⁴⁴

David spent about four years in Arkansas, learning to operate a plantation, before returning to Nashville in 1849. A year later, in 1850, David and Willie met, and they were married at her mother and stepfather’s property in Memphis. After the wedding, they lived in Nashville with David’s parents (Francis Preston McGavock and Amanda P. Harding McGavock) at their plantation Cliff Lawn.²⁴⁵ The following year saw the birth of David and Willie’s son Frank Owen McGavock. They also had a daughter who did not survive to adulthood; Bessie McGavock died in 1870 at the age of five.

Frank McGavock, the sole surviving child of David and Willie, was born in 1851. He grew up in the 1859 Mansion with his parents. His maternal grandparents, Elizabeth Clopton Harding Owen and her second husband Reverend Frank Owen moved in with David and Willie at Two Rivers around 1877, due to Reverend Owen’s failing health. Frank McGavock married Lula Spence from Murfreesboro in 1874. Frank and Lula moved to Two Rivers with the rest of the McGavocks and Owens after their wedding and their son Spencer (Spence) McGavock was born the following year. In 1880, Lula and Frank had another child, Willie Harding McGavock, who did not survive more than a year. Lula also died at a young age just a few years after her infant daughter in 1882 at the age of 29. Frank remarried in 1896 to Clara Cornelia Plimpton, a doctor in downtown Nashville.

²⁴⁴ Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 36.

²⁴⁵ Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 36.

Clara established her practice in Nashville in 1878; she is recorded in W.W. Clayton's 1880 book, *History of Davidson County, Tennessee, with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of its Prominent Men and Pioneers*, as "the pioneer of well-educated female practitioners of medicine in Davidson County, and seems likely to demonstrate here both, the right and ability of her sex to hold a place in the medical profession."²⁴⁶ She graduated from the New York Homeopathic College the year she established her practice; her office was located on Church Street.²⁴⁷ Clara worked as a general practitioner and obstetrician. She was also an important speaker and participant in professional medical organizations. She spoke at several Medical Association meetings throughout the 1880s and 1890s, presenting papers on various topics including obstetrics and ophthalmology.²⁴⁸ Clara invested in Nashville real estate, purchasing several lots downtown between 1889 and 1893. She also assisted in saving Two Rivers Farm from being sold on the courthouse steps.

David McGavock was responsible for bringing Morgan horse breeding on the farm after the Civil War.²⁴⁹ He made several important purchases of stud horses in this period; David obtained several Morgan horses in 1887, creating one of the first stud farms in the region.²⁵⁰ In a time where the 1859 Mansion initially cost around \$40,000 to build, David purchased a stallion

²⁴⁶ Barbara Franklin and Carolyn Sullivan, *Dr. Clara C. Plimpton McGavock: An Unlikely Mistress of Two Rivers* (Nashville, TN: Friends of Two Rivers Mansion, 2013), 3.

²⁴⁷ W. W. Clayton, *History of Davidson County, Tennessee, with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of Its Prominent Men and Pioneers* (Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis & Co., 1880), 286–87, <http://archive.org/details/historyofdavidso00clay>.

²⁴⁸ Franklin and Sullivan, *Dr. Clara C. Plimpton McGavock*, 4–5. The authors quote a "Correspondence from Nashville" section in the *Medical Century: An International Journal of Homeopathic Medicine and Surgery* from 1893: "Dr. Clara D. Plimpton, a most excellent physician of the gentler sex, is the pioneer woman physician of Nashville, and it is to her credit to say that no one stands higher in the profession than she. Her practice is large and lucrative. Dr. Plimpton is not only a graduate in general medicine, but also a graduate of the New York Ophthalmic Hospital."

²⁴⁹ Franklin and Sullivan, *Dr. Clara C. Plimpton McGavock*, 11. Morgan horses are a breed of early American horse originating in New England "around the turn of the 19th century." They served as utility livestock on farms, useful for pulling coaches and serving as cavalry mounts during the Civil War.

²⁵⁰ Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 56.

named Ben Franklin for \$8,000 in 1890.²⁵¹ Towards the end of his life, this type of spending and gambling caused an accumulation of debts to be borne by the Two Rivers household. David died with \$10,000 in gambling debts.

A few years before he died, in 1891, Two Rivers Stock Farm and all its property and debts were deeded to Frank McGavock. Willie McGavock maintained legal title to the property, and a courtesy life tenancy was conferred to both her and David. The Master Plan for Two Rivers describes the legal and financial situation:

The elder McGavocks kept control, through a lien, of the property, harness and saddle horses, the jack and jenny stock, the garden, truck patches, the forty milk cows and the milk or offspring they produced, the right to occupy the family residence as well as quarters for the servants, such as the cook. Any household expenses were to be borne by David and Willie McGavock. Frank supplied lard, meat and meal for the family, servants and livestock. Any additional livestock purchases, and half of all crop yields were controlled by David and Willie. Frank was also required to pay his parents \$1,500 a year and if he chose to sell any of the property the profit was to go towards reducing his father's debts, not his own.²⁵²

The Frank McGavock Era: Decline and Despondence

The economic struggles of the farm continued throughout the 1890s. The Panic of 1893 led to a fiscal depression throughout the country and the South. In the same year, Frank sold off the Morgan horses to a man in Illinois.²⁵³ Even after Willie's death in December of 1895 and David's death four months later, the fortunes of the property did not improve. Frank continued to

²⁵¹ Franklin and Sullivan, *Dr. Clara C. Plimpton McGavock*, 11. There is some evidence that the 1859 Mansion was not completed before the start of the Civil War and has a completion date of 1870. The post-reconstruction era was a deflationary period when the general price level fell, and the buying power of the dollar actually increased. For more information, please visit: <https://www.minneapolisfed.org/about-us/monetary-policy/inflation-calculator/consumer-price-index-1800->.

²⁵² Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 56. The Master Plan includes several more important pieces of information: "Frank McGavock now controlled the working stock, including mules and horses, the Morgan stock, mares, farming implements, wagons, carts, farm machinery and crops. He was also required to provide care and feed for his parent's livestock, but not the wages of the house servants, carriage drivers, or dairy, garden or truck patch workers. Upon his mother's death, Frank would inherit the property, minus any debts owed, outright. In essence, the agreement kept Two Rivers from being taken by David McGavock's debtors."

²⁵³ Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 56.

borrow money, on several different occasions, from his neighbor and cousin John Harding, Jr.²⁵⁴ The sum of his borrowing totaled nearly \$2,000, money that Frank would prove unable to repay. In 1896, the Forth National Bank took him to Chancery court to compel him to repay the money. One month after this legal trouble, Frank signed a prenuptial agreement for his second marriage to Dr. Clara Plimpton.²⁵⁵

The years of 1897 and 1898 were nearly ruinous for the farm. The McGavocks signed a deed and lease-back agreement in March of 1897 to sell the property to Marcus Cartwright, a successful bookmaker, for \$28,000.²⁵⁶ The deed was essentially a lien against the farm, with the provision that Frank and Clara could live in the home during the term of the lease, and they could recover the deed if they paid off the loan by July 1, 1897. They did not. The case went to Chancery Court, and it was ruled that the McGavocks needed to pay off their debts by May 1, 1898, or the property would be sold on the courthouse steps.²⁵⁷

Clara and Frank solicited a \$40,000 loan from the American Investors Company in New York, which they received. It is unclear what happened to the money received from the

²⁵⁴ Franklin and Sullivan, *Dr. Clara C. Plimpton McGavock*, 13.

²⁵⁵ Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 60; Franklin and Sullivan, *Dr. Clara C. Plimpton McGavock*, 13. The authors of *Dr. Clara C. Plimpton McGavock: An Unlikely Mistress of Two Rivers* includes the language of the prenuptial agreement in their book: "Whereas a marriage is soon to be solemnized between Frank McGavock and Clara C. Plimpton, both of the county of Davidson, State of Tennessee and of lawful age, and it is desired and intended that all of the property belonging to the said Clara C. Plimpton, real and personal of every kind and description, shall continue and remain her own, and under her control, after marriage as fully as it is now, as well as the property she may hereafter acquire as that she now has, in addition to the protection afforded by the laws of the State of Tennessee to married women the said Frank McGavock agrees and binds himself, his heirs and personal representatives, to renounce and relinquish all and every claim he may or could have to any part of said property, in law or equity by reason of said marriage both during the coverture and absolutely and the said Clara C. Plimpton shall have the sole disposal and management of the same, with as full and unrestricted right, power and authority and freedom from any and every debt, claim or control on his part as if a marriage had never taken place between the parties, or as if the said Clara had never become the said Frank's wife. In witness whereof, the said Frank McGavock and Clara C. Plimpton have hereto set their hands at Nashville, Tennessee, this 17th day of August 1896." This information comes from the 1896 Deeds Registration.

²⁵⁶ Franklin and Sullivan, *Dr. Clara C. Plimpton McGavock*, 14; Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 60.

²⁵⁷ Franklin and Sullivan, *Dr. Clara C. Plimpton McGavock*, 14.

investment company, because while the courthouse sale was deferred to October of 1898, it did occur. A Nashville businessman, Alex Perry, who helped build the Ryman Auditorium with Captain Tom Ryman, purchased Two Rivers Farm on October 29, 1898, for \$37,000.²⁵⁸ The same day, The McGavocks transferred a 645-acre tract of the Two Rivers land to Perry for \$15,000 and the remaining debt was charged to a trust deed in Perry's name.²⁵⁹ These transactions settled the immediate financial woes of the site, but was not the end of them. In 1900, the State of Tennessee issued a lien on the farm for unpaid taxes.²⁶⁰

At the beginning of the twentieth century, it is documented that Two Rivers took on boarders. Robert Wright and his wife and four children are listed as tenants of the property in the 1900 Census.²⁶¹ Also listed on the census are Anna Aldredge and Emma Wood, black women who worked as a cook and a domestic worker, respectively, in the home.²⁶² Clara McGavock's sister, Caroline Plimpton, and Frank's son, Spence McGavock, also lived at Two Rivers in this time period.²⁶³ Clara Plimpton McGavock died in 1904 at Two Rivers of pneumonia, and her estate went to both Frank and Spence.²⁶⁴

²⁵⁸ Franklin and Sullivan, *Dr. Clara C. Plimpton McGavock*, 15; "Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan," 61.

²⁵⁹ Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 61.

²⁶⁰ Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 61. It is unclear what became of this lien from the state.

²⁶¹ Franklin and Sullivan, *Dr. Clara C. Plimpton McGavock*, 16; Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 61. It is believed that the Wright family lived in the mansion, though it is unclear. Robert Wright is listed as the superintendent of a phosphate mine; the Master Plan authors speculate that the mine could have been located on the estate.

²⁶² 1900 United States Federal Census. Both women are registered as being born in Alabama; Anna was born in 1860, and Emma in 1855.

²⁶³ Franklin and Sullivan, *Dr. Clara C. Plimpton McGavock*, 16.

²⁶⁴ Franklin and Sullivan, *Dr. Clara C. Plimpton McGavock*, 19; Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 61. There is some discrepancy as to who inherited what from Clara after her death. According to the authors of *Clara C. Plimpton McGavock: An Unlikely Mistress of Two Rivers*, "there was no will probated, so Frank inherited all of Clara's remaining real and personal properties. Her one remaining unsold property (a lot on Addison Street) was sold by Frank's son, Spence, in 1910." The authors of the Two Rivers Master Plan, however, state: "in 1904, Clara died. She left the remaining property in her portfolio, property which she had not sold to help reduce Frank's debt, to her son-in-law, Spence."

Spence McGavock: Holding On

Spence McGavock, born at Two Rivers Mansion in July of 1876, was one of two children born to Frank and Lula McGavock. His sister Willie Harding McGavock died at less than a year old when he was five, and his mother died the following year. He is listed on the 1900 Federal Census as a 24-year-old with an occupation of “Commercial Teamster Boots and Shoes.”²⁶⁵ In 1902, his father Frank conveyed some of the Two Rivers property, 500 acres, to him for a dollar.²⁶⁶ After paying off the remainder of the debt owed to the state, Frank deeded the remaining property to Spence in 1907. Unfortunately, just a few years later, in 1910, the home was again in arrears to the State of Tennessee for property taxes. Both men jointly took out a mortgage for \$13,000 from Northwestern Mutual Life to cover the taxes.²⁶⁷



Figure 4.10. Exterior view of the 1859 Mansion in the era of Spence and Mary Louise McGavock’s ownership. Photograph from the Nashville Public Library archives collection, 2022.

²⁶⁵ 1900 United States Federal Census.

²⁶⁶ Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 61.

²⁶⁷ Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 61.

After his father's death in 1920, it took Spence another two years to pay back the mortgage. Spence continued working as a shoe salesman in downtown Nashville and leased out the farmland at Two Rivers in tenancy, as his family had done. He married his cousin, Mary Louise Bransford, on March 29th, 1928. He gave Two Rivers Mansion to his new wife on their wedding day; they were both in their 50s when they married.

Spence died of a heart attack at Two Rivers just a few years after their wedding, in 1936. In his will, he left all his property to Mary Louise, with a request to provide for several domestic workers: Anna Aldrich, Emma Woods, John Davis and his wife Eva Davis. Spence McGavock noted that the four "have been faithful and attentive to me for many years, and it is my wish and desire that they shall be provided for."²⁶⁸

Mary Louise and the Final Years as Private Home

Mary Louise Bransford was born in 1878 at her parents' home Melrose in Nashville. Her parents William and Manoah (McGavock) Bransford were wealthy individuals in the late nineteenth century city. Mary Louise was one of three children born to the couple but was the only child to survive to adulthood.²⁶⁹ She married Hugh C. Kirkman in 1902 and married Spence McGavock after Kirkman's death in 1929.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁸ Tennessee, U.S., Wills and Probate Records, 1779-2008; Davidson, Wills, Vol. 54, 1937, page 73-74, accessed May 17, 2021, https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/9176/images/004769109_00073?treeid=185953983&personid=372432447023&usePUB=true&usePUBJs=true&phsrc=ini252&pId=3304256 Spence added a codicil to his will on May 12, 1930, stating that: "in my last will given you when we were married March 29, 1928, John Davis or Eva Davis who were in my employ have since left my employ and under these conditions, I ask that you do nothing for either of them and pay no attention to them."

