

The Preservation of a Historic Black Farm: Matt Gardner Homestead in Giles
County, Tennessee.

By

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Abstract

The history of the rural South has been slow to change over the years. The narrative is dominated by White plantation owners and farmers. African Americans are featured in the narrative as either enslaved or sharecroppers. Rarely will the story of a Black landowning family be featured in the history of Southern farms. The goal of this thesis is to highlight the need for Black farm studies and why Black rural landscapes matter in the history of the South.

The project focuses on The Matt Gardner Homestead in Giles County, Tennessee. It is a prime example of a Black landowning farming family that supported an entire community. Studying the Gardner farm shows the relationship between landowning African Americans and those who rented their land. Each member of the Gardner family helps tell what life was like for a Black landowning farming family. This case study on the Gardner family will add to the history of Black landowners and farmers in the South, and hopefully provide a template for other case studies on Black rural landscapes.

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Introduction: The Need for Black Farm Studies

The stories of Black farmers and landowners are too often excluded from the history of the rural South. The understanding of Southern history is thus diminished. This thesis addresses the history and places associated with the Gardner family of Dixon Town, Giles County, Tennessee. The family established an African American enclave outside Elkton, near the Alabama border. The patriarch and matriarch of the Gardner family were Reverend Mat and Henrietta Gardner.¹ Mat Gardner was a former slave who owned and operated a 300-acre farm which included a store that sold goods to his neighbors. In addition to farming, he was a travelling minister and provided work or loans for those who needed it. The Gardner family is just one example of how these middle-class Black landowners supported a community as well as their own families. Telling the story of the Gardner family by preserving the landscape of the Matt Gardner Homestead highlights important chapters in the history of the rural South.²

Preserving the land and buildings that the Gardner family-owned is crucial. Because Black landscapes are not as visible in the rural South as they might be in the urban cities of the South. Walter Hood and Grace Mitchell Tada speak to the significance of these places in *Black Landscapes Matter*, a collection of case studies and narratives. The collection of essays argues that one can does not look at the American landscape and

¹ There are two different spellings used for Mat Gardner: Mat or Matt. His headstone inscription is Rev Mat Gardner; thus, I use Mat for the thesis. Primary sources indicate that the spellings were interchanged. The Gardner store ledger is a prime example where it contains both Mat Gardner and Matt Gardner.

² Matt Gardner Homestead Museum (MGHM) will continue to use the spelling Matt as it is the official name for the museum.

not see Black landscapes because the lives of African Americans are deeply ingrained in the country's history. The history and landscapes are erased over time; Hood and Tada argue that these landscapes need to be "layered in their physical construction, becoming a collage of all the lives that have been lived in a place."³ Sarah Daleiden, in her contribution to the book on the Beerline Trail in Milwaukee, demonstrates how preserving Black landscapes can help communities grow and create shared spaces where the community can gather.⁴ Daleiden emphasizes that Black landscapes can help bring the community together and challenge race dynamics when they are turned into public spaces that all can use. Hood and Tada's book is a starting point for understanding why Black landscapes need to be preserved. The Gardner Homestead is an early example of that preservation, effort, having been listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) in 1995. The Matt Gardner Homestead Museum as a public history site, opened about 15 years later. It tells the story of Black farmers and landowners as part of the rural Black landscape.

At the time of the property's National Register nomination, there was little in the historical literature that addressed Black farms in the South. Carroll Van West had identified the presence of a half-dozen Black-owned Tennessee Century Farms in his book, *Tennessee Agriculture: A Century Farms Perspective*.⁵ Vanderbilt University professor Donald Winters focused on pre-1860 Tennessee farms in his authoritative book,

³ Walter Hood and Grace Mitchell Tada, *Black Landscapes Matter* (University of Virginia Press, 2020), 46.

⁴ Ibid, 153.

⁵ Carroll Van West, *Tennessee Agriculture: A Century Farms Perspective* (Nashville; Tennessee Department of Agriculture, 1987).

Tennessee Farming, Tennessee Farmers: Antebellum Agriculture in the Upper South.⁶ In 1995, the year of the nomination, Southern historian Jack Kirby focused on the ordinary lives of rural Southerners from 1920-1960 in his book *Rural Worlds Lost*. Kirby argues that the modernization of the South and agriculture collapsed rural life for small Southern farmers, especially African American farmers.⁷

Leon Litwack identified the problems Black farmers faced in the post Reconstruction era to the early twentieth century in his 1998 book, *Trouble in Mind*. Litwack used primary sources to tell the story of what ordinary day-to-day life was for a Black person in the South. Black Southerners not only faced racial discrimination from the government but also from the Whites that lived around them. The racial prejudice in the South caused Black southerners to constantly be aware of their surroundings, ensuring they did not come off as a threat to the White citizens. Retaliation and violence against African Americans were common and anything a White citizen deemed out of line could set off a White mob. Lynchings and the burning of homes or churches were among the common forms of violence that White mobs used to terrorize the lives of African Americans in the South. Houses, farms, and churches could be burned just because they were meeting places for African Americans, and these meetings could lead to “lawless behavior” by the Black citizens.⁸

⁶Donald L. Winters, *Tennessee Farming, Tennessee Farmers: Antebellum Agriculture in the Upper South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 58.

⁷ Jack Temple Kirby, *Rural Worlds Lost: The American South 1920-1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1995), 27.

⁸ Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006 [1998]), 282.

Litwack also looked at how such White violence could be directed at Black landowners. A successful Black tenant farmer was shot and killed near Savannah, Tennessee, because he successfully grew cotton on his land. Ben Pettigrew was hauling cotton into town with his daughters when he was shot and killed. His daughters were hung, and the white men set the cotton on fire.⁹ Attacking successful Black citizens were common throughout the rural South, and they often paid the price of their success with their lives or loss of property like homes, business, schools, or churches.

In the new century, several key studies have emerged to shape the context and narrative of this thesis. Bruce Reynolds, an economist for the USDA, published an extensive timeline on the history of Black farmers in 2002. The report was likely written as response to the settlement in the *Pigford v. Glickman* case, a class action suit against the USDA that ended in 2000. Reynolds created a comprehensive timeline spanning from 1865-2000. The timeline is an excellent source as it details how over time, the lives of Black farmers and those living in the surrounding communities were affected by discrimination from the government.¹⁰ The role of Co-ops in the lives of Black farmers is a common theme in this timeline, and this emphasis gets at a central theme in the historiography of Black farming: co-ops and other organizations played vital supporting roles in Black farming communities. Without these organizations, most farming communities could not stay organized and failed due to the common discrimination in agriculture policy.

⁹ Litwack, 157.

¹⁰ Bruce J. Reynolds, *Black Farmers in America, 1865-2000: The Pursuit of Independent Farming and the Role of Cooperatives* (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture, Rural Business-Cooperative Service, 2002), 16.

The role of government organizations played a huge role in the discrimination against Black farmers and landowners. First came Jim Crow laws, then the New Deal policy, and last was the discrimination from and within the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Pete Daniel, whose early work documented the impact of peonage and tenancy on Black and White southern farmers, documented federal discrimination in his 2015 book *Dispossession*. Daniel analyzed the background of *Pigford v. Glickman*, a key U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1999. The *Pigford v. Glickman* case not only proved federal discrimination against Black farmers, but it also shed light on discrimination against all minorities in the agriculture industry.¹¹ Daniel argued that the USDA knew about the discrimination but did not act on it as the discrimination was happening at a local level behind closed doors. USDA officials outright denied loans to Black farmers, or they would accept the paperwork and then never act on it. These complications made many Black farmers weary of the USDA or any help from the government.

Daniel's important study came a year after the path-breaking set of essays and case studies on Black farming in Debra Reid's *Beyond Forty Acres and a Mule*.¹² The volume's case studies are important to the historiography of African American farming in the South because they show that not all the farmers were renting and sharecropping the land. These case studies show examples of vibrant communities that flourished due to the support of co-ops and a region's Black-centered organizations. The case study of James E. Youngblood is crucial to understanding how to tell the story of Mat Gardner and his

¹¹ Pete Daniel, *Dispossession: Discrimination against African American Farmers in the Age of Civil Rights* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 259.

¹² Debra Ann Reid and Evan P. Bennett, *Beyond Forty Acres and a Mule: African American Landowning Families since Reconstruction* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014), 272.

family. James Youngblood entered a contract with J.H. and Octavia Heidleberge in 1894 to purchase his first 40 acres of land in Limestone County, Texas.¹³ Around the same time, Mat Gardner in Tennessee was paying off a contract for land in Elkton. The Youngblood case study and others from Reid's book are a way to see what other Black farmers were experiencing in the South when Mat Gardner was farming in Tennessee. They can also be used to show the differences and similarities Black families of different social classes faced when farming in the South.

A study of the Gardner family adds to this recent trend in southern historiography and understanding of African American farmers in the rural South. Common themes found in these earlier studies this historiography touch on events and people in the Gardner family. The connection the Gardner family had with the church played an important part in their lives because Mat Gardner and his son Raymond Gardner were both preachers at several churches. Also, several sons-in-law were preachers, and even a few of Mat and Henrietta's grandchildren became preachers. All the members of the Gardner family, regardless of serving as a preacher, regularly attended church.

¹³ Reid & Bennett, 69.

The Gardner's were also a middle-class family, which allowed them to provide for the community of Dixon Town. This wealth, however, also drew the attention of the Ku Klux Klan, whose members attacked the farm on at least two different occasions. The women of the Gardner family also are influential, as reflected in the work of Rebecca Sharpless in her studies on Texas farming families.¹⁴ Susan Eddings (Gardner), eventually took over the family farm when Mat and Ritta could no longer run it themselves. Here is both a local place but also a place that sheds light on the Black farming experience in the rural South from 1870 to the twenty-first century.

¹⁴ Rebecca Sharpless, *Fertile Ground, Narrow Choices: Women on Texas Cotton Farms, 1900-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

Chapter One

Mat Gardner: Family and Farming in Middle Tennessee

When discussing the topic of land ownership in the rural South, most people think of white plantation owners; people rarely associate it with Black landowners.¹⁵ One of these Black landowners was Reverend Mat Gardner, born into slavery on July 18, 1847.¹⁶ His parents, Martin and Rachel (Vasser) Gardner, were enslaved on a plantation belonging to Richard Whitehead Vasser in North Carolina. Shortly after the death of Mat's father, Rachel and her children were sold on May 7, 1862, along with 74 other slaves to plantation owner Richard C. Gardner in Elkton, Tennessee.¹⁷ Mat gained his freedom in February of 1865 and was able to earn money looking after his former master's son. The 1870 census shows Mat living in Elkton with his mother and siblings in the home of his stepfather Thomas Gardner.¹⁸ The census says that Mat was 12 and working as a farm laborer. Census records have led to an issue with pertaining to Mat's birthdate. Mat's death certificate states that he was born in 1847, but the 1900 census says he was born in April 1852.

¹⁵ Winters, 58.

¹⁶ Matt Gardner; "History," Matt Gardner Homestead Museum, accessed December 8, 2021, <https://www.mattgardnerhomestead.org/history.html>.

¹⁷ Benjamin James Lea, Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the Supreme Court of Tennessee, Volume 4 *Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the Supreme Court of Tennessee* (Nashville, Tavel, Eastman & Howell, 1881), 147.

¹⁸ 1870 U.S Census, Giles County, Tennessee, Population Schedule.

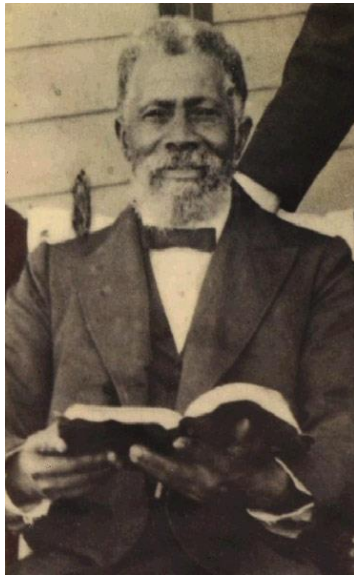


Figure 1. Mat Gardner. Photo provided by the Matt Gardner Homestead Museum.



Figure 2. Henrietta (Jenkins) Gardner. Photo provided by Carla Jones.

By 1877 Mat bought a \$1,250 marriage bond to marry Henrietta (Ritta) Jenkins. Henrietta was born sometime around 1850 to Amanda Jenkins, Ritta did not know who her father was, and there was no record of her birth.¹⁹ She does not appear on any census records until the 1880s. By 1880 Mat and Ritta lived on a farm with two children, Atha and Raymond. The census for that year shows they are both working on a farm; the census records explicitly states that Mat was a farmer.²⁰ In January 1889, Mat and John Dixon entered a four-year contract to purchase a 106-acre tract from E. W. Copeland. During this time, either Mat bought out Dixon or Dixon withdrew from the contract. When Mat completed the contract in 1896, he was the sole owner of the 106 acres.²¹ Still, Mat named the community after Dixon because he was the oldest living Black resident in

¹⁹ Henrietta Gardner Death Certificate, Tennessee Death Records, 1908-1958, (Nashville, Tennessee State Library and Archives), Roll Number 8.

²⁰ 1880 U.S Census, Giles County, Tennessee, Population Schedule, Dwelling number 120, Family number 120, Mat Gardner.

²¹ Matt Gardner Homestead Museum.

the town. Also, during 1896 Mat built a two-story, central chimney style house for his family. This home still stands on the property and serves as the Matt Gardner Homestead Museum. There were several outbuildings built at this time as well. A few were designed for livestock and farm production, but Mat also had a sorghum mill and storehouse built on his property in the years to come.²²

On the 1900 census, Gardner's occupation was still listed as a farmer, while his wife Ritta had no occupation listed. The census also lists that Ritta had 11 children, but only ten were alive when it was recorded.²³ In 1902 Gardner purchased a 15-acre gravel island in the Elk River. The gravel island was bought so that Mat's congregation and other congregations in the community could hold baptisms there.²⁴ Around this time, Mat was also a traveling minister around Giles County and Limestone County, Alabama. The 1910 census documented that Mat was able to read and write.²⁵ It also listed Mat as a farm owner and as an employer. The children who still lived with Mat and Ritta were listed as wage workers on a farm. Ritta still has no occupation listed. Sometime during 1911, Mat becomes the minister of New Hope Primitive Baptist Church. The 1920 census listed that Mat could read but not write. The family's property was still classified as a general agriculture farm.²⁶ For the 1930 census, the Gardner family is still living and operating their own farm.

²² Ibid.

²³ 1900 U.S Census, Giles County, Tennessee, Population Schedule, Dwelling number 180, Family number 180, Mat Gardner.

²⁴ Matt Gardner Homestead Museum.

²⁵ 1910 U.S Census, Giles County, Tennessee, Population Schedule, Dwelling number 13, Family number 13, Mat Gardner.

²⁶ 1920 U.S Census, Giles County, Tennessee, Population Schedule, Dwelling number 69, Family number 70, Mat Gardner.



Figure 3. Mat Gardner (right) with unidentified man (left) observing hogs. Photo provided by Carla Jones.

The 1940 census lists Mat's occupation as a minister, and it lists him as not farming any in 1939. Mat and Henrietta are still living on their farm, valued at \$1,200 on the census. Their daughter Susan Eddings is living with them and running the farm.²⁷ On July 23, 1940, Henrietta passed away in their home due to Colitis around 10:00 p.m.²⁸ Her funeral cost a total of \$125; Mat paid \$25 on July 23, and the Burial Club paid the rest. Queen Anne's Funeral Home in Pulaski was the African American funeral home, and the form states that Henrietta was the 41st person they prepared that year.²⁹ Burial Clubs were a form of cooperative where participants paid fees to cover funeral costs. Sometimes, the club would act as an insurance plan and pay for medical expense.³⁰ On November 25, 1942, Mat received a certificate from the Tennessee Home Food Supply

²⁷ 1940 U.S Census, Giles County, Tennessee, Population Schedule, Dwelling number 180, Mat Gardner.

