

STEWARDSHIP OF THE LAND AND STEWARDSHIP OF THE PAST:
TENNESSEE AGRICULTURAL HISTORY AND PUBLIC HISTORY

By

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ABSTRACT

Tennessee's agricultural history provides a lens through which to examine the macro history of change over time in relation to adaptive technology, the increasing dependence on industrial agriculture as family farms face insurmountable competition, and the evolving rural community as people labor for food and fiber production. However, public historians have played a relatively minor role in the interpretation of Tennessee agricultural history, even though one Agricultural Extension Agent initiated a statewide collection of farm-related artifacts and created an accompanying museum. This dissertation addresses that gap in public history by analyzing historic properties and museums in Tennessee that interpret agricultural history. By relying on existing scholarship on Tennessee agricultural history, the dissertation reveals the discrepancies between the lived experiences of Tennessee agriculturalists and the attenuated versions often presented at historic sites and museums. It focuses on the Tennessee Agricultural Museum in Nashville as the premier example of the state's relationship with these stories. While evaluating public historians' previous interpretation of Tennessee agricultural history, it also petitions for increased study, promotion, and integration of agricultural history at historic sites throughout the state.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Agricultural History Society (AHS)

Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)

Ellington Agricultural Center (EAC)

Land between the Lakes (LBL)

Land Trust for Tennessee (LTTN)

Middle Tennessee State University Center for Historic Preservation (CHP)

Oscar Farris Agricultural Museum Association (OFAMA)

Tennessee Department of Agriculture (TDA)

Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA)

University of Tennessee Knoxville (UTK)

INTRODUCTION

This study of the intersection of Tennessee agricultural history and public history developed out of my practice as a public historian at the Tennessee Agricultural Museum. I joined the staff in January 2015 as the Museum Program Coordinator, which serves as the primary educator and liaison with the public through outreach and programs. As I adapted the history of Tennessee agriculture to curriculum packets and field trips, I frequently struggled to find resources that addressed my topics, such as Native American cultivation practices, the historically distinct approaches of farming per Grand Division, and the changing landscape of rural life through industrialization.

Certain avenues existed to adapt comparable material for public audiences. For example, I formed meaningful connections with the Master Gardeners of Davidson County and learned from their approaches to teach about sustainability and Tennessee-specific topics, like native pollinators, heirloom crops, and soil composition. Likewise, Tennessee Farm Bureau's "Ag in the Classroom" assisted in the promotion of agricultural literacy through unique learning opportunities for both students and educators. However, I consistently experienced a sense of isolation in discussing the history of Tennessee agriculture to the museum's diverse audiences.

In the autumn of 2018, I transitioned to the role of museum director. With the increased responsibilities came amplified access to networking opportunities and a heightened awareness that the Tennessee Agricultural Museum could serve as an innovator in promoting an appreciation for rural history through dynamic, inclusive, and accessible programming and exhibits. To pursue this goal and develop myself as a

professional, I enrolled in Middle Tennessee State University's doctorate program in Public History. I was fortunate to secure Dr. Carroll Van West as my advisor and dissertation chair. As founder and director of the Tennessee Century Farms Program and Director of the Center for Historic Preservation, Dr. West's insight into my vision for the Tennessee Agricultural Museum has proved invaluable.

This dissertation studies the intersection of Tennessee agricultural history and public history through the evaluation of cultural institutions related to rural history in the state. Under Dr. West's guidance, I visited and studied numerous sites in all three Grand Divisions to observe their parameters of agricultural history and calculate their success in public programming and interpretation. I also searched for gaps in the interpretation and compared these with each other. Although I studied twelve sites, my dissertation will focus on seven as case studies.¹ My dissertation will discuss how sites such as the Historic Ramsey House, Ames Plantation, Glen Leven Farm, The Homeplace, the Lenoir Museum, and the West Tennessee Agricultural Museum relate rural history through exhibits and public programming. That analysis informs my study of the Tennessee Agricultural Museum and its origins, material collection, and interpretation, as the primary example for the state's public commitment to agricultural history.

This dissertation benefited from a diverse body of literature, but the relevant monographs rarely dovetail with the practice of public history at the state's agricultural history properties. Such major regional and state-specific agricultural history studies as

¹ These include sites from across the state: West Tennessee – the Ames Plantation and the West Tennessee Agricultural Museum, Middle Tennessee – Historic Grassmere Farm, Glen Leven, Historic Travellers Rest, Rippavilla Plantation, the Tennessee Agricultural Museum, and The Homeplace, East Tennessee – Historic Ramsey House, the Lenoir Museum, Cades Cove, and the Nancy Ward Gravesite.

those by Pete Daniel, Donald Winters, and Paul K. Conkin contributed helpful and thorough monographs that established the South's agricultural development and evolution.² Recent specialized studies on the post-Civil War Era like that of Ronald L.F. Davis, who examined sharecropping in the Natchez District from 1860 to 1950, and Connie L. Lester, who studied Tennessee agriculture through the complex dynamics of agricultural political movements like The Farmers' Alliance from 1870 to 1915, shed light on the period of agricultural history often neglected at public history properties.³

Work from historians Debra Reid and Melissa Walker particularly shaped my understanding. Both excelled at addressing the complexity of agricultural history as it is translated through the filter of public consumption. Reid's contribution through the collection of essays in *Interpreting Agriculture at Museums and Historic Sites*, and her articles "Open-Air Museums and Historic Sites" and "Tangible Agricultural History: An Artifact's-Eye View of the Field" communicate valuable fundamentals of interpreting rural life.⁴ Reid's scholarship provides benchmarks for conveying agricultural history, but her scope is not limited to Southern agriculture or a particular era. Walker's academic history monograph, *All We Knew Was to Farm: Rural Women in the Upcountry South*,

² Pete Daniel, *Breaking the Land: The Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Cultures since 1880* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1985) and *Dispossession: Discrimination Against African American Farmers in the Age of Civil Rights* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013). Donald Winters, *Tennessee Farming, Tennessee Farmers* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995). Paul Keith Conkin, *A Revolution Down on the Farm: The Transformation of American Agriculture Since 1929* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008).

³ Ronald L. F. Davis, *Good and Faithful Labor: From Slavery to Sharecropping in the Natchez District 1860-1890* (Westport: Praeger Press, 1982). Connie Lester, *Up from the Mudsills of Hell: The Farmers' Alliance, Populism, and Progressive Agriculture in Tennessee, 1870-1915* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006).

⁴ Debra A. Reid, *Interpreting Agriculture at Museums and Historic Sites* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017), "Open-Air Museums and Historic Sites," *APT Bulletin: The Journal of Preservation Technology* 21 no. 2 (1989): 21-27, and "Tangible Agricultural History: An Artifact's-Eye View of the Field," *Agricultural History* 86 no. 3 (2012): 57-76.

1919-1941 is a helpful companion piece to her oral history study: *Southern Farmers and Their Stories: Memory and Meaning in Oral History*.⁵ Her work complements Reid's by laying a foundation of research for New South historiography, especially in relation to changing gender roles and industrialization.

Scholars of American museums such as Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, Michael Vlach, Eric Gable, and Richard Handler examine how public history serves as a vehicle for interpretation for diverse audiences.⁶ Hooper-Greenhill's work provides a foundation for navigating the visual components of interpretation, while Vlach's work galvanizes public historians to better discuss the physical setting and implications of authority. Gable and Handler look at the spaces in between, especially in the context of living history and its juxtaposition with social history.

Conferences and newsletters from professional organizations provided insight on both questions and content. The creation of the Agricultural History Society (AHS) in February 1919 addressed the importance of rural history and the associated study, research, and writing.⁷ The AHS and its accompanying journal *Agricultural History*, provide a wealth of secondary sources, but one hundred years later the organization still lacks a definitive and deliberate approach towards public history and the public consumption of their research. Members have recognized that gap for many years. During

⁵ Melissa Walker, *All We Knew Was to Farm: Rural Women in the Upcountry South, 1919-1941* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002) and *Southern Farmers and their Stories: Memory and Meaning in Oral History* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2006).

⁶ Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (Milton Park: Routledge Press, 2000). John Michael Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993). Eric Gable and Richard Handler, *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 1997).

⁷ Although the AHS was founded in 1919, it was not chartered as a non-profit until June 6, 1924.

a commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the AHS in 1945, Arthur G. Peterson pinpointed the need for, “effective aids in such things as sponsoring the teaching of agricultural history, establishing agricultural museums, and getting agricultural scientists to prepare histories of their particular fields of endeavor.”⁸ AHS placed its emphasis more on points one and three of Peterson’s list. Other professional organizations, such as the American Association for State and Local History (1940), the Association for Living History, Farm and Agricultural Museums (1970-1972) and the National Council on Public History (1980) developed literature, workshops, and expertise in agricultural history and its public-facing features.

Shaped by current agricultural history scholarship, my research questions focus on the interpretation of agricultural history in Tennessee through historic sites and museums, with emphasis on the creation and history of the Tennessee Agricultural Museum and its public-facing, educational function for the Ellington Agricultural Center. I also examined how public history sites relate information to their audiences and looked for patterns of emphasis. I then asked how these patterns engage with the theory and practice of public history. I utilized the following questions when compiling my sources, leveraging my networks, and guiding my research.

How do public history sites in Tennessee interpret agricultural history? Are there any similarities or differences based on the interpreted era or geographic location? Are any narratives favored? Are any narratives marginalized or ignored?

⁸ A. G., Peterson, “The Agricultural History Society’s First Quarter Century,” *Agricultural History* 19 (October 1945): 202. Earlier in the article, Peterson noted that the AHS had considered a society-sponsored museum, but the project was “characterized by considerable talk and little effective action.” Peterson, “The Agricultural History Society’s First Quarter Century,” 199.

My examination into the origins of the Ellington Agricultural Center and the Tennessee Agricultural Museum serve as the fulcrum of my research. I asked the following questions to better understand the role of the Ellington Agricultural Center and the museum and to consider the implications for interpretation state-wide.

How do the origins influence the museum's identity as a public-serving institution? How does this affect the museum's interpretation and material culture? What responsibility does the Tennessee Agricultural Museum carry to set a benchmark for the interpretation of rural life for other public history sites? What can public historians learn from the interpretation of agricultural history? How can they facilitate a greater appreciation for this field and encourage more awareness of its role in Tennessee history? How can this knowledge be shared with the public?

To answer these questions, I created and followed consistent guidelines for evaluating the properties so that other practitioners can apply this methodology. The dissertation will serve a dual function as a source of information on the public history interpretation of Tennessee agricultural history, and as a tool for other practitioners to learn how a cultural institution can tell a broader picture of the past and lean into the difficult history associated with agriculture. Specifically, I outline the Tennessee Agricultural Museum's potential to present a fuller story through discussing its relationship with the history of women, African Americans, and the history of sharecropping and industrialization.⁹

⁹ The Tennessee Agricultural Museum in Nashville has the location and means as a state agency to serve as a repository for Black rural history. "For agricultural history, black lives have always been a critical space and place for myriad discussions, whether explicit or implicit." Bobby J. Smith II, "Black Lives and Agricultural History," in Okie William Thomas, Way Albert G., Coclanis Peter A., De Jong

My source material varies, but the museum evaluations via the case studies and research into the Ellington Agricultural Center and Tennessee Agricultural Museum are foundational. The museum evaluations provide a rubric by which to understand their priorities when interpreting agricultural history. Secondary sources such as newspapers and internal publications from the Tennessee Department of Agriculture were essential in my study of the history of the Caldwell Mansion, the Ellington Agricultural Center, Oscar Farris, the Oscar Farris Agricultural Museum Association, and the Tennessee Agricultural Museum. Primary sources, such as original documents from Oscar Farris, the Department of Agriculture, and the museum's material culture, provide additional valuable information.

After this introductory chapter, I investigate the relationship between historic house museums and agricultural history in Chapter Two: Historic House Museums and their Incorporation of Agricultural History. It takes a state-wide approach through studying a site in each Grand Division – the Ramsey House in East Tennessee, Ames Plantation in West Tennessee, and Glen Leven Farm in Middle Tennessee. The chapter contains an overview of the properties' operations and accessibility, as well as a description of their historical significance. It emphasizes their unique contributions by delineating their successes and assets in interpretation and asks how these institutions propel the ongoing discussion on the history of rural communities in the state. The chapter includes an analysis of each site and its area for growth, with special attention to women's history, the history of enslaved workers, and the difficult history of agriculture

Greta, Jørgensen Dolly, Marcus Alan I, Williams Amrys O., et al. "Roundtable: Why Does Agricultural History Matter?" *Agricultural History* 93, no. 4 (2019): 682–743.

such as sharecropping, industrialization, and displacement. Each evaluation likewise engages with relevant historiography to provide scaffolding for future discussions into these issues and to merge the site into the current public history conversation.

Chapter Three: History Museums, Living History Sites, and their Incorporation of Agricultural History adopts a mirrored approach of Chapter Two, looking at history museums and a living history operation. It charts the historical significance of three statewide cultural institutions: the Lenoir Museum in East Tennessee, the West Tennessee Agricultural Museum, and The Homeplace in Middle Tennessee. It likewise provides an overview of each site that highlights its accessibility and basic operations. The chapter then transitions to an overview of the museums' historical value and their emphases in interpretation and programming. The chapter features an evaluation of the sites' approach towards marginalized and difficult history, such as the effects of the Tennessee Valley Authority in East Tennessee and its ramifications for agriculture.

Chapters four and five focus on the public history origins and practice at the Ellington Agricultural Center and the Tennessee Agricultural Museum. Chapter Four studies the history of the Ellington Agricultural Center, with the built landscape as the focus because this property is the eventual headquarters of the Tennessee Agricultural Museum. It considers past Native American land uses, then delves into the history surrounding the property's identity as a land grant to the Ewing family. The research tells as complete a narrative as possible as it culminates in the ownership by financier Rogers Clark Caldwell, who eventually ceded the property to the State of Tennessee due to financial difficulties after the Great Depression. Chapter Five serves as a bridge between

its neighboring chapters, since it includes public history reports on select properties at the Ellington Agricultural Center.

Chapter Five studies the origins of the Tennessee Agricultural Museum through the primary sources related to the site, its collection, and its mission. It describes the career of Oscar L. Farris, the Davidson County Agricultural Extension Agent from 1920 to 1959, and his method in collecting material culture. His fervor to preserve agricultural artifacts and create a museum led to the eventual allotment of the barn at the Ellington Agricultural Center. Likewise, his spirited interest in this history encouraged like-minded individuals to charter the Oscar Farris Agricultural Museum Association, which still serves as the museum's 501c3 non-profit partnership group.

This dissertation uses the momentum of Farris and his public history work as a lens through which to understand how public history sites have engaged with rural history. Furthermore, the individual case studies from the previous chapters examine recent developments in programming and interpretation, so the study of Farris and the early years of the Tennessee Agricultural Museum provides a helpful contrast to the present.

Chapter Seven serves as the dissertation's conclusion and creates space for evaluating the limitations inherent in my research, case studies, and methodology. It also engages with future avenues for discussion on the intersection of public history sites and the history of Tennessee agriculture.

Chapter Two: Historic House Museums and their Incorporation of Agricultural History

Historic Ramsey House

Historic house museums are among Tennessee's first public history institutions. The Hermitage, Andrew and Rachel Jackson's plantation, is the oldest and set a precedent still followed by most other house museums in the state: a focus on great White men and women; their homes; and their material life. Until the last thirty years, most gave little attention to their agricultural history. Unfortunately, many still neglect the stories of farm and plantation labor, either enslaved or tenant.

Historic Ramsey House is located approximately six miles southeast of Knoxville, Tennessee at 2614 Thorngrove Pike. The property occupies 101.5 acres and includes the historic home, gift shop, and visitor center. I chose to investigate the Ramsey House and Farm in Knox County because the property dates to the late nineteenth century, is associated with an important early Tennessee historian, and has had several archaeological studies focused on the enslaved who worked the plantation from the years of early statehood to the end of the Civil War. In addition, the plantation represents the early presence of slave-based agriculture in East Tennessee, a region of the state that many consider to have had little impact from slavery.

Historic Ramsey House is typical of many Tennessee house museums in that it relies on a small staff and many volunteers to preserve the collections and offer educational programming. The staff includes a full-time director, Kelley Weatherley-Sinclair, and the Museum Assistant, Sue Jones. The non-profit group Historic Ramsey

House provides volunteer labor. The Association for the Preservation of Tennessee Antiquities (APTA) allocates administrative and limited funding support.

Historic Ramsey House is open Wednesday through Saturday from 10 to 4 with admission not exceeding \$7. The admission includes a guided tour of the house and a self-guided tour of the grounds. Historic Ramsey House provides educational field trips geared towards grade level, learning outcomes, and state curriculum. These programs include: age-specific tours of the home, opportunities to interact with period-correct toys and games, and directed learning through activities like land surveying, butter churning, creating a cornhusk doll, candle dipping, and court summons writing. A recent addition to programming is that staff members guide students in creating a heritage bracelet that showcases the significance of enslaved workers at the plantation.

Francis Alexander Ramsey, who was born on May 31, 1764, near Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, was the property's first owner. Traveling the famous Great Wagon Road--a route that thousands of White immigrants took from the heart of southern Pennsylvania, down the Shenandoah Valley, and into the Great Valley of Tennessee--Francis Ramsey migrated to East Tennessee as a teenager and created a name for himself through survey work, a task which allowed him to scout and acquire valuable property at the forks of the French Broad and Holston Rivers. He also served as the Clerk of the Superior Court for the Southwest Territory. During the 1780s, he joined a political uprising in the region that led prominent residents like Ramsey to support the creation of a new state, the State of Franklin, in an attempt to break away from what they considered to be a distant and unfavorable North Carolina government. Francis Ramsey was a delegate from the State of Franklin to North Carolina. In 1794 he was one of the original trustees of Blount

College, at first little more than a frontier prep school that developed into the University of Tennessee.