²⁶⁹ Mary Louise had a brother McGavock Bransford that died at less than a month old in 1883, and a sister Bessie Lee Bransford who died at the age of nine in 1891.

²⁷⁰ There is some discrepancy as to whether or not Mary Louise divorced Kirkman or if she simply outlived their estranged marriage.

In the 1930 Census, Mary Louise and Spence are listed as owning their own home, valued at \$70,000, with Annie Aldrich and Emma Woods, two black women in their 60s listed as “servants” in the household.²⁷¹ Spence died of a heart attack at Two Rivers in December of 1936, according to his death certificate. Mary Louise would outlive her second husband by nearly three decades, before she succumbed to congestive heart failure in November of 1965 at the age of 87.²⁷² She was the last living McGavock in this family line to reside at Two Rivers. She chose to live the last decade of her life at Two Rivers, despite having ownership of other properties, including the home of her parents, Melrose. Mary Louise did live for a time at Melrose, helping to care for her father after her mother died in 1932. Her father died less than a year later.²⁷³

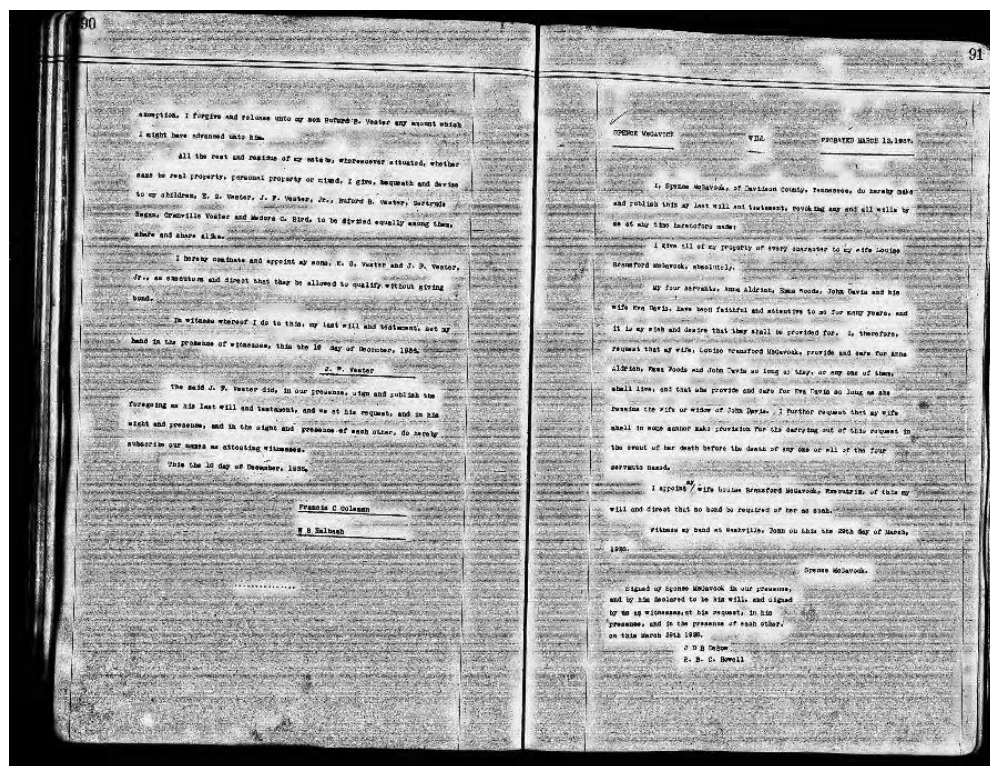


Figure 4.11. Spence McGavock's Will. Image from ancestry.com, 2022.

²⁷¹ 1930 United States Federal Census.

²⁷² “Mary Louise McGavock’s Death certificate.” Tennessee, U.S. Death Records, 1908-1965.

²⁷³ Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 62. According to a news article about her passing, Mary Louise sold Melrose a few years before her death; please see “Mrs. McGavock Dies; Owned Famous Estate,” November 22, 1965.

After Mary Louise's death in 1965, the majority of her possessions not left to various people or organizations in her will were sold at a four-day auction held in a warehouse downtown. Listed among the items at auction on January 26th, 1966, were "140 carats of diamonds and emeralds, including one diamond pin containing 46 carats, a French lace tablecloth valued at \$10,000, Louis XV and XVI furniture, silver and oriental rugs."²⁷⁴

An article written by Clara Hieronymus for *The Tennessean* reports on the excitement during the first day of the auction and the purchases made that day.²⁷⁵ More than 2,500 objects from Mary Louise's estate were brought to the Bennie Dillion Building at Church Street and Seventh Avenue in downtown Nashville for a four-day auction facilitated by Brown's Antiques, Jac's Galleries, and the First American National Bank.

The first day of the auction netted \$16,000 from sales including mirrors, a "pair of walnut-framed frame, mirror-back Louis XVI chairs in petit-point upholstery," a dining room set, ceramics, a candelabra, and assorted linens. The second day of the auction saw Mary Louise's jewelry being offered for sale, including a "fabulous stomacher, made for her by Tiffany's and containing 48 carat diamonds."²⁷⁶ The sale of her jewelry brought jewelry dealers from New York and Philadelphia to Nashville for the day.

²⁷⁴ Please see newspaper article entitled "McGavock Estate Sale Set Jan. 26," *The Tennessean*, January 15, 1966

²⁷⁵ Clara c, "McGavock Estate Auction Nets \$16,000 1st 4 Hours," *The Tennessean*, January 27, 1966.

²⁷⁶ Hieronymus, "McGavock Estate Auction Nets \$16,000 1st 4 Hours."

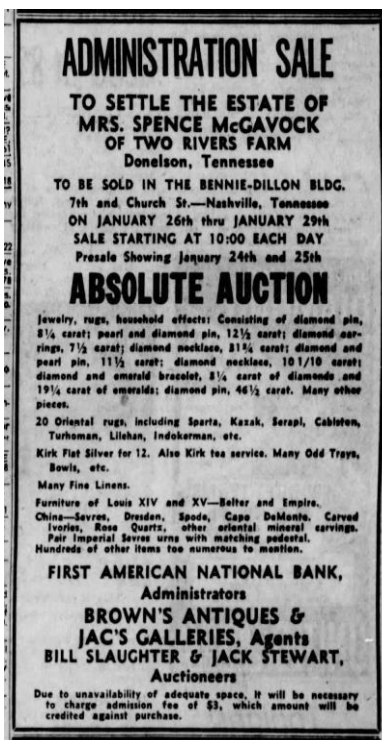


Figure 4.12. Newspaper advertisement detailing the auction of Mary Louise McGavock's possessions after her death. *The Tennessean*, January 19, 1966.

Transition and Transformation: Two Rivers becomes Public Property

Her will included provisions to bequeath items to “several family members, friends, and employees as beneficiaries.”²⁷⁷ The proceeds of the auction of the remaining items benefitted Vanderbilt Hospital and Medical School’s Division of Hematology.²⁷⁸ In October of 1966, nearly a year after her death, the City of Nashville purchased the Two Rivers Mansion and its 447 acres for \$995,000; a federal grant assisted the city in paying for the property.²⁷⁹ From the land purchased by the city, Nashville had built a new high school, park space, throughfares, and a golf course. In the 1970s, Metro officials also preserved the 1802 House and the 1859 Mansion as

²⁷⁷Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 62.

²⁷⁸ Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 62. Her will stipulated that the funds be “used for the operation or expansion” of the Hematology Department. Vanderbilt Medical School also endowed a research fund in the name of her father William S. Bransford.

²⁷⁹Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 62. The federal grant covered half of the cost for acquiring the property.

historic buildings which serve the community as event spaces and house museums. Metro allowed several families to live in the Mansion since their initial 1966 purchase. That course of action served a few functions, including deterring vandalism or damage to the property.



Figure 4.13. Mary Louise McGavock standing in the boxwood garden at Two Rivers Mansion before her death in 1965. Photograph from the Nashville Public Library Archives, 2022.

Widening the Lens of Interpretation: The Untold Story of Labor at Two Rivers Mansion

Today, the Friends Group interprets Two Rivers Mansion as an antebellum southern historic house, but interpretation has traditionally said little about the enslaved people who built it. The Historic American Buildings Survey from 1971 described the construction of the home: “apparently, all the brick were made and the stone quarried on the estate by McGavock’s slaves. Almost every brick is stamped ‘David H. McGavock’...The timber used for beams, the cedar porches and the interior surfaces were cut from trees growing on the farm. The intricate filigree

work on the front veranda is also thought to have been carved out by hand by McGavock's slaves."²⁸⁰

The story of the people of color who were residents of the plantation throughout history is largely omitted from the current interpretation. Uncovering and sharing this missing information creates a tremendous opportunity to enhance the visitor experience by telling the fuller story of the property. Research for this dissertation led to the re-discovery of an inventory of William Harding's property after his death which includes the names of seventy-seven people enslaved by Harding. Their stories remain largely untold. With more information about their lives, the Friends of Two Rivers will be able to share their stories, bringing a deeper complexity to the interpretation of the site.

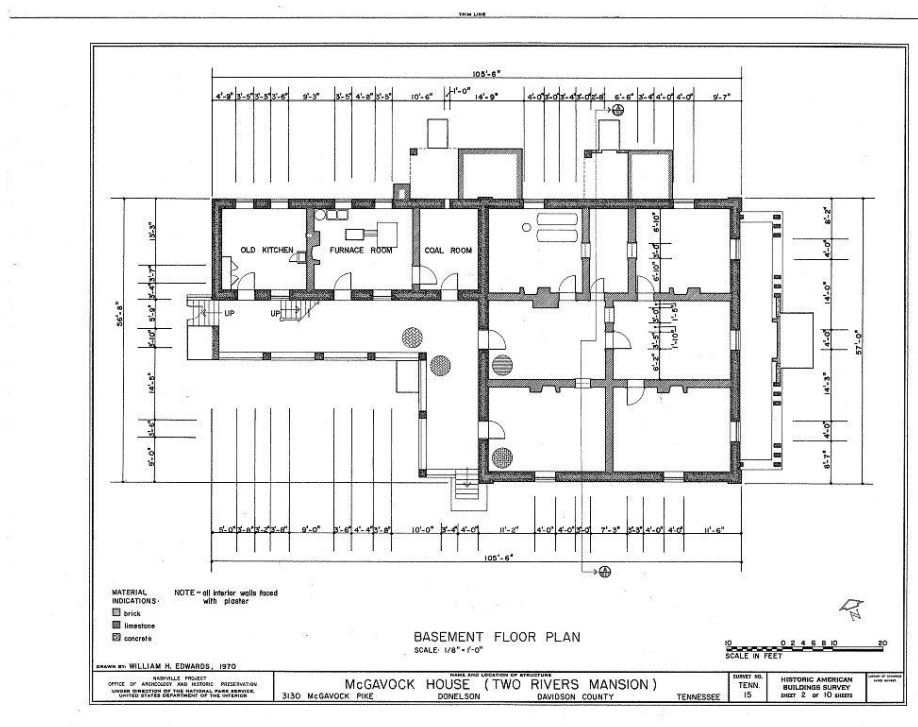


Figure 4.14. Basement schematic of the 1859 Mansion. Image from the Historic American Building Survey, 1972.

²⁸⁰ Massey and Pledger, "Mc Gavock House (Two Rivers Mansion)," Historic American Buildings Survey, 2.

The Work of Constructing and Operating Two Rivers Mansion

By 1855, the Farm had grown to roughly 1,100 acres, just under half of which was cultivated. The crops consisted of grain, corn, and cotton, and there were hogs, cattle, and sheep raised on the property.²⁸¹ There were numerous outbuildings at Two Rivers farm, including stables, a smoke house, a corn house, a spring house, a barn, and slave quarters for the 51 people owned by David and Willie McGavock.²⁸² Kitchen and medicinal herb gardens were likely found on the property, as well as small supplementary gardens by the slave quarters.²⁸³

David and Willie had their home constructed for them beginning in 1859, but due to the economic turmoil of the Civil War, the home was not completed until the 1870s.²⁸⁴ The home, a two-story Italianate brick building, was constructed from raw materials found on the property, including poplar wood and limestone.²⁸⁵ There is no architect on record for Two Rivers Mansion, however, the builder is stated as brick mason John Huff and stone mason John L. Stewart is credited with cutting the limestone found in the foundation and lintels of the home.²⁸⁶

Federal troops arrested David McGavock during the Civil War for ferrying Confederate soldiers across the Cumberland River and giving them food. After a short imprisonment, he paid

²⁸¹ Tennessee Valley Archaeological Research, "Archaeological Phase I Survey of the Proposed Events Center Location at the Two Rivers Mansion Property in Nashville, Tennessee," 10.

²⁸² Tennessee Valley Archaeological Research, "Archaeological Phase I Survey of the Proposed Events Center Location at the Two Rivers Mansion Property in Nashville, Tennessee," 10.

²⁸³ Tennessee Valley Archaeological Research, "Archaeological Phase I Survey of the Proposed Events Center Location at the Two Rivers Mansion Property in Nashville, Tennessee," 10.

²⁸⁴ Tennessee Valley Archaeological Research, "Archaeological Phase I Survey of the Proposed Events Center Location at the Two Rivers Mansion Property in Nashville, Tennessee," 10.

²⁸⁵ Tennessee Valley Archaeological Research, "Archaeological Phase I Survey of the Proposed Events Center Location at the Two Rivers Mansion Property in Nashville, Tennessee," 9–10.

²⁸⁶ Tennessee Valley Archaeological Research, "Archaeological Phase I Survey of the Proposed Events Center Location at the Two Rivers Mansion Property in Nashville, Tennessee," 12.

\$150 for his release and promptly fled the area, leaving Willie and Frank alone at Two Rivers.²⁸⁷

David eventually signed a loyalty oath to the Union in the beginning of 1864.