²⁸ Henrietta Gardner Death Certificate, Tennessee State Library and Archives.

²⁹ Jones, 36.

³⁰ Reynolds,

Program for growing 75% or more of the food needed to feed the family and livestock.³¹

However, Susan Eddings remained the farm manager.

Reverend Mat Gardner died on June 5, 1943, at 12 p.m. in his home. The death certificate lists his occupation as a minister, and the cause of death was cerebral hemorrhaging due to chronic myocarditis.³² Mat's funeral was delayed for five days so family and friends could travel to Dixon Town. According to newspapers in the area, over 1,000 people attended Gardner's service. People from the surrounding counties, including several from Alabama, attended.

The Gardner Legacy: Mat and Henrietta's Descendants in the Community

Mat and Henrietta's legacy did not die with them and was continued by their ten living children.³³ Mat and Ritta had 11 children, Atha, Raymond, Susan, Mary, Richard, Ellen, Paralee, John, Clancy, Velma, and Walker. They all survived until adulthood except for Clancy whose death date is unknown, but the 1900 census states that one child died sometime before it was recorded.³⁴ Most of the Gardner children stayed in Elkton and lived close to the family farm. Mat and Henrietta's children became farmers, and one of their sons became a Minister.

³¹“Gardner Certificate, Tennessee Home Food Supply Program Nov 23, 1942”, Gardner Museum.

³² Mat Gardner Death Certificate, Tennessee Death Records, 1908-1958, (Nashville, Tennessee State Library and Archives), Roll Number 5.

³³ “Mat Gardner Obituary,” *Pulaski Recorder*, June 16, 1943.

³⁴ 1900 U.S Census, Giles County, TN, Mat Gardner.



Figure 4. Atha Gardner (left) and his wife Ether (Bonner) Gardner (right). Photo provided by Carla Jones.

Atha Gardner, born on September 10, 1877, was Mat and Ritta's first born. On December 23, 1905, Atha married Ethal Bonner (1880-1963). In 1920 Atha and Ethal were renting a farm, in Giles County, and his occupation shows as a farmer.³⁵ Atha and Ethal had eight children; Shellie Lee (1906-1997), Joe D (1908-??), Andrew Grady (1909-1988), O.G. (1913-1996), L.Z "Hog" (1914-1985), Mary I.E (1917-??), Willie (1919-??), and Matt (1921-1979). After the 1920's census Atha is no longer renting and owns the farm that his family lives on. He continues the family tradition of farming, until his death on September 7, 1948, at the age of 70.

³⁵ 1920 U.S Census, Giles County, TN, Atha Gardner.

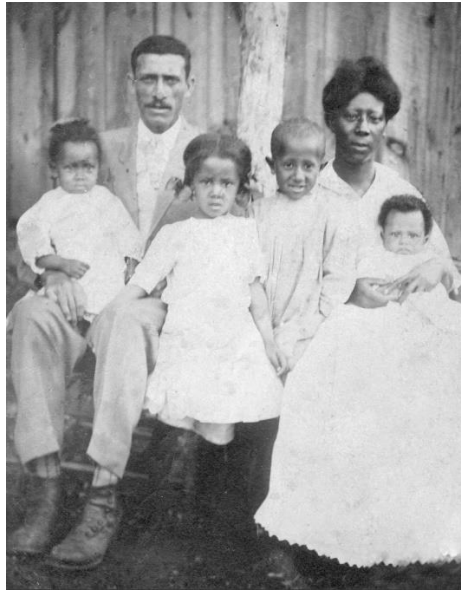


Figure 5. Raymond Gardner and his first wife Frances (Gardner) Gardner with their children (left to right) Katherine, Henrietta, Lemond, and Clyde. Photo provided by Carla Jones.

Raymond Gardner was born on October 23, 1879. Raymond and his first wife Frances were married on December 27, 1906 and had ten children; Cleveland (1907-??), Joe Lemond (1908-1930), Henrietta Elizabeth McCray (1909-2003), Clyde A. (1911-1989), Katherine Adell (1912-??), Matt (1916-??), Madelene (1917-??), Raymond Jr. (1918-??), Martin Luther Sr. (1919-1992), and John (1920-1994). Raymond rented his farmland in 1910. His wife Frances died in 1922, leaving Raymond to raise 10 children on his own. Raymond married Beulah King a few months later to provide a mother for his children. Just like his father, Raymond became a pastor; serving at St. Elizabeth's Primitive Baptist Church until his death on January 19, 1963.³⁶ Raymond was so involved with the church that he was buried on the church grounds instead of the church

³⁶ Raymond Gardner death certificate, Tennessee Death Records, 1908-1958, (Nashville, Tennessee State Library and Archives).

cemetery in downtown Elkton, where the Gardner family plot is. Raymond's occupation was listed as a minister and farmer at the time of his death.³⁷



Figure 6. Susan “Susie” (Gardner) Eddings. Photo provided by Carla Jones.

Susan Gardner Eddings was born on December 25, 1881. She lived on the farm with her family until she married Willie Eddings on December 24, 1903. In 1910 she was living with her husband on a farm, but Willie died sometime before the 1920 census, and Susan moved back in with her parents, bringing along her four daughters. Susan and Willie's children were Ella Mary (1903-1997), Anna Lee Bledsoe (1907-??). Iwilla Phelps (1908-??), and Alberta Sloan (1911-2000). She worked as farm labor, but in the 1940s Susan is the one who takes over Mat and Henrietta's farm after they both pass away.³⁸

³⁷1880 U.S Census, Giles County, TN, Mat Gardner.

³⁸1920 U.S Census, Giles County, TN, Susan Eddings; 1930 U.S Census, Giles County, TN, Susan Eddings; 1940 U.S Census, Giles County, TN, Susan Eddings.



Figure 7. Mary (Gardner) Gardner. Photo provided by Carla Jones.

Mary Gardner was born in December 1883. She married her husband George (1893- 1948) before 1910. They had four children; Josie P. (1913-1943), Ellen (1916-??), George R. Jr (1917-1981), and Joe T. (1925-1989). George was a deacon at St. Elizabeth's along with Raymond Gardner. The family lived on their farm until the 1940 census, and George's occupation was a farmer.³⁹ Her brother Raymond and his wife Beulah lived with Mary according to the 1950 census.

³⁹ 1930 U.S Census, Giles County, TN, George Gardner; 1940 U.S Census, Giles County, TN, George Gardner.

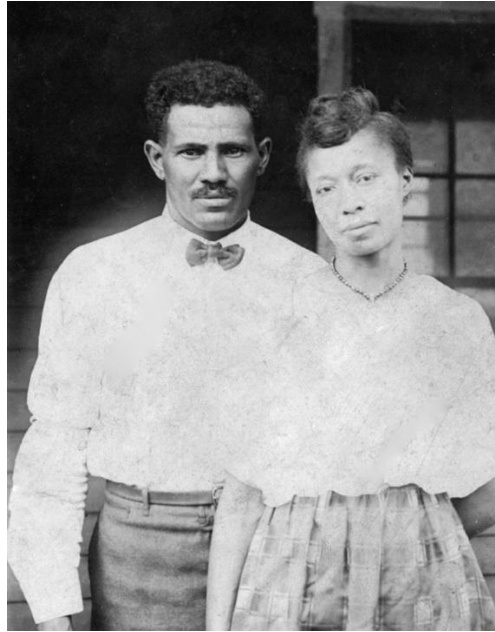


Figure 8. Richard Gardner (left) and his wife Florinda (Holt) Gardner (right). Photo provided by Carla Jones.

Richard Lee Gardner was born on September 11, 1886 and lived on the family farm until at least 1911. Richard married Florida Holt (1891-1968) on April 25, 1912. From 1920 to 1950, Richard is listed as being a farmer and owning farmland in Giles County.⁴⁰ He died on March 8, 1961 and was buried at the same cemetery as his sisters Susan and Mary. Richard and Florinda never had any children, however Richard had three children: Mildred, Howard, and Ben before his marriage.⁴¹

⁴⁰ 1920 U.S Census, Giles County, TN, Richard Gardner; 1930 U.S Census, Giles County, TN, Richard Gardner; 1940 U.S Census, Giles County, TN, Richard Gardner; 1950 U.S Census, Giles County, TN, Richard Gardner.

⁴¹ Jones, 47.



Figure 9. Ellen (Gardner) Vance. Photo provided by Larry Vance.

Ellen Gardner Vance was born in September of 1887. She later married Benjamin Vance on December 24, 1909.⁴² They had three boys William Huston (1911-??), Servier (1913-??), and Willis S. (1917-??). Ellen and her husband Benjamin passed away some time before 1920 and the boys were raised by their fraternal grandmother Winnie Bass Vance.⁴³

⁴² 1910 U.S Census, Giles County, TN, Ellen Vance.

⁴³ Jones, 81.



Figure 10. Paralee (Gardner) Coleman. Photo provided by Thurmond Coleman.

Paralee (Gardner) Coleman was born on May 21, 1889. She lived at home until she married Reverend Charles William Coleman (1889-1958) on December 23, 1911. They set up their family on a rented farm in Giles County until they moved to Logan County, Virginia, by 1930, where her husband worked for the Dry Clay Plant as a presser.⁴⁴ Paralee Coleman was one of two children who left Tennessee. She later moved to Louisville, Kentucky to live with her son Rev. Thurmond Coleman. Paralee died on July 18, 1972 and is buried in Louisville at Eastern Cemetery.

⁴⁴ 1930 U.S Census, Giles County, TN, Paralee Gardner.



Figure 11. John Gardner (left) and his second wife Alma (McClaurine) Gardner (right). Photo provided by Carla Jones.

John Gardner was born on June 28, 1891. He lived with his parents as a wage worker doing farm labor. He married his first wife, Lera Driver (1896-1920), on March 29, 1915. They rented a farm in Giles County, and John is listed as a farmer in the 1920 census. After the 1920 census taker had passed by the farm, Lera died, and John remarried Alma McClaurine (1903-1997) on October 1, 1922.⁴⁵ By 1940 John owned their home, valued at \$300, and he is still working as a farmer.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Jones, 82; Tennessee State Library and Archives; Nashville, TN, USA; *Tennessee State Marriages, 1780-2002*, 312.

⁴⁶ 1940 U.S Census, Giles County, TN, John Gardner.



Figure 12. Velma (Gardner) Braden. Photo provided by Carla Jones.

Velma Gardner Braden, born on May 10, 1895, was the last daughter of Mat and Henrietta. She lived with her parents until she married Robert Braden on December 27, 1919. They had three children Magnolia (1921-1975), Robert (1925-1994), and Frances (1930-1991). The 1950 census had Velma and Robert living on a farm in Giles County with two of her children and her mother-in-law.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ 1950 U.S Census, Giles County, TN, Velma Braden.



Figure 13. Walker Gardner (left) and daughter Lura Mae (right). Photo provided by Gloria McLean.

Walker Gardner was born on February 26, 1898.⁴⁸ He lived and worked on his parent's farm until 19, when he marries Lizzie Hogan (1901-1971) on December 26, 1917, at St. Elizabeth's with his brother Raymond as minister. Walker and Lizzie rent a farm until 1940, when the census documents they owned a home, with a value of \$300. The census listed Walker as a farmer, with two other household members as farm laborers. Walker Gardner was the second child to move away from Tennessee when he moved to Chicago sometime after the 1950s to be closer to his children.⁴⁹

With ten surviving children, Mat and Ritta had around 60 grandchildren. Most of their children stayed in Giles County except for Paralee and Walker. Many grandchildren left Giles County. Several of the grandsons enlisted and served in the military over the years. A few places the grandchildren and great-grandchildren moved to were

⁴⁸ Delayed Birth Records, Walker Gardner, #193266, Giles County, TN, Department of Public Records.

⁴⁹ Jones, 64.

Indianapolis, Louisville, Chicago, Detroit, Canton, Ohio and Logan, Virginia, while some descendants moved to other parts of Tennessee.

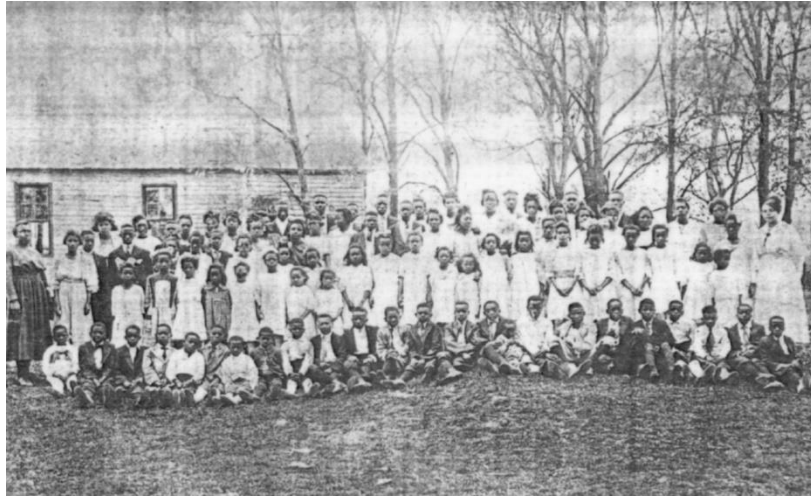


Figure 14. Early 1900's picture of the Elkton Colored School. Photo provided by Carla Jones.

The Gardner's, in general, were impactful. Mat was the first one in his family to leave his mark on the community, earlier. He founded the community of Dixon Town and helped to finance and build its first school for African American children. Along with this, Mat made sure that the teachers got paid and had a place to live while teaching. In 1926 the Ku Klux Klan burned the school. By 1930 Mat and other community members raised the \$500 needed to match the local and state funds along with money from the Julius Rosenwald Fund, to build a new Rosenwald school.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Jones, 30.

Mat Gardner was also a religious leader. In 1911 he became the first long term pastor at New Hope Primitive Baptist Church. Mat was also a pastor at St. Rebecca's Primitive Baptist Church in the Conway community. Besides these two churches, Mat was a traveling minister to other Primitive Baptist congregations in Giles County and Limestone County, Alabama.⁵¹

Gardner also operated a storehouse and a Sorghum gin. The storehouse was vital to the community of Dixon Town because it was a place people could go to buy foodstuffs and other necessities. Through this store, Mat allowed people to purchase goods and run a credit at the store. All of this was written down in-store ledgers that Mat and Susan kept; the ledger shows who bought items and the cost, plus the days people worked to pay back their credit or earn money.⁵² Some of the things sold in the store were molasses, flour, corn, ham, middle meat, and cottonseed. Throughout the ledger, it can be seen when people worked off their credit balance and even when others in the community paid off someone's debt. The ledger, documents when items were bought from Mat or Ritta, or when people borrowed money from them. Mat also sold livestock and rented out his workhorses for people to grind grain.⁵³

Other family members continued the Gardner legacy showing continued involvement in the community through politics and religious organizations. Raymond Gardner minister at St. Elizabeth's Primitive Baptist Church from 1914 till his death in 1963.⁵⁴ When he passed away, he and his wife donated land for the current church

⁵¹ Jones, 24, 32, 36.

⁵² Gardner Store ledger, Matt Gardner Homestead Museum

⁵³ G.H. Ferguson, Check to Mat Gardner. "Mule for \$25." Ardmore, TN, February 15, 1938.

⁵⁴ Jones 34.

edifice. St. Elizabeth's is one of the few churches that both Mat and Raymond preached at that is still an active congregation. The church's location is not far from the Matt Gardner Homestead Museum. Raymond was also known for being a sought-after scribe in the town, and this led him to be the clerk at the Indian Creek Primitive Baptist Association for 26 years. During his time, Raymond wrote a chapter on the principles of Primitive Baptist for the Association's book. Another position he held was the Vice moderator from 1937 to 1962.⁵⁵ People knew they could go to the Gardner family in a time of need, and this is obvious through a letter sent to Mat in 1935 asking for some money during troubling times. This letter also asks his son Raymond to ask the congregation at St. Elizabeth's for help. These examples are just a few that show how involved the Gardner family was in the lives of the people of Dixon Town.