In the following year Francis Ramsey contracted with England-trained cabinetmaker and carpenter Thomas Hope, who moved from Charleston, South Carolina, to the Great Valley of Tennessee seeking employment. From 1795 to 1797 Hope, working with skilled enslaved Black craftsmen, built a frontier-era statement house for Ramsey.¹⁰ As historian Lisa Oakley observed in the *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, the house “is exceptional for its walls of pink marble [cut by enslaved labor from nearby quarries], the detailed stringcourse of blue limestone which circles the house, the marble keystones and quoins, and the intricately carved consoles at the roof corners.”¹¹

Francis Ramsey died in 1820 and the property passed to his eldest son, Dr. James G.M. Ramsey. J.G.M. Ramsey built a new home, called Mecklenburg, on the family land. He is prominent in the early historiography of Tennessee. He was a founder of what became the East Tennessee Historical Society, serving as recording secretary and cataloging the organization’s early collections. In 1853 he wrote *The Annals of Tennessee to the End of the Eighteenth Century*, still a crucial early source on state history. During the Civil War, he supported the Confederacy and acted as a treasury agent for the Confederate States of America. While the Union Army occupied Knox County, they

¹⁰Architects have frequently used Tennessee marble to create statement structures, from the settlement years with Ramsey to the construction of the State Capitol. For more information on how this medium speaks to cultural and social constructs and authority, see Susan Knowles, “Of Structure and Society: Tennessee Marble in Civic Architecture” (PhD diss., Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, 2011).

¹¹ Lisa Oakley, “Ramsey House,” Carroll Van West, et. al., eds., *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, online edition (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004).

burned Ramsey's property to the ground, destroying his invaluable library in the process.¹² J.G.M. Ramsey sold his father's home in the 1850s. Francis Ramsey's other son, William B.A. Ramsey, served as Tennessee's secretary of state and as the first elected mayor of Knoxville.

The Knoxville Chapter of the Association for the Preservation of Tennessee Antiquities acquired the Francis Ramsey House in 1954. The artifacts on display are mostly period-specific, but unconnected to the residents. An inventory from 1821 reveals that the tea set is original, as well as the dining room chairs, which date from at least 1789, as they were a wedding gift. The dearth of material culture associated with the Ramsey family is alleviated by the display of comparable items and engaging narratives from the site interpreters.

From an evaluation of its exhibits, tours, programs, and publications, it is possible to understand Historic Ramsey House's contribution to the public history field and to ascertain its priorities. Historic Ramsey House's website provides information on their institutional purpose and adopts a transparent position in its accessibility.

Mission Statement - The purpose and mission of the Historic Ramsey House is to restore, maintain and preserve the historic structure, its gardens, and its dependencies; to interpret the early life and culture of early Tennessee and the important role of the Ramsey Family; to interpret the built environment and encourage interest in preservation; to help preserve the folkways of the region, and the arts, crafts and skills of the period interpreted in the house (1790-1820) and to link the past to the future through preservation, education and interpretation for children as well as adults.¹³

¹² Lisa Oakley, "James Gettys McGready Ramsey," Carroll Van West, et. al., eds., *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, online edition (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004).

¹³ <http://www.ramseyhouse.org/about/>

The statement accentuates the purview of the site's responsibilities – namely the house and grounds - and its scope – the period of Ramsey's early settlement and the accompanying years through the lens of the descendants.

Most of the house tour discusses the male family members, namely, Colonel Ramsey, Dr. James G.M. Ramsey, and William B.A. Ramsey. Secondly, the tour stresses the architectural aesthetics of the house and the construction process and materials. The house functioned as a showcase of Ramsey family's wealth and influence. Along with serving as an impressive building in a region previously occupied only by log structures, the home contains features, such as a water table surrounding the first floor, and paneled shutters, that distinguish its designer's skill. Overall, the tour prioritizes the family's social significance and uses the house's uniqueness in its own time period as a statement of the Ramseys' prestige.

Gaps exist in the Historic Ramsey House's narrative. For example, the house tour, exhibits, and most public programming do not capitalize on the extensive and accessible archaeological research conducted by Charles H. Faulkner. Published in 2008, *The Ramseys at Swan Pond: The Archaeology and History of an East Tennessee Farm*, serves as a concise and thorough compendium of over twenty years of professional archaeological discoveries by Faulkner and his students from 1985 to 2005. Faulkner divided the monograph into four chronological sections that mirror his recommended interpretive periods - early Ramsey (1793-1820); later Ramsey (1820-1866); Victorian (1866-1912); and modern (1866-1952).

Faulkner's research serves as an interdisciplinary complement, and at times, challenge, to the site's dependence on traditional written sources. He blends his

excavation findings with the existing material culture, descendant and community interviews, and the primary sources most associated with the site, such as the relevant diaries, and government records, etc. Faulkner asserts that his research studies “the totality of human occupation at Swan Pond” starting with the indigenous people.¹⁴ In reality, Faulkner’s monograph provides information on the indigenous land uses and then steers the focus to the Ramsey family and their enslaved workers, where it remains. For example, Faulkner unearthed evidence of a blockade fence that encircled the house, demonstrating the tenuous relationships between the Ramseys inside the wall and the Cherokee Nation, travelers, and wildlife on the other side. Faulkner’s conclusions prioritize the Ramsey family and their perspective with the world outside the wall.

The research of *The Ramseys at Swan Pond* complicates the current, family-centered interpretation. Most notably, the book shares evidence on the enslaved, such as information on their living and working conditions, that public interpretation at the property ignores. For example, archaeological excavations pinpointed the location of the dwellings for the enslaved and their proximity to the main house, which indicate that the enslaved supplied both domestic labor as well as agricultural labor through tending livestock, harvest fields, etc. In a broader sense, the findings in *The Ramseys at Swan Pond* demand interpretation of the property as a farm, not just a tour of a prominent “statement” house. A wider context would allow the organization to present a fuller story of eighteenth and nineteenth century life in East Tennessee, rather than simply biographies of the Ramseys. Faulkner’s research connects the house to not just Knox

¹⁴ Charles H. Faulkner, *The Ramseys at Swan Pond: The Archaeology and History of an East Tennessee Farm* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press), 145.

County, but a much larger backcountry and North Atlantic world. He added that the “ingenuity and efficiency of the inhabitants’ construction techniques, table setting, and clothing...demonstrate that these sturdy folk enjoyed most of the same conveniences and fashions found on the Atlantic seaboard.”¹⁵ Therefore, the site interpreters could create dialogue with their guests about the nascent American economy, East Tennessee settlement, trade routes, and other broad, meaningful concepts that connect Historic Ramsey House to the community, state, and nation – further cementing its significance and contributing to the ongoing public history dialogue.

Historic Ramsey House has great interpretive value in relation to agricultural history. First, its location sets it apart as a sensible place to interpret the agricultural character of East Tennessee as it was developed by settlement patterns, soil composition, access to waterways, climate, dependence on enslaved labor, and other cultural and environmental variants. Historic Ramsey House is well-situated to discuss the history of agriculture and early settlement because many European and American migrants traveled from East to West, not only across the country, but across the Tennessee territory as well.

Tennessee joined the Union in 1796, only one year before the construction of the Ramsey House. Historian Donald Winters argues that “East Tennessee’s agriculture was already well established” by statehood.¹⁶ Furthermore, in less than forty years and with a population of roughly 700,000, “all regions of the state had passed beyond the pioneer stage of settlement, contained a sizable number of permanent residents, and established a

¹⁵ Faulkner, *The Ramseys at Swan Pond*, 145.

¹⁶ Donald Winters, *Tennessee Farming, Tennessee Farmers: Antebellum Agriculture in the Upper South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 24.

strong agricultural base.”¹⁷ The timeline of the Ramsey House’s construction and occupation aligns with East Tennessee’s agricultural development and could speak to the state’s early dependence on farming.

Additionally, Historic Ramsey House can contribute to the discussion of public history and agriculture through emphasizing the geographically and environmentally distinct qualities of East Tennessee and how they influenced the dependence or lack of dependence on enslaved labor. Although all three Grand Divisions receive relatively equitable rainfall, they comprise drastically different soil compositions and growing seasons.¹⁸ Because the growing season of East Tennessee is more limited than Middle and West Tennessee and because labor-intensive row crops, such as cotton, do not thrive on the terrain, the economy relied less on enslaved labor.¹⁹

Enslavers most capitalized on their labor force through continual, annual work, which was not always possible in East Tennessee because of its shorter growing window. Instead, East Tennessee farmers grew summer grain, raised cattle, and harvested other seasonal crops. In contrast, settlers in Middle and West Tennessee grew the more labor-intensive cash crops of cotton and tobacco, which allowed for maximization of enslaved labor. Sometimes landowners in Middle and West Tennessee employed people for additional help, but the reliance on enslaved labor was normative.

¹⁷ Winters, *Tennessee Farming, Tennessee Farmers*, 11.

¹⁸ “Rainfall is generally uniform across the state, averaging between forty-five and fifty inches annually. Rainfall, therefore, placed few constraints on the production choices open to early Tennessee farmers.” Winters, *Tennessee Farming, Tennessee Farmers*, 7.

¹⁹ “The farming areas of East Tennessee have from 150 to 170 frost-free days per year, which limited settlers there to relatively fast maturing summer crops, such as oats and corn, and to livestock farming. ...Moving from northeast to southwest, the growing season lengthens, exceeding 250 days per year in the extreme southwestern corner of the state.” *Ibid.*, 7.

Colonel Ramsey enslaved between six and ten people at a time from the years of his ownership of the property until his death. His dependence on enslaved labor was not identical to the enslavers of the other Grand Divisions or to the antebellum planters in later generations. Ramsey exploited the enslaved workers to maintain production lifestyle regarding his farming, while he amassed wealth through more industry-related means, such as survey work and the buying and selling of real estate. Although Historic Ramsey House does not conjure images of large plantation homes with columns and white facades, the site's legacy is interwoven with the narrative of slave ownership and the men and women who were denied their freedom. Winters described slavery in antebellum Tennessee as "firmly entrenched" and argued that "non-slaveholders desired to become slaveholders and small slaveholders desired to become large slaveholders."²⁰ Although slavery manifested in different ways across the state, East Tennessee enslavers bought into this desire to augment their capital and social standing through the accrual of enslaved workers.

Along with better incorporating the history of the enslaved workers and their contribution to the region's agricultural advancement, Historic Ramsey House has numerous opportunities for improving its interpretation of the history of agriculture at their site. Environmental history is a natural steppingstone by which to interpret agricultural history at Historic Ramsey House. Although the built environment and Ramsey family constitute the site's interpretative priorities, it would be beneficial to use the land as a central character for additional research. In their 2019 work, *Interpreting the*

²⁰ Winters, *Tennessee Farming, Tennessee Farmers*, 154.

Environment at Museums and Historic Sites, Debra A. Reid and David D. Vail note that “the landscape might be the largest three-dimensional object in the collection,” and ask if public historians engage with their property as an artifact.²¹ By viewing the Ramsey property as an artifact, it is possible to apply Reid and Vail’s three themes, or “hooks” as the authors describe them, to studying environmental history within a cultural institution:

Natural Resources: Land, Elements, and Other Organic and Inorganic Substances
Human Influence: Land Use and Natural Resource Extraction
Advocacy: Raising Issues, Providing Perspectives, Encouraging Inquiry and Investigation

By adopting this framework, we can study Historic Ramsey House’s relation to the property through farming, land use, and extraction. For example, the enslaved workers owned by the Ramsey family drastically altered the landscape through clearing it for construction and farmable acreage.

The property on which the house sits was once known as Swan Pond and the home eventually occupied a tract of land that jutted into the pond as a type of marshy peninsula. Before the home’s construction in 1797, the area was familiar to both the indigenous people, who relied on its water and ample game, and to the traders and trappers who were attracted to the prolific beaver. In the early 1790s, Ramsey and his family lived in a log structure that is no longer extant and was situated to the east of the location of his later permanent home. In preparation for constructing the stone home, Ramsey, along with Thomas Hope, considered the implications of the natural environment. Ramsey feared that malaria would strike with a water source so near, so he directed Hope and the

²¹ Debra A. Reid and David D. Vail, *Interpreting the Environment at Museums and Historic Sites* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), xii.

enslaved workers to drain the pond, destroy the accompanying beaver dams, and initiate construction.²²

Reid and Vail encourage us to ask how the Ramsey family affected the site – both for agricultural purposes and for overall changes to the landscape through occupation - and how this narrative is related through interpretation. The authors assert that the “stories of settlers tend to celebrate innovation, ingenuity, and resourcefulness,” and note that they “often fail to address exploitation of natural resources and evidence of how this hurt others such as displaced, enslaved, and underpaid people, as well as negative effects on the environment.”²³ The property could better include these diverse stories by remarketing itself as Historic Ramsey Farm instead of restricting interpretation to the White owners and their house.

Overall, Historic Ramsey House aligns with Reid and Vail’s observation of the lack of interpretation regarding displaced, enslaved, and underpaid individuals. However, multiple avenues of discourse exist. For example, the property could adopt the lens of environmental history to better understand the agricultural usage of the site and its relationship with the natural realm. Historic Ramsey House’s institutional purpose establishes that the property exists to preserve, interpret, and communicate not only the narrative of the Ramseys, but also their historic context and geographic region. By making use of *The Ramseys at Swan Pond* and other resources like those provided by

²² For more information on Ramsey and his land clearing efforts, see Elizabeth Skaggs Bowman and Stanley J. Folmsbee, “The Ramsey House: Home of Francis Alexander Ramsey,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 24, No. 3 (Fall 1965), 8-13. Ramsey’s efforts to prevent disease were met with ironic failure, since he purportedly died of malaria in 1820.

²³ Debra Reid and David Vail, “Interpreting the Environment at Museums and Historic Sites,” American Association State for State and Local History *Technical Leaflet* #289, (Winter 2020), 3.

Reid and Vail, the site could provide a fuller interpretation. Historic Ramsey House would build on its existing narrative success and serve as a better steward of its material culture, built environment, and the stories associated with both.



Figure 2. 1: Historic Ramsey House. Source: Photograph by author, May 13, 2019, Knoxville, Tennessee.

Ames Plantation

Ames Plantation is located at 4275 Buford Ellington Road in Grand Junction, Tennessee. It is approximately 60 miles east of Memphis and consists of more than 18,400 acres across both Fayette and Hardeman Counties, spanning 11 miles at its widest.²⁴ I chose to investigate Ames Plantation because the property dates to the mid-

²⁴ Compounding the site's remote location and extensive sprawl, tours of the Manor House are only offered once a month, on the fourth Thursday, March through October. Ames Plantation currently has no public events listed and does not offer a virtual learning package.

nineteenth century, is associated with a transitional era in Tennessee and Reconstruction history, and supports research on West Tennessee enslaved labor. In addition, the plantation represents the post-bellum system of sharecropping and reveals how large-scale plantations were sometimes sold to outsider investors, who then divided the property into lots.

Although the history of the Ames Plantation acreage extends far into the reaches of indigenous history, the interpretation at Ames Plantation starts in the early nineteenth century. John T. Patterson was one of the first American settlers in the area, since he built a homestead on the North Fork of the Wolf River in 1820. John Walker Jones, a later relative of Patterson, moved to the area in the 1840s with his wife Martha Moorman Jones and established Cedar Grove Plantation. Jones managed Cedar Grove Plantation through the exploitation of his enslaved workers and amassed great wealth and social standing in the area. He initiated the construction of his antebellum mansion in 1847 to serve as a public reminder of his planter status. Jones' descendants eventually sold the property to Hobart and Julia Colony Ames in 1901, who were attracted to the landscape and the manor house. Hobart came from a wealthy and well-connected New England family. His brother, Winthrop Ames, was a famous playwright and his grandfather, Oliver Ames, had established the family fortune in previous decades through backing the Union Pacific Railroad.²⁵ Hobart capitalized on his family's name and finances by expanding his business, the Ames Shovel and Tool Company, and through serving as president of the First National Bank of North Easton, Massachusetts. Hobart and Julia

²⁵ "Hobart Ames: Industrialist, 80, Founder of National Field Trial Association," *New York Times*, April 23, 1945, 16.

split their time between West Tennessee (from December through March), Maine, and Canada.

Ames added a domestic servants' wing, ensuring separation between the White residents and the Black labor, and installed indoor plumbing, a generator for electricity, and a squash court. Along with purchasing the house to display his wealth, Ames was also interested in the vast tracts of land that accompanied the sale. As president and judge for the National Field Trial Championship for bird dogs, Ames promoted the property as the premier location for the sport. During Ames' 35-year involvement, his plantation served as the national headquarters for the trials, starting in 1915. It continues to host the trials to the present day.