During Reconstruction, labor on the farm shifted away from enslaved labor to tenant farming, however, many of these tenant farmers were likely people formerly enslaved at Two Rivers.²⁸⁸ Corn, cotton, and wheat continued to be produced on the farm, as well as hay and wool for sale at market. By the 1880s, there were over 100 laborers employed by the McGavocks, both black and white, to ensure to continued crop production.²⁸⁹ Boarders were brought into the home, and improvements made to the Mansion. These improvements included moving the kitchen from the 1802 House into the 1859 Mansion and installing a dumbwaiter.



Figures 4.15 and 4.16. The kitchen in the 1802 House (L) and the family dining room in the 1859 Mansion (R) are two possible spaces in the homes to interpret labor on the property. Photographs by author, 2022.

²⁸⁷ Tennessee Valley Archaeological Research, "Archaeological Phase I Survey of the Proposed Events Center Location at the Two Rivers Mansion Property in Nashville, Tennessee," 10.

²⁸⁸ Tennessee Valley Archaeological Research, "Archaeological Phase I Survey of the Proposed Events Center Location at the Two Rivers Mansion Property in Nashville, Tennessee," 12.

²⁸⁹ Tennessee Valley Archaeological Research, "Archaeological Phase I Survey of the Proposed Events Center Location at the Two Rivers Mansion Property in Nashville, Tennessee," 12. According to the Tennessee Valley Archaeological Research report from 2018, the decade of the 1880s saw an expansion of crops produced on the farm including the addition of a pear tree orchard.

The Two Rivers plantation was “thriving” in the decade before the Civil War.²⁹⁰

According to the Two Rivers Master Plan, the crops produced at the plantation were numerous and plentiful. David and Willie McGavock appear to have run the plantation beginning in 1851-55.²⁹¹ The chosen crops for the plantation were corn, grain, cotton, as well as timber and livestock. There were horses, sheep, hogs, mules, and cattle.²⁹² While it seems like the composition of the plantation crops and livestock varied over the course of the 1850s and 1860s, what is important to remember is the necessity of enslaved labor to run such an agricultural enterprise.

According to the United States Federal Census Slave Schedules, in 1850 David McGavock owned 43 enslaved people; a decade later, the 1860 Slave Schedule shows a total of 35 enslaved people. None of the people owned by the McGavocks are listed by name; they are numerated by age, gender, and “color.”²⁹³ There is no clear indication for this reduction in enslaved people on the property. The enslaved lived and worked at Two Rivers; there were a few rare exceptions, however. One man enslaved by the McGavocks, Henry Harding, had some level

²⁹⁰ Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 38.

²⁹¹ Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 38. The Master Plan references an unnamed report describing the McGavock property from 1855. It states: “David H. McGavock’s Farm, seven miles from Nashville, near the mouth of the Stones River: Twelve hundred acres of land—three hundred in corn, one hundred and twenty-five in shall grain, and seventy-five acres in cotton: the balance in timber, and partly set in bluegrass. Keeps one hundred head of cattle, twenty-five mules, seven horses, one hundred and thirty head of sheep, and three hundred head of hogs. Made, this year, eighteen hundred barrels of corn, and twenty-five bales of cotton. Has nine hundred barrels of corn for sale, and hay and oats in proportion. Employs fifteen hands, and supports a family of fifty-four persons.”

²⁹² Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 38. The authors of the Master Plan list the assets of the 1860 plantation as: “comprised of almost 1100-acres. 550 acres were improved property and 450 acres unimproved. David McGavock valued his land holdings at \$50,000. His farm equipment totaled \$2,000. Livestock at Two Rivers was plentiful: 22 horses, 28 mules, 12 milk cows, 30 other cattle, 95 sheep and 200 hogs. The combined livestock value was \$8,000.”

²⁹³ 1850 U.S. Federal Census: Slave Schedules.

of independence within the institution of slavery. Henry was a skilled craftsman, working as a blacksmith and “[s]mall goods trader” while also having a residence in downtown Nashville.²⁹⁴



Figure 4.17. Grave marker of Henry Harding in Greenwood Cemetery, Nashville, Tennessee. Photograph by author, 2021.

Post-Emancipation Economic Survival and Labor Relations at Two Rivers Mansion

During Frank McGavock’s tenure as owner of Two Rivers Mansion, he nearly lost the estate due to poor business choices and gambling debts. Because of an attempt to take out a mortgage to rescue the home and grounds, several appraisals were performed to assess the value of the property. The Master Plan states these appraisals listed the value of the farm between \$70 and \$100 an acre; the important information to focus on in this section is the listing of structures on the property at the time of Frank and Clara McGavock’s ownership. These structures included: fifteen tenant houses (with ten of them having either three or five rooms), a saw and grist mill, smokehouse, icehouse, dairies, granaries, tool houses. Most notably, the list also

²⁹⁴ Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 38.

includes a “Negro Church and schoolhouse.”²⁹⁵ No more detail is given about the structures in this document.

The appraisals provide valuable information but also raise important questions. One, that there were enough African Americans living on the McGavocks’ property to necessitate both a church and a schoolhouse. Two, that they were able to congregate for educational and religious services. Three, if these buildings were extant in 1898; how were they used from their construction until their demolition? It is unknown when they were removed from the property; a tornado did come through the site and damage or destroy numerous outbuildings in the early twentieth century, but it is unclear if these buildings were still extant on property until that particular natural disaster. What can be inferred from the description of these structures in the appraisals is that there was a large enough African American population to necessitate buildings focused on community life.

Serving the Contemporary Needs of the Community while Practicing Public History

As part of the Two Rivers Master Plan, various suggestions for interpretation are being considered as the museum space changes over time. The authors of the Master Plan suggest: “visitors can explore the mansion in a way that allows for interaction with a combination of artifacts and props. The restoration of the basement allows the site to tell the story of those who were enslaved at the plantation within the spaces they once occupied.”²⁹⁶ When Metro officials purchased the property with an eye towards preservation of the buildings, the emphasis in the 1960s was to preserve and interpret the spaces of the elite white family who lived here. Architecture and furnishings were often seen as the necessary components of a mansion to

²⁹⁵ Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 61.

²⁹⁶ “Encore Interpretive Design, *Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan*, 96.

safeguard. The Master Plan, along with other preservation efforts, puts forward an effort to tell the larger story of the property, and all of the people who lived and labored here.

The 1859 Mansion basement, where many of the enslaved would have worked, is at present not open to the public. It contains a large number of objects that will move to another location when a proposed event center is built. By clearing out the basement, the hope is to use this space to interpret the unseen stories of the many people who lived and worked here. Two Rivers will be an effective and approachable tool to tell the story of the enslaved in middle Tennessee.

How does the Community Interact with Two Rivers Mansion?

Two Rivers Mansion is currently an event venue, with numerous public events occurring throughout the year, including concerts and historic tours. There is a greater opportunity for engagement with the local community available to the property. According to the Two Rivers Mansion Master Plan, the idea is to involve the surrounding neighborhoods more deeply with the historical interpretation of the houses and grounds.

Two Rivers Mansion receives many out-of-town visitors during their semi-regularly scheduled tours. During COVID 19, the demographics for visitors was noticeably more local; as restrictions have decreased the visitor base has expanded. While out-of-town visitors are important to the viability of Two Rivers Mansion as a sustainable historic house museum, there is a desire to engage more with the local community.

McGavock High School, directly adjacent to the fourteen acre Two Rivers Mansion grounds, is a majority minority high school demographically.²⁹⁷ The school grounds were a part of the land purchased by Metro Davidson in 1966 after the death of Mary Louise McGavock. McGavock High school serves the neighborhoods surrounding the Mansion, indicating that Two Rivers has an imperative to reach out to the local community and share the story of how the neighborhood has evolved over the last two centuries. More can and needs to be done to embrace the surrounding community and provide inclusive context for the landscape.

While the demographics of McGavock High School are notably a minority majority, the surrounding Lincoya Hills neighborhood is decidedly whiter and more affluent. Lincoya Hills is an upper-middle class suburban neighborhood built largely in the middle of the twentieth century.²⁹⁸ These two disparate groups occupy the areas surrounding the Mansion. The next phase in the story of Two Rivers will encourage these groups to engage with the history of the place where they learn and live by enhancing programming and increasing visitation.

²⁹⁷ Public School Review, “McGavock High School, Nashville, TN,” accessed February 26, 2023, <https://www.publicschoolreview.com/mcgavock-high-school-profile>.

²⁹⁸ Neighborhood Profile, “Lincoya Hills & Riverpoint Nashville, TN.,” accessed February 26, 2023, <https://www.neighborhoodscout.com/tn/nashville/lincoya-hills>.

CHAPTER FIVE:
CHEEKWOOD ESTATE AND GARDENS, NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION,
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

The refashioning of domestic spaces as educational tools of public history is a continuous process. The Cheekwood Estate and Gardens has served as a pre-eminent Nashville historic house museum for over sixty years. Its development has experienced many different stages, the most recent being one that I became involved with the institution from 2020 to 2022 for my doctoral residency project. The goal then was the creation and installation of a new interpretive plan—a process that remains ongoing in the spring of 2023. When you consider Cheekwood as a case study within the different properties presented in this dissertation, it seems radically different: an American country house estate envisioned by one of the nation's leading landscape architects in the late Jazz Age and then built during the Great Depression.

The home has retained its status of grandeur from its inception as a private home throughout its life as a public institution, unlike the prolonged declines of Two Rivers and the Dinkins home. A grand estate built during the Great Depression, Cheekwood garnered public interest in Middle Tennessee even before the Cheeks moved into the property. While the other homes examined in this case study were primarily private domestic spaces before their transition to institutions of public history, Cheekwood functioned as quasi-public space and hosted community functions during the Cheeks time in residence, owing to the family's affluence and social standing.

The time frame, location, and size of the estate overwhelms the other properties considered in this study. However, the property's long history as a public institution informs the treatment of the other homes as instruments of public history. Interpretation is an ongoing

iterative process. After the initial work of identifying a site as significant and articulating its utility as a lens through which to view the past, historic house museums must continuously clarify and reframe their interpretations.

Compared to Two Rivers—a once great Nashville estate reduced to a postage stamp sized suburban lot—Cheekwood seems a poor comparison. But there is a noticeable overlap between Two Rivers and Cheekwood in the discussion of labor on the respective properties. Obviously, the conversation of labor at Two Rivers encompasses the topic of enslavement, while Cheekwood is a twentieth century construction and built without the institution of slavery. These two historic properties create the opportunity to bring the stories of labor to the forefront, giving me the opportunity to highlight the craftsmen responsible for these impressive estates.



Figure 5.1. Exterior of Cheekwood, with a view of the loggia. Cheekwood website.

Cheek Family History

Preston Leslie Owen Cheek was born on September 7, 1872, in Glasgow, Kentucky. His parents were Major Christopher Tompkins “C.T.” and Ann Valeria Cheek.²⁹⁹ He grew up in a tight knit family with two sisters and a brother. His father, C.T., decided to move the family to Nashville in 1890 to seize on the economic opportunities of the region, and to join with other

²⁹⁹ Leslie B. Jones and Shanna T. Jones, eds., *Cheekwood*, (New York: Scala Arts Publishers Inc., 2020), 21.

family members in a burgeoning grocery distribution business. Mabel Wood, born to parents Louis Garth and Huldah Belle Warfield Wood in Clarksville, Tennessee in 1874, crusaded for education throughout her lifetime. The two met on a train traveling from New York City to Nashville in the 1890s and the couple married in Clarksville on October 7, 1896.³⁰⁰

The newlyweds settled in Nashville so Leslie could work for the family grocery business, Cheek, Webb & Co., first as a travelling salesman. A short time later Leslie was promoted to partner at the firm. The company, created by two cousins, Joel O. Cheek and Christopher T. Cheek, formed in 1890. Just a few years after their formation, they began focusing on the coffee market. The company created prepared, roasted coffee in a time when most grocery distributors were selling unroasted whole beans. In the creation of this new product, the Cheek family established the firm Nashville Coffee and Manufacturing.³⁰¹ By 1900, Leslie Cheek was running the grocery distribution company. In 1904, the Cheek family partnered with James W. Neal, forming the Cheek-Neal Coffee Company. Roasteries were built around the country, including Jacksonville, Brooklyn, Los Angeles, and Chicago. A coffee factory was also constructed in downtown Nashville at Cummins Station.³⁰²

The newly formed coffee company sought to establish their coffee as a high-end product. They were able to convince the Maxell House hotel in Nashville to serve their coffee exclusively in their restaurant and gained the use of the hotel's name for the product. Maxwell House Coffee,

³⁰⁰ Jones and Jones, *Cheekwood*, 21.

³⁰¹ Carroll Van West, "Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art," in *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, accessed August 4, 2021, <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/cheekwood-botanical-garden-and-museum-of-art/>.

³⁰² West, "Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art."

with the memorable slogan “Good to the Last Drop” became an immensely popular beverage, gaining a third of the entire American coffee market in just over two decades.³⁰³



Figure 5.2. Leslie and Mabel Cheek on their wedding day in Clarksville, Tennessee, 1896. Cheekwood Archives.

Joel Cheek sold Cheek-Neal Coffee to the Postum Company (later known as General Foods, Post, and Kraft) in 1928 for the sum of \$42 million. The sale led to the enrichment of those who had invested in the coffee company, including Leslie Cheek. Leslie didn't stop working after his impressive windfall from the sale of Cheek-Neal Coffee in July/August of 1928.

He was a part owner and an investor in the River Falls Power Company in Alabama, the American Bank, and the Princess Theatre in Nashville; he also retained a healthy share of stock in Postum from the sale.³⁰⁴ His personal windfall totaled around \$1.25 million, with a portion

³⁰³ Carroll Van West, “Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art,” National Register of Historic Places Nomination, Tennessee Historical Commission, 2000, 7. The slogan for Maxwell House Coffee, “Good to the Last Drop” was “allegedly, praise lavished by President Theodore Roosevelt when he visited the Maxwell House in 1907.”