Buford Warren Gardner, the son of Walker and grandson of Mat and Ritta, was the second Black reelected alderman of Elkton in 1984. Buford served as an alderman for 12 years and was so dedicated to his job that the new bridge across the Elk River was named the Buford Gardner Bridge. Mary Gardner's husband, George, was one of the original deacons at St. Elizabeth's, founded on May 5, 1873, and continued to work with the church until his death. Besides George, most of the Gardner family was very involved with St. Elizabeth's, as documented in the church ledger. There was always at least one member of the Gardner family present at each service, and they always gave a minimum of 25 cents.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ *ibid* 103

⁵⁶ Church Ledger, St. Elizabeth's Primitive Baptist Church 102.

Chapter Two

The Preservation of A Black Owned Tennessee Century

Farm: The Matt Gardner Homestead

In 1995 Carla Jones, President of the Matt Gardner Homestead Museum, asked the Center of Historic Preservation at Middle Tennessee State University to explore the preservation and curation needs of the property. Trina Brinkley and Dr. Carroll Van West prepared the National Register for Historic Places nomination. Fifteen year later, in March 2010, Michel Thomas Gavin prepared a physical condition assessment and restoration action plan for the property. Graduate students from MTSU and the CHP next took on various historic preservation projects at the house in 2010. The house opened for public tour in 2010 and remained open to 2016.

On April 16, 2021, Abigail Coomes and Kate Hughes, both MTSU graduate students in public history, documented the property along with Gary Gardner and Dr. Carroll Van West, the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation. On December 13, 2021, Abigail Coomes, Kate Hughes, Dr. Tiffany Momon, and Dr. Carroll Van West returned to the property with Gary Gardner to collect artifacts from the house and document damage from a windstorm. This chapter documents the current preservation needs of the farm.

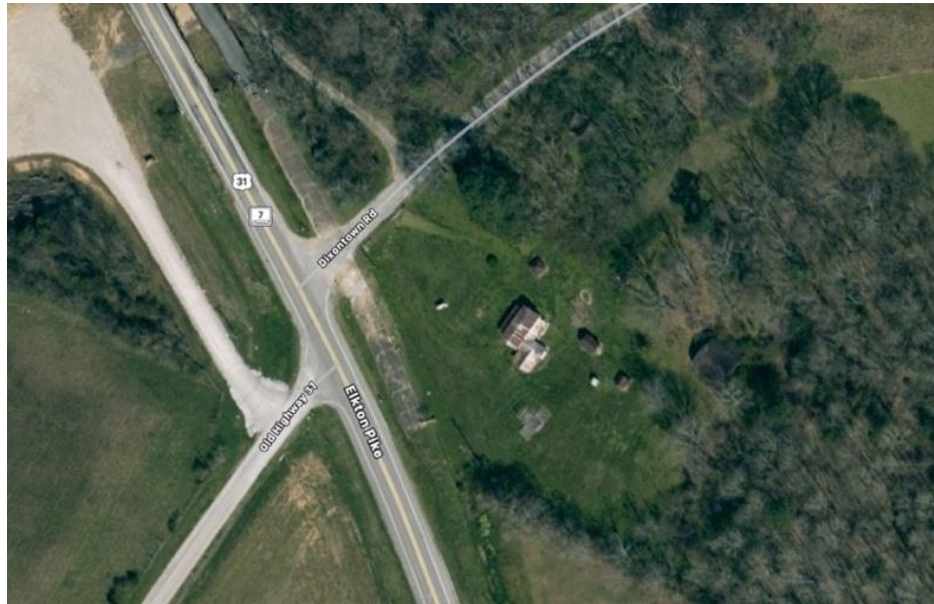


Figure 15. Aerial View of the Matt Gardner Homestead at US 31 and Dixontown Road. Photo provided by Apple Maps.

The Gardner House

The house is a two-story central chimney-style home with a front porch and a back porch. The back porch connects the main house to a small kitchen and a dining room addition from circa 1920. A section of the back porch was enclosed in 1986 for a bathroom and laundry addition; this has since been removed to restore the house to its original condition in the 1920's. The house and its outbuildings sit on 1.7 acres.



Figure 16. Circa 1990's picture of the Gardner Homestead. Photo provided by the Center for Historic Preservation.

One of the important architectural features of the main house is the central chimney. The central chimney can be seen from a photo taken of the home in 1995 before the chimney fell over. Now, most of the chimney is hidden underneath the metal roof, and at some point, it should be rebuilt.



Figure 17. Turned spindles on the front porch. Photo provided by Kate Hughes.

On the facade of the house, floor has three bays with a central entrance flanked by double-hung windows. The second floor only has two symmetrical windows on either side of the entrance. The east and west sides of the home have one window on the first and second floors. There are no windows on the back of the main house, but a back door leads from both first-floor rooms. Matt Gardner built a front porch and back porch on the main house. The supports for the front porch are turned spindles, while the supports on the back porch are rough-hewn. The back porch spans the length of the house and connects the main house to the kitchen and dining room. The porch was extended to reach past the home to the end of the dining room.

This central chimney dictates the home's floor plan, with a room on either side featuring the double fireplaces. Another unique feature of the home is the center opening leads to an alcove/entryway with doors on each side that open to the rooms. The parlor is the east side room. Its mantel has fine details, most likely left from woodworking tools when it was being carved. A bedroom is on the westside. Gardner built a box staircase in the southwest corner of the first-floor bedroom to access the second floor.



Figure 18. Gardner Homestead outbuildings. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.

The outbuildings also have significant architectural features. The chicken coop is substantial because it is a larger coop design, and most of the original features remain inside. The privy was built during the depression era by the Works Progress Administration's sanitation facility program. Though the horse barn is collapsing, its size is a testament to the wealth and status that Matt and Henrietta had. Matt and those who helped him build the house and outbuildings were most likely never formally trained in

architecture or construction. Their skills came from what they had seen, been verbally taught, and learned from past work.

Preservation Assessment and Recommendations

Exterior Recommendations

Foundation

The house's limestone foundation should be assessed. There are no visible foundation issues but having an assessment will ensure the home can handle the traffic and weight of being reopened to the public. The metal panels along the foundation should be repaired so to block access to the underside of the house to any animals; a door can be added to allow access when needed. Water damage is the biggest threat to the home's foundation; one way to stop this is by adding a six-mil sheet of plastic under the home to act as a water vapor barrier. Another way to mitigate future foundation issues is installing French drains on the house. French drains are essential because they move water away from home, allowing for proper drainage. Removing any landscaping away from the house's foundation will also help adequate drainage. Overgrown landscaping too close to the home should be removed.



Figure 19. West side of the main house. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.



Figure 20. West side of the kitchen. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.

Walls

The weatherboard needs repairs and/or replaced. All weatherboard sidings need to be checked for any damage caused by either water or bugs like termites—several places on the home's exterior where the siding needs special attention. There are several holes where the weatherboard has rotted away on the west side of the house. The most significant gap is near the top left side of the first-floor window. The opening allows water and bugs to get inside the house and can cause damage to the exterior and interior of the home. Above the support beam for the floor on the west side of the home, there is a small section of the weatherboard that is missing. The east exterior wall of the house has a hole in the weatherboard at the bottom near the support beam. There are no other visible holes on this wall, but there is visible damage to the rest of the weatherboard, including a warped board that is below the second-story window toward the façade.

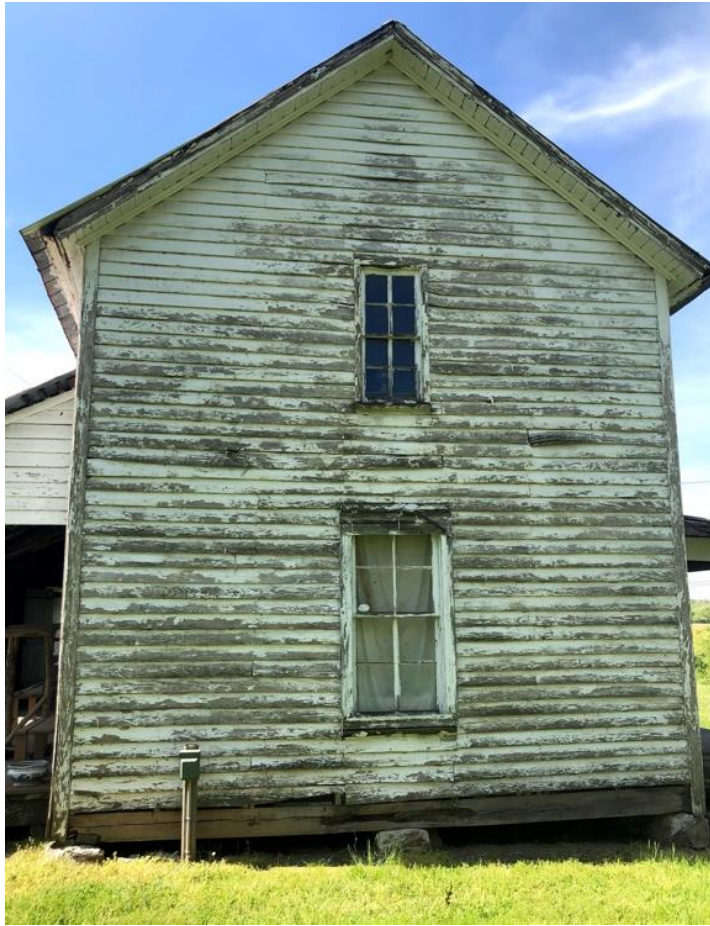


Figure 21. East side of the main house. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.

The weatherboard on the north wall has a small hole near the corner board connecting the north and east walls of the house. Any damaged or missing battens or corner boards should be replaced. Removing siding includes the tarpaper on the kitchen's exterior walls, which needs to be taken down and properly disposed of by professionals. A significant amount of siding along the south wall of the dining room needs to be replaced. Most of the damaged siding is along the bottom of the structure by the support beam for the buildings floor. Along the west side of the dining room, several pieces of siding are

lifting away from the building. One section of the weatherboard hangs off the structure, leaving a gap in the siding

The windows and exterior door frames need to either be repaired or replaced. The second-story window on the west side of the home has part of the window frame coming to lose. Window frames need to be checked for rot and ensure no loose frame pieces. Any windows that need work should be replaced with period windows and trim. The glass on the windows also should be looked over for any cracks or any loose glass panels. The windows should also be checked to ensure they are correctly sealed to keep the elements and other critters out; adding flashing above the windows is recommended. The flashing is also recommended over the exterior doors and door frames.

The door frames need to be replaced or repaired if any rot or lose pieces are found. The kitchen board and batten door need the hinges replaced; if other doors present with these issues, they should be replaced as well. Any metal screen doors or metal window screens need to be removed. It is also recommended that any locks on the door be rebuilt or readjusted as required.



Figure 22. East side of the back porch. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.

Porches

The floorboards on both porches will need to be tested to ensure they are structurally sound and handle weight. Access to the porches will need to be addressed so the public can easily access the home. There are only two-stone steps on the west side of the back porch and an unstable plywood ramp on the east side. This ramp will need to be removed, and a new ADA compliant ramp needs to be installed. The steps on the front porch will need to have handrails installed for safety reasons.

The roof decking on both porches needs to be checked for any structural issues. There is a structural issue with the covered roof on the rear porch separating from the exterior wall on the southeast side of the home. The separation of the rear porch and exterior wall

needs to be fixed as the gap will worsen, eventually to the point of being completely detached from the house and making the porch unsafe for the public to access. Both porches also need metal flashing added between the roof and the exterior wall to prevent water from getting between the wall and roof. The addition of flashing will also avoid any future problems with the porch roof separating from the house.



Figure 23. East side of the back porch with vegetation around ramp. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.



Figure 24. West side of the back porch with stone steps. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.

Roof

It is recommended that professional roofers assess the extent of rust on the metal roof and to check for any holes as a result of severe rusting. Identifying the location of holes in the metal roof will help when addressing the issue of water damage in the interior of the house. Depending on the state of the metal roof, it will either need to be replaced or repaired; this applies to the main home, porches, and the kitchen and dining room. If the roof needs to be repaired, several loose sheet panels will need to be screwed back into place. After the metal roof is replaced or repaired, it would be recommended to paint it with a reflecting roof paint. The fly rafters and roof board eaves on the main house, along with the kitchen and dining rooms, need to be either replaced or repaired.



Figure 25. South side of the main house and kitchen addition. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.

Chimneys

The central chimney should be rebuilt as a defining feature of the home's architectural style. This chimney does not have to be functional, but it is a matter that the family and board will need to discuss. If the chimney is not rebuilt, the ridge cap where the chimney was located needs to be replaced. When working on the chimney, the flue must be inspected for safety. If the flue does not meet safety regulations, it needs to be repaired; documenting what it looks like is crucial so that the repairs can be accurate.

Paint Colors

One of the last things that need to be done on the home's exterior is to put a new coat of paint on the main house and kitchen. Painting the exterior doors will also need to be done at this time. Before the painting is done, it is vital to prep the home correctly. All surfaces need to be cleaned so no dirt gets under the paint, rough areas need to be sanded down, and any scrapes in the wood must be filled first. Proper prepping will allow the paint to last longer and provide a finished look to the home.

Interior Recommendations

General Considerations

Before starting the preservation work on the interior, all artifacts and furniture will need to be removed and safely stored elsewhere. Removing all artifacts is important because anything left in the home could be damaged during the restoration work. Several of these artifacts are important to the family history and are irreplaceable.

Another essential step will be cleaning the interior of the home, which will involve sweeping both interior and exterior floors, wiping all surfaces with Murphy's Oil Soap and water, removal of wasp nests, and removal of other bugs found in the home.

Any modern paneling needs to be removed from the main house and the kitchen and dining room. Gaps in any house's interior walls need to be repaired, including the wooden trim. Any nails or screws found in the walls need to be removed at this time, including those used to display artifacts.

The flooring throughout the home should be structurally sound but checking for any rotten boards at this time would be recommended. The electricity throughout the house needs to be inspected by an electrician to see if it is safe and up to code. It is recommended that underground electric and telephone lines be installed on the property, but this is not an essential preservation recommendation now. Whenever any painting is done in the home, the highest surface should be painted first; this way, no dripping occurs on finished surfaces below.



Figure 26. Main entry to the house on the north side of the building. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.

First Floor:

The alcove/entryway is painted white, but a teal or green color is visible where the white paint has chipped off. The correct paint color needs to be determined. Other areas where the paint has worn away indicate no other paint on some paneling. Depending on the results, the room needs to be prepped and repainted with white or teal color. The base molding on the first floor has original molding and more modern molding. Modern molding needs to be removed and replaced with molding that matches the period molding. The door frames and interior doors need to be inspected for any issues with the hinges, frames, locks, or handles. The ceiling in the first-floor bedroom is painted white and should be determined if this color was correct to the period of significance.