Julia assumed the property's management after Hobart's death from a heart attack in 1945. Although she permanently moved to New England, Julia cemented her plans for the estate in her will by instituting the Hobart Ames Foundation in honor of her deceased husband. Before her death in 1950, Julia specified that the Foundation (which included a board of directors) serve two major functions: that the Ames Plantation grounds be maintained as a bird dog site and that the trustees form a cooperative program with the University of Tennessee so that the land remain accessible for students as a research center.²⁶ Both stipulations have been upheld. Graduate students from across the state have

²⁶ "The entire trust fund and all securities and property...shall be a permanent foundation as a memorial to my husband, Hobart Ames, and shall be created, held, and operated exclusively for scientific and education purposes...and shall be known as the 'Hobart Ames Foundation.'" From the will of Julia C. Ames, dated April 25, 1949. Thomas J. Whatley, *The History of the Hobart Ames Foundation-Ames Plantation: 50 Years of Cooperation with the University of Tennessee* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, Agricultural Experiment Station, 2000), 2.

utilized the diverse resources available at Ames Plantation for projects concerning beef cattle, soil, water, insects, forestry, archaeology, and history.²⁷

From an evaluation of its exhibits, tours, programs, and publications, it is possible to understand Ames Plantation's contribution to the public history field and to ascertain its priorities. The house tour prioritizes information on Hobart and Julia and interpreters describe how an elite social group annually occupy the rooms during the National Field Trial Championship for bird dogs. Site Director Jamie Evans conducted the house tour.²⁸ Evans' interest in West Tennessee history and his connection with agricultural research are complemented by his experience, since he has worked at Ames Plantation for over 37 years. However, the site does not have a designated educator or curator, so the information on the material culture was limited. Most of the artifacts in the home are from the family or from the period. However, the wallpaper in Julia Ames' sitting room is of enough significance to warrant attention. Francois Delicourt released the wallpaper, titled *the Grande Chase*, in 1851 and it was installed in 1902. It is handmade from woodblocks and imported from France. The paper depicts graphic images of hounds chasing deer and bloody scenes of the dogs mauling their prey.²⁹ Although these gruesome depictions are no longer common in modern design aesthetic (fortunately),

²⁷ In October 2020, the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture located at Ames Plantation changed its name. With approval from the Trustees of the Hobart Ames Foundation, the site transitioned from the "UT Research and Education Center at Ames Plantation" to "UT Ames AgResearch and Education Center." The name change will "allow the University's efforts be reflected in a name focused on advancing the science of agricultural and natural resource endeavors." "A Second UTIA AgResearch Facility Renamed," UT Institute of Agriculture *News Release*, November 19, 2020.

²⁸ As of May 2019, Jamie Evans is in the process of writing a book on the history of the site, with special attention to Julia Ames. His background is in agricultural science and farming, but he has thrived at the Ames Plantation because of the history angle.

²⁹ Ames Plantation claims that the wallpaper in Julia Ames' sitting room is one of our only four existing copies, with one of the known copies owned by the Louvre Museum.

Julia Ames undoubtedly was more interested in the social and financial status such decoration conveyed.

Along with the infrequent house tour, Ames Plantation is also available for field trips and special groups.³⁰ Ames Plantation fosters a viable relationship with their local Boy Scouts and numerous Eagle Scouts have completed their projects on site. These groups tour the home and accompanying Heritage Village, a collection of historic structures that includes a nineteenth-century farmhouse, a nineteenth-century one-room schoolhouse, a replica of a kiln, two cabins that are likely dwellings for enslaved workers, and a demonstration garden.³¹ Ames Plantation has added structures piecemeal to the site since approximately the 1980s but is not actively curating additional buildings. The Heritage Village is open by appointment only.

Within the Heritage Village, Ames Plantation preserves the Stencil House, one of Tennessee's leading homes to view this unique interior design and domestic aesthetic. Jennie Smithson is a descendant of the home's original owner and recognized its historic value, but also its increasing deterioration. The home moved from Wayne County to Ames Plantation upon her donation in 2002. The home was likely constructed in the 1830s with local beech and hackberry wood for John W. Nunnely. Unlike Julia Ames' elaborate wallpaper, the home features hand-stenciled paintings on the walls that serve as "the poor man's wallpaper."³² Ames Plantation does well to preserve and protect the

³⁰ 21 Eagle Scout projects have been done on site and in 2019 they hosted 150 participants for the Regional Boy Scout Jamboree.

³¹ As of 2019, they welcome three to four field trips per year.

³² Jessica Walker, "Stencil House Moved to Ames Plantation for Preservation," *Tennessee Home & Farm Magazine*, August 9, 2010. <https://www.tnhomeandfarm.com/travel/stencil-house-moved-to-ames-plantation-for-preservation/>.

Stencil House, but its interpretation and incorporation into the visitor experience is lacking.³³

Ames Plantation's contribution to the public history field is found more in its varied outreach programs than in its historical interpretation. For example, the site invests most fully in its sponsorship of the National Field Trial Championship for bird dogs. The event takes place on the second or third Monday in February every year and spans across 6,000 acres. The public is welcome to attend and there are usually less than forty entrants of either English Setters or Pointers. Some of the judges and handlers spend the night at the Ames Manor. By attracting this audience, the Ames Foundation upholds Julia Ames' stipulation to remain accessible for the bird dog community, but also brings in additional yearly revenue. Furthermore, the site prioritizes hunting. The Ames Plantation Hunting Club limits its membership to 115 and charges an annual fee of \$1,630.³⁴ Members are permitted to hunt squirrel, deer, turkey, and quail (by appointment). Ames Plantation projects itself as a destination for hunters and outdoor enthusiasts, since their website describes Ames Plantation as *the* place to hunt in the South.³⁵

Along with promoting itself as a hunting and outdoor sporting venue, Ames Plantation is also recognized for its relationship with the University of Tennessee's AgResearch and Education Center. In conjunction with UT, Ames Plantation conducts research that benefits both the state and the nation. For example, they raise approximately

³³ To learn more about the Stencil House, see Anne-Leslie Owens, "The decorative painting tradition in Tennessee Interiors: 1830-1890," (MA Thesis, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, 1995).

³⁴ "The Ames Hunting Program is designed to accomplish three things: 1) achieve the goals of Quality Deer Management, 2) preserve the tranquility and grandeur of the outdoor experience, and 3) place safety as the ultimate priority." <https://www.amesplantation.org/hunting-and-recreational/deer-hunting-club/>

³⁵ <https://www.amesplantation.org/hunting-and-recreational/deer-hunting-club/>

300 head of Black Angus cattle that are descendants of a herd originally purchased by Hobart Ames in December of 1913.³⁶ UT publishes research on their grazing patterns and subsequent alterations due to variables like soil composition and provender.

Ames Plantation has numerous opportunities for growth in interpreting the history of agriculture. Because of its sheer size, the site encompasses a great deal of regional history.³⁷ Like Historic Ramsey House, Ames Plantation is well-situated to interpret the history of settlement patterns for its Grand Division. For example, West Tennessee's influx of European and American settlers arrived later than East Tennessee because of travel routes and tenuous relationships with the Native American Nations. Eventually, settlers flooded the region after the Jackson Purchase of 1818, when the Chickasaw surrendered title to the land.³⁸ Settlers found the soil extremely beneficial because of its nutrient-rich connection to the Mississippi River basin and its relatively flat grading. These characteristics made the soil ideal for row crops and a cotton monoculture was firmly entrenched by the antebellum era.

Ames Plantation could provide a unique interpretation of the history of agricultural slavery and the aftermath of emancipation. In his tour, Evans stated that enslaved workers, "more than any other group," contributed to the culture and growth of West Tennessee. For example, the 1850 census records 1,250 enslaved people residing

³⁶ The Ames herd is currently the fourth oldest registered Black Angus herd in the United States. Along with the cattle, Ames Plantation is home to 25 work horses. Their main job is to serve as mounts during the bird dog trials.

³⁷ The Ames Plantation website lists these additional sites of note: the homestead of John T. Patterson, one of the earliest in Fayette County, and the homestead of Robert G. Thornton which was the location of the first court session held in Fayette County in 1824. Other important sites of local historical interest include: the location of the Mount Comfort (Morgan's) Store, Andrews Chapel Methodist Episcopal Church, the town site of Pattersonville, and the earliest documented burial in Fayette County. <https://www.amesplantation.org/historical-research/19th-century-history/>

³⁸ Winters, *Tennessee Farming, Tennessee Farmers*, 28.

within the current acreage of Ames Plantation, making it one of the largest plantations in antebellum Tennessee. The site could leverage the built environment at the Heritage Village to address this narrative, since the site includes two cabins that were relocated there from the property in the 1990s. Staff describe them as cabins for the enslaved, since the “locale they came from and the fact that they are log domestic buildings and were part of a farm in Fayette County is highly suggestive of slave use.”³⁹ Furthermore, the site could relate the experiences of the recently emancipated. Many enslaved workers and poor Whites adopted sharecropping as a means to provide for their families. They frequently lived in the available antebellum structures, such as the dwellings for the enslaved workers.⁴⁰

Economic historians Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch proposed that antebellum enslavers were ‘laborlords’ and that after the Civil War, the financial and social elite rose as ‘landlords’ instead.⁴¹ As tenancy gained traction in postbellum Tennessee in the following decades, Ames served as a landlord. He continually sought way to distinguish himself as the elite by raising prize-winning cattle, accommodating the National Field Trials for bird dogs, and hosting parties at his elaborate manor. He originally purchased 400 acres in 1901 and acquired adjoining properties as they became available. By 1936, he amassed 25,000 acres. Sharecroppers occupied many of these lots. Ames hired a full-time supervisor, Mr. Buckle, to live onsite.

³⁹ Mike Strutt, ““Yes, I was a House Slave: I Slept under the Stairway in the Closet”: Slave Housing and Landscapes of Tennessee 1780-1860: An Architectural Synthesis” (PhD diss., Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, 2012).

⁴⁰ Ames Plantation has conducted archaeological excavations that add to these discussions of the role of the built environment.

⁴¹ Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

Historians disagree about the character of sharecropping, a discussion which is exacerbated by sharecropping's changing character based on the region, era, and race of those involved. Sharecropping is a version of tenant farming where the landlord leased land to the farmer for a fixed share of the crop, with variables like acreage, soil composition, and the availability of tools and stock animals weighing heavily on the farmer's success. While some scholars view it as a step up on the agricultural ladder, others regard it as a formula to deny the lower classes the capital and resources required to secure a more fruitful life. Winters posited that sharecropping could serve as a phase towards farm ownership and financial autonomy.⁴² Others note that landlords, banks, and merchants designed the tenant and sharecropper system to restrict financial mobility.⁴³

Even after Ames death, the Foundation maintained the sharecropping system and collected the money from the occupants. Eventually, in the mid-1950s, the Foundation trustees investigated the tenant situation. They learned that the tenants lived on plots averaging 25 acres in size, relied on work stock instead of machinery, and that over 80 percent of the tenants were Black. Furthermore, the restrictive monoculture bound the tenants, since cotton accounted for approximately 90 percent of their gross income.⁴⁴ The Foundation trustees made a dire evaluation and recorded that the tenants "lived in

⁴² Winters asserts that sharecropping was not entirely unbeneficial, and it was not relegated to the South alone. He argues that the agricultural ladder theory works in the South because there is proof that young men improved their economic situations through the model. However, this theory does not account for individuals who descend the ladder – and Winters agrees that this happened, especially in the decades before and during the Civil War. Donald Winters, "The Agricultural Ladder in Southern Agriculture: Tennessee, 1850-1870," *Agricultural History* 61, no. 3 (1987): 36-52.

⁴³ "There was no meaningful labor mobility for the great majority of sharecroppers and tenants, either to better agricultural opportunities or to nonfarm jobs." Gilbert C. Fite, *Cotton Fields No More: Southern Agriculture 1865-1980* (The University Press of Kentucky, 1984), 28.

⁴⁴ *The History of the Hobart Ames Foundation-Ames Plantation*, v-vi.

poverty, and the rent received by the landlord was inadequate to make improvements.”⁴⁵

Based on these results, the Foundation enacted the Tenant Farm Management Project to further study the situation at Ames Plantation and to evaluate the feasibility of improvement. They selected five tenants and provided aid through equipment that was previously inaccessible from the lack of capital. The Foundation Trustees also allocated resources to diversify crops. Instead of only growing cotton, the tenants were instructed to grow corn, soybeans, strawberries, hay, silage, and to raise dairy cattle and swine. These efforts experienced success but were ultimately abandoned after the study and were not extended to the other tenants.

The Tenant Farm Management Project was a pivotal capstone in the history of Ames Plantation, but it requires more analysis and utilization. The existing interpretation at the site via printed and virtual materials and in-person tours barely mentions sharecropping. Thomas J. Whatley’s 2000 *The History of the Hobart Ames Foundation* contains information on the project but fails to contextualize sharecropping within the site’s history or the history of the region and state. The text does not explain the exact decline of the sharecropping system or list the date when the last sharecropper vacated or died. It notes that the “tenant farm management projects dropped from the total farm mechanization and reorganization activities.”⁴⁶ In 1977, the Foundation terminated the Tenant Farm Management Program.⁴⁷

Ames Plantation has numerous areas for growth in discussing agricultural history,

⁴⁵ Ibid., vi-vii.

⁴⁶ Ibid., vii.

⁴⁷ Limited data on the decline of tenancy at Ames Plantation exists. In 1968, only ten tenants remained, only three of whom were among the original 54 listed at the start of the Tenant Farm Management Program.

not only regarding its relationship with the enslaved workers who cultivated the extensive acreage and those who worked the land as sharecroppers after the Civil War. Ames Plantation provides an opportunity to study Black rural life in West Tennessee. In *Beyond Forty Acres and a Mule: African American Landowning Families since Reconstruction*, Debra A. Reid and Evan P. Bennett argue that “city life did not define African American experiences as much as the concentration on urban history and black culture studies implies.”⁴⁸ Ames Plantation could join the dialogue on the interpretation of Black history through the agricultural and rural lens.

More than anything, Ames Plantation needs a firmer and clearer understanding of its mission, history, and responsibility to the public. The site’s current interpretation varies widely based on the context of the encounter. If someone were to attend the National Field Trials for bird dogs, they would perceive the site as an outdoor venue with an interesting history. In contrast, agents from the UT Agricultural Experiment Station value the Ames Plantation for its research potential for non-industrial agricultural studies. However, neither component complements the other nor provides a cohesive image to the public.

Ames Foundation should condense its identity so that it succeeds as a historic house museum that also functions as an operational base for the UT Agricultural Experiment Station and hosts the National Field Trials for bird dogs as an annual capital campaign. The Foundation needs to hire more site interpreters, an educator, and a curator. The transition would also allow the organization to capitalize on existing research. For

⁴⁸ Debra Ann Reid and Evan P. Bennett, *Beyond Forty Acres and a Mule: African American Landowning Families since Reconstruction* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012), 3.

example, Ames Plantation hosts students from The Institute for Regional Studies at Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee. The program encourages scholars to engage with the history of Memphis and the Mid-South region through interdisciplinary projects, such as those made possible with the primary sources available at Ames Plantation. Papers such as “Origins and Endings: Share Labor and the Economic Effects of Emancipation on the Ames Plantation in Fayette County, Tennessee” by Jason Jordan and “Burying the Peculiar Institution: An Analysis of West Tennessee Slave Culture and Religion through Cemeteries” by Lora Terry have already established a sound basis of research.⁴⁹

By solidifying Ames Foundation’s identity as an important plantation, the Foundation could also make the most of existing partnerships and programs. The site has a dormant volunteer association, the Ames Plantation Historical Society, that could serve as a potential outlet for future assistance.⁵⁰ The Foundation could also leverage its extensive online genealogical database which allows people to search through the names of those interred in the 26 cemeteries with nineteenth century origins located on site. These steps are needed for Ames Plantation to live up to the statement posted on its website, where the property claims to function as a “laboratory for the study of regional historical and preservation issues.”⁵¹ In many ways, the obstacles inherent in its sheer size and rural location could also double as unexpected benefits, since the acreage allows

⁴⁹ Jason Jordan, “Origins and Endings: Share Labor and the Economic Effects of Emancipation on the Ames Plantation in Fayette County, Tennessee” (Research Paper, Rhodes College, Memphis, 2006). Lora Terry, “Burying the Peculiar Institution: An Analysis of West Tennessee Slave Culture and Religion through Cemeteries” (Research Paper, Rhodes College, Memphis, 2006).

⁵⁰ Membership in the Ames Historical Society is approximately \$25 a year and includes a quarterly newsletter, annual dinner, and invitation to a specialized tour of the grounds each spring. <https://www.amesplantation.org/historical-research/ames-plantation-historical-society/>

⁵¹<https://www.amesplantation.org/historical-research/>

for diverse research and its relative isolation has sheltered it from the encroachments of urbanization. Overall, Ames Plantation is a largely underutilized public history property that could serve as a benchmark for the interpretation of agricultural slavery, sharecropping, and the rural life of West Tennesseans.



Figure 2. 2: Ames Plantation. Source: Accessed December 7, 2021. Photo Courtesy of Ames Plantation.



Figure 2. 3: Guest Accommodations at Ames Plantation. The photo depicts the unpredictability of staying overnight at Ames Plantation, since the room is furnished with electricity, but also includes flashlights in case of frequent outages. Source: Photograph by author, May 22, 2019, Grand Junction, Tennessee.

Glen Leven Farm

Glen Leven Farm is a rare find on Franklin Road in Nashville. Located on 64 acres and only four miles from downtown, the Glen Leven Farm is a land conservation project that showcases the administrative headquarters for The Land Trust for Tennessee, which owns the property and house. The property includes a farm office, spring house, carriage house, smoke house, circa 1887 horse barn, circa 1940 cattle barn, historic roads, woods, and well-defined historic fields.⁵² Thanks to extensive and ongoing research, Glen Leven Farm also has a well-documented history that stretches from some of the earliest American settlements to the end of the twentieth century. Furthermore, the site is ideal for reviewing developments in rural life through transportation advancements because of its centralized location in Davidson County and adds a unique character to my dissertation as an experiment farm and historic property operated by the Land Trust for Tennessee.