³⁰⁴ Jones and Jones, *Cheekwood*, 22.

going to the construction of his new familial home. The country house estate for the Cheeks combined the last names of Leslie Cheek and his wife Mabel Wood Cheek's maiden name.³⁰⁵

Mabel and Leslie Cheek had two children: Leslie Jr. and Huldah Cheek. Leslie Jr., born in 1909, attended several schools in the Nashville area, including Peabody Demonstration School and Duncan College Preparatory School, while also spending time in the summers at Culver Military Academy in Culver, Indiana. Harvard University accepted Leslie Jr. in 1927 where he intended to study engineering but transferred into the art history and fine arts department.³⁰⁶ After his graduation from Harvard in 1931, he enrolled at Yale University to study architecture. He worked at the College of William and Mary after his Yale graduation, where he founded and chaired their first Department of Fine Arts. Shortly after his marriage to Mary Tyler Freeman in 1939, he and his wife moved to Baltimore where he served as the director of the Baltimore Museum of Art. In 1948, Leslie Jr. accepted the position of director of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, where he worked for twenty years, becoming the longest serving director in the history of the museum.³⁰⁷

Huldah Warfield Cheek, born in 1915, attended the all-girls Ward-Belmont School for her primary education; this school later became the modern-day Harpeth Hall School and Belmont University.³⁰⁸ Huldah later attended the Shipley School in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania (a private K-12 college preparatory school) and graduated from Bryn Mawr College with an

³⁰⁵ West, "Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art"; Jones and Jones, *Cheekwood*. Cheekwood was not the first home built for the couple. They had a West End Avenue Italianate home constructed for them by 1900. The West End property is where the Cheeks began their family; both children grew up in the home. The Cheeks also owned a cottage called Birdsong in Sycamore, Tennessee, where the family would often go for the summers as the children grew up.

³⁰⁶ Jones and Jones, *Cheekwood*, 25. According to the authors, the elder Cheeks were unhappy with this decision, stating that Leslie Jr. choose art and art history "much to his parents' chagrin."

³⁰⁷ Jones and Jones, *Cheekwood*, 27.

³⁰⁸ Jones and Jones, *Cheekwood*, 27.

undergraduate degree on June 1, 1938.³⁰⁹ She was an accomplished equestrian, both at school and when visiting her family in Nashville. She rode competitively in various events, “earning awards and accolades” for her ridership.³¹⁰ While both Leslie Jr. and Huldah were away at school in the 1930s, they both often returned to the Nashville area to visit with friends and family. Their visits were frequently chronicled in the *Tennessean* society pages.

Mabel and Leslie travelled with their children to Europe on a several month-long antique buying trip with their architect Bryant Fleming in 1929. They travelled together throughout England to decide what sort of house, type of garden spaces, and range of antiques they wanted to use for their Nashville estate. Their journey resulted in the acquisition of many objects, including antiques and even components of historic homes from various countries in Europe. They returned to Nashville with seven train cars loaded with objects. These items were used to fill their 30,000 square foot home built on 100 acres.

An invoice from the trip details nearly 150 objects purchased from a single dealer, ranging from “A Lot of Swords” to “Brass Georgian Lantern.”³¹¹ The Cheeks purchased more objects after their months long trip with Bryant Fleming. In 1931, Leslie Sr. purchased two chandeliers and several wall sconces from the Little Antique Shop in New Orleans, Louisiana.³¹²

³⁰⁹ “Parents to Attend Graduation Exercises,” *The Tennessean*, May 8, 1938, accessed March 10, 2023. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/160994080/>.

³¹⁰ Jones and Jones, *Cheekwood*, 27.

³¹¹ Jones and Jones, *Cheekwood*, 93. The invoice is dated April 22, 1929, from Thomas Crowther & Sons and included 148 objects.

³¹² Jones and Jones, *Cheekwood*, 93. The authors of *Cheekwood* include a segment of the letter written from the dealer to Leslie Sr.: “I have gotten the man in England down to 800 pounds for the only pair I know of that I would recommend unqualifiedly, as they came from the beautiful home of a Duchess [of Scarborough] and are fully authenticated.”

Two years later, they made a purchase from Frank Partridge of an eighteenth-century sideboard, from the collection of the Countess of Portsmouth.³¹³

Leslie Cheek Jr. recorded various aspects of the acquisition and construction of the home. He noted that “the firm of Crowther was one of those [antique dealers] most frequently visited, from which many boxes of architectural fragments eventually came to the Cheekwood site.”³¹⁴ According to the *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, the prominent London dealer Edward Duveen also served as a procurer of antiques for the Cheeks. Other notable dealers include Charles of London, French & Co., and Frank Partridge. From these dealers, the Cheeks were able to acquire architectural salvage and antiques from various aristocratic estates throughout Europe. These items and others purchased elsewhere during this period of acquisition included fireplaces, friezes, “doors, door frames, handrails, iron work, mantels, wall panels, molding, chandeliers, tapestry, statuary, and furniture” used to decorate and construct the estate.³¹⁵

Leslie Cheek Sr. died in 1935, just a few short years after the completion of Cheekwood. Mabel outlived him by more than a decade, dying in 1946. Bryant Fleming died the same year as Mabel, in 1946, in Warsaw, New York.³¹⁶ The estate passed to Huldah Cheek Sharp and her husband, Walter Sharp. They married in the living room of Cheekwood on February 14, 1942.

Water Sharp was an influential member of the arts community in Nashville in the 1940s and 1950s. He was instrumental in the formation of the Nashville Symphony Orchestra, was a

³¹³ Jones and Jones, *Cheekwood*, 93–94. The piece is noted on the invoice as “an important Adam carved mahogany serving table, English XVIII Century...From the Collection of the Countess of Portsmouth. Exhibited at the Chicago Art Institute. Compare with MacQuoid and Edwards, *Dictionary of English Furniture*.”

³¹⁴ West, “Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art,” 10. The firm of Crowther refers to Thomas Crowther & Sons.

³¹⁵ Jones and Jones, *Cheekwood*, 31; Carroll Van West, “Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art.”

³¹⁶ “Death Takes Bryant Fleming, 70,” *The Ithaca Journal*, September 23, 1946, accessed March 11, 2023, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/254823994/>.

trustee at Fisk University, served as an art history professor and the chair of Vanderbilt's Department of Fine Arts and Music, was the first president of the Nashville Arts Council, and was a founder of the Tennessee Commission on the Performing Arts (later the Tennessee Arts Commission).³¹⁷ In 1959, the Sharps decided to deed the property, including the house, outbuildings, and 55 acres, to create the Tennessee Botanical Gardens and Fine Arts Center.

Early History of Belle Meade

Leslie Cheek Sr. purchased land in the Belle Meade area in order to build his large Country Place Era estate. He chose land in this area so named for the Belle Meade Plantation built for John Harding in the early nineteenth century. Harding was known for his successful thoroughbred stud farm located on site. He began with purchasing a “well-watered 250-acre tract on the east side of Richland Creek, six miles from Nashville. The road along Richland Creek was an old buffalo trail known as the Natchez Road.”³¹⁸

Harding continued to expand his farmland, eventually tripling his holdings- purchasing more than 3,800 acres within Davidson County by the end of the 1820s. He brought this acreage up to more than 8,500 acres by 1840.³¹⁹ The property passed down to his son William Giles Harding, who took over the day-to-day management of Belle Meade by the middle of the century. By the turn of the twentieth century, however, the land and assets were broken up and

³¹⁷ West, “Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art,” 13.

³¹⁸ Suzanne Turner Associates, *Cultural Landscape Report for Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art*, (Nashville, TN, Private, 2013), 142–43.

³¹⁹ Suzanne Turner Associates, *Cultural Landscape Report for Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art*, 144.

sold off as the plantation was dissolved in 1904. When Belle Meade sold, it was the “largest and oldest thoroughbred farm in the country.”³²⁰

Three developers began to work towards what would become Belle Meade Park: Jacob McGavock Dickinson, Luke Lea, and Johnson Bransford. Dickinson, a prominent attorney, along with several officials of the Illinois Central Railroad, purchased the land to create a new residential subdivision just outside of Nashville.³²¹ Dickinson is also responsible for bringing renowned landscape architect O.C. Simonds to Belle Meade. Simonds “designed numerous roads and streets and consulted on the siting of the five to fifteen acre lots included in the original Belle Meade development.”³²²

These three men formed the Belle Meade Land Company to finance the \$185,000 purchase price. A few years later, the land and company exchanged hands and the developer became the Belle Meade Company (BMC). Luke Lea, mentioned above, became a controlling stockholder and principal developer in the BMC in 1910.³²³ He was also instrumental in the formation of Percy Warner Park, which served as a memorial to his father-in-law after his death.

William S. Bransford of Bransford Realty Company and his son Johnson Bransford sought to buy land and build homes in Belle Meade during the early years of its formation as a subdivision; Johnson would later build his own home in the Deer Park tract of Belle Meade in 1913. Johnson Bransford purchased large sections of the development, sold individual lots, and built homes for customers in the subdivision. John Wilkes, a civil engineer, filed the first subdivision plat in 1906. There were several restrictive covenants filed at the time of the platting

³²⁰ Carroll Van West, *Nashville Architecture: A Guide to the City* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2015), 171.

³²¹ “Belle Meade Golf Links Subdivision Historic District National Register Nomination,” 2004, 25.

³²² Suzanne Turner Associates, *Cultural Landscape Report for Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art*, 148.

³²³ West, *Nashville Architecture*, 171.

of Belle Meade. These included: “only residences could be built. No liquor could be sold. No fence nor house could be built closer than one hundred feet to any road, but entrance gates and low hedges would be permitted. No person of African descent could buy property.”³²⁴

On April 17, 1928, Leslie Cheek purchased sixty acres of the former Belle Meade plantation from the Hillsboro Land Company for the cost of \$40,000.³²⁵ The land was situated north of the new Warner Park boundary. Other prominent Nashvillians invested in this new subdivision just outside the city, that was served by a purpose-built train line.³²⁶ O.C. Simonds is credited with the design of the streetcar track that is now present-day Belle Meade Boulevard. Luke Lea approached the rail company to construct a new terminus to their line with the promise that he would underwrite it himself; the plan did not come to complete fruition due to financial difficulties faced by the developers.³²⁷

These new homes and their grandeur set the stage for what the Cheeks and Bryant Fleming wanted to accomplish at Cheekwood. The authors of the Cultural Landscape Report situate the Cheeks in this time and community: “what all of these homes show is that before the Cheeks began construction of their Georgian Revival home, there was a distinct precedent of suburban estates in Belle Meade, associated with the merchant class of the city of Nashville.

³²⁴ Suzanne Turner Associates, *Cultural Landscape Report for Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art*, 149.

³²⁵ West, “Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art.”

³²⁶ Suzanne Turner Associates, *Cultural Landscape Report for Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art*, 150. Luke Lea’s daughter, Mary Louise Lea Tidwell wrote about her father’s involvement in the Belle Meade Company: “Luke Lea proposed to the Nashville Railway and Light Company that it construct a single line cartrack from the terminus of its West End line for approximately four miles through the property owned by the Belle Meade Company, three miles to be flanked by a macadam road. Thus was laid out Belle Meade Boulevard, land facing which is still more than three-quarters of a century later the most expensive residential property per foot in Davidson County.”

³²⁷ West, *Nashville Architecture*, 170–71.

These homes were primarily designed by architects of both local and national renown, and had extensive grounds with sweeping lawns, ornamental plantings, and formal gardens.”³²⁸



Figure 5.3. 1938 USDA aerial photograph of the Cheekwood property, United States Department of Agriculture, National Archives. Cheekwood Cultural Landscape Report.

What is the Country Place Era?

The design work for Cheekwood began in 1928. Fleming was a proponent of the country place style that placed Georgian revival homes in bucolic landscaped grounds, a style particularly suited to the tastes of American nouveau-riche. Historian Barr Ferree described the emerging Country Place Era in his 1904 book *American Estates and Gardens*. In this work, Ferree discusses the Americanized version of the British country house: “a new type of dwelling, a sumptuous house, built at large expense, often palatial in its dimensions, furnished in the richest manner and placed on an estate, perhaps large enough to admit of independent farming operations, and in most cases with a garden which is an integral part of the architectural scheme.

The formal garden, in which garden architecture has an important part to perform, is the most usual; but the garden is always present, even though a considerable latitude be permitted in

³²⁸ Suzanne Turner Associates, *Cultural Landscape Report for Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art*, 154.

its design and arrangement.”³²⁹ Clive Aslet, in his book *The American Country House*, echoes the sentiment of Ferree, describing the American country house as inspired by European design, yet in the way the style developed, as a “peculiarly American achievement.”³³⁰ Aslet also notes that the building of country homes during the early twentieth century was a “natural form of expression for those with the money and energy to afford it.”³³¹

Two figures were largely responsible for shaping American landscape design before the Country Place Era movement: Frederick Law Olmsted and Andrew Jackson Downing; these designers focused on the locality of a place, imbuing their gardens with a romantic and picturesque style.³³² As new wealth flowed into the American upper class, the preferences for landscape and home design took a markedly Eurocentric turn. The film, *Cheekwood: A Masterpiece by Man & Nature*, defines the ethos behind the Country Place Era: “What distinguishes the Country House movement is that the place and the house are inseparable, the landscape and the structure were conceived together.”³³³ That emphasis highlights the longstanding relationships often found at Country Place Era estates between patrons and the architects designing their homes and gardens. The period of the Country Place Era movement varies but is typically viewed as the years between 1895 and 1942. Such a large window can make distinguishing its characteristics challenging.

³²⁹ Barr Ferree, *American Estates and Gardens* (New York: Munn and Company, 1904), 1.

³³⁰ Clive Aslet, *The American Country House* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 22.

³³¹ Aslet, *The American Country House*, 4.

³³² Robin S. Karson, *A Genius for Place: American Landscapes of the Country Place Era* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007).

³³³ *Cheekwood: A Masterpiece by Man & Nature*, 2017. Accessed November 17, 2022.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BRzhIBM_vpI.