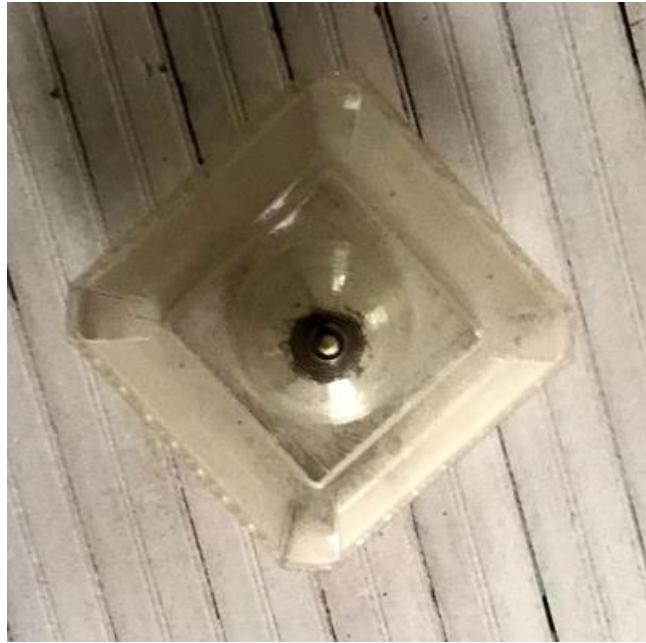


Figure 27. Light fixture in west first-floor bedroom. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.



Figure 28. Fireplace in the East first-floor parlor. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.

With the chimney being an important exterior feature of the home, the double fireplaces in the interior are equally as important. The mantel in the parlor is original, and marks from woodworking tools can be seen in the wood. The parlor mantel needs to be washed with Murphy's Oil Soap and water. The fireplace in the first-floor bedroom is missing the mantle. There is a temporary one over the fireplace that needs to be reassessed. If possible, a period mantel should be acquired and installed, or a replica of the parlor mantle could be crafted by a woodworker. Both fireplaces have cast-iron inserts, and these need to be cleaned and cleared of debris. If the chimney is not rebuilt, the flues of the fireplaces will need to be adequately sealed so no animals or birds can get inside the home.

The first floor has some historic light fixtures in the parlor and bedroom. During the restoration of the ceiling and its painting, the fixtures need to be carefully removed and properly stored.

The biggest interior project outside of the fireplaces will be stabilizing and repairing the box stairway to the second floor. The stairway is in the righthand corner of the west bedroom. Three steps are not enclosed and lead up to a door where the box stairway starts. The stairway will need to be inspected for any damaged boards that might impact the structural integrity of the stairs. The wall to the south of the staircase has two gaps in the wood where it has rotted away. Wallpaper covers most of the walls in the stairwell and needs to be assessed. Removing the wallpaper may reveal if the wood underneath needs to be repaired. A small portion of the wallpaper could be preserved under plexiglass to show how the home has changed over time, or it could be removed, and a small section framed.



Figure 29. Box staircase in west side first-floor bedroom. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.



Figure 30. Inside the box staircase from the second-floor. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.

Second Floor:

Most of the interior restoration efforts will focus on the second floor. Due to the lack of use in the last six years, the second floor has more debris on the floors and several wasp nests throughout both rooms. Proper safety procedures need to be taken when dealing with the wasp nest removal. the flooring needs to be inspected, and damaged boards must be replaced. Making sure the flooring on this level is structurally sound is a safety concern. Wallpaper initially covered most second-floor rooms, and most was removed in 2010. There are sections of the walls that have been damaged by the wallpaper and will need to either be refinished or replaced altogether. Any modern paneling needs to be removed and replaced with period paneling.

Removal of the artifacts on this floor will need to be done with extreme care due to the box stairway. Special attention needs to be made to removing Henrietta's quilting rack from the second floor. The quilting rack is part of the material culture of the Gardner Homestead and its importance to the property is addressed in the next chapter.



Figure 31. Gap under window in the west second-floor bedroom on the west wall. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.

In the west bedroom, there are gaps in the west wall that will need to be filled in, or the boards and paneling be replaced. On this wall, the window is also loose in its frame, and a gap has formed in the paneling. Another concern along the bottom of the north wall towards the west end of the room. A section of the paneling is warped to the point of creating a gap to the outside at the floor line.

The east bedroom's walls will need the same treatment as the west bedroom, with particular attention to the closet in the east bedroom. In the closet, a section of the ceiling is missing on the north side, and the underside of the metal roof is exposed. A few gaps are in the west wall of the closet. Wallpaper was also on the closet walls, and pieces of glue and paper were left behind. A red wire is tacked to the south wall of the closet. Electricians should determine if these wires can stay or need to be moved. All the windows need to be inspected on the inside for a proper seal; any damaged boards of the frames around the windows need to be repaired. The door to the east bedroom will need to be sanded and prepped for a new coat of paint. The hardware for the door will also need to be replaced or repaired as required, including the door frame on both sides.



Figure 32. Gap under the north wall in the west second-floor bedroom. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.



Figure 33. Missing panels in the ceiling of the west second-floor bedroom. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.

The ceiling in both second-floor bedrooms is a primary concern. Both bedrooms there are sections missing; the boards need to be replaced to seal off access to animals, birds, and the elements. The chimney can be seen through the hole in the east bedroom 's ceiling, and the rafters can be seen through both holes.

Another common fix is the electricity. There is one ceiling light fixture in each of the bedrooms, and they each have smoke alarms as well. Currently, there is just a pull string fixture in place. It will need to be determined if these modern fixtures stay or are replaced with period-appropriate ones. The smoke detectors will need to be tested and replaced if they are not functioning.

The second floor will primarily be used for storage and closed off to the public. There is no place to install an elevator in the home to make the second-level handicap accessible. Restricting access to the second floor is mainly due to safety concerns caused by the narrow and steep box stairway. Blocking the staircase off to the public will also minimize the foot traffic on the steps and reduce the risk of future damage.



Figure 34. Missing panels in the ceiling of the east second-floor bedroom. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.

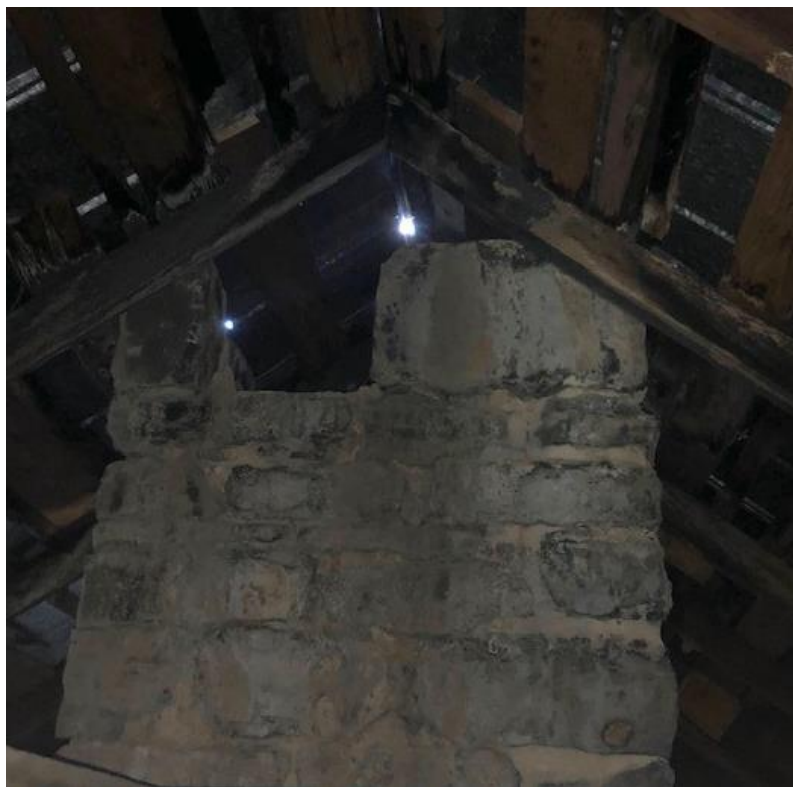


Figure 35. View of the chimney through the east second-floor bedroom. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.



Figure 36. View of the chimney through and roof in the kitchen. Photo provided by Kate Hughes.

The Kitchen and Dining Room Addition

Artifacts in the kitchen and dining room addition, c. 1920 will also need to be cleaned and removed before the restoration process. The ceiling in the kitchen was sheetrock at some point but was taken down, leaving the rafters, roof and chimney exposed. If left in its current state, the remainder of the chimney should be inspected for structural damage. Two considerations are if the rafters continue to support the chimney and how stable is the section above the roof. If the chimney is removed, this change may require more work on the kitchen's roof. Installing a new ceiling will need to be done in

the kitchen; this could also be affected by the chimney. The kitchen is currently painted a mint/teal color; it would be recommended to see if the color was original to the room. If not, the paint should be stripped, and the wood refinished. Should the paint be authentic, the kitchen needs to be prepped, and a new coat of paint would be recommended.

The ceiling in the dining room has some warping in the boards, probably due to water damage and/or humidity. A few panels in the dining room have already been replaced, and they need to be stained to match the rest of the wood in the room. The trim, window frames, and door frames should be checked for loose or damaged sections.

The hardware on the doors for the kitchen and dining room needs to have proper period pieces installed that match the rest of the home's hardware. Electricians should check the electricity in the two rooms to ensure it is up to code. Floors should be inspected for needed repairs.



Figure 37. View of the ceiling and walls of the dining room. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.

Outbuildings Recommendations

Well House:

The well house was initially constructed c. 1870 with a circa 1930's metal roof. The walls are wood latticework that has been replaced once due to termite damage. There was also a limestone foundation, but only a few stones remained. The main concern with preserving this building is to keep it structurally sound and free of termite damage. Any repairs or replacements for the metal roof should be carried out. Also check for loose stones in the well. A mason should repair the stonework, if necessary, iron bars have been placed over the well to ensure it is inaccessible to people. These bars need to be secured.



Figure 38. Exterior of the well house. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.



Figure 39. Interior of the well house. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.

Chicken Coop:

The chicken coop, circa 1925, is an important structure on the property as it is one of the last livestock buildings left standing. Metal sheets have been placed around the outside of the coop where there are missing boards. These pieces of sheet metal need to be removed as they are not original to the coop's design. Once the sheet metal is removed, any damaged boards should be replaced. Any debris inside the chicken coop needs to be removed and the interior cleaned. Most roosting bars are still inside the coop and should remain there. If any are rotten or damaged, then they need to be replaced. The original nesting boxes are also still along the bottom of the coop. The coop's east wall is where the door and chicken gate are located. The hardware on both the door and gate needs to be replaced with a period-appropriate piece if the current ones are too rusted. The roof on the southwest side of the coop needs replacement; the entire roof and the limestone foundation of the coop should also be inspected.



Figure 40. Exterior of the chicken coop. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.



Figure 41. Interior of the chicken coop. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.

Privy:

The privy was built in 1936 as part of the Works Progress Administration program for better sanitary facilities in rural areas. No visible issues can be seen on the foundation of the privy but still should be assessed for any possible problems. The boards around the building also seem to be in good condition, along with the metal roof. Any damage or debris on the inside of the privy needs to be fixed and removed. Lastly, the hardware on the door should be replaced or repaired as needed.



Figure 42. Exterior of the privy. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.

Other Outbuilding Features

The smokehouse/store was built along with the main house in 1896. Unfortunately, due to a severe windstorm in December of 2021, the smokehouse collapsed. The debris from the building's collapse needs to be removed from the property. As of the December 2021 visit to the property Gary Gardner, the property's caretaker stated that he would use the wood from the storehouse on a barn built by one of Matt and Henrietta's sons. If there is any wood remaining, it could help restore the walls on the chicken coop. Since this building was also the storehouse, it is recommended that the limestone foundation be left to show where the building was located.



Figure 43. Exterior of the smokehouse before December 2021. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.

The horse barn is at the back of the property and was constructed in 1903. Currently, the west side of the barn is collapsing in on itself, and most of the siding is gone. The barn's interior seems to be intact, but overall structural integrity is probably compromised. While the barn is important, it would be a costly and timely restoration project.

There is a ring of stones located behind the well house. This circle of stones could be a fire pit but more prominent than most. Another possibility is that this circle of stones could be the location of the sorghum press. It would be an ideal location because it was located near the well and the horse barn. More research will determine if this location was for the sorghum press.

The dilapidated stage to the southwest side of the house, added c. 2010, needs to be removed. It is a safety hazard for visitors is not a original structure to the property.



Figure 44. The west side of the horse barn. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.



Figure 45. Possible location of the Sorghum Mill. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.

Chapter Three

Material Culture Associated with the Matt Gardner Homestead

The objects associated with the Gardner Homestead represent a valuable collection of rural middle -class Black family life from c. 1870 to c.1960. The material culture of the Gardner homestead is essential because it helps tell the story of Mat, Henrietta, and their family, but also those who worked for Mat and those who lived in Dixon Town. All the artifacts considered in this chapter are currently housed at the Heritage Center of Murfreesboro and Rutherford County for curation and safekeeping. The quilt rack was not removed from the home due to its location on the second floor as it would need special equipment to remove due to the box staircase leading to the second floor.

Quilts

Log Cabin Quilt, c. 1880 hand-sewn by Henrietta Gardner.

The Log Cabin quilt is the oldest in the collection.⁵⁷ The style gets its name from the pattern, the strips of fabric or ‘logs’ are arranged around the center square and then stacked. Log Cabin style is typically done in light and dark colors. The technique using light and dark colors is also called the sunshine and shadow pattern, so this quilt combines the log cabin and sunshine and shadow patterns.⁵⁸ This large (74 ½ in x 72 ⅞ in) quilt is more than likely used for an adult’s bed. The quilt's fabric is silk with a cotton backing.



Figure 46. Log Cabin quilt by Henrietta Gardner. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.

⁵⁷ Jones, 121.

⁵⁸ “Quilt Discovery Experience,” National Parks Service (U.S. Department of the Interior), accessed July 13, 2021, <https://www.nps.gov/home/planyourvisit/quilt-discovery-experience.htm>.

Pine Burr Quilt, c. 1900-1930 hand-sewn by Henrietta Gardner,

The Pine Burr Quilt reflects the pine burr/ pinecone style. The quilt is a regular-sized (67 $\frac{7}{8}$ in x 47 $\frac{3}{16}$ in). It is constructed of folded triangles or prairie points sewn side by side on a foundation into circles. It is the state quilt pattern for the state of Alabama. The Alabama state archives, and museum have created a PDF on constructing the pine burr quilt pattern.⁵⁹ Quilt historian Cuesta Benberry says that in the early to late 20th century, this pattern was popular among southern African Americans. The pine burr quilt is often associated with the Gee's Bend quilters, and when the state of Alabama proclaimed it as the state quilt, a quilter named China Groves Myles was the only one in Gee's Bend who could sew this pattern.⁶⁰ Sewing a quilt in this pattern takes time and patience, making it a problematic design only done by experienced quilters.



Figure 47. Pine Burr quilt by Henrietta Gardner. Photo provided by Alexis Matrone.

⁵⁹ “The Official Quilt of Alabama: The Pine Burr Quilt,” The Official Quilt of Alabama: The Pine Burr Quilt (Montgomery, AL: Alabama Department of Archives and History, n.d.), <https://archives.alabama.gov/activity/PineBurrQuiltbrochure.pdf>.

⁶⁰ “Official Symbols and Emblems of Alabama,” Alabama Department of Archives and History, Official Emblems--Pine burr Quilt, accessed February 23, 2022, https://archives.alabama.gov/emblems/st_quilt.html.

Pinwheel Quilt, c. 1900 hand-sewn by Henrietta Gardner.

The Pinwheel quilt is the smallest ($37 \frac{5}{16}$ in x $37 \frac{11}{16}$ in) and likely created as a baby's quilt. The style of this all-cotton quilt is a pinwheel. The pinwheel quilt block is one of the oldest patterns in quilting. The pinwheel quilt consists of two contrasting-colored triangles. The quilt also has blue tufts of yarn sticking out throughout the quilt.



Figure 48. Pinwheel quilt by Henrietta Gardner. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.

Quick Trip Quilt, c. 1900-1930 hand-sewn by Henrietta Gardner.