Access to Glen Leven Farm is limited to prior reservations for groups with a minimum of 15 participants. The tour generally takes 90 minutes and includes information on the historic house, trails, arboretum, and garden.⁵³ Occasionally, the site hosts Open Gate Day for public admission not requiring a reservation. Glen Leven Farm also welcomes school groups from spring until autumn and they do not cap their participant numbers, although staff limit reservations to two to three groups per week.

⁵² The site does not include a well. The original owners used the spring house and captured water from the roof using a cistern. Glen Leven is a registered arboretum.

⁵³ The site's garden is used for educational purposes and is not restricted to heirloom varieties. Jack Duffus manages the gardens.

The programs are 1.5 hours in duration and the material is primarily geared to the kindergarten through second grade.⁵⁴

The majority of Glen Leven Farm’s public programs and outreach relate to The Land Trust for Tennessee. Founded in 1999, this non-profit organization’s mission is to “conserve the unique character of Tennessee’s natural and historic landscapes and sites for future generations.”⁵⁵ The Land Trust for Tennessee is committed to meeting its mission through advocacy and fundraising, but also promotes community engagement. The Land Trust for Tennessee networks with local businesses to foster viable working relationships. For example, the Hermitage Hotel farms two acres of the site and serves the produce at its restaurant. Also, the site works in connection with the Nashville Foodwaste Initiative and hosts programs on composting and other public-oriented programs. The Land Trust for Tennessee also collaborates with Jackalope Brewing Company by allocating fields for the company to grow hops.⁵⁶ The Land Trust for Tennessee conserves property based on the following criteria: agricultural importance, wildlife and biological significance, historic characteristics, and landscape value. Glen Leven meets each of these qualifications, so it functions as a showcase for the Land Trust for Tennessee and its mission.

In 2009, the Land Trust for Tennessee asked the Center for Historic Preservation at Middle Tennessee State University to conduct a historic structures report on the extant

⁵⁴ Similar to Open Gate Days, the site determines how many volunteers are needed per school group. Steph Karns orchestrates these groups, but they do not have a staff member dedicated to educational programs.

⁵⁵ <https://www.landtrusttn.org/about-us/>

⁵⁶ The Land Trust for Tennessee benefits from the arrangement through access to local beer during their fundraising events.

buildings and structures as well as the field and road patterns. The report also included an archaeological assessment. Completed in 2011, the Center for Historic Preservation provided an assessment of the property's history to circa 1990 and guidelines for the farm's restoration. In 2012, the Land Trust for Tennessee launched a stabilization campaign for the Glen Leven Farm that raised over a million dollars for restoration costs for the manor house and several outbuildings. In 2018, the organization relocated its offices to the newly restored Glen Leven Farm.⁵⁷

The Land Trust for Tennessee was founded in 1999, but the history of the Glen Leven manor house extends to the decades preceding Tennessee's statehood in 1796. After serving in the American Revolution, twenty-one-year-old Thomas Thompson moved from Orange County, North Carolina, to the region we now know as Nashville. Born on November 24, 1759, he later established the Glen Leven property, but not the manor house.⁵⁸ Thompson was one of the 250 original signers of the 1780 Cumberland Compact, which "served as a guide for land transactions and as a simple constitutional government for settlers," and is thus considered among the founders of Davidson County.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ The Land Trust for Tennessee has two office spaces – one in Nashville at Glen Leven and one in Chattanooga. The Chattanooga office has three full time staff. The Nashville location supports seventeen full time staff.

⁵⁸ "The language of this grant supports the second claim which suggests that the land was acquired in 1783, located by Thompson in early 1784, surveyed in 1785, and that while the Thompsons had already owned the property for seven years, it was finally registered in 1790." "Glen Leven: Historic Structure Report and Archaeological Reconnaissance Survey," Sponsored by the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area and MTSU's Center for Historic Preservation (January 2011), 6.

⁵⁹ The Cumberland Compact further "called for a representative form of civil government. Each of the seven stations (or forts) of the Cumberland settlement was entitled to a specific number of elected representatives to form a twelve-man "Tribunal of Notables" which dispensed justice, received and dispersed funds, settled claims, and regulated the land office." Kenneth Fieth, "Cumberland Compact," Carroll Van West, et. al., eds., *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, online edition (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004).

Thomas Thompson and his wife Nancy had five children, including their eldest, John Thompson. John Thompson was industrious and built upon his father's limited landholdings until he was well known in the area. As an enslaver, John Thompson also purchased more enslaved workers as he accrued capital and acreage, and records indicate that he owned as many as 75 enslaved workers.⁶⁰ He expanded his reach through investing in the Franklin Turnpike Company and Alabama Railroad (later the Nashville & Decatur), which connected his farm to the community and allowed for easier access to markets. John Thompson leveraged his wealth to fund the construction of the Glen Leven plantation house in 1857 that still stands today. Nashville architect A.E. Franklin designed the house and enslaved workers likely made the bricks on site. John Thompson experienced many misfortunes in life with the death of partners and children and was eventually married four times. John Thompson Jr. was born from the fourth and final marriage.

Glen Leven and the Thompson family's involvement in the Civil War and the Battle of Nashville are well-documented.⁶¹ John Thompson Jr. was too young to engage in the conflict, but he remembered the hardship of those years as the cultural and economic foundations of the South dissolved. After the war and his parents' death, John Thompson Jr. assumed legal ownership of Glen Leven and the land on the west side of the Nashville & Decatur Railroad. John Thompson Jr. ushered the farm into a new era of

⁶⁰ John Thompson was firmly entrenched in the plantation elite through his profile as an enslaver. His "level of slave ownership also separated him not only from the majority of Davidson County farmers but further distinguished him among the ranks of the county's slave owners. In the 1830s John owned almost fifty slaves, and by the 1840s that number had grown to seventy-five." "Glen Leven: Historic Structure Report and Archaeological Reconnaissance Survey," 11. Overall, Thompson's records indicate that at least 140 people were kept in slavery at the site between 1816 and 1862. <https://www.landtrusttn.org/glen-leven-farm/history/>

⁶¹ "Glen Leven: Historic Structure Report and Archaeological Reconnaissance Survey," 15-31.

agricultural practices. His agricultural workers raised Shorthorn cattle and Southdown Sheep and created the Hermitage Stud, a showcase farm for horses, as well as growing staple crops like corn and wheat.⁶²

John Thompson Jr.'s career also serves as an excellent launching pad to study agriculture in the early twentieth century. Along with serving as a state senator, John Thompson Jr. acted as the Commissioner of Agriculture from 1907 to 1911.⁶³ He advocated for and enforced quarantines and regulated new food safety standards across the state. During his tenure as commissioner, Tennessee adopted the University of Tennessee Extension Service in 1910, which provided (and still provides) assistance to farmers through education, financial incentives, and agricultural programs, such as soil testing, water conservation, and more.

After John Thompson Jr.'s death on September 25, 1919, the home eventually passed to the family of Conn T. Harris, one of John Thompson Jr.'s five children, and then to her brother Overton Thompson in 1946. After Overton Thompson's death in 1968, the family released possession for the first time, to country music executive Shelby Singleton. Singleton did not reside in the home for the two years he owned it, but only used it for parties. The house remained inactive and largely neglected. Susan M. West, Conn's daughter, bought back the house in 1971 and retained ownership until her death

⁶² Ibid., 33.

⁶³ During his time as Commissioner of Agriculture, John Thompson Jr. "worked closely with such agricultural reformers as Harcourt A. Morgan (later one of the three original directors of the Tennessee Valley Authority) and Brown Ayres, president of the University of Tennessee, to institutionalize progressive farming across the state." Ibid., 42.

in 2006, when she willed it to the Land Trust for Tennessee.⁶⁴ The home was listed in The National Register of Historic Places in 2008.

Although Glen Leven Farm's history is significant and accessible, the site's main contribution is through its relationship with the Land Trust for Tennessee. Currently, the staff of the Land Trust of Tennessee prioritize their conservation and education mission over any level of historic preservation or public history programming. However, the Land Trust for Tennessee recognizes the property's historic value and communicates basic, if not innovative, interpretation on the indigenous communities who lived in the region, the Thompson family, the enslaved workers, and the architecture of the house.⁶⁵ Interpretation is found primarily on their website and through the guided tours, but is also available via panels in the house's main entryway.

Glen Leven Farm also serves as a public liaison between the educational mission of the Land Trust for Tennessee and current agricultural initiatives. Because of its centralized location, Glen Leven Farm is a resource for people with restricted access to green space. Parts of inner-city Nashville qualify as "food deserts," where personal garden plots and farmers markets are limited. Although Glen Leven Farm does not sell or

⁶⁴ Susan West is the great-great-great-granddaughter of Thomas Thompson.

⁶⁵ The Land Trust for Tennessee's website includes this acknowledgement: "We acknowledge that The Land Trust for Tennessee's Glen Leven Farm sits on the traditional homelands of Indigenous Peoples. We do not know their names, but during the Woodland and Mississippian Periods they constructed temple, effigy, and residential mounds in Middle Tennessee including Old Town, Mound Bottom, Old Stone Fort, Castalian Springs, Sellars Farm, Beasley Mounds, and Glass Mounds. We know that there were at least eight tribes in what is now Tennessee during the time of European colonization. Those Indigenous Peoples are the Muscogee Band of Creek, Yuchi, Chickasaw, Chickamauga Band of Cherokee, Choctaw, Eastern Band of Cherokee, Shawnee, and Seneca. Ultimately, by the 18th century, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians) were likely the only native people living permanently in Tennessee, and they were removed by European settlers. These Indigenous Peoples had a relationship with this land for which we are grateful, and we recognize the unique and enduring relationship that exists between Indigenous Peoples and their traditional territories. We as an organization seek to learn more, and understand our small place within the vast history of this land." <https://www.landtrusttn.org/glen-leven-farm/history/>

donate its harvests, they educate visitors on the importance of farms, buying local, and land stewardship. The property also excels at serving as a meeting point for people to learn about contemporary agricultural practices. For example, the Davidson County Soil and Water Conservation District hosted its annual field day at Glen Leven Farm in 2019 and taught audiences about the Tennessee Department of Agriculture's programs, grants, and internal agencies that partner with farmers to promote cleaner water and reduce agricultural run-off. The location and the cultivated fields provide a convenient setting for such events.

Like The Homeplace to be discussed later, Glen Leven's opportunities for growth would require an expanded mission and commitment to outreach. However, it would allow the site to present a more complete picture and would create meaningful dialogue on some of the difficult history associated with Middle Tennessee. For example, Glen Leven Farm is well-situated to discuss farmland's relationship with urbanization, particularly as it relates to Davidson County, displacement of the largely Black labor force, and transportation. Glen Leven experienced major changes with every advancement, from railroads, turnpikes, and highways, with a major federal highway on one side and an interstate highway on the other.

A discussion of Davidson County's evolution could lead into a dynamic investigation of how the family responded to these changes – from John Thompson Jr.'s advocacy and investment in the rail system, to Susan West's extended struggles with the state Department of Highways (now Tennessee Department of Transportation or TDOT) as Interstate 65 connected Harding Place and Berry Road in the early 1970s. The state

had its eye on property that belonged to Susan West's mother, Conn West.⁶⁶ Susan West also leased land and oversaw tenant farmers on her property. Susan West raised cattle successfully, but faced challenges along the way. For example, in the 1980s TDOT proposed a new interstate access point on the east side of her property. West navigated the tense situation with the Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County and state officials as she continued to operate her cattle farm beside an expanding interstate.

Overall, Glen Leven Farm contributes to the intersection of Tennessee agricultural history and public history through its involvement in the state's past and the stories that emerged from this relationship. The experiences of the enslaved workers, the family, and those invested in the land are communicated through guided tours and the website. Glen Leven Farm also serves as a centralized home base for the Land Trust for Tennessee and functions as an educational platform for their conservation-minded mission. By incorporating Glen Leven into the narrative of Tennessee agricultural history, it is possible to learn how the land transformed from a settlement farm, to a plantation, to a New South farm under Thompson Jr., and then to a conserved space within a metropolis.

⁶⁶ "In the mid-winter of 1970-1971, the state proposed to buy and finalize the purchase of 25 acres from Conn West to build a section of interstate across the eastern boundary of her land." "Glen Leven: Historic Structure Report and Archaeological Reconnaissance Survey," 52.



Figure 2. 4: Glen Leven Farmhouse. Source: Photograph by author, April 5, 2019, Nashville, Tennessee.



Figure 2. 5: Glen Leven Farmhouse Rear View. Source: Photograph by author, April 5, 2019, Nashville, Tennessee.

Chapter Three: History Museums, Living History Sites, and their Incorporation of Agricultural History

Historic Ramsey House, Ames Plantation, and Glen Leven Farm provide a view of agricultural history that is supplemented by both its connection to regional history and the history associated with its owners and occupants. In Chapter Three, the perspective shifts from historic house museums to history museums. Visitors to history museums and living history sites have slightly different expectations than those touring historic houses and historic properties. Often, there is an expectation of a hands-on approach or a varied approach to communicating material – such as first-person interpretation or an interactive exhibit, educational video, etc. The following sites represent the different regions in Tennessee and their approaches to agricultural history and its interpretation.

Lenoir Museum

The W. G. Lenoir Museum is located inside Norris Dam State Park at 2121 Norris Freeway in Anderson County, Tennessee. The museum is open Wednesday through Sunday with free admission and operates with a limited staff of one full-time curator, Michael Mlekodaj, and the occasional summer intern. I chose to study the Lenoir Museum because the site has an abundance of artifacts related to rural and agricultural life in East Tennessee as one of the early agricultural museums in the state. The museum's association with the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) provides unique and relevant perspective on the TVA's role in the displacement of farm families, and its position as a catalyst for change via electrification, commercialization, and industrialization.

The Lenoir Museum owes the majority of its collection to the generosity and foresight of preservation enthusiasts and advocates, William G. Lenoir and his wife Helen Hudson Lenoir. They collected artifacts related to life in Tennessee during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, some of which were included in the displays with a historic water mill that TVA restored as part of its Norris Dam complex in the 1930s. Their methodology followed the ‘cabinet of curiosity’ and Henry Ford’s approach at Greenfield Village in that it was composed of items the Lenoirs found intriguing, regardless of their historical significance or value in relating a diverse regional history. They did not exercise a specific collections policy, so the museum contains dozens of similar items, like hand tools, with only minor variations. The Lenoirs donated over 4,000 artifacts, 90% of the site’s collection. The Lenoirs finalized their donation to the State of Tennessee in 1975 with the stipulation that the museum must remain open to the public with free admission. Consequently, the site is a common destination for school and specialty groups.

The Lenoir Museum is located at the Norris Dam State Park, within walking distance of the Norris Dam. Channeling the Clinch River, the Norris Dam was the first TVA hydroelectric project, initiated in October 1933 and finished in March 1936. TVA built sixteen dams in East Tennessee between 1933 and 1945 to improve navigability of the Tennessee River by deepening certain channels, generate hydroelectric power, and control the water to reduce the flooding and erosion of farmland. From the creation of the TVA on May 18, 1933, the institution radically altered the landscape, economy, and culture of East Tennessee. The region was a prime location for government assistance because of rampant soil erosion, limited access to healthcare and education, and a long-

standing economic depression.⁶⁷ In response to these issues, historian Gilbert Fite notes, the TVA's objectives were "soil conservation, reforestation, flood control, and improvement in agricultural practices" and that TVA achieved success, in part, through the construction of dams on the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers and their tributaries, supplying "cheap hydroelectric power for both farm and industrial use."⁶⁸

The TVA purchased 153,000 acres across five counties in preparation of constructing the Norris Dam and maintained ownership of most of that acreage from 1933 to 1952.⁶⁹ The TVA leased 4,000 acres to the state as a park in 1952, eventually selling the land to the state the following year for \$28,969.⁷⁰ After receiving the land from the TVA, the park joined the State Parks system. The Lenoir Museum partners with the park to provide programs for guests, like wildlife walks, ranger talks, and public events.⁷¹

From an evaluation of its exhibits, tours, programs, and publications, it is possible to understand the Lenoir Museum's contribution to the public history field and to ascertain its priorities. The Lenoir Museum does not prioritize interpretive and promotional materials, such as a newsletter, social media, or handbook/guide for guests. Furthermore, the Lenoir Museum does not have its own website and instead shares

⁶⁷ "Soil erosion had ruined or damaged seven million acres of farmland. Per capita income in 1933 was only 44 percent of the national average." W. Bruce Wheeler, "Tennessee Valley Authority," Carroll Van West, et. al., eds., *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, online edition (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004).

⁶⁸ Fite, *Cotton Fields No More*, 148.

⁶⁹ The five counties were Union, Campbell, Claiborne, Anderson, and Grainger, with the majority of the acreage coming from Anderson and Campbell counties.

⁷⁰ Carroll Van West, "Norris Dam State Park," Carroll Van West, et. al., eds., *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, online edition (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004).

⁷¹ For example, the Lenoir Museum markets through the Park's platforms to promote their seasonal music series that showcases traditional mountain music on Sundays.

information on its accessibility and operations on the Norris Dam State Park's website, which is difficult to navigate. Instead of contributing to the public history dialogue via written interpretation, the site's value is in its collection and self-guided tours.⁷² For example, the museum has an exhibit called "Early Farm Life in Tennessee" that permits visitors to touch certain artifacts, such as an anvil, millstone, washing machine, and plow. The advisability in terms of best practices for preservation is debatable, but the approach certainly encourages visitors to engage with the items and creates a more visceral understanding of their uses. This approach is particularly true of artifacts related to labor, for which it is meaningful to lift an item and imagine the energy required to utilize the tool, such as a scythe. The exhibit labels provide basic artifact identification, but do not delineate the provenance or tell a story about the object.