The Cultural Landscape Report, completed by Suzanne Turner Associates in 2013, examines the term Country Place Era through the physicality of Cheekwood. The report notes all the characteristics of this movement that Cheekwood embodies:

A winding entry drive that enhanced the arrival sequence, the location of the mansion on a high point offering the opportunity for prospect, and yet connected to the larger landscape by framed views and vistas to the distant forests and surrounding mountains, the integration of the house and surrounding gardens-especially the rear loggia's relationship to the swan lawn, multiple changes in the elevation, transition zones between spaces, sculptural elements placed in strategic locations in the gardens, an unusual juxtaposition of asymmetry and balance that are hallmarks of these estates-especially the work of Beatrix Farrand, and gradual change from more formal elements and arrangements adjacent to the house to a freer and more natural landscape further from the house.³³⁴



Figures 5.4 and 5.5. Two views of Cheekwood, rendered by Bryant Fleming. Bryant Fleming Glass Slides, Cheekwood Archives.

Landscape historian Lance Neekar examines the Country Place Era in an article for *Landscape Journal*, comparing the decades on either side of the twentieth century. He states that the time period is a “dramatic transition between the ornamental horticultural design practices of the mid-nineteenth century and the expansive concerns of landscape architecture in the mid-

³³⁴ Suzanne Turner Associates, *Cultural Landscape Report for Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art*, 259–60.

twentieth.”³³⁵ With this discussion, Neckar brings into sharp relief the debate among landscape architects and architectural historians about the changing desires of American consumers of large estates: do they prefer to emulate the Eurocentric cultural model, or is the desire to move towards a hybridized, homegrown style born on the American soil?

One of the earliest and most notable examples of the Country Place Era was the Biltmore in Asheville, North Carolina. Architect Richard Morris Hunt and famed landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted designed and constructed this home for George W. Vanderbilt II between 1889 and 1895. The house is immense, the largest private home in America, but the gardens are equally impressive. The Biltmore has the first professionally managed forest in the country, as well as significant formal grounds. The authors of the Cultural Landscape Report note: “although the area immediately surrounding the house was quite formal in character, beyond the initial viewshed from the house’s front façade, the quality of the landscape was extremely naturalistic, although this ‘look’ was the result of deliberate and artful design decisions.”³³⁶ Similar approaches to the design and care of garden spaces was undertaken by Bryant Fleming at Cheekwood a few decades later.

Bryant Fleming: Architect

The architect for Cheekwood is Bryant Fleming. Born in 1877 in Buffalo, New York, Fleming grew up on his grandparent’s farm after the death of his mother. His father worked as an art appraiser for the United States Custom Office at the U.S. border with Canada; the authors of *Cheekwood* claim that “these combined experiences of art and nature foretold the young

³³⁵ Lance Neckar, “Developing Landscape Architecture for the Twentieth Century: The Career of Warren H. Manning,” *Landscape Journal* 8, 1989, 79.

³³⁶ Suzanne Turner Associates, *Cultural Landscape Report for Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art*, 161.

Fleming's life pursuits."³³⁷ He worked at the South Park Conservancy in Buffalo during his high school years. These botanical gardens were designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, a prominent landscape architect who would be a powerful influence for Fleming throughout his career. In 1901, Fleming graduated from Cornell University with a Bachelor of Science, having majored in agriculture and architecture.³³⁸ He spent an additional year at Cornell after graduation to focus his studies on architecture. Once his education was complete, Fleming sought out Liberty Hyde Bailey, an authority of gardening and horticulture as a mentor.³³⁹ Bailey also served as the first editor of *Country Life in America* magazine. Fleming worked for several years at the turn of the twentieth century for landscape architect Warren H. Manning in his Boston firm.

In 1905, Fleming returned to Buffalo, where he started his own firm in partnership with Frederic dePeyster Townsend. The firm Townsend & Fleming provided landscape design for state parks, subdivisions, and private residences, as well as site planning services. During this time, Fleming also became a faculty member and department chair for the Department of Landscape Architecture that he founded at Cornell from 1904 to 1915.³⁴⁰ He opened another practice in Ithaca after the dissolution of Townsend & Fleming in 1915, hiring graduates of the Cornell program. He worked on commissions throughout the United States, in cities like Nashville, Chicago, Detroit, Memphis, and Louisville, as well as smaller towns in Florida, Mississippi, New York, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and even in southern Canada.³⁴¹ According to the National Register nomination for Cheekwood, "his projects often combined interior design,

³³⁷ Jones and Jones, *Cheekwood*, 28.

³³⁸ The Cultural Landscape Foundation, "Bryant Fleming," accessed August 7, 2021, <https://tclf.org/pioneer/bryant-fleming>.

³³⁹ Jones and Jones, *Cheekwood*, 28.

³⁴⁰ The Cultural Landscape Foundation, "Bryant Fleming"; Jones and Jones, *Cheekwood*, 28.

³⁴¹ Jones and Jones, *Cheekwood*, 28.

antique furnishings, landscaping, and domestic architecture, all with the purpose of creating a unified statement of time and place.”³⁴²



Figure 5.6. Bryant Fleming. Cheekwood Archives.

It is unclear as to when Fleming was hired by the Cheeks to build their Country Place Era estate, but it appears to be sometime in the mid-to-late 1920s. After Leslie Cheek purchased land in 1928, the Cheeks and Fleming visited antique shops and palatial homes throughout Europe, seeking inspiration and physical objects to return to Nashville with them. Items were salvaged from ancestral homes from around England especially. While the family and Fleming were travelling in search of objects and inspiration, laborers and craftsmen were hard at work transforming the Belle Meade site. Tennessee limestone was quarried on property, providing material for the exterior of the home.

³⁴² West, “Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art,” 13.

Bryant Fleming was an active architect and landscape architect in this time and place, but he is also described by Charles A. Birnbaum in the Cheekwood film: “what is extraordinary to me is the artistry of Fleming’s work at both the large and small scale. I would suggest at Cheekwood that this is in fact the work of a master at the top of his game and not only is it a significant work of landscape architecture or a Country Place Era estate in its own right, but it is a masterwork of the period.”³⁴³ Fleming respected the landscape and was sensitive to the integrity of the natural site; in his mind, the landscape was paramount.

According to Leslie B. Jones and Shanna T. Jones, the authors of the recent monograph *Cheekwood*, Fleming’s design for the estate “is meticulously detailed with clear circulation and spatial structure, and his application of Country Place Era principles in a context of locality is evident here.”³⁴⁴ The *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* article for Cheekwood highlights Fleming’s desire to have the landscape and the built environment form one cohesive design. An article from *The Tennessean* written by Louise Davis in April 1952 sums up this sentiment: “it is easy to believe that the house was made to grace the gardens.”³⁴⁵

³⁴³ *Cheekwood: A Masterpiece by Man & Nature*.

³⁴⁴ Jones and Jones, *Cheekwood*, 58. The authors detail some of their observations about Cheekwood and its personification of the Country Place Era: “the approach, via a grand, winding driveway, is as much a response to the landscape as it is a fully realized design gesture. The water features throughout the property not only take advantage of the terrain’s various elevations, but they also satisfy Mabel Cheek’s request for tranquility through sound. Structures and sculptures are purposefully placed to signal transitions and add interest. The ultimate vistas are found and framed in a painterly fashion. And, the equestrian trail leading to Percy Warner Park exemplifies Cheekwood’s sense of place and honors a family favorite recreation.”

³⁴⁵ West, “Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art.”

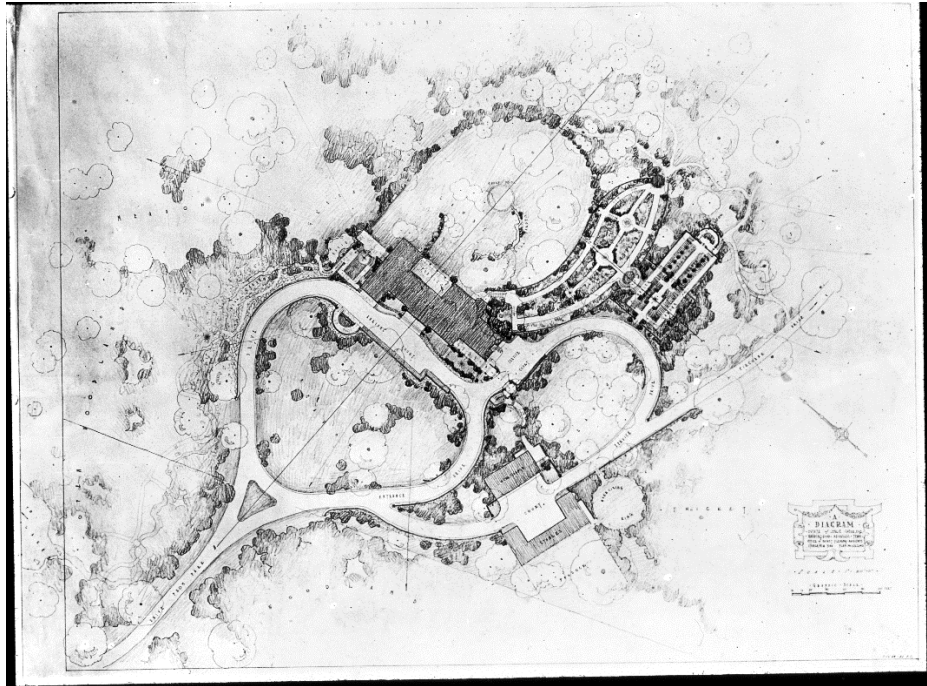


Figure 5.7. Rendering of Cheekwood by Bryant Fleming. Bryant Fleming Glass Slides, Cheekwood Archives.

Country Place Era Landscape Design Principles

The approach to the landscape by Olmsted was tripartite. The gardens located close to the home would serve as outdoor extensions of the interior living space, blending the indoors and outdoors seamlessly for the owner. These spaces often took the shape of terraces, walled gardens, hedges, and open lawns. The first layer of Olmsted's garden design ethos can be found in the Swan Lawn and garden off of the library. The Loggia of Cheekwood was designed by Fleming to exist as a simultaneously interior and exterior space; Leslie Cheek Jr. later enclosed the space.

Moving further away from the house, one would find the second layer of garden space, an almost liminal area where the lines between refined garden and wild forest became blurred. These transitory spaces could contain semi-formal spaces like rose gardens, wild gardens, or other horticultural areas that would suit the tastes of the owners. The third component of the

tripartite County Place garden would likely be “managed forest or farmland, the place where the regional of local look of the landscape was most celebrated.”³⁴⁶

These design principles provided the estate with an almost choreographed experience for those who would visit the home. One would begin their arrival to the estate in the far, forested component of the landscape, where the “personality of the landscape was gradually revealed through the winding nature of the road alignment, the crafted views along the way, the contrasting quality of the open and closed tree canopy creating areas of shadow and light, and dramatic long vistas to the ultimate destination of the house.”³⁴⁷

These manipulations of the landscape can certainly be seen in the historic approach to Cheekwood. The visitor would begin in the forested area near the entrance to Percy Warner Park, following a winding driveway past a gate house and a large set of metal gates, to eventually wind around to the sweeping circular driveway to the Cheek’s home. The home is also outfitted with a wisteria arbor, suitable for experiencing the vista from Cheekwood. Carroll Van West, in the film *Cheekwood: A Masterpiece by Man & Nature*, describes the experience of the house: “if you step out onto that arbor, particularly in the spring or fall, you really understand Fleming’s achievement. It becomes a way of linking nature right into the house itself. It’s a powerful statement of how design, architecture, and nature can be put together in such a way that you leave inspired, impressed, and a little bit grateful for having stepped into the house.”³⁴⁸ The 1960 alteration of the estate to a public botanical garden and museum has completely changed the visitor experience of the Country Place Era grand entrance.

³⁴⁶ Suzanne Turner Associates, *Cultural Landscape Report for Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art*, 162.

³⁴⁷ Suzanne Turner Associates, *Cultural Landscape Report for Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art*, 162.

³⁴⁸ *Cheekwood: A Masterpiece by Man & Nature*.

Leslie Cheek Jr., in an unpublished typescript found in the Tennessee State Library and Archives (TSLA), describes the physicality of Cheekwood, emphasizing the relationship between the house and grounds:

The location consisted of a wooded, rounded, steep hill, the top of which Mr. Fleming decided to level slightly, in order to create an area for a lawn immediately behind the house, in the center of which he decided to place the now-famous Swan Fountain. (The Long Gallery of the first floor) also opened up on a capacious 'Loggia,' which had its west side supported by a series of limestone columns, giving a view out onto the Main Lawn and its central Swan Pool, described above- which became the actual center of the whole upper level complex of the garden system. The Main Floor Gallery also led through the living room to its south side, where doors opened onto an elaborate metal-supported Wisteria Arbor, with related series of fountains. These fountains served as a focus for the small stream which meandered outside the library windows. This water was collected in a pool below the Wisteria Arbor, from which it flowed into a series of cascades to the chief reflection pool of the main garden, which was ornamented by two sculptures. The various pools were connected on the site by a series of natural steps and walking paths of varying levels to form a fascinating and diverting pattern of landscape design. The sources of the little streams eventually terminated in the three lakes located on the property at a lower level, serving as informal swimming pools.³⁴⁹

Workers and Craftsmen of Cheekwood

The Cheeks hired many workers to fulfill their dream of a grand estate. Some are well known, like Bryant Fleming, while others have been obscured or forgotten through the passing of time. According to the National Register nomination, "to work the estate, they [the Cheeks] employed five servants for the mansion in addition to a foreman and twelve to fourteen workers for the gardens. Some of the employees lived in rooms on the third floor of the mansion."³⁵⁰ These rooms are no longer extant within the home because the third floor was converted to gallery space in 1970, with some later remodeling in 1998-1999.

³⁴⁹ West, "Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art," 11-12. The unpublished typescript written by Leslie Cheek Jr. can be found in the Albert W. Hutchinson Jr. Papers at the Tennessee State Library and Archives.

³⁵⁰ West, "Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art," 12.