The next object, the Quick Trip quilt has unique edges to the quilt instead of the regularly pointed edges. It is also regular-sized ($77 \frac{7}{16}$ in x $57 \frac{3}{16}$ in) and is possibly a stuffed quilt. It is made from many different fabrics, but the quilt's outer edges are primarily done in yellow and red cotton.



Figure 49. Quick Trip quilt by Henrietta Gardner. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.

Green and White Quilt, c. 1900-1930 hand-sewn by Henrietta Gardner.

The green and white quilt is a vernacular geometric quilt pattern with scalloped edges (71 $\frac{3}{16}$ in x 74 $\frac{5}{8}$ in). Through research on quilt patterns, there have not been any quilts like this pattern. The green and white quilt is made of cotton and is likely a stuffed quilt. Stuffed work or stuffed quilts included some filler under the quilt or appliquéd designs to make them appear stuffed.⁶¹ Several examples of stuffed quilts can be found in *The Quilts of Tennessee*, which shows examples of quilts throughout the state of Tennessee before 1930



Figure 50. Geometric quilt by Henrietta Gardner. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.

⁶¹ Bets Ramsey, Merikay Waldvogel, and David Luttrell, *The Quilts of Tennessee: Images of Domestic Life Prior to 1930* (Nashville, TN: Rutledge Hill Press, 1986), 100.

Trying to date these quilts has been a challenge because most farming families reused clothes and scraps of cloth in their quilts to keep them cost-effective.⁶² The reuse of fabric was essential to working and some middle-class farming families. Material reusing was also done in isolated rural communities with limited access to goods. Dating the quilts can be difficult, the only quilt that has been dated is the log cabin quilt, and the family has provided this. However, it is known through family oral history that Henrietta was responsible for quilting all five quilts.

Furniture

At the Gardner Homestead, furniture was abundant, with chairs the most common pieces in the house. Three chairs stood out among all the others. These three chairs were removed from the home because of their age and distinctive design and construction. Two of the chairs are ladder back chairs, and the other is either a modified ladder-back chair or a child's chair. All three chairs have woven cane splint seats.

⁶² Teri Klassen, *Tennessee Delta Quilting* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2017), 16.

Ladder-back Chair, c. 1880.

The first chair (L $13 \frac{1}{16}$ in x W $17 \frac{1}{16}$ in x H $35 \frac{7}{8}$ in) was crafted with lighter wood and had two simple $2 \frac{3}{16}$ in. finials on the back. All three back slats are present and are unadorned. The split cane seat has holes, and the seat may have been rewoven. Overall, the chair is in excellent condition and is quite sturdy. The finials on this chair closely resemble the finials on a crib that Mat Gardner crafted, which means Mat could be the maker of the first chair.



Figures 51 & 52. Ladder back chair number one ca. 1880. Photos provided by Abigail Coomes.

Ladder-back Chair, c. 1880.

The second chair (L 13 $\frac{1}{16}$ in x W 17 $\frac{3}{16}$ in x H 37 $\frac{9}{16}$ in) has been crafted out of a darker wood than the first chair. There are two detailed 2 $\frac{1}{16}$ in. finials on the chair and other interactive carvings. Carved one-inch rings are on both sides of the back supports about one inch above the seat; two inches below the carved rings, a thin line is cut into the leg. The front legs have one-inch round finals on the top. Three back slats are present, with the fourth one missing at the bottom. These slats are straight and have been shaved and carved to fit into the chair. A split cane seat, like the first chair, is in good condition, but the seat could have been repaired. White paint is visible on the chair, with most color on the cane split seat. Throughout the chair, nail holes can be found to keep the different pieces secure. The chair is sturdy despite missing one back slat and is in good condition. The craftsman of the second chair is unknown.



Figures 53 & 54. Ladder back chair number two ca. 1880. Photos provided by Abigail Coomes.

Child's Chair, c. 1880-1930,

The third chair (L 14 ½ in x W 17 ⅞ in x H 21 ¾ in) is a child's chair, constructed out of dark wood with only one back slat. The original was a ladder-back chair, modified at an unknown date. The back slat has a carved "L.P." in the center; they are probably initials. There are no known members of the Gardner family with these initials, so they could be the initials of the craftsman who made the chair. All four legs have a band of three rings carved into them, and the two front legs have been rounded off with a circle cut in them, almost like a finial. Also, on the bottom of the legs, there are markings that lead to the possibility of some cap or protector on the feet of the chair, that or they were carved down for some reason. The split cane seat of the chair has broken off in places, but the rest is in good condition. The craftsman who created this chair is unknown.



Figure 55 & 56. Child's Chair and carved "L.P." on the back. Photos provided by Abigail Coomes.

The Gardner chairs are similar to other ladder-back chairs found from the late 19th century. A ladder-back chair attributed to Black craftsman Richard Poyner, at the Tennessee State Museum is similar to the Gardner chairs. Poyner was a formerly enslaved craftsman who bought his freedom in 1850 and became a chair maker in Williamson County, TN.⁶³ The Poyner chair dates ca. 1860-to 1880.



Figure 57. Richard Poyner Chair. Photo provided by the Tennessee State Museum.

⁶³ Richard Poyner, "Richard Poyner Chair," slat back chair, 1860-1870, Object ID 91.80, (Tennessee State Museum, Nashville), https://portal.museum.tn.gov/TSM_ARGUS/Portal/TSM_Portal.aspx?lang=en-US ; Carroll Van West and Margaret Duncan Binnicker, *A History of Tennessee Arts: Creating Traditions, Expanding Horizons* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2004). Pg. 163

The child's chair from the Gardner collection has no Tennessee comparable. A child's chair from Rutherford County, attributed to an enslaved craftsman, came from the Hiram Gibson Farm.⁶⁴ The Tennessee State Museum has dated the chair to ca. 1850-1870. It is a miniature ladder-back chair and is not similar to the child's chair from the Gardner collection.



Figure 58. Child's Chair. Photo provided by the Tennessee State Museum.

⁶⁴ Enslaved craftsmen, "Child's Chair," slat back chair, 1850-1870, Object ID 73.1, (Tennessee State Museum, Nashville), https://portal.museum.tn.gov/TSM_ARGUS/Portal/TSM_Portal.aspx?lang=en-US

The chairmaker's initials, also are different. These initials would usually be on the underside of the chair on the back of the slats, not the front of the back slat. Sometimes the makers would carve their initials or name into the chair, but company names could also be found as a symbol. The Chipstone Foundation has a web page that discusses the use of makers marks on furniture and provides several examples. The site has different ways to add the marks to the wood. Some standard methods would be “punched,” where dots would be punched into the wood to form the initials. The second way would be to have a stamp created and “stamp” the initials into the wood. Other methods included hand carving the initials into the wood and chalk inscriptions.⁶⁵ Having initials on the child’s chair show that the craftsperson wanted people to know they crafted the chair, and they were proud of their work. The child’s chair is the only chair with a maker’s mark that has been found at the Gardner homestead and can be used to talk about the art of chair making and the craftspeople who made them.

⁶⁵ Philip D. Zimmerman, “Early American Furniture Makers' Marks,” Chipstone, accessed April 30, 2022, <https://chipstone.org/images.php/571/American-Furniture-2007/Early-American-Furniture-Makers'-Marks>.

Baby Crib, c. 1877, Mat Gardner, Craftsperson.

The crib (L 32 ¼ in x W 22 ¼ in x H 31 ¾ in): was constructed sometime before the birth of Mat and Ritta's first child in 1877. According to descendants, this crib was used for three generations, meaning all of Mat and Henrietta's children, some of their grandchildren, and a few of their great-grandchildren slept in the crib.⁶⁶ It is painted green, at an unknown date. The slats and rockers are replacements, c. 1970.⁶⁷



Figures 59 & 60. Side and top view of crib. Photos provided by Abigail Coomes.

⁶⁶ Jones, 127.

⁶⁷ Ibid.



Figure 61. Crib without slats or rockers. Photo provided by Carla Jones.



Figures 62 & 63. Spindle & Rocker of the Gardner Crib. Photos provided by Abigail Coomes.

Having a crib was necessary when raising children, and many families either made or bought their cribs. A comparable crib originated somewhere around Lucas, OH. Date and maker are unknown, but it was purchased off a farm in 1892 by Harmon McFarland for his firstborn son and stayed in his family until 1942.⁶⁸



Figure 64. Oak Spindle Rocking Cradle. Photo provided by Woody Auction LLC.

⁶⁸ “26’ x 29’ Oak Spindle Rocking Cradle - Feb 20, 2016: Woody Auction LLC in Ks,” LiveAuctioneers, accessed March 27, 2022, https://www.liveauctioneers.com/item/43381748_26-x-29-oak-spindle-rocking-cradle.

Quilting Rack, c. 1880.

The quilting rack is important due to the significant number of quilts made by Henrietta Gardner. Quilting racks were an essential tool that aided in the quilting process; these racks made the quilting process easier for the quilter. The Gardner Quilt Rack is different from other identified late 19th century racks. The red and blue quilt rack is a southern example from Oglethorpe County, Georgia, that dates c. 1800-1860.⁶⁹ The unpainted 19th century quilt rack is from Pennsylvania and is a similar model to the Gardner quilt rack.⁷⁰



Figure 65. Quilting Rack. Photo provided by Kate Hughes.

⁶⁹ “Rare Southern Quilt Rack - Nov 13, 2010: Brunk Auctions in NC,” LiveAuctioneers, accessed April 5, 2022, https://www.liveauctioneers.com/item/8098706_77-rare-southern-quilt-rack.

⁷⁰ “Pa 19th Century Mixed Wood Quilting Rack. - Mar 18, 2017: Conestoga Auction Company Division of Hess Auction Group in Pa,” LiveAuctioneers, accessed March 27, 2022, https://www.liveauctioneers.com/item/51033191_pa-19th-century-mixed-wood-quilting-rack.



Figure 66. 19th c. Mixed Wood Quilting Rack. Photo provided by Conestoga Auction Company a division of Hess Auction Group.



Figure 67. Rare Southern Quilt Rack. Photo provided by Brunk Auctions.

Table, c. 1940.

A family member built the small (L 18 $\frac{9}{16}$ in x W 14 $\frac{13}{16}$ in x H 28 $\frac{1}{8}$ in) table from scrap wood. It has been painted grey/silver over the years and has pieces of wood added to it to stabilize it. Currently, the table is very unstable, and before removal, it had a metal grinder attached to one side. When the table was removed from the property, Gary Gardner said, "I remember they would prep and grind up vegetables on that table."⁷¹ The side with the grinder attached to the tabletop has an extra piece of wood between the tabletop and legs. The extra piece was probably added later to help support and secure the grinder to the table; at least one of the legs of the table looks like it might be a handle of an ax.

The two pieces of wood used for the tabletop are painted grey on top, the underside is unpainted, and there is writing printed on the wood. The visible letters on the underside are B U C K L with a faint E and S. The bottom line is A R I O S A. Through research, these letters led to the Arbuckles Ariosa Coffee company, which was sold in wooden boxes containing 100 pounds bags of roasted coffee. This company dates to 1865, when the Arbuckle brothers started the company in their Pittsburgh grocery store, and it can still be purchased online.⁷² The print on the bottom shows that whoever constructed this table used scrap wood for the construction. It is possible that this small table had other uses besides in the kitchen when it was first created, but due to its placement and oral histories, it is being interpreted as a small kitchen table.

⁷¹ Gary, Gardner, interview, December 13, 2021.

⁷² Josh Willis, "The Arbuckle Blog Vol 1 Issue 1: The Story of Arbuckle Coffee," Arbuckle Coffee (Arbuckle Coffee, September 17, 2018), <https://arbucklecoffee.com/blogs/news/the-arbuckle-blog-vol-1-issue-1>.

The kitchen table is one of a kind, but there are similar primitive tables that the Gardner piece can be compared to. The primitive table from Copake Auction Inc. is the closest in size to the Gardner table.⁷³ The farmhouse table from Rivich Auction is like the Gardner table. The farmhouse table and Gardner table have a less refined look and is obviously made from scrap pieces of wood, while the primitive table looks more refined compared to the others.⁷⁴ Tables like these were not created to be decorative, but the Gardner table and the two comparatives all have a coat of paint on them. The primitive table is painted green, the farmhouse table is blue with green visible under the blue, and the Gardner table is grey and silver.

⁷³ “Primitive Side Table - May 20, 2017: Copake Auction Inc. in NY,” LiveAuctioneers, accessed March 26, 2022, https://www.liveauctioneers.com/item/53043452_primitive-side-table.

⁷⁴ “Early 20th C. Farmhouse Primitive Table - Jan 17, 2021: Rivich Auction in IL,” LiveAuctioneers, accessed April 5, 2022, https://www.liveauctioneers.com/catalog/209831_museum-quality-pt-4-farmhouse-and-america/.



Figure 68. Kitchen worktable. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.



Figure 69. Underside of kitchen worktable. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.



Figure 70. Primitive Side Table. Photo provided by Copake Auction Inc.



Figure 71. Early 20th c. Farmhouse Primitive Table. Photo provided by Rivich Auction.

RCA Victor Radio, c. 1943-1946,

Model 65F Serial No. B005216.⁷⁵ The radio is broadcast-only. The schematics service notes possible list parts used in the radio. Having a radio was a symbol of status and wealth. Most rural African American families did not own a radio since radios were often expensive and seen as a luxury item. Radios were not seen as necessary for most families, and they found other ways to obtain news or entertain themselves. A member of the Gardner family bought the radio after the death of both Mat and Henrietta, perhaps as a way to obtain central news about World War II. Several members of the Gardner family served in the armed services the during the war.



Figure 72. RCA Victor Radio Model 65F. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.

⁷⁵ *RCA Victor Service Data 1943-1946 Radio Receivers Phonographs Television* (Camden, NJ: RCA Victor Division, 1948).

Butter Churn, c. 1880.

The butter churn is brown glazed stoneware with a four stamped on the churn. The churn also has two handles on either side of the jug. The churn lid is also brown glazed but is made of different material due to the darker clay on the underside of the lid. This lid has a five stamped on it. The numbers were stamped into lids and jugs so the user could tell how gallons it should hold; since the four is on the jug of the churn, it should be a four-gallon butter churn. The butter churn paddle could be original, but there is a strong possibility that part or all of it has been replaced over the years due to the nature of churning butter and its usage. This butter churn was located in the kitchen and was an essential tool for life on a farm.



Figure 73. Butter Churn. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.

Clothing and Accessories

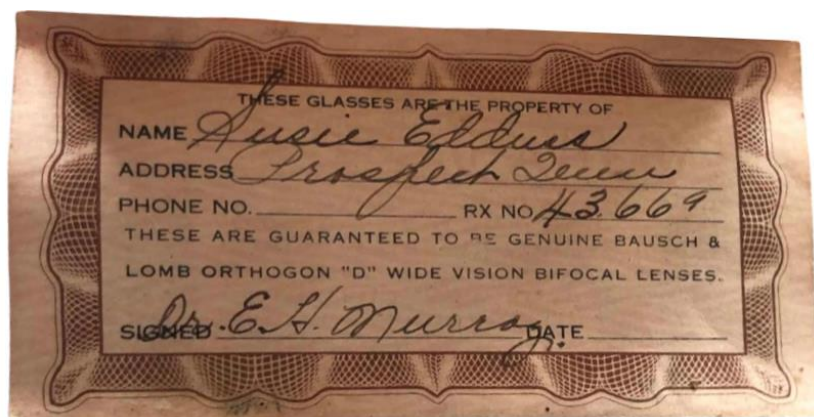
Inside the Gardner home, there were several clothing items and a pair of eyeglasses. Four of these items were hats that once belonged to members of the Gardner family. There is only one object from this collection that we know who owned and wore the artifact, and that is the eyeglasses. Family members as bought most of the hats. Looking at the locations of these department stores shows how the Gardner family left Elkton and spread out to different states.