The Lenoir Museum also has the added benefit of two outdoor structures, a mill and a barn, that provide additional lenses into living history. Four generations of the Rice Family from Union County owned and operated the grist mill, starting with James Rice in 1798.⁷³ It contains the original millstone. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) relocated the mill to its present spot and opened it for public viewing in 1935. The CCC and NPS wanted the mill to demonstrate "what 'machine power' was along the Clinch River before the construction of Norris Dam."⁷⁴ Today the mill is still operational and

⁷² Tennessee Agricultural Museum curator, Sarah Williams, and I met with the curator, Michael Mlekodaj, to discuss the Lenoir Museum's public programming, collection, and current challenges, such as staff limitations.

⁷³ "The mill was originally built along Lost Creek in Union County by James Rice and his sons after they migrated to Sharp's Station from North Carolina in 1790. Construction was completed in the autumn of 1798." https://tnstateparks.com/assets/pdf/additional-content/norris_dam_museum_brochure.pdf

⁷⁴ Carroll Van West, *Tennessee's New Deal Landscape: Guidebook* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 154.

available for view on Saturday and Sunday. The Lenoir Museum also includes a threshing barn that was originally built by Caleb Crosby in the 1830s, which the family donated to the park. It was relocated in 1978 and is open to the public seasonally. East Tennessee agriculture was not as conducive to growing wheat, so towns often included one or two wealthy farmers who owned a threshing operation and bartered and sold its uses to the rest of the community.⁷⁵

The Lenoir Museum contributes to the interpretation of Tennessee agricultural history through the threshing barn and grist mill and through its artifacts. Although the threshing barn and grist mill do not employ first or third person interpreters, there is some level of living history by observing the equipment in use. However, the grist mill is operational only sporadically throughout the year, so it is not a guaranteed experience for every visitor. Furthermore, most families could not have afforded their own grist mill or threshing barn, and would have brought their produce for processing to buildings like these. Therefore, this site is educational more than representative of the population of East Tennessee farmers. Instead, the outbuildings are more valuable for their accessibility and for the stories they relate about how people used tools and technology before the TVA brought electricity to the region.

⁷⁵ The Museum of Appalachia in Anderson County, Tennessee, mirrors some of the interpretation found in the Lenoir Museum. Like the Lenoir Museum, the creation of the Norris Dam launched the grassroots movement that formed The Museum of Appalachia. John Rice Irwin, distraught over the cultural changes in the region, collected artifacts and started the museum in 1962. The Museum of Appalachia is more expansive in its collections, historic outbuildings, and public programming. For example, in November 2021 they opened a new exhibit: The Mountaineers' Sacrifice & Renewal, that discusses the Norris Dam project and the subsequent changes to the regional culture. Carroll Van West, "Museum of Appalachia," Carroll Van West, et. al., eds., *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, online edition (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004).

The Lenoir Museum has great interpretive value in relation to agricultural history through the lens of the TVA. Two of the most profound stories to emerge from the intersection of agriculture and the TVA are the displacement of farm families and the modernization of the countryside. Out of all the TVA's projects, the Norris Dam displaced the most rural communities, amounting to approximately 3,000 families in the Clinch and Powell River valleys of central East Tennessee.⁷⁶ Black families suffered disproportionately from the policies enforced by the TVA's Reservoir Family Removal Section.⁷⁷ In her study on farm women in the upcountry South, Melissa Walker noted that the "TVA's workers failed to refer black families to other local, state, and federal offices that might have helped them locate new land or improve their farm's productivity."⁷⁸ The TVA discriminated against poor White farmers and tenant farmers as well.⁷⁹ As the TVA assisted wealthier families in their relocations, the accessibility of farmland and affordable housing decreased drastically. And as the large-scale farmers received their government financial packages, they purchased capital-intensive machinery that largely eliminated the need for draft animals and the farmhands to manage them. These reductions and constrictions led Black and lower-class families away from the region in search of work. The Lenoir Museum is well positioned to interpret their stories through the abundance of material culture, photographs, and oral history available.

⁷⁶ Walker, *All We Knew was to Farm*, 153-154.

⁷⁷ See also Melissa Walker, "African Americans and TVA Reservoir Property Removal: Race in a New Deal Program," *Agricultural History* 72, no. 2 (1998): 417-428.

⁷⁸ Walker, *All We Knew was to Farm*, 156.

⁷⁹ Walker's study centralizes women, noting that "wives of tenant farmers, widows, and black women found themselves at the mercy of an impersonal bureaucracy and cruel economic forces." Walker, *All We Knew was to Farm*, 181.

The TVA further altered the agricultural history of East Tennessee through its revolutionary advancements in electricity, commodification, and community planning. In his biographical and historical study on the American agriculture from 1929 to 2010, Paul Keith Conkin identifies electrification as one of the main catalysts for industrialization and eventual commercialization.⁸⁰ Electricity ushered in major changes for the farmyard, since power-driven lights elongated workable hours in the barn and introduced new technology, such as new milking machines. These changes extended to the farmhouse as well since wealthy homes utilized interior electric lighting. The economic development of the region overturned the previous way of life, which was often isolated. Counties used the income generated from TVA-involvement and economic growth to pave roads and build schools, which translated to greater connectivity and access to markets for rural inhabitants.⁸¹

The Lenoir Museum recently initiated conversations about the difficult history surrounding its origins. In the spring of 2021, the Lenoir Museum hosted a month-long exhibit that featured information on the experiences of the approximately 2,900 East Tennessee families displaced by the Norris Dam project. The exhibit is the result of a collaboration between the TVA and Norris Dam State Park. TVA historian Pat Ezzell commented on the experiences of those displaced, noting that “at great personal loss to

⁸⁰ Conkin argues that American agriculture has experienced the most successful revolution in terms of economics and industrialization. He attributes the growth to four main causes – electrification, chemical usage, animal breeding, and capital-intensive machines. Paul K. Conkin, *A Revolution Down on the Farm: The Transformation of American Agriculture since 1929* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009).

⁸¹ As the area modernized, Walker notes that the cash-earning opportunities for some women also improved. “White women benefited not only from the cash brought from the sale of farmland to TVA but also from the new earning opportunities created by the transformation of the region.” Walker, *All We Knew was to Farm*, 149.

them, they left their homes and the land they loved for the greater good – to improve the quality of life in the region for all.”⁸² The Lenoir Museum should transition the temporary installation to a permanent exhibit inside the museum and interweave its artifacts in the narrative.

The Lenoir Museum can advance and expand its interpretation of agricultural history through improving its artifact labels and making the collection’s historical context accessible through multiple mediums – such as written text, audio files, and videos.⁸³ By doing so, the Lenoir Museum is well-positioned to relate the character of East Tennessee rural life through its material culture. It would also allow the museum to preserve the legacy of the Lenoirs and their donation. The most recent June 2021 state park pamphlet claims that the Lenoirs “strongly desired that rapidly-changing times not wipe out an appreciation of the hard work and ingenuity that used to be critical to everyday life,” so they “searched for, bought, and stored away artifacts to preserve an understanding of that life—not just of the artifacts themselves, but also of the people that created them and put them to daily use.”⁸⁴ Currently, the museum fails to live up to this standard of interpretation. The Lenoir Museum has the artifacts necessary to leverage a complicated narrative of settlement, farming, displacement, and economic development so that audiences learn about how the rural community changed over time.

⁸² Ezell went so far as to call their experiences ‘sacrifices,’ writing that “without their sacrifices, we would not enjoy the quality of life that we have today.” <https://www.tn.gov/environment/news/2021/4/28/state-park-presents-exhibit-on-norris-dam--with-tva-photography.html> “State Park Presents Exhibit on Norris Dam, with TVA Photography.” *States News Service*, 28 April 2021.

⁸³ The site could also communicate its agricultural stories through social media outlets and a website specific for the museum.

⁸⁴ https://tnstateparks.com/assets/pdf/additional-content/norris_dam_museum_brochure.pdf



Figure 3. 1: Guttormson with Lenoir Museum Staff. Site curator Michael Mlekodaj on far left. Source: Photograph by author, June 13, 2019, Norris, Tennessee.



Figure 3. 2: Rice Grist Mill. Source: Accessed December 7, 2021. Photo Courtesy of Norris Dam State Park.

West Tennessee Agricultural Museum

The West Tennessee Agricultural Museum is located at 3 Ledbetter Gate Road in Milan, Tennessee. Housed in a 16,000 square foot barn beside the UT AgResearch & Education Center, the site includes the museum, a historic cabin, and demonstration fields for row crops planted and harvested by the Research Center. The museum caters to a small rural audience, since the town of Milan has an estimated population of 8,000. The museum primarily engages with the public through tours.⁸⁵ The site is free and open to the public from Monday to Friday. School children and other groups are welcome to tour the museum and receive some level of introduction from their staff. The museum supports one full time staff member and an occasional summer intern. Other than tours, the property serves as a venue for the community.⁸⁶ The big event of the site is now the biennial No-Till Day hosted by the UT Research Center.⁸⁷ I included the West Tennessee Agricultural Museum because of its connection to the twentieth-century history of no-till farming in Tennessee, its abundance of material culture associated with rural life, and the similarity of its origin story to that of the Tennessee Agricultural Museum.

Like the Lenoir Museum and the Tennessee Agricultural Museum, the West Tennessee Agricultural Museum's collections are largely founded on one person's or a family's collection.⁸⁸ Thomas Clyde McCutchen served as the initial champion for the

⁸⁵ The West Tennessee Agricultural Museum has permanently canceled its Fall Folklore Jamboree. It was last hosted in October of 2018.

⁸⁶ The public can rent an interior room in the museum for business purposes. The site charges \$120 for a half day and \$200 for a full day. They can lock the doors so that the room is accessible but the museum is not.

⁸⁷ No-Till Day started as an annual event in 1981 and continued as such until 2002, when it transitioned to every other year.

⁸⁸ Like Oscar Farris, McCutchen felt strongly about educating future generations about Tennessee's agricultural history and preserving its material culture. Unlike Farris, Tom McCutchen did not leave an extensive paper trail.

creation of the West Tennessee Agricultural Museum. McCutcheon was born in Yorkville, Tennessee, on November 12, 1928. He earned a Bachelor of Science in 1949 from the University of Tennessee and Master of Science in Agricultural Extension in 1965. In 1952, he served as the assistant county agent in Lincoln County, but in 1955 he stepped away from the agricultural sector for two years to work as a salesman for the Quaker Oats Company. In 1957, McCutchen returned to agriculture by assuming the role of “assistant county agent and later as a county agent in Obion County” in West Tennessee.⁸⁹

McCutchen made his mark on Tennessee agricultural history through his involvement with the Milan Experiment Station, starting in 1963 when he served as its first director, and through his contribution to the creation of the West Tennessee Agricultural Museum.⁹⁰ In partnership with local newspaperman and activist Bob Parkins, he petitioned for an agricultural museum in the early 1980s and earmarked his personal collection for the bedrock of the museum’s acquisitions. Unfortunately, McCutchen did not live to see his dream realized because he died at the age of 54 on June 3, 1983 from cancer.⁹¹ In June of 1983, shortly after McCutchen’s passing, the Milan Chamber of Commerce, in “sincere appreciation of Tom McCutchen’s contribution to

⁸⁹ Catherine Ploskonka Dore, “Thomas C. McCutchen – Father of Tennessee No-Till,” *Tennessee Agri Science*, Summer, 1996, 42.

⁹⁰ The UT Agricultural Extension Department created the Milan Experiment Station in 1963 with the “specific objective of conducting field-scale research in cropping systems of western Tennessee.” H. P. Denton and D. D. Tyler, “Making No-Till “Conventional” in Tennessee,” in *Making Conservation Tillage Conventional: Building a Future on 25 Years of Research. Proc. of 25th Annual Southern Conservation Tillage Conference for Sustainable Agriculture*. Edited by E. van Santen. (Auburn: Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station and Auburn University, 2002), 56.

⁹¹ McCutcheon was survived by his wife Peggy, with whom he had a positive relationship. “His wife Peggy worked as his secretary. Employees on the station marveled at how the two would finish breakfast each morning and stroll a few hundred yards across the road to begin the day’s work. They were a team in every sense of the word.” Dore, “Thomas C. McCutchen – Father of Tennessee No-Till,” 41.

mankind,” adopted a resolution “to foster, support, and encourage legislative efforts to secure funding for the West Tennessee Agricultural Museum.”⁹²

In 1988, the West Tennessee Agricultural Museum opened to the public, with McCutchen’s private collection, donated by his heirs, serving as the foundation.⁹³ The site reflects the interests of McCutchen and now has a collection of over 2,700 objects.⁹⁴ In July 1996, the museum was renamed the Tom C. McCutchen Agricultural Museum.⁹⁵ Museum supporters created a non-profit association, the West Tennessee Agricultural Museum Association, on August 19, 1981.⁹⁶ The association went inactive on April 12, 2014 and its current status with the Secretary of State’s Business Entity Detail is “Inactive - Dissolved (Administrative).”⁹⁷

One of the most comprehensive exhibits at the West Tennessee Agricultural Museum focuses on no-till farming. McCutchen’s research and legacy are so far-reaching that “no story of no-till in Tennessee can be complete without mention of Tom McCutchen and the Milan No-Till Field Day.”⁹⁸ McCutchen launched his research and advocacy for no-till farming in Milan in 1965.⁹⁹ McCutchen also created the group Tennessee No-Till (TNT) in the early 1960s, and “members of the Tennessee

⁹² Ibid.,” 43.

⁹³ “It was nearly five years later that the 17,500-square foot, two-story, West Tennessee Agricultural Museum in Milan opened to the public.” Ibid.,” 43.

⁹⁴ The museum consists of exhibits on two floors and the boyhood cabin of a local governor which was later relocated to the site. The cabin is only unlocked by request during regular business hours. The cabin is ADA compliant and is maintained well through appropriate artifacts. A barn exists in the back for oversized and damaged items.

⁹⁵ Dore, “Thomas C. McCutchen – Father of Tennessee No-Till,” 43.

⁹⁶ The association is now largely inactive.

⁹⁷ “A business entity that has failed to file its annual report on a timely basis may be administratively dissolved and placed in inactive status.” <https://sos.tn.gov/products/business-services/business-entity-filings-faqs>

⁹⁸ Denton and Tyler, “Making No-Till “Conventional” in Tennessee,” 56.

⁹⁹ Maurine Taylor, “A Century of UT Extension,” *Tennessee Alumnus*, Fall, 2010.

Agricultural Experiment Station have been researching and refining no-till production continually since that time.”¹⁰⁰ McCutchen’s publications include “The Effect of Three Tillage Methods on Soybeans Grown on Silt Loam Soils with Fragipans,” which studied how West Tennessee soil retained or lost moisture based on tillage depths. He determined that “field crops on silt loam soils in West Tennessee have not responded to deep tillage.”¹⁰¹

McCutchen also co-authored “A Five-Year Comparison of Seedbed Preparation Systems for Cotton on Memphis and Collins Silt Loams.” Here, he analyzed field preparation methods and summarized that “annual chiseling or breaking is not required, beds of 6 inches are deep enough, and 6-inch bedding or offset discing are comparable to breaking or chisel plowing.”¹⁰² The article is not only geared towards no-till, but it promotes less involvement in preparing the soil beds since discing is less invasive than tilling. By 1981, McCutchen was accredited with establishing “commercially viable systems of no-till corn and soybeans” at Milan.¹⁰³

The history of the West Tennessee Agricultural Museum is interconnected with the region’s unique farming history and soil composition. West Tennessee soil differs from that of Middle and East Tennessee through its nutrient density, water retention rates,

¹⁰⁰ T.C. Mueller and R. M. Hayes, “No-Till Farming and Weed Control,” *Tennessee Agri Science*, Summer, 1996, 33.

¹⁰¹ Donald D. Tyler and Tom C. McCutchen, “The Effect of Three Tillage Methods on Soybeans Grown on Silt Loam Soils with Fragipans,” *Tennessee Farm and Home Science*, April, May, June 1980, 26.

¹⁰² J.A. Mullins, T.C. McCutchen, W.L. Parks, F.F. Bell, and S.M. Parks, “A Five-Year Comparison of Seedbed Preparation Systems for Cotton on Memphis and Collins Silt Loams,” *Tennessee Farm and Home Science: Progress Report*, October, November, December, 1974, 17.

¹⁰³ Denton and Tyler, “Making No-Till “Conventional” in Tennessee,” 56.

and through its elevation – since the farmland in West Tennessee is flat and more advantageous for row crops.

Although West Tennessee farmland, especially that closest to the Mississippi River, is incredibly fertile, farmers encountered reoccurring issues with the soil, such as its consistency and displacement of sediment. The soil is loose, sometimes being compared to talcum powder.¹⁰⁴ Subsequently, West Tennessee experienced high rates of run-off that were exacerbated by soil quality and seasonal drought. The run-off led to decreased crop production. In 1977, the “average rate of erosion for all cropland in Tennessee was 15 tons per acre year, and on upland soils it was much higher, sometimes exceeding 50 tons per acre year.”¹⁰⁵ The Tennessee Institute for Agriculture considered these rates for West Tennessee “a soil erosion crisis.”¹⁰⁶ As the soil washed away from the fields, it polluted streams and water sources and presented new hazards to the environment.¹⁰⁷

The traditional farming practice of tilling precipitated these issues. As farmers loosened the soil with plows, they aerated the ground, permitting more run-off during annual rains which damaged the fields and reduced output. The practice of tillage continued for numerous reasons, namely because it was traditional and generally considered to be cost effective. Traditional plowing with draft animals was the norm for thousands of years. In America, the introduction of Illinois blacksmith John Deere’s steel

¹⁰⁴ “The soils in West Tennessee are especially erodible because they are ...almost like talcum powder – very silty and easily moved by water if they’re exposed and tilled.” Quote from Dr. Don Tyler, retired agriculture professor from the University of Tennessee. Brittany Stovall, “How Farmers are Saving the Soil in Tennessee,” *Tennessee Ag Insider*, 2017, 28.