The conversation surrounding labor on the estate needs to essentially be divided into two categories: the construction of Cheekwood and its later maintenance and functionality as a house. Different workers were needed to craft the home, while others were required to maintain the household and keep it running. According to the authors of *Cheekwood*, the construction of the estate was quite laborious: “the construction of Cheekwood was no simple feat, as challenges existed on every level, the site, high on a hill, required both horses and horsepower. Mules, horse, and automobiles were enlisted to transport building materials up the steep incline.”³⁵¹

The construction of the building and the exterior façade seems to have moved along relatively smoothly, without much alteration; the interior, however, was in flux as construction progressed. Fleming chose to alter the plans for the home’s interior as he worked through assessing the functionality and flow of the estate. The uncertainty of the interior spaces led to some conflict between the architect and his employer, Leslie Cheek. Surviving correspondence between the two indicates that there was some tension with the ever-changing designs. Fleming concentrated on how the building would be used by the family; private spaces and public spaces were considered and designed with multifunctionality in mind. The Cheeks were fond of entertaining and throwing lavish parties; the home needed to reflect these special occasion uses.

³⁵¹ Jones and Jones, *Cheekwood*, 32. The Cheekwood monograph goes into some greater detail on the construction timeline: “according to the photographic record, 1929 brought a great deal of progress. By the summer, as inscribed on surviving photos, the exterior of the house was in progress, covered in scaffolding. Images show a structure made of cement blocks and brick, with a Tennessee limestone façade, as well as the beginnings of the three stepped ponds in the landscape below the house. By October, the stable and garage were near completion. Other images include written inscriptions sharing ‘Spring 1930’ as a time when the house was weatherproofed with windows and a roof, suggesting that most of the exterior work was complete.”



Figure 5.8. Exterior of Cheekwood during the initial construction, view of the rear of the home, looking at the loggia. Cheekwood Archives.

The home was completed in 1932 by a “team of local Nashville craftsmen, artisans, and gardeners,” and the Cheek family moved into the home for Thanksgiving of that year.³⁵² Upon completion, Cheekwood stood as a behemoth on the landscape; thirty-six rooms, 30,000 square feet, two elevators, and a library with two thousand books collected by the Cheeks during their travels.³⁵³ The home boasted eleven bedrooms and twelve bathrooms. There were bedrooms for the Cheeks, Huldah, Leslie Jr., Mabel’s mother Huldah Warfield Wood, and several guest bedrooms. The remaining bedrooms, five in total, were designated for domestic staff, “including maids, a valet, and a butler.”³⁵⁴ The aim is to tell their stories now through the Interpretive Plan and a National Historic Landmark application.

³⁵² Jones and Jones, *Cheekwood*, 34.

³⁵³ Cheekwood Estate & Gardens. “History of Cheekwood.” Accessed July 18, 2021. <https://cheekwood.org/explore/history/>.

³⁵⁴ Jones and Jones, *Cheekwood*, 39.

Domestic Staff

Florence and Edward Drake

Florence Drake and her son Edward worked for the Cheeks for many years. They are listed on the 1920 United States Census as part of the Cheek household on West End Avenue.³⁵⁵ Florence is categorized as a servant, working for a private family as a wage or salary earner. Her birth year is c.1855, therefore she is about 65 years of age at this Census taking. She is also listed as widowed. Her son Edward is 35 years old at the time of Census data collection; he is listed as married, but there is no indication of his wife being included in the Cheek household. Edward is also a wage earner, employed by the Cheeks as their chauffeur. Leslie Cheek Sr. did not drive, and Edward occasionally drove the Cheek children to school.³⁵⁶ Both Edward and his mother were born in Tennessee. Not many details are known of their earlier lives before their employment by the Cheeks, but it seems as if they were staff to the Cheeks around the time of Leslie Jr.'s birth. He remembers Florence in his memoirs, that she was "a constant companion for me and my Sister," and that she was protective and caring for the Cheek children.³⁵⁷

Gardening Staff at Cheekwood

Although Fleming was likely responsible for the design of Cheekwood's extensive gardens, he was not the person tasked with maintaining the gardens after the initial layout and construction of the grounds. Malcolm Jackson served as Head Gardener for the Cheeks after moving into Cheekwood. He lived in the gatehouse with his family, wife Frieda and son Paul,

³⁵⁵ 1920 United States Federal Census.

³⁵⁶ Jones and Jones, *Cheekwood*, 25. Leslie Jr. recalls being driven by Edward to school in "White Steamers, Stevens Duryea, Lincolns, or a Dodge." This recollection by Leslie Jr. indicates that the Cheeks had quite the fleet of automobiles, despite Leslie Sr. never learning how to drive a car.

³⁵⁷ Jones and Jones, *Cheekwood*, 25.

and was responsible for overseeing “the landscape’s beauty and provided a sense of security” for the Cheeks in their new estate.³⁵⁸

William Meier also served as a gardener for the Cheeks. Born a German citizen, Meier was listed as a landscape architect in his obituary in 1943.³⁵⁹ He became a naturalized citizen in May of 1932, according to an article in *The Nashville Banner*. In the article, he is listed as a “landscape gardener at Cheekwood,” indicating that the Cheeks had hired him as their home was nearing completion.³⁶⁰

Johnnie Winstead

Identified in her obituary as “Cheekwood’s first cook,” Johnnie Wolridge Winstead was a Franklin native whose life spanned more than a century. She died in 1998 at the age of 104, spending her last few years in a nursing home on the same site of the former Franklin Training School campus, where she attended school until the seventh grade. Likely the longest living alum of the school and the longest living Williamson County native, she had to stop attending school in order to assist with bringing money into her family’s household. Williamson County Historian Rick Warwick called her “the best window we had into the 19th century” upon her death.³⁶¹ In the 1940 United States Federal Census, she is listed as a cook for a private home as a wage or

³⁵⁸ Jones and Jones, *Cheekwood*, 48.

³⁵⁹ “William Meier,” *The Tennessean*, 26 February 26, 1943, accessed February 20, 2023, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/148099596/>. In his obituary, it is stated that he “came here at the age of 26 and soon became widely known in landscaping, having helped plan the lawns of numerous homes in Belle Meade.” He died at the age of 45 from an undisclosed illness.

³⁶⁰ “Nineteen Foreigners Welcomed as Citizens,” *The Nashville Banner*, May 27, 1932, accessed August 20, 2022, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/605241085/>.

³⁶¹ Bonnie Burch, “Johnnie Wolridge Winstead, 104, was ‘best window’ to 19th century,” *The Tennessean*, July 24, 1998, accessed February 10, 2023, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/111889362/>.

salary earner.³⁶² A decade earlier, she is listed as a cook as well, but as a part of the Cheek family household, as well as some of the other people in this list.³⁶³

Johnnie likely learned her trade from her father, John Wolridge. He was a “well-respected cook” in the Hard Bargain neighborhood, and he raised a portion of the family’s food in the garden and through hog farming.³⁶⁴ Her obituary relays an anecdote about her relationship with her employer, Mabel Cheek. Their “close bond” was exemplified by a story told by Johnnie Winstead; she travelled “to the fiercely segregated Southern states with the family to find boxwoods. Mrs. Cheek expected Johnnie to accompany her wherever she went on the trip whether it was into the white rest rooms or having a little dinner at the family’s table in a country diner.”³⁶⁵

Other Cheekwood Staff

Less information is known about several other important figures in the Cheekwood household staff, beyond their names and occupations. David Suggs served as a butler for the Cheeks in the 1930s, and he is listed as part of the Cheek household in the 1930 Federal Census. Jim Smith worked in the stables on the property, taking care of the various animals kept by the family, including several horses and mules.

Craftsmen

Phillip Kerrigan Jr.

Philip Kerrigan Jr. was a Nashville native born in 1904. On his 1941 draft card, he is listed as the President and General Manager of Kerrigan Ornamental Iron Works in Nashville,

³⁶² 1940 United States Federal Census. Her husband, Noble Winstead, is listed as a Carpenter who owned his own building construction business,

³⁶³ The other staff listed with the Cheeks at the 1930 Federal Census are Florence Drake and David Suggs. Their relation to the household is listed as “servant.”

³⁶⁴ Bonnie Burch, “Johnnie Wolridge Winstead.”

³⁶⁵ Bonnie Burch, “Johnnie Wolridge Winstead”

Tennessee.³⁶⁶ His business initially specialized in ornamental iron work but pivoted to producing products for the Navy during World War II, including airstrip landing mats. The company also provided “many iron and steel specialties for industry and commerce.”³⁶⁷ Kerrigan made a reputation for himself in his business dealings to hire older workers and refugees, providing them with job training, housing, and advanced funding for necessities like food and clothing. While the Iron Works produced lucrative contracts with industry and military leaders, Kerrigan is known for his ornamental iron work. In his 1958 obituary, it is written that his “skill with wrought iron brought on a renaissance in the use of decorative iron work in the Nashville area.”³⁶⁸

The iron work he is known for includes the decorative features at Cheekwood. He designed and constructed the Wisteria Arbor, as well as some of the interior iron pieces.³⁶⁹ Cheekwood was Kerrigan’s first major commission after founding his company in 1929 and established a long and productive working relationship with Bryant Fleming. The two would go on to work on many other projects after completing the Cheek home.³⁷⁰ Fleming is said to have expanded Kerrigan’s knowledge of and appreciation for traditional European metal work and how natural elements can be emulated in iron.³⁷¹

Historian Jack Hurley is quoted in the National Register nomination for Cheekwood describing Kerrigan’s Cheekwood work as “a virtual catalogue of Kerrigan’s ideas concerning design in iron. The undulating lines and natural motifs of acanthus leaves, vines, and flowers can

³⁶⁶ Kerrigan’s business is also alternately called the Kerrigan Iron Works or The Forges of Kerrigan.

³⁶⁷ “Kerrigan Rites to Be Wednesday,” *The Nashville Banner*, 25 November 25, 1958, accessed September 20, 2022, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/603554984/>.

³⁶⁸ “Kerrigan Rites to Be Wednesday.”

³⁶⁹ West, “Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art.”

³⁷⁰ West, *Nashville Architecture*, 174.

³⁷¹ West, “Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art.”

be seen in the great gates that lead to the inner gardens. Beautiful use of the scrolls and geometrical forms are features in the exterior light fixtures. The banister to the great stairway in the entrance hall use a combination of wrought iron and cast brass to dramatic effect.”³⁷²

Kerrigan also created his own impressive home in the Belle Meade neighborhood, Longacres, a 1947-built Greek Revival home that was occasionally included in architectural tours of the region.³⁷³ Kerrigan received praise by contemporaries and more recent historians for his iron work, specifically at Cheekwood, for his “revival of the ornamental metal arts in the city [Nashville] in particular and in the South in general.”³⁷⁴

Harold V. Hopton

Born in Bristol, England, Harold Hopton learned the plastering trade from his father. He emigrated to the United States around 1911 and started his own plastering firm in Nashville a few years later.³⁷⁵ Hopton had several high-profile commissions in the Nashville area besides Cheekwood, including the Nashville Trust Bank, the Andrew Jackson Hotel, the War Memorial Auditorium, as well as numerous structures on Church Street. Hopton Brothers Plaster Company also had commercial contracts in other states, including the Jefferson County Hospital in Birmingham, Alabama, a State Penitentiary in Ashland, Kentucky, and the Fox Theatre in Atlanta, Georgia.³⁷⁶

³⁷² West, “Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art” 15.

³⁷³ ““Kerrigan Rites to Be Wednesday.”

³⁷⁴ West, “Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art.”

³⁷⁵ “H.V. Hopton Services Held at Woodlawn,” *The Tennessean* 21 August 21, 1981, accessed February 12, 2023, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/112220810/>.

³⁷⁶ “Hopton v. United States Gypsum Co., 1942,” accessed February 20, 2023, <https://casetext.com/case/hopton-v-united-states-gypsum-co>.

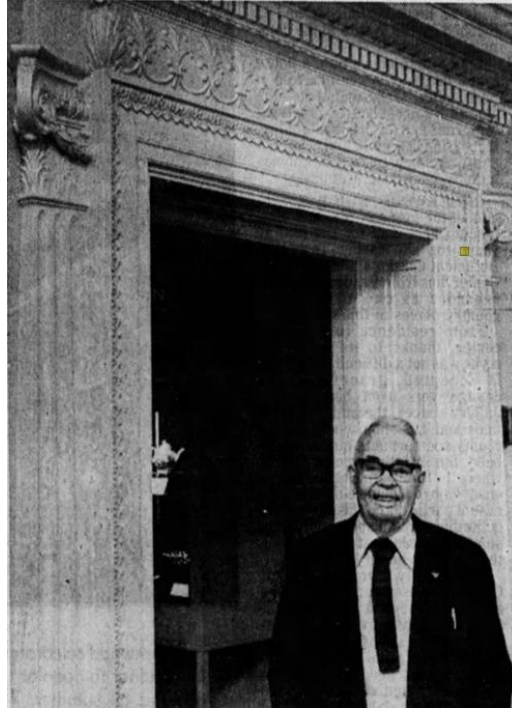


Figure 5.9. Harold Hopton at Cheekwood. *Tennessean* article, 1979.

Just two years before he died, Hopton gave an interview at Cheekwood to *The Tennessean* discussing his labor in the home. The master plasterer and contractor, listed as one of the last surviving skilled craftsmen who worked on the Cheek home, stated that it “was a beautiful job. I’m proud of it.”³⁷⁷ Hopton also notes in this article that he and half a dozen workmen were responsible for the elaborate plaster work, and that he and all of his workers “had served their apprenticeships and were journeyman plasterers,” and that they “spent some 18 months on the job which called for the plastering of curved walls and stairwell ellipses as well as creating the ornamental moldings and over-door decoration.”³⁷⁸

Leo Barthol

Leo Barthol of Memphis, Tennessee, led the carpenters responsible for the woodwork in Cheekwood.³⁷⁹ He learned the trade from his father, a Polish native who worked constructing

³⁷⁷ Clara Hieronymus, “Cheekwood’s 50 Years: Growing Again,” *The Tennessean*, June 3, 1979.

³⁷⁸ Hieronymus, “Cheekwood’s 50 Years: Growing Again.”