The eyeglasses belonged to Susan Eddings, who was Mat and Henrietta's first daughter. They are in good condition, and both lenses are still in the glasses. The case for the glasses is still in good shape, and there is a card with the glasses that say who they belong to and the optometrist they came from. The certificate states that they are genuine Bausch & Lomb No. 300519 D *Orthogon* "D" wide vision bifocal lenses. This certificate was also a warranty that if anything happened to the glasses, the company would replace them. Dr. E.H. Murray, an optometrist in Pulaski, Tennessee, has signed the certificate prescribing the glasses to Susan with a prescription number of 43669.

Bausch & Lomb was founded in 1853 in Rochester, NY, and is still in business, with its headquarters located in Canada.⁷⁶ The company was known for its top-of-the-line eyeglasses, and family oral history states that Susan was known to be a fashionable lady. Also, according to family members, these eyeglasses are circa 1925.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ "The Bausch + Lomb Story," accessed April 28, 2022, <https://www.bausch.com/our-company/about-bausch-lomb/the-bausch-lomb-story>.

⁷⁷ Jones, 126.



Figures 74, 75, & 76. Susan Eddings' glasses with Bausch & Lomb Certificate. Photos provided by Abigail Coomes.

The grey and white brim baseball cap contain a tag with an “L” on it and a bird; the tag also says that it was made in Japan.⁷⁸ The Straw Brim Sun hat has fake flowers around the front part with a black ribbon around the entire hat. The tag on the inside of the hat says Shillito’s, and then below that, Cincinnati. The Shillito department store originally opened in 1830 in Cincinnati and eventually spread to Northern Kentucky and Louisville starting in 1960.⁷⁹ The store was eventually merged when Lazarus bought it in 1986.⁸⁰ The original store still stands and has been turned into luxury apartments.

The Juliet flower cap has an assortment of fake pink flowers on it. The flower-trimmed small hat gained popularity in 1954 with the coronation of Queen Elizabeth.⁸¹ On the inside of this hat, the tag reads, “The Wm. H. Block Co.” Indianapolis – Glendale. The original location was opened in 1911 and slowly started opening more locations, including the Glendale location, one of the first suburban locations opened in 1958. Lazarus took over all their stores in 1987.⁸² The Cossack Hat, unfortunately, has no identifiable manufacturing labels to provide where it was purchased or a possible date for the hat.⁸³

⁷⁸ Admin, “Caps - Billed Caps - Baseball Caps,” Vintage Fashion Guild, February 25, 2017, <https://vintagefashionguild.org/hat-resource/baseball-caps-billed-caps-caps/>.

⁷⁹ “Shillito’s, Cincinnati, Ohio,” The Department Store Museum, accessed July 10, 2021, <http://www.thedepartmentstoremuseum.org/2010/06/shillitos-cincinnati-ohio.html>.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Admin, “Calot - Juliet Cap,” Vintage Fashion Guild, February 25, 2017, <https://vintagefashionguild.org/hat-resource/juliet-cap-calot/>.

⁸² Dawn Mitchell, “Retroindy: William H. Block Department Store Was as Fancy as They Get,” *Indianapolis Star* (December 1, 2017), <https://www.indystar.com/story/news/history/retroindy/2017/12/01/retroindy-william-h-block-department-store-fancy-they-get/900724001/>.

⁸³ Admin, “Cossack Hat,” Vintage Fashion Guild, February 25, 2017, <https://vintagefashionguild.org/hat-resource/hat-cossack/>.



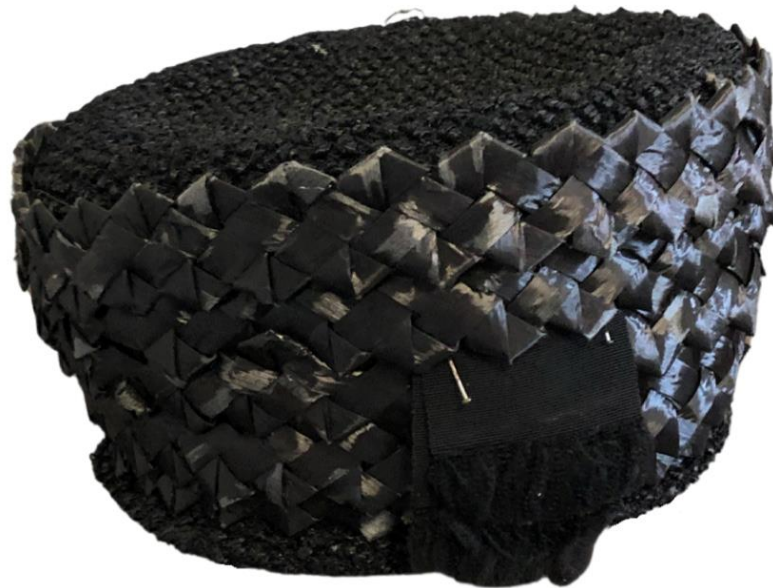
Figures 77, 78, & 79. Shillito's Straw Hat & Tag. Photos provided by Abigail Coomes.



Figures 80 & 81. Grey & White Baseball Cap. Photos provided by Abigail Coomes.



Figures 82, 83, & 84. The Wm. H. Block Co. Juliet Cap & Tag. Photos provided by Abigail Coomes.



Figures 85 & 86. Black Cossack Hat. Photos provided by Abigail Coomes.

Two dresses were exhibited in first-floor west bedroom in the home. They are a ca. 1940's red sundress with a matching bonnet and a reproduction ca. 2010 field dress with a cotton bag.⁸⁴ The red sundress and bonnet is made with a red fabric that contains white and yellow flowers that resemble a daisy. The dress and bonnet also have blue and yellow accent trim throughout the pieces. The dress could have belonged to one of the daughters of Mat and Henrietta or one of the grandchildren; further research needs to be done to determine who owned the dress.

This reproduction field dress and cotton bag are important to the family history because Mat grew and sold cotton and cotton seed. The *Store Ledger* and family oral histories confirm that Mat and the Gardner family grew cotton⁸⁵.



Figure 87. Red Sundress & Bonnet. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.

⁸⁴ The reproduction field dress currently needs to be cleaned as it was infested with bugs and other debris.

⁸⁵ Elkton Historical Society, and Jewel Bailey. Jewel Bailey Interview. Other. Matt Gardner Homestead, 2006. https://elkton.storymapper.org/sites/default/files/2019-05/jewel_bailey_interview_edited_for_wtp.pdf.

Other Objects

Life on a farm tends to be busy with other responsibilities like raising a family or going to school, but the Gardner's still found time for other activities. For the children, playtime would have been special as they often had to finish their schoolwork and chores first. A wood and metal red painted box contained several dolls and a few knickknacks. The box could have been used to store other objects, but as the number of children born into the family grew, Mat and Henrietta supplied their grandchildren and great-grandchildren with a box to store their toys. This doll box had one porcelain baby doll, date unknown, and four plastic dolls, which were broken apart. No documented label shows that the box was bought at a store. There is no label, stamp, or tag anywhere in or on the box.

The box was painted red at some point, and inside the box, an owner placed white and green wallpaper for decoration. There was also some rope on each side of the box to keep the lid propped open, as well as a rope handle on the top. All three of these rope components have been removed over the years. The Gardner doll box is like other doll boxes available during the 19th century. A comparative object from Oklahoma has locks and some decorative paper on the inside of the boxes. The black and red box includes a tray that helped organize the chest while the Gardner box did not have a tray.⁸⁶ The comparative Oklahoma doll box has a more finished look; which suggest that the Gardner doll box was hand-made, or it could have been repurposed with the addition of decorative paper.

⁸⁶ "Wood Doll Trunk - Sep 24, 2006: Livingston's Auction in Ok," LiveAuctioneers, accessed March 27, 2022, https://www.liveauctioneers.com/item/2465247_625-wood-doll-trunk.



Figures 88 & 89. Gardner doll box. Photos provided by Abigail Coomes.



Figure 90. Doll Box. Photo provided by Montrose Auction Inc.

J. Pressman and Company, Inc., which was founded in Texas in 1922, produced the Bingo Game c. 1925.⁸⁷ The company was renamed in 1947 to the Pressman Toy Corporation and is based out of New York City; with production focused on family games. A majority of the pieces for the game are still inside the box, though the box lid has deteriorated due to the game being a Gardner family favorite.⁸⁸



Figure 91 & 92. Bingo by J. Pressman & Co. Inc... Photos provided by Abigail Coomes.

⁸⁷ "About Pressman," Pressman Toy, accessed April 30, 2022, <https://www.pressmantoy.com/about-pressman/>.

⁸⁸ Jones, 123.

The case for the sewing needles is in good condition. Some needles are missing from the case, but that is to be expected with an item used frequently. There are a couple of needles that have extremely small eyelets. One section of the case shows a patent date of 1914. The date means that the needle kit most likely belonged to Henrietta Gardner or one of her daughters. This case was a way to store an essential tool many women used during the 19th and 20th centuries. Sewing was a skill that women were taught because it allowed women to make and repair clothes, quilts, blankets, and other goods for their families. The skill could also help a woman earn money by offering to repair, make, or hem clothes.



Figures 93 & 94. Sewing needle case. Photos provided by Abigail Coomes.

Mat and Henrietta made most of their money from farming and operating a small store out of their smokehouse. Four glass bottles and jars were removed from the collapsed smokehouse in December 2021. One jar accounting to Gary Gardner was a c. 1970 jam jar. There were several of these jars found through the collapsed building, but only two remained intact. One went to the Heritage Center for future use in the museum exhibit, and the other Gary kept for his family. The only markings on the bottom of this jar are “11” in the center.



Figure 95. Collection of four glass bottles and jars. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.

A mason jar still had the metal lid attached to the jar. There were several of these jars, but this is the only jar and lid set with a mostly intact lid. The bottom of this jar has four markings on it “A-32-12” at the top, a “14” in the middle to the left, a circle off-centered from the middle, and lastly, “GAC” at the bottom. The “GAC” is the makers mark and has not been identified by glass experts. Researching makers marks through the Society for Historical Archeology’s Historic Bottle Identification website, a possible marker was identified. The Arkansas Glass container Corp. marked some of their bottles with AGC, bottles made by the company also show a similar code sequence format.⁸⁹ The company is still producing glass jars, and they have a jar on their site that is “A0032-12” like the one from the Gardner homestead.⁹⁰



Figures 96 & 97. Bottoms of Mason Jar (left) and Jam Jar (right). Photos provided by Abigail Coomes.

⁸⁹ Bill Lockhart et al., “Other ‘A’ Marks,” accessed April 29, 2022, <https://sha.org/bottle/pdf/AOther.pdf>, 521.

⁹⁰ Arkansas Glass Company, “A0032-12,” AGC, accessed April 29, 2022, <http://www.agcc.com/products/32oz-eco.html>.

The hobble-skirt Coca-Cola bottle has a break in the bottom, it has “Pat. D. 105529” identified. Bottles with this embossed patent were known as “D-Patent Cokes” and were produced from 1938 to 1951.⁹¹ The bottom of the Coke bottle “FOLR” is embossed; if the base were not broken, this would likely continue to spell Florida. Manufacturing companies often put the name of the bottling location on the glass bottoms.



Figure 98. Bottom of Coca-Cola Bottle. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.

⁹¹ “Antique Coke Bottles,” Antique Bottle Collectors Haven, accessed April 28, 2022, <http://www.antiquebottles.com/coke/>.

The last bottle was a small bottle with ribs on the sides. The bottle was made by Knox Glass Bottle Company in Jackson, MI, between 1932 and 1953.⁹² The left bottom corner has a keystone with a “J” in the center, this tells where the bottle was produced. It was most likely used for flavoring extracts. However, there is a “133” on the right side of the bottom, which was the liquor code given to Knox by the federal government, but this usually was followed by a two-digit number representing the year, i.e., “64”.⁹³ In the middle of the bottom towards the top is a “1,” and this could represent several things like a mold number.



Figure 99. Bottom of Knox Bottle. Photo provided by Abigail Coomes.

Bottles are not often used as a source of information when researching a property or family, but these four bottles contain useful information. Markers embossed on the glass can provide dates that tell us what was happening at the Gardner homestead. The Knox bottle can be used in a kitchen exhibit, the mason jar and canning jar can be used in a presentation on canning clubs, a Coca-Cola bottle could be displayed in the dining room, or all four pieces could be used in an exhibit about the storehouse.

⁹² Bill Lockhart et al., “The Knox Glass Bottle Co. - Society for Historical Archaeology,” accessed April 28, 2022, https://sha.org/bottle/pdffiles/Knox2_BRG.pdf, 7.

⁹³ Bill Lockhart et al., “Knox Glass Bottle Co. - Society for Historical Archaeology,” accessed April 29, 2022, <https://sha.org/bottle/pdffiles/KnoxGlass.pdf>, 220.

The MTSU Center for Historic Preservation is planning an exhibit including objects from the Gardner Collection for the Heritage Center of Murfreesboro in the fall of 2022. Abigail Coomes, Carroll Van West, Laura Holder, and Amy NeeSmith will curate and design the exhibit. The preservation of the home needs to be started and completed before the objects are returned to the property. More research into primary source documents will also need to be done, including two Gardner ledgers that are currently being housed at the Heritage Center. The goal is to get the house preserved and exhibits re-installed so the site can be reopened to the public. An Omeka website is also being developed for the museum. The website will contain information about the history of the property and information on the objects that are used in the exhibits. If possible, a section of the website will be dedicated to the family tree and contain information about individual descendants of Mat and Henrietta Gardner.

Why Black Rural Landscapes Matter

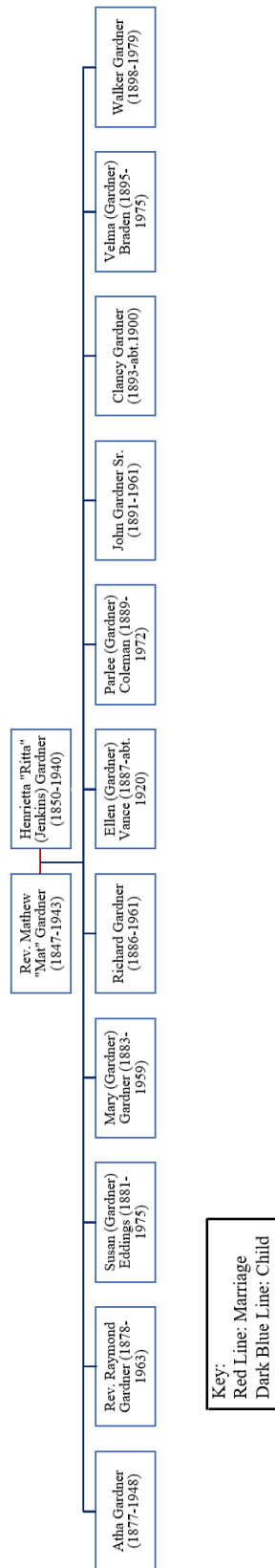
The Matt Gardner Homestead is an important part of the historiography of the rural South because it is a Black-owned farm that was successful up until the death of Mat Gardner. It helps tell the story of rural African American life beyond poverty and sharecropping. Mat's story also shows how crucial churches were to the survival of these rural African American communities. The Gardner family story also shows how agency and institutions provided support for the growth of a rural Black enclave. The agency that Mat Gardner had as a landowner and religious leader lead him to work with institutions like the Rosenwald program and other religious organizations that would help support the community. This community thrived in the rural South, only 18 miles from where the KKK was founded in Pulaski, Tennessee; and it continues to be a thriving community due to the lasting impact of the Gardner family in the community.