¹⁰⁵ Denton and Tyler, “Making No-Till “Conventional” in Tennessee,” 53.

¹⁰⁶ Ginger Rowsey, “Nation’s Oldest and Largest Conservation Tillage Event Marks 30th Field Day,” Public Release from University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture, April 23, 2018.

¹⁰⁷ David R. Huggins and John P. Reganold, “No-Till: The Quiet Revolution,” *Scientific American, Inc.*, July, 2008, 71.

moldboard plow in 1837 instigated a sea-change in agricultural mechanization. Deere's plow allowed Midwestern farmers to cultivate the dense soil of America's heartland. In the early twentieth century, tractors skyrocketed tillage productivity, almost to dangerous levels. Farmers tilling the soil with tractors inadvertently instigated the Dust Bowl (1931-1939) as "wind blew away precious topsoil from the drought-ravaged southern plains of the U.S."¹⁰⁸ Agriculturalists grew aware of the need for improved farming practices.¹⁰⁹ However, farmers considered traditional tillage to be cost effective since it managed weeds.¹¹⁰ Farmers often did not investigate alternative weed control methods, such as "terracing, rotation with forages, and contour strip-cropping," despite the best efforts of federal soil conservation experts, because they required additional expenses through installation and often did not yield the harvest rates of more traditional farming methods.¹¹¹

It took extensive research, the invention of powerful herbicides, and the popularization of new machines to standardize no-till. No-till farming reduces or eliminates the amount of tilling required when planting and harvesting crops. There are many different ways to implement no-till, or conservation tillage, but it is defined as "any method that retains enough of the previous crop residues such that at least 30 percent of

¹⁰⁸ Huggins and Reganold, "No-Till: The Quiet Revolution," 73.

¹⁰⁹ A separate and interesting historiographical subject is the debate on tillage from this period forward. Of significance is the 1943 publication, *Plowman's Folly* by Edward Faulkner. He initiated the movement to reduce reliance on tillage-based farming, though he faced heavy criticism.

¹¹⁰ Denton and Tyler, "Making No-Till "Conventional" in Tennessee," 53.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 53.

the soil surface is covered after planting.”¹¹² Educating farmers about no-till through research and evidence about increased productivity served as the first step.¹¹³

No-till advocates in Tennessee experienced many early setbacks.¹¹⁴ One primary obstacle was the management of weeds, since traditional plows created deep furrows for the crop and uprooted weeds from the previous growing cycle. Scientists endeavored to create a comprehensive herbicide, especially pertaining to West Tennessee’s struggle with johnsongrass. Herbicides were so formative to the adoption of no-till that their development “between 1960 and 1980 changed the situation.”¹¹⁵ By 1985, corn, cotton, and soybean farmers had access to herbicides that contended with the major weeds in Tennessee soils.¹¹⁶ Along with buying these herbicides, farmers invested in their occupation through purchasing new machinery, which was often expensive.¹¹⁷ As no-till equipment reached the markets, farmers noticed that the residue leftover from previous seasons clogged the equipment and compromised seed placement. Agriculturalists redesigned their machines so that the seeders could penetrate the thicker soil and crop residue.¹¹⁸

¹¹² Huggins and Reganold, “No-Till: The Quiet Revolution,” 73.

¹¹³ Agriculturalists, such as Professor Henry Andrews and his students, initiated research at the “University of Tennessee in the late 1950s” and “attempts at farmer adoption began between 1965 and 1970.” Denton and Tyler, “Making No-Till “Conventional” in Tennessee,” 54.

¹¹⁴ These initial setbacks also included, “soil compaction, adequacy of surface application of lime and fertilizer, buildup of insects and diseases, and concerns about accumulation of a thick, unmanageable layer of mulch over time.” Denton and Tyler, “Making No-Till “Conventional” in Tennessee,” 54.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹¹⁸ The amount of soil that is turned over is one of the benchmarks for identifying conservation tillage versus traditional tillage. For example, “tillage with a moldboard plow completely turns over the first six to 10 inches [sic] of soil, burying most of the residue.” In contrast, “no-till methods merely create in each planted row a groove just half an inch to three inches across into which seeds can be dropped, resulting in minimal overall soil disturbance.” Huggins and Reganold, “No-Till: The Quiet Revolution,” 73.

Fortunately, farmers who accepted the challenge to adopt no-till reaped many benefits. Most notably, no-till, “when combined with high residue cropping systems, is much more effective in control of erosion than traditional systems.”¹¹⁹ It also reduces run-off and provides habitat for animals. The residue that is not tilled under provides foraging material and ground cover for birds and small mammals. Importantly, no-till does not create additional pest problems due to the increased crop material. The main pests are those which thrive in the decaying material left for crop cover. Easily the most advantageous aspect of transitioning to no-till was the financial compensation by state and federal governments. In the 1980s, the USDA required farmers to decrease their erosion rates to comply with the Farm Bill (and receive its monetary benefits). Therefore, “since the majority of cropland in Tennessee falls in the highly erodible category, Tennessee farmers were heavily impacted.”¹²⁰ The 1985 Farm Bill’s Conservation Compliance provisions did not mandate that farmers adopt the no-till method to reduce erosion, but as the method gained popularity and as herbicides progressed, it served as the most cost-effective medium.

Although no-till is not a perfect solution for modern agricultural practices, it alleviated many urgent issues and evolved into the dominant form of cultivation.¹²¹ The

¹¹⁹ Denton and Tyler, “Making No-Till “Conventional” in Tennessee,” 53. In comparison, the “use of contour terraces in cotton production will reduce soil erosion by 50 to 60 percent, but use of no-till with a winter crop cover will reduce erosion by 90 percent.” Denton and Tyler, “Making No-Till “Conventional” in Tennessee,” 53.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹²¹ Denton and Tyler note that the transition from tillage farming to no-till farming in Tennessee is a “classic example of the Land Grant approach to agricultural production problems.” They show that “from the time research first began around 1960, 15 to 20 years were required to develop commercially viable systems, and another 15 to 20 years were required before the new technology was adopted on half of the planted area.” Therefore, a “problem was identified (soil erosion), a viable solution was developed through research (no-till), and the solution was adopted on the land as a result of Extension education programs.” *Ibid.*, 55.

2002 statistics for Tennessee farms reveal that no-till was used on “60 percent of the cotton, about 65 percent of the corn and about 70 percent of the soybean acreage.”¹²² In 2018, the National Agricultural Statistics Service reported that Tennessee farmers used “no-till practices on more than 70 percent of their acres, while farming an additional 20 percent with some type of conservation tillage.”¹²³ With increased adoption, the drawbacks to no-till became more apparent. It is not the best method for all climates, since it can result in lower productivity yield. The leftover crop residue “blocks the sun’s rays from warming the earth to the same degree as occurs with conventional tillage,” which lowers the soil temperatures and can “slow seed germination and curtail the early growth of warm-season crops, such as corn, in northern latitudes.”¹²⁴ No-till is also heavily dependent on herbicides.¹²⁵ Some agriculturalists expressed uncertainty since “reliance on agrichemicals may adversely affect non-target species or contaminate air, water and soil.”¹²⁶

The West Tennessee Agricultural Museum’s mission, history, public programs, and exhibits are connected to the story of no-till. One of the most cohesive and educational exhibits in the museum relates information on the benefits of no-till farming. The exhibit, though dated, contains photographs, statistics, and text that describe the method. Furthermore, one of the lasting legacies of McCutchen’s advocacy for no-till is

¹²² Denton and Tyler, “Making No-Till “Conventional” in Tennessee,” 53.

¹²³ Rowsey, “Nation’s Oldest and Largest Conservation Tillage Event Marks 30th Field Day.” This compares to a 2018 national estimate of 60 percent of farmland using no-till methods.

¹²⁴ Huggins and Reganold, “No-Till: The Quiet Revolution,” 77.

¹²⁵ “Interest in no-till began to expand when burndown herbicides such as glyphosate, glufosinate, and dicamba were registered for use in row crops, and new planters and spray equipment came on the market. The advent of Roundup Ready crops in 1996 brought even more interest in reduced tillage.” Forrest Laws, “Farm Press and No-Till: Partners through the Years,” *Delta Farm Press*, September 12, 2018.

¹²⁶ Huggins and Reganold, “No-Till: The Quiet Revolution,” 77.

the Milan Field Day. The Extension Service hosts a free biennial event to share information on best practices for no-till farming through presentations and tours of their demonstration-fields. McCutchen hosted the first Milan No-Till Field Day in July 1981. The event welcomed 2,000 people and has recorded increased attendance ever since. It is now considered “world famous” among agriculturalists and “has been a major factor in the adoption of no-till in the United States.”¹²⁷ Presently, the Director of the AgResearch and Education Center at Milan, Blake Brown, wrote that the field day originated to teach about no-till, but has evolved “over the years” to incorporate “teaching procedures” focused on “the latest technologies” involved with no-till.¹²⁸

Other than the no-till farming exhibit, the West Tennessee Agricultural Museum is largely collection-oriented instead of timeline-oriented. Occasionally, the museum feels more like a county museum because of the types of items collected, such as a large array of agricultural themed ballcaps or a hair-perming machine from the early 1900s. The upstairs contains vignettes from rural life in the twentieth century, such as the local church and school. These exhibits were likely effective during their original placement, but are now dated. Furthermore, the lack of written interpretation reduces the experiences of Tennessee farmers to what visitors see. Since every West Tennessee farmer did not attend the same church, the one-sided interpretation lacks the diversity necessary to relate a holistic story. Moreover, the artifacts are clumped together to present an extreme representation, such as a wall of tools that might display twenty wrenches of various sizes or ten butter churns.

¹²⁷ Denton and Tyler, “Making No-Till “Conventional” in Tennessee,” 56.

¹²⁸ Rowsey, “Nation’s Oldest and Largest Conservation Tillage Event Marks 30th Field Day.”

The West Tennessee Agricultural Museum fails to interpret the history of Tennessee slavery and tenancy even though it the best-positioned museum to do so, due to its location and the level of slavery found in West Tennessee. The centrality of row-crops in the western region of the state, the economy's dependence on enslaved labor, and the high rates of tenancy before and after emancipation all point to the West Tennessee Agricultural Museum as an appropriate platform. Slavery is mentioned within the exhibits only in passing and tenancy is not incorporated at all. Like some of the other sites, the museum leans on the familiar history of the settlement period – early Tennesseans plowing fields – then it leaps forward to early twentieth century farming that showcases small-town America and its self-sufficiency.

The museum and research center staff believes that guests gain a better understanding of Tennessee agriculture through the proximity of the research center and the surrounding fields. The staff asserted that the cultivated fields allow visitors to see West Tennessee agriculture in motion.¹²⁹ To them, they promote no-till farming by practicing it. Ultimately, the lack of interpretation around the fields strips it of all educational value for a visitor unassociated with modern tillage practices. The exhibitions on the value of no-till do not connect with the surrounding areas in terms of stepping outside and witnessing it firsthand. Overall, the museum is largely a sidelined item. The UT Research center is the primary concern in terms of the site's budget, labor, and staff. Revitalization of the West Tennessee Agricultural Museum would require innovative exhibits, increased staffing, artifact labels, and an intense and a thorough campaign to

¹²⁹ The site is 638 acres with 20,000 plots of planted crops, including cotton that they harvest and sell.

incorporate diverse history into the narrative. These initiatives would permit the West Tennessee Agricultural Museum to provide a better visitor experience and to contribute to the current public history discussion of rural life.



Figure 3. 3: Homage to Tom McCutcheon Near Museum Entrance. Source: Photograph by author, June 6, 2019, Milan, Tennessee.



Figure 3. 4: Portion of the No-Till Exhibit at the West Tennessee Agricultural Museum. Source: Photograph by author, June 6, 2019, Milan, Tennessee.

The Homeplace

The Homeplace is tucked away inside the expansive Land Between the Lakes (LBL) National Recreation Area, a 170,000-acre peninsula in Western Kentucky and Tennessee.¹³⁰ The site is a popular destination for campers, wildlife enthusiasts, and those who wish to immerse themselves in the outdoors, since 96% of LBL is undeveloped. LBL contains 300 miles of shoreline along Lake Barkley (Cumberland River) and Kentucky Lake (Tennessee River).¹³¹ Chartered in 2000, the non-profit Land Between the Lakes Association, or “Friends of LBL,” provides fundraising, advocacy, and public programming.¹³² The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service manages LBL and provides financial assistance as well.¹³³ I chose to study The Homeplace because of its third-person interpretive style, adherence to traditional farming demonstrations, and unique interpretive era among public history sites in Tennessee.

The Homeplace consists of 50 acres inside LBL that engage with guests through programming, living history demonstrations, historic structures, and an Interpretive Center.¹³⁴ The Homeplace, located in Stewart County, Tennessee, represents life on a

¹³⁰ For more information on the history of LBL, see Edward W. Chester and James S. Fralish, *Land Between the Lakes, Kentucky and Tennessee: Four Decades of Tennessee Valley Authority Stewardship* (The Center for Field Biology – Austin Peay State University, 2002), Betty J. Wallace, *Between the Rivers: History of the Land Between the Lakes* (Clarksville: Austin Peay State University, 1992), and Frank E. Smith, *Land Between the Lakes: Experiment in Recreation* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014).

¹³¹ As of 2018, annual visitation hovered near 45,000.

¹³² The Mission of the Land Between the Lakes Association, “Friends of LBL,” is to “assist with the improvement, promotion, conservation and wise use of Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area.” The Homeplace New Staff Member Handbook. Edited 2018.

¹³³ The 2018 Homeplace New Staff Member Handbook notes that the “title changed from The Homeplace-1850 to The Homeplace after the transition from TVA to the Forest Service,” 9.

¹³⁴ For additional reading on The Homeplace and the animals visitors may encounter on their visit, see Geraldine Ann Marshall, *The Homeplace History and Receipt Book: History, Folklore, and Recipes from Life on an Upper Southern Farm a Decade before The Civil War* (Scotts Valley: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013), Edmund J. Zimmerer, *Amphibians and Reptiles of Land Between*

second-generation family farm from the 1850s. The site preserves and interprets numerous historic structures, cultivates demonstration gardens, and connects with guests through third person interpreters in period dress who perform the daily chores. The site generally operates with five site interpreters. Admission to The Homeplace includes a brief video and exhibit in the Interpretive Center and access to the historic farm for a self-guided tour. The rate does not exceed \$9 and guests are allowed access March through November, Wednesday through Sunday.¹³⁵

Part of the Land Between the Lakes (LBL) federal preserve, multiple agencies have managed the property since President Kennedy approved it as a National Recreation Area, starting with the TVA and transferring to the USDA Forest Service in 1999. After the creation of LBL in 1963, the site managers assessed the existing historical structures and discussed how to preserve, interpret, and promote them. They collected multiple buildings and relocated them to the Pryor Valley, to “form the nucleus for a cultural activities complex with historical emphasis in the southern portion of LBL.”¹³⁶ By its opening in October 1978, The Homeplace included “16 authentic wooden 1850s structures” with “15 of those log buildings...from within 10 miles of the Pryor Creek area.”¹³⁷

the Lakes (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2016), and David H. Snyder, *Birds of Land Between the Lakes* (Clarksville: Center for Field Biology, Austin Peay State University, 1991).

¹³⁵ The LBL offers multiple educational outlets besides The Homeplace, such as the Golden Pond Planetarium and the Woodlands Nature Station. They also have self-guided destinations, such as The South Bison Range and The Elk and Bison Prairie. The Homeplace revitalized its online presence after 2020 and now offers more virtual components for elementary-age students. Educators can download grade-specific lesson plans, like an interactive timeline. <https://friendsoflbl.org/virtual-resources/>

¹³⁶ Excerpt from the 1975 operational plan created by Ann Winstead Wright, Supervisor of Interpretive Services/Manager of Marketing and Planning for LBL, cited in The Homeplace New Staff Member Handbook. Edited 2018.

¹³⁷ “Time Travelers Guide to the Homeplace 1850s Farm,” *The Homeplace Gazette* 3 no. 2 (April 2015). <https://www.landbetweenthe lakes.us/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/2015HPFarmEtiquetteR3.pdf>

The Homeplace's interpretive value is interwoven with its three-part mission:

- To communicate, in comparison and contrast to life today, the culture and activities of yeoman class farm life between the Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers during the mid-nineteenth century.
- To communicate that mankind is a significant actor in the environment, that historically people have improved quality of life through the manipulation of natural resources, and to encourage wise use of natural resources through education and action.
- To communicate to present day users throughout LBL, the natural and cultural history of LBL offering permanence and veneration for past cultures and the traces they left on the land.¹³⁸

The Homeplace uses the resources at the Interpretive Center and the farm to communicate its goals and meet its mission. The exhibits and video at the Interpretive Center relate how the site is dependent on the environment and showcase how the tasks were molded around the season, weather, and available help.¹³⁹ The Interpretive Center supplies helpful written context and provides amenities like a restroom and gift shop. The bulk of The Homeplace's interpretive value resides in its living history and public interpretation, which is accomplished through three initiatives: third person interpretation/narrative and demonstration of heritage chores; a reliance on historic/reproduction equipment and methods; and inclusion of farm animals and heritage plants.