³⁷⁹ West, “Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art,” 15.

railcars. He left school in his sophomore year of high school to work for John C. Dix, a wagon body and works shop. He was known mostly for architectural carvings, cabinetry, and furniture; he also built his own home in Memphis. Barthol additionally crafted a wide variety of objects over the course of his career, including a dance floor, harpsicords, religious items including an altar, baptismal font, and communion rail, a boat, and a coffin.³⁸⁰

It is unclear how Barthol received the commission to create the elaborate woodwork from the Cheeks, but Barthol's connection to Cheekwood and his craftsmanship did not end when the home was completed in 1932. In 1990, Beth Cunningham, Cheekwood Registrar, contacted Leo Barthol to inquire about his contributions to the Cheekwood estate. There was also some correspondence between Barthol and Cunningham regarding the restoration of an eagle carved by Barthol during the initial building of Cheekwood. In the handwritten letter from Barthol dated July 27, 1990, he stated "I will be happy to restore the old eagle. I can give you an estimate when I see the bird."³⁸¹ The status of the requested restoration is unknown.

The Obscured Story of Labor

There are two historic properties in this collection of case studies which are especially instructive for contemporary visitors learning about the men and women whose labor created and sustained the domestic spaces of powerful families: Cheekwood and Two Rivers Mansion. Both institutions illustrate the role of labor and craftsmanship at different points in Nashville's history. Both sites provide an informative contrast to the Sadie Ford and Carothers family homes which were constructed and operated with the labor of the residents themselves as well as their

³⁸⁰ Alice Fulbright, "Every Piece of Wood Contains Image," *The Commercial Appeal*, April 11, 1977, accessed September 22, 2022, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/771673300/>.

³⁸¹ Cheekwood Archives. Correspondence between Leo Barthol and Beth Cunningham, July-August 1990.

extended families. All four sites illustrate the varied and complex lives of the individuals who created the contemporary landscape of Middle Tennessee.

Two Rivers, the antebellum home of the McGavocks, relied on enslaved labor to construct the home, as well as work the land during the property's time as an economically viable agricultural operation. In contrast Cheekwood is an early twentieth century property that utilized paid labor to construct and maintain the home and grounds. Comparing these two historic properties provides the opportunity to bring the stories of labor to the forefront, highlighting the craftsmen responsible for these impressive estates. It also reveals how two generations of individuals living in Middle Tennessee transitioned from an economic system based on the institution of slavery to one characterized by wage labor. In this way the preservation and interpretation of domestic spaces illustrates the larger social systems through which they were produced.

In domestic labor, the delineation of personal and professional relationships is obscured by the asymmetrical interactions between employer and employee. Domestic labor also created an unusual point of contact in a society segregated by race. The Cheeks employed both black and white skilled laborers in the implementation of Bryant Fleming's vision. They had longstanding working relationships with various black domestic staff, including a cook, butler, and nanny. These individuals were paid for their labor, and several were listed as residing in the home in the Federal Census for 1930 and 1940. The antebellum labor at Two Rivers, in contrast, consisted almost entirely of black enslaved workers. These individuals remain largely unknown to history. William Harding, one of the first owners of the property, enslaved more than seventy people at the time of his death. Unfortunately, little is known about them other than the scant information provided in the inventory of Harding's property after he died. The Harding-McGavock time at

Two Rivers straddles the Civil War, Emancipation, and the transition to wage labor. That process also featured long-standing relationships that blended domestic and professional roles. Harding's great-grandson, Spence McGavock, who owned the home in the early twentieth century, identified several staff in his will: Anna Aldrich, Emma Woods, John Davis and his wife Eva Davis. Anna Aldrich and Emma Woods, two black women, were also identified as residing at Two Rivers in Census data for the home in 1930. Anna and Emma were paid for their labor, both in wages and lodging at the home.

Both institutions are working to refocus their interpretation on labor. Two Rivers lacks full-time professional staff or abundant resources. Public interpretation of the site is limited to events and tours during the summer months. The effort to create a more inclusive interpretation consists mostly of adding anecdotes to the tour script about the lives of individuals who worked at the property. At Cheekwood, a more established institution, the institutional pivot to focus on labor is more robust. The museum is currently in the process of incorporating the story of labor into its ongoing interpretation of the site.

Cheekwood's current interpretation of the domestic staff and workmen who built and maintained the home in the early twentieth century consists of several didactic panels located on the first floor of the home. These panels describe several of the people responsible for running the home, including people mentioned in the previous section. These workers include the Drakes, Malcolm Jackson, and Johnnie Winstead. Photographs are included within each of the panels, and they are in one of the areas of the home that would have been utilized by several of these workers during their daily tasks at Cheekwood.



Figures 5.10 and 5.11. Interpretive panels about the domestic staff who worked at Cheekwood. Photograph taken by author, 2021.

There is an additional panel titled “The Staff at Cheekwood” and describes the labor needs of an estate like Cheekwood, indicating that homes like this one would have typically employed, including a “butler, valet, housekeeper, cook and maids.” Depending on the family, nannies may have been needed, as well as groundskeepers, gardeners, and chauffeurs. The panel also includes an explanation of the physical space used inside grand estate homes to perform their duties, while referencing a small extant component that remains from Cheekwood’s time as a private home:

To efficiently run a household like Cheekwood, it was important to have specific spaces for staff who worked behind the scenes. This bannister, which is original to this location, is now all that remains of the three-floor staff staircase that ran from the Ground Floor to the Second Floor. The stairs began on the Ground Floor where a service entrance, a single-car garage, mechanical room, two laundry rooms, and the valet’s and butler’s offices were located. On the First Floor, the stairs provided access to a hallway outside of the kitchen, food storage areas, and a vault where china, crystal, and silver were kept. At the top of the stairs on the Second Floor, were bedrooms for maids, bathrooms, and a sewing room. The staircase was removed during renovation work in the 1990s.

There is currently no documentation about the craftsmen whose labor constructed the home in 1929 on the website for Cheekwood. Bryant Fleming is discussed; his biography and several photographs are available on the website. The desire of Cheekwood’s executive

leadership is to include the stories of the men and women responsible for creating and running Cheekwood in the larger interpretive plan.

Institutional History: Cheekwood's Transition from Personal Home to Public Institution

Leslie Cheek did not get to experience much of the Country Place Era Estate he had built for himself and his family; he died just three years after the Cheeks moved into the home, on October 10, 1935. Mrs. Wood, Mabel's mother, who lived in the home with the family, died in 1940. Mabel Cheek followed her husband in death a decade after his passing, dying on February 16, 1946. These events led to the home being left to Huldah Cheek Sharp and her husband Walter, while the contents of the home went chiefly to Leslie Jr.

While in the private ownership of the Sharps, visitation increased; Walter would invite some of his Vanderbilt art history students to see the home and Huldah would support charitable causes through her use of the property.³⁸² By the 1950s, however, the maintenance and upkeep on the home proved to be too much for the Sharps, and they decided to turn the estate into a community institution. In 1957, they began the process of gifting the home in the pursuit of creating a community amenity where the house, garden sculptures, and grounds would be open to the public "as a center for the study and appreciation of art and horticulture."³⁸³

The Sharp's gift of the grand estate was joined with financial support from several local cultural organizations like the Horticultural Society of Middle Tennessee and the Nashville Exchange Club. The Nashville Museum of Art had recently disbanded and offered their permanent collection and the proceeds from the sale of their building on West End Avenue as a generous endowment for funding the creation of the new institution. It was determined that

³⁸² Jones and Jones, *Cheekwood*, 53. Huldah was a member of the Nashville Humane Society and would use the home to facilitate her activism.

³⁸³ Jones and Jones, *Cheekwood*, 53.

\$350,000 would be necessary to establish the organization and provide operating expenses for the first three years.³⁸⁴ The goal was to “establish the new primary destination for visual arts in Nashville” with this new institution.³⁸⁵ These events led to the formation of the Tennessee Botanical Garden and Fine Arts Center which opened to the public on May 31, 1960.

The art collection held by Cheekwood is not solely the detritus of the defunct Nashville Museum of Art’s collection. The Cheeks were also avid collectors of artwork. During their travels, they amassed a number of works, numbering in the hundreds, including fine art and antiquities. The Sharps donated many objects after the establishment of the Tennessee Botanical Garden and Fine Arts Center including silver and glass pieces, furniture, and ceramics.³⁸⁶ In its first few years as a public organization, this cultural institution mounted various exhibitions and shows, highlighting French tapestries, Tennessee painters, Renaissance art, photography, and ceramics, to name a few.³⁸⁷ In 1992, more than thirty years after opening to the public as Tennessee Botanical Garden and Fine Arts Center, the site changed its name to Cheekwood Botanical Garden and Museum of Art.

The Cheekwood Estate serves its community with multiple events throughout the year, drawing in the largest number of visitors per year between all of the properties examined in this dissertation. The question persists: how does the property relay the story of the people who lived and worked here? Hugh Howard, architectural historian and author, notes that Cheekwood is important for people of today to visit and understand its history: “I think there are all kinds of lessons about class, about economics, about family, about architecture, and I think that you just

³⁸⁴ Jones and Jones, *Cheekwood*, 53.

³⁸⁵ Cheekwood Estate & Gardens, “History of Cheekwood.”

³⁸⁶ Jones and Jones, *Cheekwood*, 95. Many of the items donated by the Sharps were in the original Cheek family collection, which was amassed chiefly in the 1920s and 1930s.

³⁸⁷ Jones and Jones, *Cheekwood*, 95.

can't underestimate what can be learned, even by osmosis and walking through a house like this. Maybe it's things we like, maybe it's the things we don't like; but the way people used to live can inform us in the way we want to live our lives."³⁸⁸ Cheekwood, with a more inclusive interpretive plan that brings domestic staff and craftsmen into the narrative of the home and grounds, can serve as a wonderful example of telling a fuller story at a historic property.

Cheekwood is currently working to identify and interpret a larger, more inclusive narrative of the site and its role in the social history of Middle Tennessee. However, Cheekwood shares with the other case studies the need to identify and interpret a larger, more inclusive narrative, especially for the mostly white craftspeople who carried out the initial work and then the mostly black domestic staff who made the estate function as designed for the first thirty years of its history.

³⁸⁸ *Cheekwood: A Masterpiece by Man & Nature.*

CONCLUSION

Historic house museums are far from dead; in fact, they can be exciting places for dialogue in communities. My dissertation seeks to demonstrate the vitality of historic house museums for communities, as well as the inherent need for interpretation at these sites in order to truly unlock their potential as community assets. The needs of these house museums and the communities in which they are located are ever-changing and fluid. There is no doubt that people in the community want and need historic house museums.

What is the future of historic house museums? The future of historic house museums is largely contingent on what the community envisions for it. Those who are stewards of these properties also serve an important function of ensuring the utility of the space for the public. Community engagement is the key. Taking the fuller story approach to interpretation and community engagement is paramount to having historic house museums as a vital component to a neighborhood, town, or city. Leadership at cultural institutions needs to be on board to embrace new directions for their properties and working in tandem with the public to embrace and interpret the story on the landscape.

The issues confronting contemporary museums will evolve over the next three decades. Important questions include: Why should the public care about historic collections? What stories can they tell? Are cultural institutions telling the whole story? What can we do as museum professionals and public historians to facilitate the learning process for our communities? Why do museums matter? How can we continue to make them matter? These questions, and many others, will guide museum programming, planning, interpretation, and management in the foreseeable future. Museums and their staff are tasked with an awesome responsibility; they are

the keepers of the past. The past is the stuff left behind by previous generations, both tangible and intangible. We have art, oral histories, documents, gardens, architecture, and an innumerable amount of objects to use as tools to interpret and share the past. We need to be good stewards of the history entrusted to us. We need to tell all the stories on the landscape. We owe that to those who came before us, and those who will come after us.

The John Henry Carothers House will hopefully serve its new community, built on the land of the former Carothers farmstead, as an opportunity for the public to learn about the African American farming experience in Williamson County during the early twentieth century. The John Henry Carothers House also provides a unique interpretative opportunity to identify an accumulation of generational wealth that occurred during the twentieth century for some black families engaged in small-scale farming. The familial home of generations of the Carothers family will now help visitors gain a greater understanding of the historic landscape of the twentieth century African American farmer, and how it has drastically changed over the last century, nearly disappearing as the surrounding land is subsumed by development and construction.

The Burwell-Dinkins-Anderson Historic House Museum in Selma, Alabama, serves as a disruption in the narrative of the poor black southerner, having housed doctors, educators, musicians, and veterans during the last century. The Burwell-Dinkins House advances many historical narratives. The property can tell the stories of prosperous African American professionals making their way in a segregated south, the dramatic events leading to passage of the Voting Rights Act, and the everyday lives of people living through an era when technological change transformed domestic life. It also reveals information about architectural preferences and

building techniques common to the American South in the era between the Civil War and World War II.

The Sadie Ford Heritage Farm and Cultural Art Center provides its surrounding community with a unique opportunity to experience rural farm life in Lebanon, Tennessee, and provides a window into the area in the decades between 1920-1950 as urbanism has encroached on the landscape. The Carothers property and Sadie Ford provide interesting dialogue when considering the viability of vernacular historic house museums in the Middle Tennessee region. The two burgeoning house museums, both still under development, share many similarities in significance and interpretation. At the same time, contrasting the spaces reveals the dynamic of *de jure* segregation in mid-twentieth century. The significant similarities between the properties draw the difference in race between the families who lived in the homes into sharper perspective.

Two Rivers Mansion is the only antebellum property utilized in this dissertation, providing an occasion to discuss the enslaved and their experiences in the Nashville region. Just like with Carothers and Sadie Ford, an opportunity arises to compare Two Rivers Mansion and Cheekwood when examining the concept and interpretation of labor on either side of the Civil War. Cheekwood, built after the turn of the twentieth century, nonetheless relied on skilled labor to construct and maintain the home. Two Rivers Mansion, however, is firmly situated in the challenging historical conversation regarding enslaved labor.