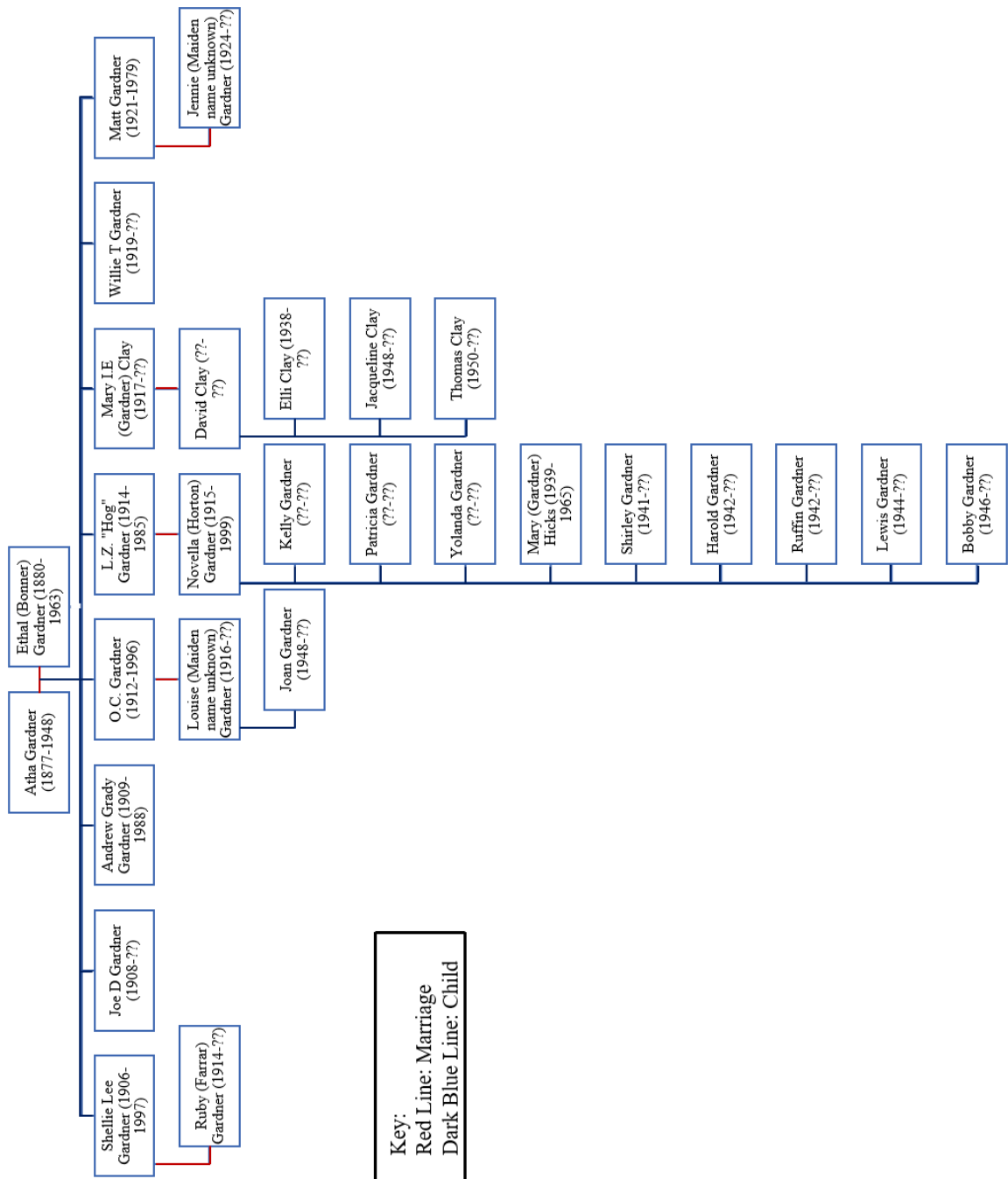
It became a community with a working, middle, and wealthy class of African Americans, and it was only one of two Black enclaves in Giles County, TN. Reverend Mat Gardner was instrumental in getting the community started and established, and his children and grandchildren helped carry on that legacy. The Gardner family is just one example of Black landowning families in the rural south that were able to provide for the surrounding African American community. Black landowners often provided jobs, access to provisions, or provided a safe place for the community to gather. The role of Black landowners in the landscape of the rural South is why the Matt Gardner Homestead and others like it need to be studied further.

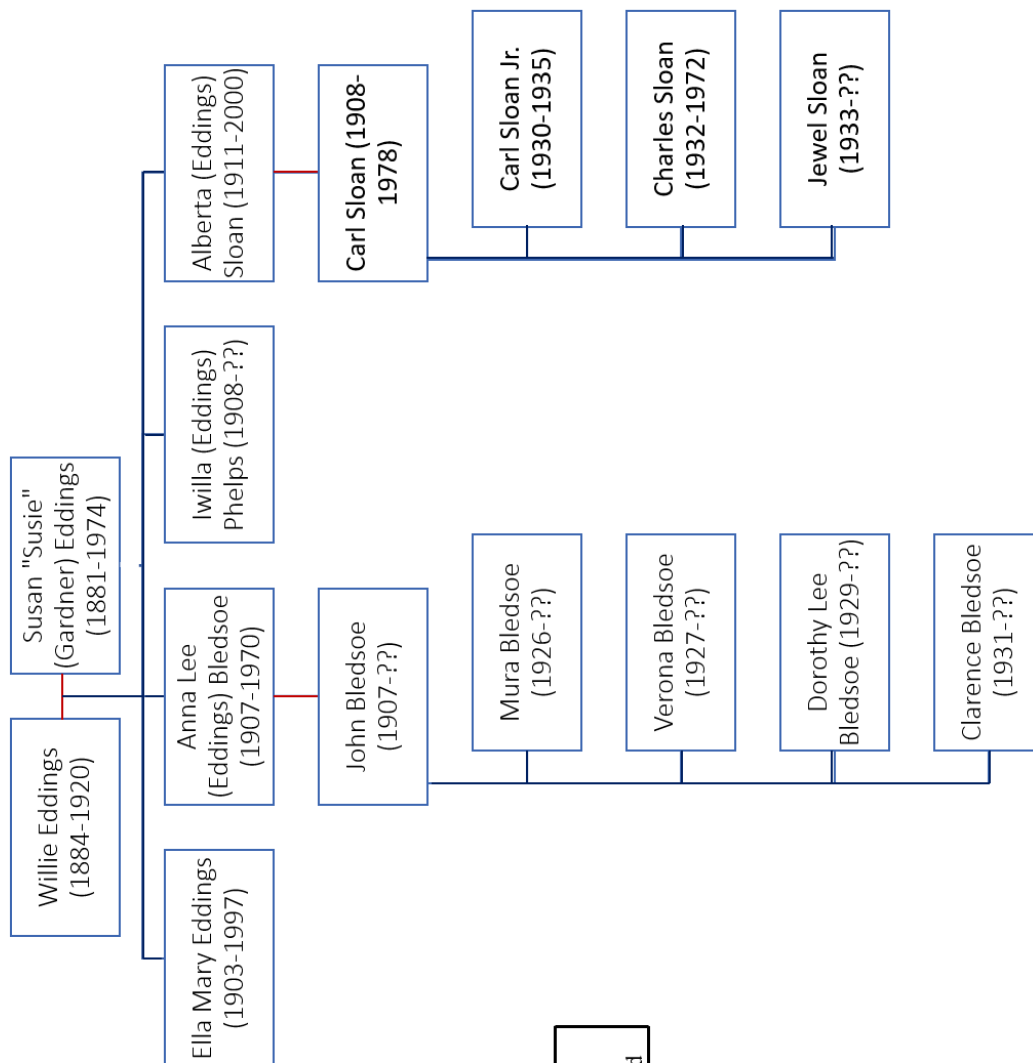
Appendix:

Gardner Family Tree

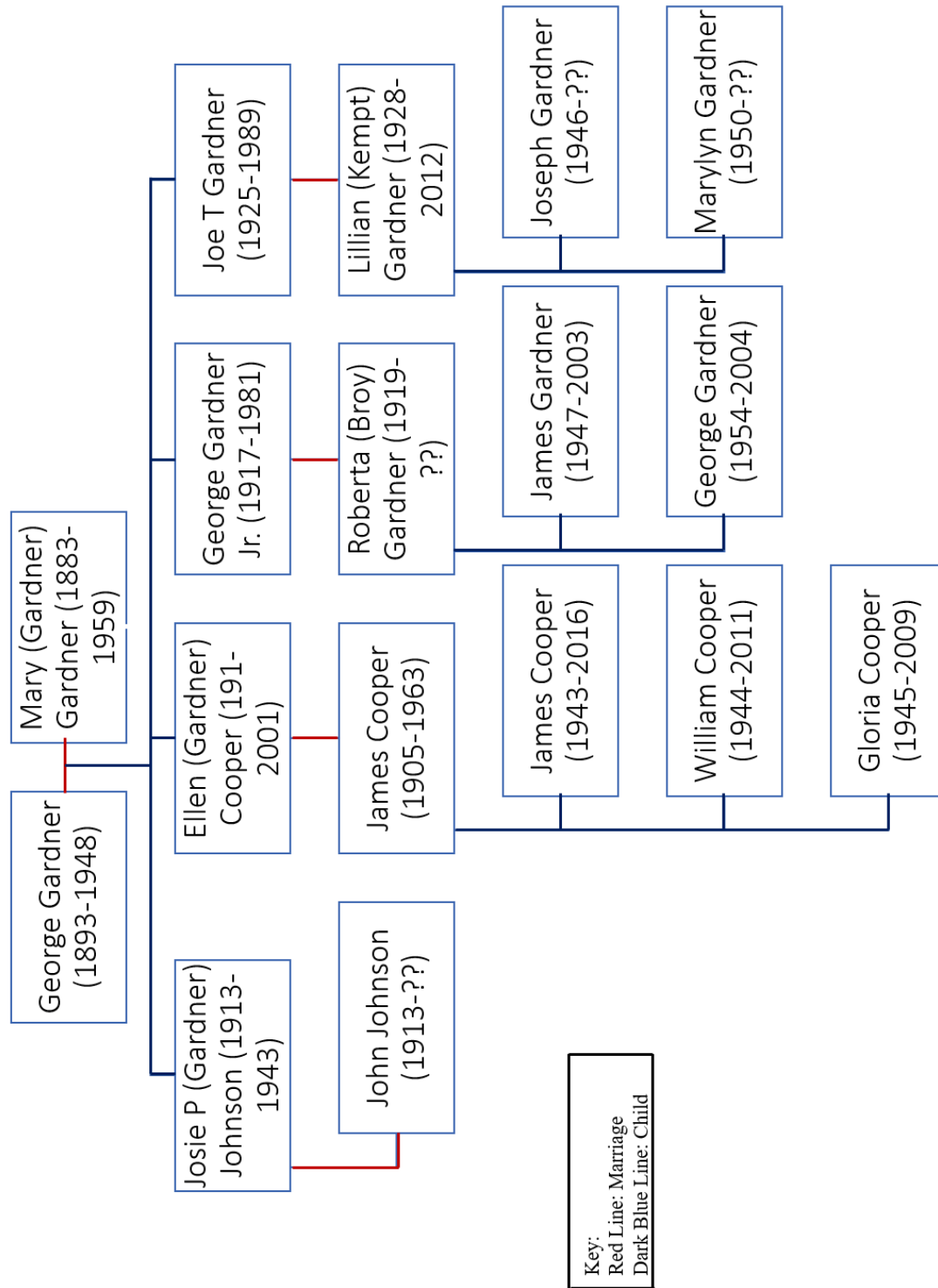
An appendix has been added to this thesis containing the Gardner family tree. I carried out the research for the family tree in the summer of 2021 during an internship with The Land Trust of Tennessee and the Heritage Center of Murfreesboro and Rutherford County. The family trees in the appendix focus on Mat and Henrietta's children and goes to their great-grandchildren. The Gardner family provided crucial information and review of the family tree.