First, The Homeplace is a unique site because of its successful use of third person interpretation in demonstrating chores associated with historic rural life. These chores

¹³⁸ The Homeplace New Staff Member Handbook. Edited 2018.

¹³⁹ The Interpretive Center at The Homeplace consists of a 6,500 square foot structure enclosed by earth, that educates guests on the environmental features, such as heating and cooling through its vegetative roof.

include woodworking, plowing, and domestic labor, like sewing, cooking, and spinning.¹⁴⁰ Along with teaching guests about the work on the farm, they are also a lens into the gendered division of labor. The period clothing and interpreter-training further accentuates the realism. Staff engage with audiences based on age and interest level. They also welcome visitors into the experience, through engaging questions, cultivating interest, and allowing them to ‘try’ the task (when safe). Second, the site relies on historic or reproduction equipment and methods, which adds multiple layers of authenticity by fostering a discussion of why the interpreters are doing their task and how it has changed over time. Many of the crafts, chores, and activities are promoted through The Homeplace’s website, so that guests will have an idea of what they will see based on the time and season of their visit.¹⁴¹

Lastly, The Homeplace features heritage farm animals and heirloom plants to continue its efforts towards authenticity. The animals perform a function on the farm just as the people do. For example, The Homeplace allows Black Cayuga Ducks to roam the barnyard to reduce pests and provide meat and eggs and Belgian Mules plow the fields, pull logs, and clear fields. Heirloom plants grow in the kitchen garden and in the large surrounding plots. These crops are representative of those grown in the nineteenth century and are generally open-pollinated.

¹⁴⁰ These activities are dependent on the season, weather, and the site interpreter’s skill. They are not dependent on the group present or the number of viewers. They shear sheep in the spring, whether they have an audience of 1 or 100.

¹⁴¹ <https://www.landbetweenthe lakes.us/seendo/attractions/homeplace/>

These plants “produce seeds that maintain true characteristics of the parent plant from generation to generation” and are known for their genetic stability.¹⁴² Examples include Yellow Crook Neck Squash and Red Ripper Pea.

The Homeplace excels at communicating information on the daily life of a second-generation family farm during the nineteenth century. On the basic level, it demonstrates how to plant heritage crops, harvest them with historic or reproduction equipment and draft animals, store them in historic outbuildings, by incorporating them into their third-person narratives. The museum primarily raises corn, specifically Texas Gourdseed and Bloody Butcher, but also grows other secondary crops like oats, cotton, and vegetables.¹⁴³ In a broader sense, The Homeplaces adds to the discussion on Tennessee agricultural history through its distinct time period. Many cultural institutions focus on the settlement period when the area was essentially a frontier. The Homeplace’s period is approximately fifty years past settlement, when the residents gained access to additional markets through improved roads and waterways. The Homeplace staff member handbook stresses that “one of the main themes, or ideas, to get across to the visitors is the fact that this is a one [white] family, middle class home...with towns nearby and a steady source of income.”¹⁴⁴

Furthermore, The Homeplace allows people to grasp concepts about agricultural history that are not always accessible through written and visual mediums, since a photo

¹⁴² “Special Edition: Spring 2015 Heirloom Gardening,” *The Homeplace Gazette* 3, no. 1 (April 2015).

<https://www.landbetweenthe lakes.us/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/2015HPHeirloomGardeningR5.pdf>

¹⁴³ The Homeplace has grown tobacco, but the site found the crop difficult to harvest, store, and interpret. They still grow it, but not as the primary crop.

¹⁴⁴ The Homeplace New Staff Member Handbook. Edited 2018.

of someone working beside draft animals is not the same experience as watching it. Subsequently, The Homeplace successfully depicts some of the difficulties of the time, which mitigates the nostalgia many feel towards the past, especially the rural past. Instead of only focusing on how things ‘were made to last,’ visitors hear about the annual hog butchering and how the family stores food for the winter since their well-being depended on proactive labor and planning. The Homeplace New Staff Member Handbook warns readers that some visitors perceive the site as “an idyllic place where time stands still and all the good things of the “Good Old Days” come to life.”¹⁴⁵ By leaning into the difficult aspects of the agricultural lifestyle, The Homeplace relates a more complete narrative.

The Homeplace largely meets its mission to interpret yeoman farm life through third person interpretation and demonstration. Any suggestions on interpretive growth would necessitate creativity and flexibility on the part of The Homeplace, but would ultimately create a diverse experience and allow for more versatility in their public programming and visitor experience. Furthermore, repeat visitors would have something new to learn from temporary exhibits. Many possibilities exist to combine the agricultural history of The Homeplace with its broader historical context. For example, it would be meaningful if the Interpretive Center could connect with LBL descendant communities and ask how the National Recreation Area’s creation affected the inhabitants. Like the

¹⁴⁵ It goes on to add that “it is worth mentioning that The Homeplace is still a farm and our visitors and staff are still human beings and that Murphy’s Law is to be revered because if it can go wrong, it probably will go wrong at the worst time possible for it to go wrong,” The Homeplace New Staff Member Handbook. Edited 2018.

Lenoir Museum, they could press into the difficult history surrounding the TVA, displacement, and rural life.

Most notably, The Homeplace performs poorly in interpreting the history of slavery and tenancy in Tennessee agriculture.¹⁴⁶ The panels in the Interpretive Center reference slavery, but it is not explored in depth. However, Stewart County recorded 2,415 enslaved persons living within its boundaries in 1860. One of seven Whites in Stewart County owned enslaved workers, with most owning five or less. The living history presented is devoid of enslaved workers, since the interpreters are demonstrating the labor of a free and presumably White family. Tenancy is likewise absent. These absences permit visitors to make their own assumptions about the role of White yeoman farmers in a culture dependent on enslaved labor. The Homeplace's lack of interpretive text (outside of the Interpretive Center) is both a strength and a weakness. Guests need to come with questions and curiosity to make the most of their visit. Key themes like race, commercialization, and technological advancements are missing unless visitors press into these issues.

Overall, The Homeplace serves as one of the most effective examples of living history for the intersection of agricultural history and public history in Tennessee. The site communicates many of the hallmarks of rural life: community uplift through interdependence, viable connections between family and friends, and stewardship of the land and animals. However, it is important that guests also learn that this experience was not normative. Not everyone in the 1850s could afford a two-story house, access to prime

¹⁴⁶ The scarcity of interpretation extends to the Civil War also, since The Homeplace does not address it and their website only suggests other sites to visit.
<https://www.landbetweenthe lakes.us/seendo/attractions/homeplace/civil-war/>

land and water, and have the physical and financial capacities to operate a farm. If they did in antebellum Stewart County, they most likely owned enslaved workers, who performed the bulk of the labor. The Homeplace should continue in its successes and address the gaps and absences that keep it from serving as a more comprehensive interpretive site.



Figure 3. 5: The Homeplace 1850 Interpretive Center. Source: Photograph by author, June 17, 2019, Dover, Tennessee.



Figure 3. 6: Third-Person Interpreter at The Homeplace. Source: Photograph by author, June 17, 2019, Dover, Tennessee.

Chapter Four: The Origins of the Ellington Agricultural Center

Research into the History of the Property and its Relationship with Rogers Caldwell and the State of Tennessee

After an analysis of the interpretation of agricultural history at some of Tennessee's historic houses and museums, it is helpful to delve more deeply into an evaluation of the state's primary public history institution for agricultural history – the Tennessee Agricultural Museum. By researching the museum's history – both through a study of the environment that later developed into the Ellington Agricultural Center campus and a study of the museum's founding and collections acquisition – it is possible to understand its mission, its contribution to the ongoing public history dialogue, and its growth opportunities.

The 207 acres constituting the Ellington Agricultural Center retains geographical and historical value. Indigenous Peoples utilized the area during the Woodland and Mississippian Periods for hunting grounds and remnants of their residential, temple, and effigy mounds speak to their stewardship. As European settlements gained traction in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the Cherokee Indians represented the majority of Native American people in the region. After Andrew Jackson's forced displacement of Native Americans east of the Mississippi River, the character of middle Tennessee shifted permanently.

The land comprising the Ellington Agricultural Center traces its documented history to the tenuous years before Indian Removal, when the site was parceled to

Andrew Ewing via a land grant in February of 1788.¹⁴⁷ Andrew Ewing served as a Davidson County Court Clerk from 1783-1813, while his son Nathan served from 1813-1830.¹⁴⁸ The Ewings maintained ownership of the property, through complicated family relationships and bequeathments, until the early 1900s.¹⁴⁹ In 1909, financier James E. Caldwell purchased the land from Ewing's descendant, Pleasant A. Smith.¹⁵⁰ Eventually, James Caldwell gave the property to his son, Rogers Caldwell, so he could build a grand Colonial Revival-theme estate, part of a pattern of building country house estates in Nashville during the 1920s.

Rogers Clark Caldwell was born on January 25, 1890 to James E. and Mary Winston Caldwell. He grew up in the middle Tennessee area and attended Vanderbilt University for two years. He eventually left school and went to work full time for his father, who was a successful businessman. On September 26, 1917, at the age of 27, Caldwell submitted the charter to create Caldwell and Company – his business conglomerate that would eventually establish and operate the Bank of Tennessee.¹⁵¹ Caldwell's power and influence were not limited to the realm of finances, but also extended into politics. He was a lifelong Democrat who supported Colonel Luke Lea,

¹⁴⁷ Metropolitan Government Archives of Nashville-Davidson County. North Carolina Land Grant to Andrew Ewing. Deed Book A, page 133.

¹⁴⁸ Metropolitan Government Archives of Nashville-Davidson County. People of Nashville. Lists of officials for the City of Nashville and Davidson County: Davidson County Court Clerks. <http://www.nashvillearchives.org/nashville-people.html>

¹⁴⁹ Although Andrew Ewing references a house in his December 1812 will, no original Ewing structures remain. "Wills of Notable Nashvillians," Metro Archives, Nashville Public Library <http://www.nashvillearchives.org/documents/ewing-andrew-will.pdf>

¹⁵⁰ Metropolitan Government Archives of Nashville-Davidson County. Deed from Pleasant A. Smith to James Caldwell. Deed Book 371, pages 228-230.

¹⁵¹ Caldwell chose his office space to display his social standing and wealth. He set up shop at 400 Union Street, Nashville in a building that has since been destroyed.

who served as U.S. Senator from 1911 to 1917 and Henry Horton, who served as governor from 1927 to 1933.

The lucrative and interdependent relationship between Caldwell and Company and the State of Tennessee would result in complicated consequences in later years. Caldwell helped Lea purchase two major newspapers in Tennessee, the *Knoxville Journal* and the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*.¹⁵² In return, Lea steered state contracts towards Caldwell subsidiaries. As Caldwell and Company's reputation and capital swelled from state contracts, Caldwell used money from the Bank of Tennessee to build his home, Brentwood Hall, in 1927.¹⁵³ Foster and Creighton served as the general contractors and Marr and Holman served as the architects.¹⁵⁴

Caldwell modeled Brentwood Hall after Andrew Jackson's nineteenth century home, The Hermitage. Both buildings are two-story red brick house with a second story portico, and the central entrance hallway, "like the Hermitage, featured a circular staircase and the walls were covered with imported hand-painted French paper."¹⁵⁵ One

¹⁵² David D. Lee and David L. Lee, "The Attempt to Impeach Governor Horton," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (1975): 189.

¹⁵³ I will refer to the structure as Brentwood House throughout the paper, though it was later renamed the Moss Administration Building. It was dedicated in honor of William F. Moss, Commissioner of Agriculture from 1958-1971, by the State Building Commission in 1970. I have always heard that Brentwood Hall was completed in 1927. The idea is further supported by the inscription "Brentwood Hall 1927" above the back door of the mansion. However, photos from the Tennessee State Library and Archives show that the house was not finished in 1927, but that construction was initiated that year. Additionally, the estate is known as Brentwood Hall, while the dwelling is known as Brentwood House.

¹⁵⁴ The Bush Building Company provided the brick work; Martin A. Hayes and Company provided the casualty insurance; W. T. Hardison Company provided the brick, sand, and gravel; the Hermitage Portland Cement Company provided the cement; the Hopton Brothers provided the plastering; International Steel and Iron Company provided the iron work; J. O. Kirkpatrick and Sons Company provided the millwork; H. E. Parmer Company provided the marble, tile, roofing, and sheet metal; Southern Door and Glass Company provided the glass and glazing; and Warren Paint and Color provided the paint.

¹⁵⁵ Carroll Van West, *Nashville Architecture: A Guide to the City* (Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 2015), 210.

notable difference between the dwellings is the lack of exterior paint for Brentwood Hall, since The Hermitage is white on one side to mask discoloration from an 1834 fire. The Hermitage was in the midst of preservation efforts by the Ladies Hermitage Association during the 1920s and 1930s. Eventually, a “series of legislative acts—in 1923, 1935, and 1960—turned over to the Ladies Hermitage Association the original 500 acres of Hermitage lands and 125 more, with the agreement that the Hermitage be preserved in perpetuity as a proper memorial.”¹⁵⁶ While it is not certain how and when Caldwell first encountered the Hermitage, its preservation efforts undoubtedly spurred his enthusiasm to mimic its look in his own home.¹⁵⁷

By inhabiting a replica of the residence of his favorite president, Caldwell equated himself as a 1920s-Nashville Jackson. Robert Kent Sutton, in *Americans Interpret the Parthenon: The Progression of Greek Revival Architecture from the East Coast to Oregon, 1800-1860* wrote that in “Anglo American heritage ... an individual's dwelling is one's castle” and that it “is the most prized possession and physical evidence that he or she has “succeeded.”¹⁵⁸ Caldwell intended to show not only his guests, but also his business competitors and investors, that he had succeeded.

Brentwood Hall is an example of the architectural style and zeitgeist of the twentieth century Greek Revival. Sutton notes that Greek Revival architecture gained popularity first in Europe in the mid-eighteenth century but translated to Southern

¹⁵⁶ Thomas B. Brumbaugh, Martha I. Strayhorn, and Gary. G. Gore eds. *Architecture of Middle Tennessee: The Historic American Buildings Survey* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1974), 122.

¹⁵⁷ Additionally, Caldwell’s mother served on the Board for the Ladies Hermitage Association. Move this into the body of the chapter—more evidence that he was familiar with the Hermitage.

¹⁵⁸ Robert Kent Sutton, *Americans Interpret the Parthenon: The Progression of Greek Revival Architecture from the East Coast to Oregon, 1800-1860* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1992), 8.

domestic architecture in later decades. Architects and artists such as James Stuart and Nicolas Revett are credited with depicting the original Greek monuments and disseminating their renderings.¹⁵⁹ Among historians, Talbot Hamlin was one of the first to study the influence of Greek Revival architecture in his *Greek Revival Architecture in America: Being an Account of Important Trends in American Architecture and American Life Prior to the War Between the States*, published in 1944. Hamlin wrote that there has never “been a period when the general level of excellence was so high in American architecture, when the ideal was so constant and its varying expressions so harmonious . . . as during the forty years from 1820 to the Civil War.”¹⁶⁰ Caldwell and wealthy Southerners adopted a motif of grandeur and prestige by building homes that replicated the elite structures of the past. One historian made the connection between projecting the image of elegance with the internal self-consciousnesses of Southerners, who their East Coast counterparts often considered one step behind. W. Barksdale Maynard noted that if “insecurity about taste accounts for the literalism of the Greek Revival in America at large, the situation must have been especially acute in the South, which has always fretted about its backwardness.”¹⁶¹ Caldwell probably had numerous personal reasons for imitating The Hermitage, but it is safe to guess that one of them was to flaunt his wealth and sophistication.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 9.

¹⁶⁰ Talbot Hamlin, *Greek Revival Architecture in America: Being an Account of Important Trends in American Architecture and American Life Prior to the War Between the States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1944), 317.

¹⁶¹ W. Barksdale Maynard, “The Greek Revival, Americanness, Politics and Economics” in Keith Eggener, *American Architectural History: A Contemporary Reader* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2004), 138.

As Caldwell and Company developed into a massive machine, it also grew in its legal responsibility to its clients. By 1929, the firm acted as the “largest insurance group in the region with assets totaling \$230 million” and when “expanded to include interests in other enterprises, the total equaled at least half a billion dollars.”¹⁶² Further, Caldwell and Company included the “region’s largest chain of banks, eight insurance companies, twenty-four business and industrial enterprises, an investment trust, newspapers, and a professional baseball team.”¹⁶³ However, Caldwell’s speculative and unethical business practices, his lack of capital, and his tendency to overcommit to keep up the appearance of stability, led to a cataclysmic failure.¹⁶⁴

After the Stock Market Crash of 1929, Caldwell was under pressure to present a façade of stability. But with his scarcity of liquid assets, Caldwell relied on his powerful allies, namely, Colonel Lea and Governor Horton. Lea funneled money through Horton, who then “transferred state deposits and state bond issues to supply cash to Caldwell and Company and to cover reserve shortages in Caldwell banks.”¹⁶⁵ Caldwell’s illicit dealings and financial volatility remained discreet until Governor Horton’s election in 1929.

¹⁶² Elmus Wicker, *The Banking Panics of the Great Depression. Studies in Macroeconomic History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 33.

¹⁶³ David E. Hamilton, “The Causes of the Banking Panic of 1930: Another View,” *The Journal of Southern History* 51, no. 4 (November, 1985): 591.