Those who constructed the mansion in Donelson, Tennessee, were not afforded an opportunity to choose employment, instead they were bought and sold on the whims of their white owners. The stories of the enslaved and their labor have largely been obscured in the historical interpretive narrative. By using this case study, and researching the untold story at Two Rivers Mansion, the goal is to bring their history and stories to a larger audience. By allowing

the public the opportunity to learn about the men and women who labored at this property, there can be an increased dynamism at this historic house museum.

The final case study, Cheekwood Estate and Gardens, also allows for a discussion of labor, but in the era of the Great Depression, as well as a house museum that is situated as an impressive public amenity. Cheekwood focuses on the obscured story of labor, moving beyond the Cheeks to fulfill a later narrative of labor on the property. It begins with the background of the Cheek family and their abrupt transition from affluent Nashville business leaders to opulent wealth on the eve of the Great Depression. After deciding to invest a portion of their windfall in a grand estate, the Cheeks engaged others in the work of creating and operating the property that still bears their name. The case study follows the progression of labor beginning with the design professionals like Bryant Fleming who envisioned the country place estate.

The evaluation moves on to the craftsmen who actually built Cheekwood in the midst of the Great Depression. Those workers were followed by the domestic staff, gardening staff, and others who operated the grand estate. The Cheekwood chapter looks at what is known of those individuals whose lives and work were segregated by race, gender, and occupation. Finally, this chapter evaluates Cheekwood's institutional history and the transition from a private residence to public institution. The analysis reveals that even the most well-resourced institutions must continuously reevaluate the ways in which they interpret and elucidate a shared past.

Catherine Howett's chapter "Grounds for Interpretation: Landscape Context of Historic House Museums" in Donnelly's *Interpreting Historic House Museums* lends the question: "What landscape do you as an institution present to the public?" The cultural and historical landscape is complex and not linear, so how do sites tell a full story of the historical narrative? Another important question to ask when approaching these cultural institutions: "who is making the

decision on the landscape?"; this question can include the physical landscape, as in "what is physically here for people to see and understand the story through interpretation?", as well as the unseen story and how to share the historical narrative.

House museums are never "one size fits all." As I have demonstrated in these five case studies, the historic house museum can present in a variety of ways, both physically, structurally, and through its interpretation of the history of the home. These sites vary in physical form, and well as organizational structure; some are nonprofits, some are under the ownership of private foundations, others are owned by various governmental agencies. These are simply different models of how historic house museums can present to the public.

Why do these properties matter? Why should the public care to see them preserved or to visit them at all? What does this mean for interpretation? These historic house museums and the landscapes upon which they sit are vital to the greater understanding of the past. The case studies I chose are not only the homes of the elite upper class, but several of them are vernacular buildings that shine the light on how other families lived.

The Cheeks of Cheekwood and the McGavocks and Hardings of Two Rivers Mansion were certainly wealthy elites, but the Ford Family of the Sadie Ford Farm and the Carothers family of the John Carothers House were not. The Carothers and Ford families farmed the land they lived on, creating an indelible mark on the landscape, and through the preservation and interpretation of their homes, the public can begin to find a deeper understanding of the ups and downs of early twentieth century farming life in Middle Tennessee. Hopefully, through these case studies, I have demonstrated the need for a larger story around historic house museums, interpretation, and community engagement.

The built environment is integral to telling the fuller story of a place. Through the extant buildings on a property, history can be revealed. It is also important to recognize the spaces that are not visible in a landscape. These can be missing for many reasons, including neglect or active removal. Examining the landscape in its entirety allows historians to interpret the fuller story of a place, including the figures that may have typically been left out or eliminated from the narrative. Their stories can be told in a way that they may not have been able to in the past, but as historic house museums continue to research everyone present in a home's history, the people whose stories have historically been silent are now being given more space in which to be understood and interpreted in the larger narrative.

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APPENDIX
BURWELL-DINKINS COLLECTION INVENTORY

Burwell Dinkins Collections Inventory

This report presents the inventory findings of the Burwell-Dinkins-Anderson House in Selma, Alabama. Dr. Carroll Van West and I went through the home on February 8th and 9th, 2020, documenting the furniture and other notable objects. Using the methods of photography and notetaking, we compiled an inventory of significant pieces in the house. This completed inventory will provide the Dinkins family with a holistic assessment of important objects located inside. Also, because this significant home is intended to become a historic house museum, this inventory can guide interpretation of the home by highlighting important artifacts.

Objects in the Burwell Dinkins Inventory, By Room and Floor

First Floor

Parlor (101)

Family Piano and stool	c. 1890-1900
Victorian Settee Sofa	c. 1890
Victorian Loveseat	c. 1890
Accent Table	c. 1890
Wood Rocker with cushion	c. 1890



Family Piano and stool c. 1890-1900



Victorian Settee Sofa c.1890



Victorian Loveseat c. 1890



Accent Table c. 1890



Wood Rocker with cushion c. 1890

Music Room/Library (102)

Starr Baby Grand teaching piano with bench	
Bentwood chairs (6)	c. 1920
Large Table with drawer	c. 1900
End Table	c. 1890
Eastlake chairs (2)	c. 1890
Globe Wernicke Co. bookcase grade 299	
Roll-top Desk	c. 1900
Legal chair	



Starr Baby Grand teaching piano with bench



Bentwood chairs (6) c. 1920



Large Table with drawer c. 1900



Eastlake chairs (2) c. 1890



Globe Wernicke Co. bookcase grade 299 (with detail)



Roll-top Desk c. 1900



Legal chair

Formal Dining Room (103)

Victorian sideboard	c. 1890
China cabinet with mirror	c. 1900
Tall china cabinet with shelf	c. 1900
Craftsman end table/chair with foldable back	c. 1900-1910
Craftsman-era dining chairs (9)	
Eastlake chair	c. 1890
Round dining table with leaf	c. 1890
Oak chair	c. 1900 (?)



Victorian sideboard



China cabinet with mirror



Tall china cabinet with shelf



Craftsman end table/chair with foldable back



Craftsman-era dining chairs (9)



Eastlake chair



Oak chair

Living Room (106)

China cabinet	c. 1900-1910
Victorian armchair	c. 1900
Eastlake style small table	c. 1890
Classical style end table	c. 1890
Hall tree	c. 1890
Bookcase with Encyclopedia Britannica set inside	c. 1910
Shelf unit with mirror	c. 1900
Shelf unit	c. 1900
Exotic armchair	c. 1950
Leather wooden chair	c. 1900
Woman's rocker chair	c. 1890



China cabinet



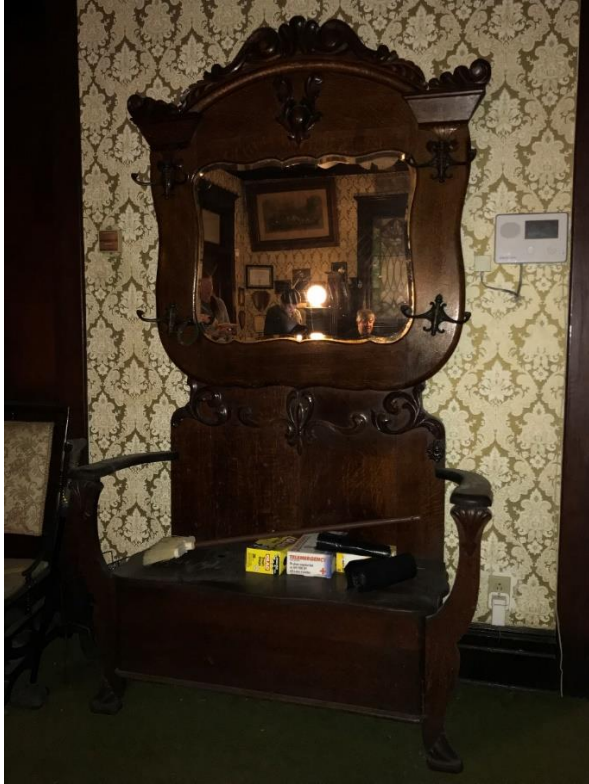
Victorian armchair



Eastlake style small table



Classical style end table



Hall tree



From L to R: Shelf unit, Shelf unit with mirror, Bookcase with Encyclopedia Britannica set inside



Exotic armchair



Leather wooden chair



Woman's rocker chair

Hallway (107)

Globe Wernicke Co. sectional bookcase pattern 109	
Craftsman-style bookcase (?)	
Eastlake-style hall tree	
Four shelf wooden bookcase	c. 1930
Clothes chest	c. 1920
Jelly chest	
"Cary Safe Co" metal safe	



Craftsman-style bookcase



Eastlake-style hall tree



Four shelf wooden bookcase



Clothes chest



"Cary Safe Co" metal safe

Rear Porch (108)

Classical sideboard	c. 1910
Table with drawer	c. 1920
Bowed chest of drawers	c. 1950-1960
Morris chair black leather	c. 1910
Five shelf bookcase	c. 1930



Classical sideboard



Table with drawer



Bowed chest of drawers



Morris chair black leather

Master Bedroom (109)

Desk/bookcase	c. 1890-1900
Eastlake basin with mirror	c. 1890s
Eastlake dresser with mirror	c. 1890s
Cedar clothes chest	c. 1950
Leather wooden chair	c. 1900



Desk/bookcase



Eastlake basin with mirror



Eastlake dresser with mirror



Cedar clothes chest

Second Floor

Bedroom over Small Parlor (201)

Victorian wood bed (headboard/ footboard)	c. 1890
Small Victorian table	c. 1890
Wooden single plat chair (2)	early 20th century
Matching chest of drawers with mirror	c. 1890
Chest of drawers/Chiffarobe with mirror	c. 1900
Victorian washstand	c. 1890
Mantle mirror (veneered)	c. 1910



Victorian wood bed (headboard/ footboard)



Small Victorian table



Wooden single plat chair (2)



Matching chest of drawers with mirror



Chest of drawers/Chiffarobe with mirror



Victorian washstand



Mantle mirror (veneered)

Bathroom (202)

Midcentury Modern kitchen shelving unit	
Dresser with mirror (painted)	c. 1890
Wicker clothes bin	c. 1930
Wooden chair (painted)	c. 1900



Midcentury Modern kitchen shelving unit



Dresser with mirror (painted)



Wicker clothes bin



Wooden chair (painted)

Back Bedroom over Dining Room (203)

Eastlake-style bed	c. 1890
Eastlake-style chiffarobe	c. 1890
Eastlake-style dresser	c. 1890
Eastlake-style wash table	c. 1890
"Lane" wood hope chest	c. 1950
Piano bench (repaired)	c. 1900
Metal coal bin	c. 1900
Victorian end table	c. 1890
Victorian-style writing desk/bookcase	c. 1930
Midcentury Modern-style contemporary desk	c. 1960



Eastlake-style bed



Eastlake-style chifforobe



Eastlake-style dresser



Eastlake-style wash table



“Lane” wood hope chest



Piano bench (repaired)



Metal coal bin



Victorian end table



Victorian-style writing desk/bookcase



Midcentury Modern-style contemporary desk

Hallway (204)

Handmade three shelf wooden bookcase	c. 1930
Handmade Mission-style four shelf bookcase	c. 1920
Small Mission-style three shelf bookcase	c. 1920-1930
Handmade five shelf bookcase	c. 1920
Handmade plywood bookcase with filing shelf	c. 1920
Plantation desk	c. 1860
Ladderback chair with horsehair seat	19th century
Two door medical cabinet (painted)	c. 1900
Storage chest (painted)	c. 19th century
Victrola with storage cabinet	1904
Storage chest	c. 19th century
Wooden magazine table	c. 1910
Metal plant stand	c. 1910
Handmade chest	19th century



Handmade three shelf wooden bookcase



Handmade Mission-style four shelf bookcase



Small Mission-style three shelf bookcase



Handmade five shelf bookcase



Handmade plywood bookcase with filing shelf



Plantation desk



Ladderback chair with horsehair seat



Two door medical cabinet (painted)



Storage chest (painted)



Victrola with storage cabinet



Storage chest



Wooden magazine table



Metal plant stand

Bedroom over Living Room (205)

"Viko Furniture" Midcentury chair	
End table with shelf	c. 1950
Victorian rocker (repaired seat)	c. 1900
Victorian chair	c. 1900
Wooden rocker	c. 1920
Dresser with mirror	c. 1900
Wicker end table (painted)	c. 1930
Low Victorian rocker	c. 1900
Handmade wood table	19th century
Dressing table with mirror	c. 1880-1890
Chest of drawers	c. 1880-1890
Milk glass lamp	c. 1910
Homemade coat rack	c. 1930
Wooden plant stand	c. 1900
Handmade plant stand	c. 1930



End table with shelf



Victorian rocker (repaired seat)



Victorian chair



Wooden rocker



Dresser with mirror



Wicker end table (painted)



Low Victorian rocker



Handmade wood table



Dressing table with mirror



Chest of drawers and Homemade coat rack



Milk glass lamp



Wooden plant stand

Room over Kitchen [Pink Room] (206)

Victorian dining chair (round cane seat with turned balusters and splat)	c. 1890-1900
Victorian dining chair (square cane seat)	c. 1890-1900
Craftsman-style child's chair (square cane seat)	c. 1900
Pine chest	mid-20th century
Cedar chest	c. 1930
Classical-style wooden end table	c. 1920
Victorian bed (disassembled)	c. 1890
Chiffarobe (Classicism/Victorian)	c. 1880-1900
Four shelf Mission-style bookcase	c. 1920
"Cody Musical Creations" music box	c. 1910
Woman's writing desk	
Small oak table with turned legs	c. 1900
Large table with ball and claw feet	c. 1890
Dresser with mirror (bowed front)	



Victorian dining chair (round cane seat with turned balusters and splat)



Victorian dining chair (square cane seat)



Craftsman-style child's chair (square cane seat)



Pine chest and Cedar chest



Classical-style wooden end table



Victorian bed (disassembled)



Chifferobe (Classicism/Victorian)



Four shelf Mission-style bookcase



Woman's writing desk and "Cody Musical Creations" music box



Small oak table with turned legs



Large table with ball and claw feet



Dresser with mirror (bowed front)

Closet (207)

Trunk	19th century
Framed mirror (broken)	



Trunk with Framed mirror (broken) on top