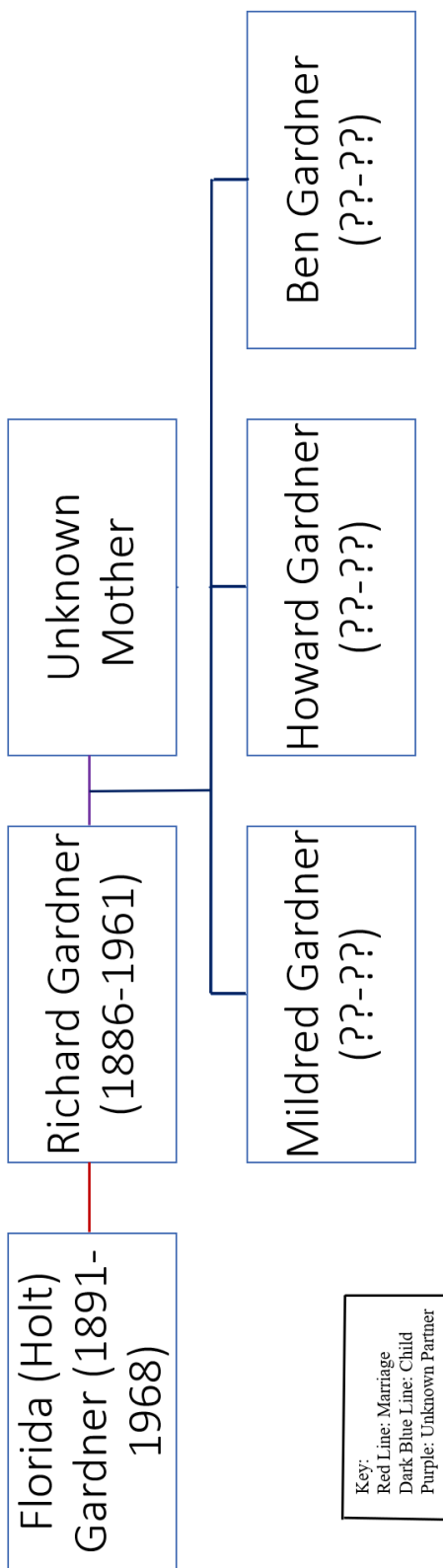


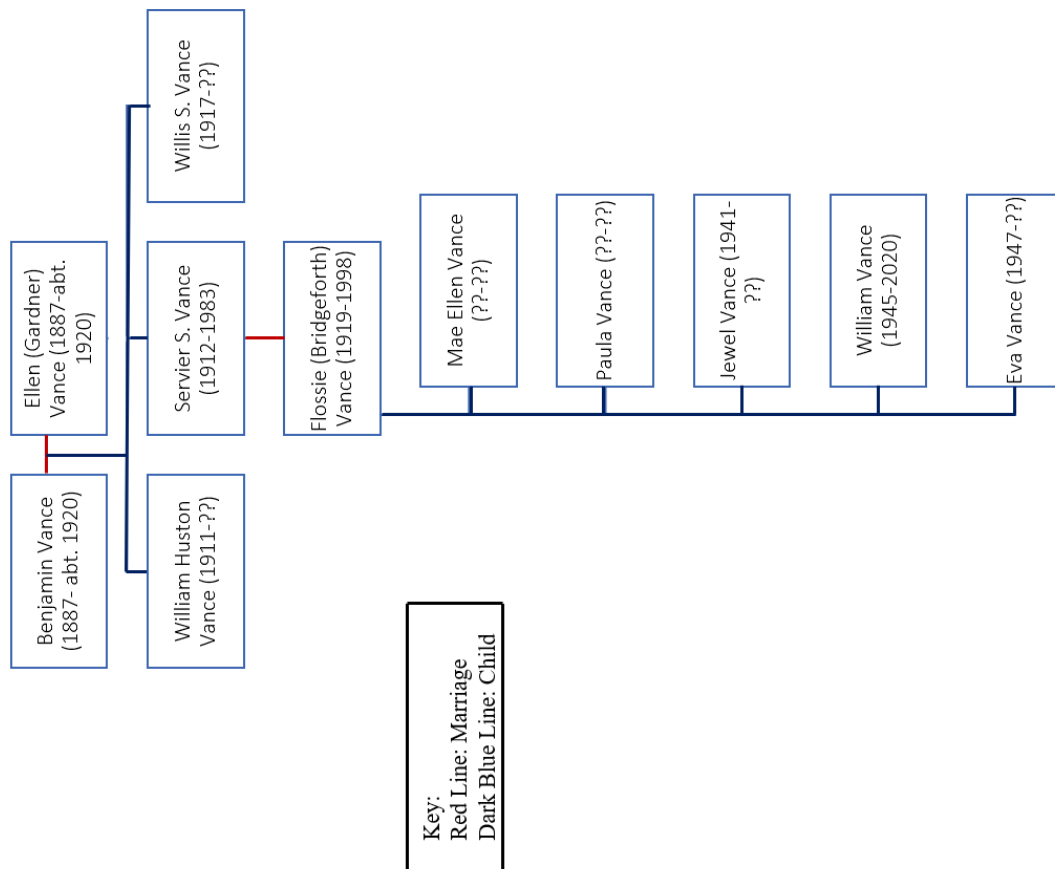


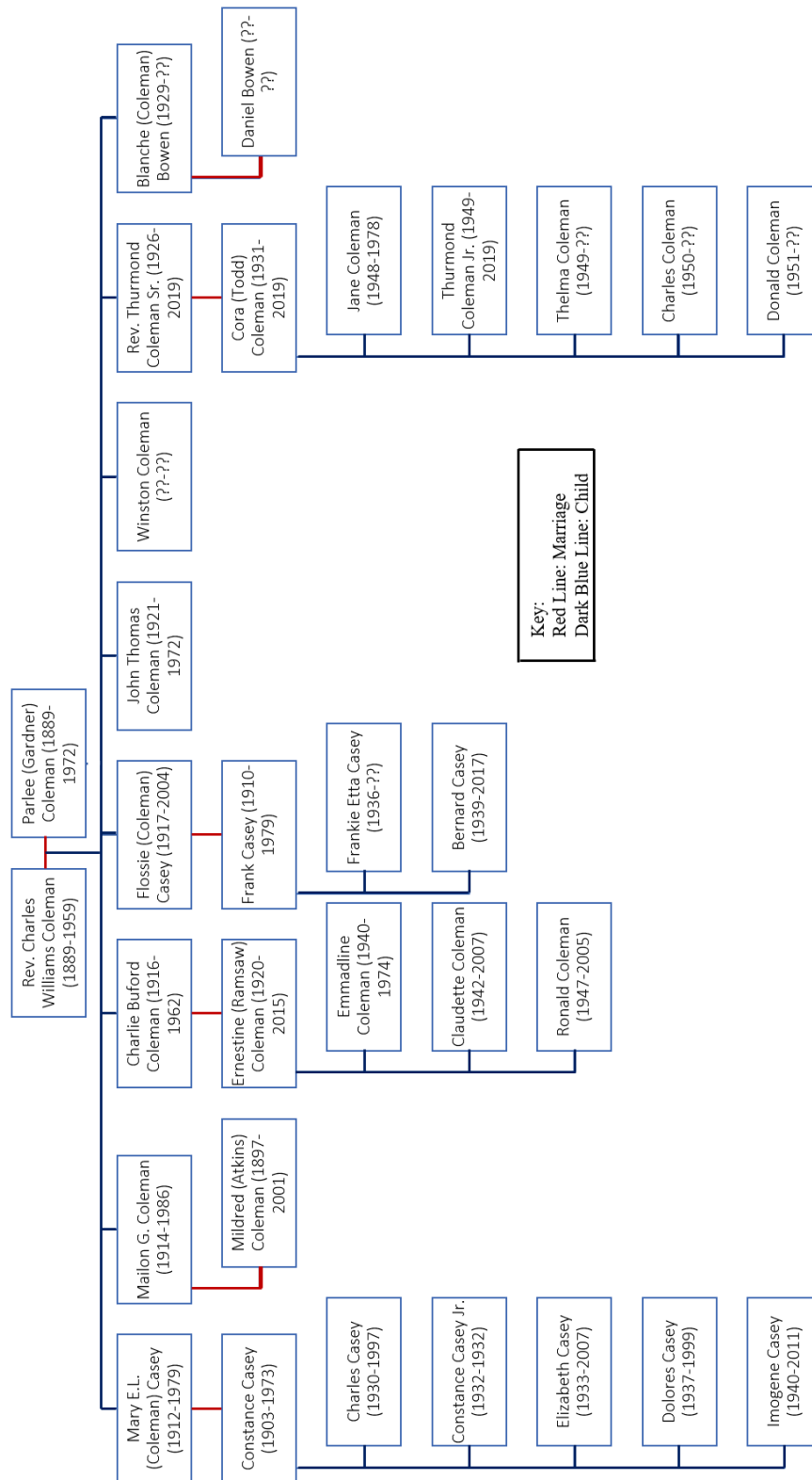


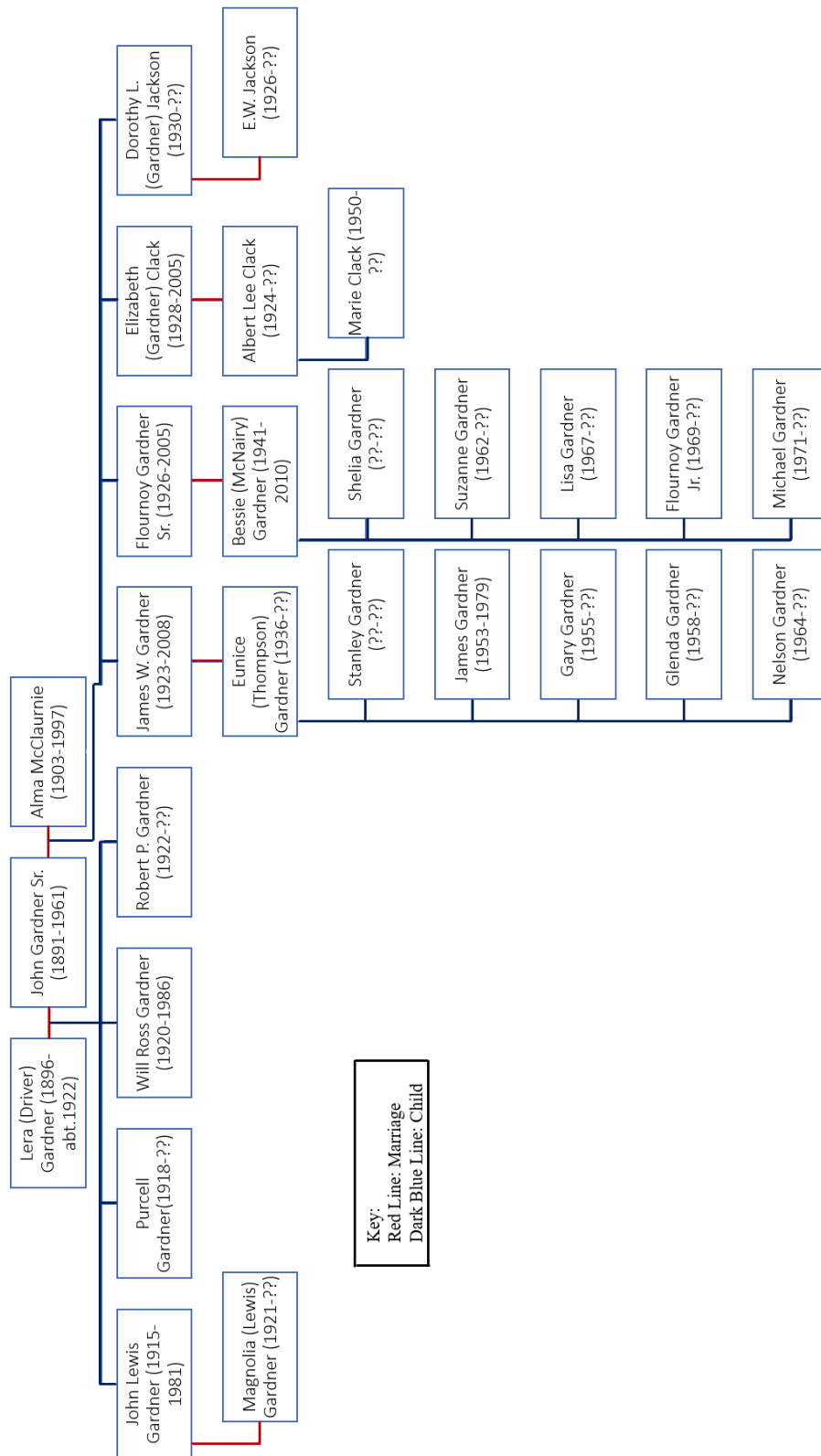
Key:
 Red Line: Marriage
 Dark Blue Line: Child

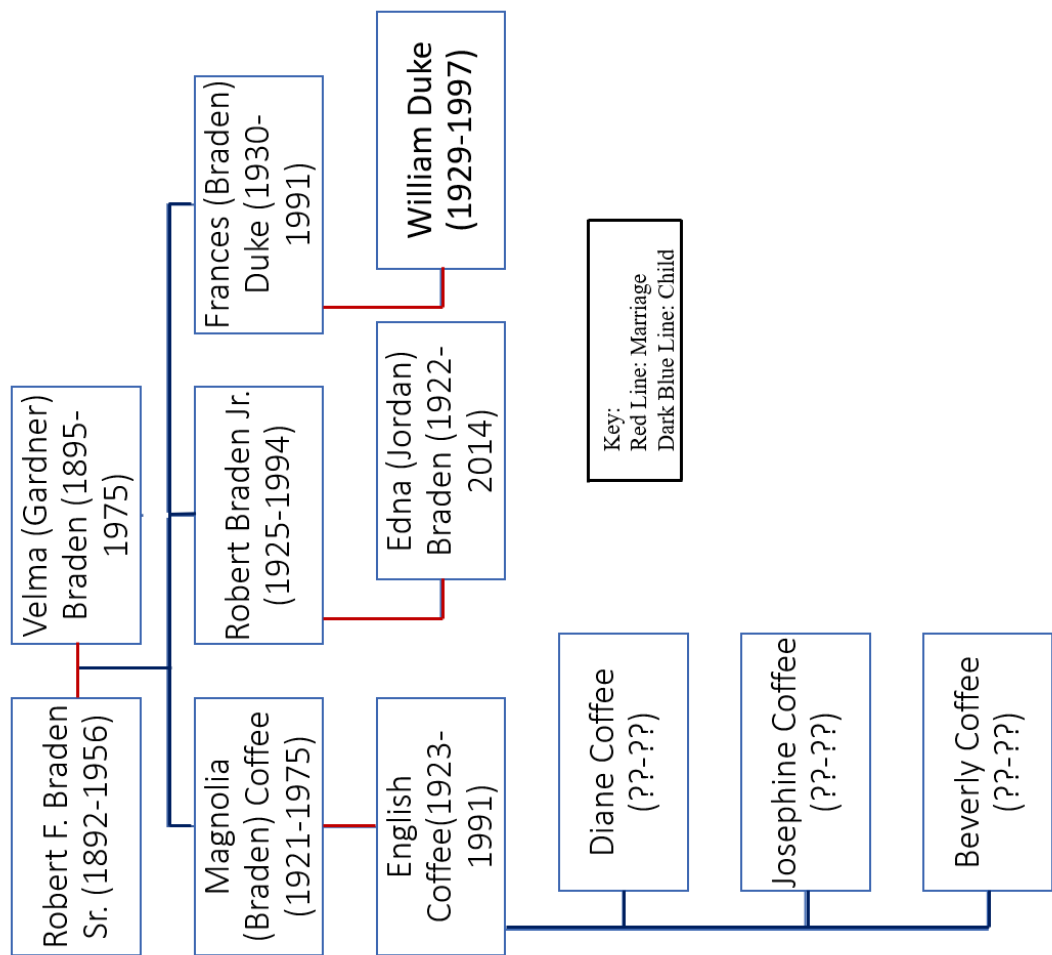


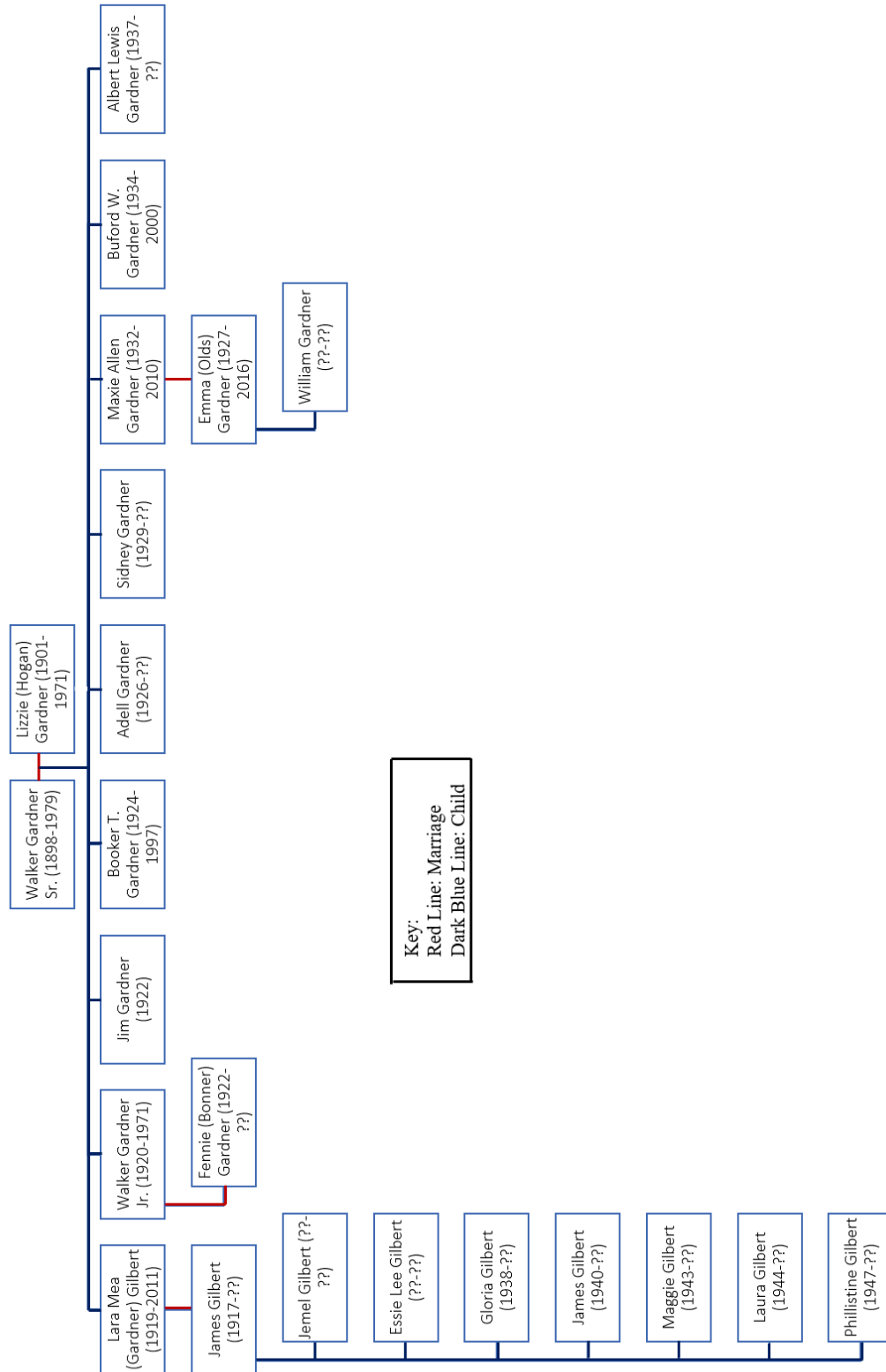












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