¹⁶⁴ Hamilton describes Caldwell and Company’s less than exemplary practices, writing, “Throughout its short history the company continually lacked working capital and relied almost entirely on loans from affiliated banks and other outside sources. In 1926 capital stock and reinvested earnings accounted for only 10 percent of its total assets, and by the end of 1929 they accounted for 4.7 percent. Its most important source of funds was the Bank of Tennessee, a subsidiary established in 1919 to serve the companies under Caldwell control and to supply the capital for the firm’s ambitious expansionary aims. In its bond transactions the company included a depository agreement stipulating that the proceeds of bond sales must be left on deposit in the Bank of Tennessee until needed to meet construction costs, an agreement that enabled the company to control such funds and use them to finance securities issues and other new endeavors. They became instrumental in its rapid growth.” Hamilton, “The Causes of the Banking Panic of 1930,” 592.

¹⁶⁵ Lee and Lee, “The Attempt to Impeach Governor Horton,” 189.

On November 5, 1930 the Bank of Tennessee halted operations.¹⁶⁶ It stepped into voluntary receivership on November 14. At the time of its closure, the Bank of Tennessee did not hold any deposits from individual customers. Instead, it served large corporations and entities, like the State of Tennessee, and the subsidiaries of Caldwell and Company. This arrangement was confusing since the funds, operations, and officers of Caldwell and Company and the Bank of Tennessee were as intertwined as the ouroboros. Regardless of the interconnectedness, the State was due \$3,418,000 and it would pursue both ends of the snake to reimburse itself.

Through the winter and spring of 1930 to 1931, a Public Emergency Committee investigated Caldwell's role in the collapse of his empire, with special attention to the stewardship of the state's funds.¹⁶⁷ In March of 1931, the Davidson County Grand Jury indicted Caldwell on six counts of breach of trust and grand larceny. Caldwell faced further indictments from a payout he made to himself in October 1930 and for misrepresenting his company during its merger in 1929 with Banco Kentucky. Judge Chester K. Hart presided over Caldwell's trial in the summer of 1931 and Attorney-General L.D. Smith represented the State of Tennessee.¹⁶⁸ During his trial, Caldwell displayed an impressive array of connections. He showcased no less than seventeen character witnesses. These affluent and powerful people included the mayor of Nashville, Hilary Ewing Howse; the sheriff of Davidson County, Sam Shryer; a former governor,

¹⁶⁶ "Because the bank's closing was announced on Saturday, November 8 and both Sunday and the following Tuesday, November 11 were holidays, it was Wednesday, November 12 before the full repercussions of the failure took effect." Wicker, *The Banking Panics of the Great Depression*, 33.

¹⁶⁷ Caldwell's associates were also in hot water, especially Caldwell and Company's vice presidents: Frank D. Marr, H.C. Alexander, E.J. Heitzeberg, and J.D. Carter. "State Seeks to Recover Funds in Bank of Tennessee," *Tennessean*, December 5, 1930.

¹⁶⁸ "Arguments Will Begin Today in Caldwell Trial," *Tennessean*, July 3, 1931. "State Seeks to Recover Funds in Bank of Tennessee," *Tennessean*, December 5, 1930.

Benton McMillin; and the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, Dr. James I. Vance.¹⁶⁹ Caldwell also fortified his reputation through a catalog of his civic engagements, such as serving as a member on the State Fair Board and the board for the George Peabody College for Teachers.¹⁷⁰ Caldwell entered a not guilty plea.¹⁷¹

Perhaps it was to Caldwell's detriment that his home was so attractive, and his property so well situated within Davidson County, because it served as one of his prime assets and a liability in his legal struggles. The State pushed for reimbursement by claiming Brentwood Hall as collateral, but Caldwell had knit an intricate web of ownership rights around the home. Caldwell was set to inherit the acreage surrounding Brentwood Hall after his father's death. Knowing this, he used cashier's checks from the Bank of Tennessee to fund the construction of his \$350,000 mansion in 1927. Therefore, when the project was complete, the Bank counted the house as one of its assets.¹⁷² Caldwell cemented the fact that the bank owned the mansion when he paid rent to the Bank of Tennessee for the right to reside in his own home until June 1930.¹⁷³ However, Caldwell planned to escape creditors by claiming that the house belonged to his father because the land technically belonged to James E. Caldwell.

¹⁶⁹ "Arguments Will Begin Today in Caldwell Trial," *Tennessean*, July 3, 1931.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² McFerrin adds that, "...the house was paid for by the Bank of Tennessee and carried as an asset on the books of this bank for some three years but was actually located on land owned by James E. Caldwell, Rogers's [sic] father. This asset was removed from the books of the Bank at the time of the merger with BancoKentucky Company when Rogers Caldwell's indebtedness to his firm was canceled by a dividend of \$1,200,000 payable to him alone." John B. McFerrin, *Caldwell and Company: A Southern Financial Empire* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, Reprint Edition, 1984), X.

¹⁷³ "State Seeks to Recover Funds in Bank of Tennessee," *Tennessean*, December 5, 1930.

The State beat Caldwell at his own game by examining the dates for these transferences.¹⁷⁴ James E. Caldwell’s deed of trust for the property was dated in September 1930, but it was not registered in the court system until twelve days after the Bank of Tennessee failed.¹⁷⁵ The State faced two options for moving against Caldwell – legislation or court action. McFerrin calls the State’s legislative strategy a “failure.”¹⁷⁶ The State altered the law in 1943 so that if an individual had assets secured in a spendthrift trust, they are no longer inaccessible to the State. Legislation was futile because James E. Caldwell had added the property into two additional trusts to safeguard it in 1937 and 1938, but more importantly, the Supreme Court of Tennessee was unwilling to retro-activate the law for Caldwell’s case.

Adjusting their tactics, the State then turned to court action. In November 1944, the Tennessee Court of Appeals ruled in favor of the State.¹⁷⁷ The State turned away from the legality of the spendthrift fund and asked instead how Caldwell had used his house and his/his father’s property as collateral in the Bank of Tennessee. The historian John B. McFerrin summarizes the State’s perspective by writing that the “State maintained that, to the extent that Rogers Caldwell had, through his Bank of Tennessee, made a contribution to the trust, he had provided a trust for his own benefit, and that he could not under the law withhold his property from his creditors in this way.”¹⁷⁸ The State

¹⁷⁴ Caldwell attempted to protect the house through another layer of support – in the form of a spendthrift trust that is specially designed to repel creditors. McFerrin explains that James E. Caldwell “conveyed the property to the son in a spendthrift trust legalized by an 1832 Tennessee statute which permitted property to be placed in such trusts, free from claims of any creditors of the beneficiary.” McFerrin, *Caldwell and Company*, x-xi.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, xi.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, xi.

¹⁷⁷ McFerrin adds that the “Supreme Court of Tennessee denied certiorari, thus leaving the issue as settled by the Court of Appeals.” McFerrin, *Caldwell and Company*, xi.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, xi.

eventually settled, but it was an internecine struggle comprised of 18 years of litigation. In 1948, the State gained legal ownership of the estate, but bizarrely allowed Caldwell to continue to live in the house.

Newspaper articles generally portray Caldwell in a positive light. However, Caldwell undoubtedly curated his public image after his financial ruin. Historians have not been as gracious about Caldwell and his role in the South's financial troubles in the late 1920s and early 1930s. McFerrin provided the most comprehensive overview in his book *Caldwell and Company: A Southern Financial Empire*. He asserts that the "losses suffered through the collapse of the Caldwell empire more than wiped out any long-run economic contribution, and its net impact on Southern economic development was unquestionably adverse."¹⁷⁹

Although historians dispute the causes of the Great Depression, most historians agree that the collapse of Caldwell's empire contributed to Tennessee's financial instability, while one historian goes so far as to credit Caldwell with the advent of the Depression in the Southeast. Economic historian Elmer Wickus argues that the banking panic of 1930 was region-specific and notes that the states connected to the Caldwell Empire were struck the hardest. He wrote that the "failure of Caldwell and Company had immediate repercussions in four states, namely Tennessee, Kentucky, Arkansas, and North Carolina in the Atlanta, St. Louis and Richmond Federal Reserve Districts."¹⁸⁰ The

¹⁷⁹ McFerrin, *Caldwell and Company*, ix. On that same page, McFerrin adds the pithy and inflexible remark, "I do not believe these and all like matters can be expurgated under the shibboleth of "the losses occurred because of the Great Depression.""

¹⁸⁰ Wicker, *The Banking Panics of the Great Depression*, 33. Wicker goes into further detail, noting that "seventy banks failed in Arkansas of which forty-five belonged to the A.B. Banks chain, the stock of which was owned by the Home Insurance Company, a Caldwell affiliate. The fifteen or more banks that closed their doors in Kentucky were either correspondent banks or were directly affiliated with BancoKentucky, a bank holding company that merged with Caldwell in June 1930. Similarly, at least ten

historian David E. Hamilton provided a more nuanced approach to the role of Caldwell and Company in the Banking Panic of 1930 and its role in the Great Depression. He wrote that the “principal reasons for the panic and the panic’s distinguishing characteristics were as follows: the repercussions of the failure of Caldwell and Company and other large banking institutions; the weak condition of the failed banks prior to 1930; the disastrous effects of the Great Drought of 1930.”¹⁸¹ While Hamilton is not so heavy-handed in assigning blame to Caldwell and Company, he asserts that the timing of the organization’s collapse was unfortunate and thereby contributed to the severity of the Great Depression in Tennessee.

Today, Caldwell’s reputation is more connected with the Ellington Agricultural Center than with his financial empire. Tennessee Governor Buford Ellington (1959-1963 and 1967-1971) understood the long-term value of the property and the opportunities it presented to Davidson County and the state. Ellington promoted agriculture, not only because he operated a farm in Marshall County, but also because he served as the Commissioner of Agriculture from 1952 to 1958. He commenced the relocation of the Department of Agriculture and in 1957, the Tennessee Department of Agriculture initiated a slow move from their downtown office. In 1961 the state legislature renamed the 207-acre complex the Ellington Agricultural Center in his honor.

bank failures in Tennessee and fifteen in North Carolina can also be traced directly to relationships between Rogers Caldwell and individuals connected with the suspended banks in these states. The collapse of Caldwell and Co.’s financial empire raised expectations of deposit losses in the surrounding region and contributed to bank suspensions in December and January as well.” Wicker, *The Banking Panics of the Great Depression*, 33.

¹⁸¹ Hamilton, “The Causes of the Banking Panic of 1930,” 591.

The Ellington Agricultural Center (EAC) is a hidden gem in Nashville, though it is easily accessible (less than ten miles from downtown) and provides public services. The local community walk the trails and volunteer during events. However, the EAC did not always have an easy relationship with its neighbors, since the Crieve Hall Neighborhood Association initially worried that the relocation of state agricultural offices would stymie neighborhood growth.¹⁸² The former Commissioner of Agriculture, William F. “Red” Moss, assuaged their fears. Moss went on record saying that “it will be a grand thing for that community” and that “there will be nothing obnoxious about it.”¹⁸³

The State of Tennessee, namely, the Department of General Services, has been the only proprietor of Caldwell’s estate since he vacated the premises around 1957.¹⁸⁴ Immediately after assuming legal ownership, the state commenced tearing down many of Caldwell’s outbuildings and barns. Today, the remaining original structures are his mansion – now the Moss Administration Building, renamed in 1970; the barn for his high-grade horses – now the Tennessee Agricultural Museum; the barn for his low-grade horses – now the Ed Jones Auditorium; Caldwell’s laundry – now office space known as the annex; a set of stables – now the Jennings Building; and a cottage – now office space.

¹⁸² In hindsight, the Crieve Hall Neighborhood Association was correct in predicting the curtailment of their development. The Ellington Agricultural Center put a firm boundary to the neighborhood on its Eastern side. However, the Department has served as a quasi-park for the residents, who make frequent use of its trails and greenspace.

¹⁸³ “Crieve Hall Assured No Eyesore Planned,” *Tennessean*, March 11, 1958.

¹⁸⁴ Caldwell and his wife moved to Franklin, Tennessee. He died after a series of strokes on October 8, 1968.



Figure 4.1: Rogers Caldwell. Source: Photo Courtesy of “Rogers Caldwell to Sell Horses and Go to Farming,” *The Knoxville News-Sentinel*, November 17, 1930.

Report on Brentwood Hall

The Tennessee Agricultural Museum is only one component of the Ellington Agricultural Center. An evaluation of other buildings on the campus, such as Brentwood House, illustrates how the Ellington Agricultural Center and its utilization of the original buildings has evolved since the 1960s. Furthermore, the construction of Brentwood House (Brentwood Hall serving as the name of the property, which was later known as the Ellington Agricultural Center) as a country estate in what was then rural Davidson County presents interpretive opportunities for public history, especially in relation to the site's changing relationship with agriculture. Chapter Five presents a brief overview of Brentwood House and the historic outbuildings associated with the Tennessee Agricultural Museum and emphasizes their character-defining features as a possible tool for public interpretation.

Brentwood House (the Moss Building)

Architects Marr and Holman of Nashville designed Brentwood House as a near replica of Andrew Jackson's Hermitage. The facades of both dwellings feature a second-story Greek Revival-styled portico.



Figure 5.1: Andrew Jackson's Hermitage. Source: Photo Courtesy of The Hermitage, c. 2021.



Figure 5.2: Brentwood House, July 15, 1959. Source: Photo Courtesy of Ellington Agricultural Center.

Robert S. Gamble provided the following five helpful tips on recognizing the Greek Revival style in his 1987 *The Alabama Catalog: Historic American Buildings Survey: A Guide to the Early Architecture of the State*. Many of these are evident at Brentwood Hall and are depicted in the accompanying illustrations.

1. Symmetry and balance both of plan and elevation (the side-hall plan simply being half of a symmetrical unit).
2. Rectilinearity of line and a general heaviness of scale (for example, square-headed door and window openings and rectangular transoms, as opposed to the fanlights and Palladian windows of the Federal period).¹⁸⁵



Figure 5.3: Brentwood House Interior Doorway, which are heavy-scaled and paneled with thick wood. These represent the ‘rectilinearity of line and a general heaviness of scale.’ Source: Robert S. Gamble, *The Alabama Catalog: Historic American Buildings Survey: A Guide to the Early Architecture of the State* (Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama Press, 1987), 79.

¹⁸⁵ Robert S. Gamble, *The Alabama Catalog: Historic American Buildings Survey: A Guide to the Early Architecture of the State* (Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama Press, 1987), 79.



Figure 5.4: Brentwood House Exterior Doorway. The exterior doorways are also heavy-scaled and include rectangular-shaped transoms. Source: Photograph by author, July, 2019, Nashville, Tennessee.



Figure 5.5: Greek Revival Detailing above Window at Brentwood House. Source: Photograph by author, July, 2019, Nashville, Tennessee.



Figure 5.6: Greek Revival Pilaster at Brentwood House. Source: Photograph by author, July, 2019, Nashville, Tennessee.

3. Low-pitched or even flat rooflines and the use of wide, heavy entablatures; gable ends are often treated as triangular pediments.¹⁸⁶
4. Engaged antae or pier-like pilasters articulating wall surfaces.¹⁸⁷
5. Bold, heavy interior trim; use of applied Grecian-based ornament such as acanthus leaf, palmette, egg-and-dart molding.¹⁸⁸



Figure 5.7: Marble Fireplace at Brentwood House. The fireplace is operational and contains many of the features of Greek Revival styles, such as the acanthus leaf. Source: Photograph by author, July, 2019, Nashville, Tennessee.

¹⁸⁶ Gamble, *The Alabama Catalog*, 79.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.



Figure 5.8: Molding Depicting Greek Revival Egg and Dart Pattern at Brentwood House. Source: Photograph by author, July, 2019, Nashville, Tennessee.



Figure 5.9: Doric Column at the Rear Elevation of Brentwood House. Source: Photograph by author, July, 2019, Nashville, Tennessee.



Figure 5.10: Corinthian Column at the Façade of Brentwood House. Source: Photograph by author, December, 2019, Nashville, Tennessee.



Figure 5.11: Wallpaper in Central Hallway in Brentwood House. The wallpaper in the first-floor central hallway is original and closely resembles the paper at The Hermitage. The staircase is also a focal point of the site's architecture since it is freestanding.

Source: Photograph by author, July, 2019, Nashville, Tennessee.

Outbuildings at Brentwood Hall

Today, the “annex” is used by the Tennessee Department of Agriculture’s Creative Services Department. The low-ceiling second story originally provided housing for domestic workers and the bottom floor operated as a laundry.



Figure 5.12: Annex at the Ellington Agricultural Center. Source: Photograph by author, July, 2019, Nashville, Tennessee.



Figure 5.13: Photo of the Laundry and Servants' Housing shortly after Caldwell's eviction. The State of Tennessee removed the fireplaces and chimneys. The back of the photograph reads, "Servants quarters adjacent to Brentwood Hall, they burned previous to 1944 and were not repaired by R. Caldwell." Source: Photo Courtesy of Ellington Agricultural Center.



Figure 5.14: Image of Will and Willie’s Cabin at Brentwood Hall, circa 1940-1960. Will and Willie Black laborers employed by Caldwell. Willie served as a laundress and domestic laborer. The back of the photograph reads, “Home of Uncle Will and Aunt Willie, black servants for the Caldwell. Home faced Franklin Rd and was near the Jennings Bldg.” The usage of derogatory terms such as “Uncle” and “Aunt” speak to the social climate present at Brentwood Hall. The 1940 Census lists Willie’s occupation as a laundress but does not include an occupation for Will. He is listed as unable to work. 1940 United States Census, National Archives. Source: Photo Courtesy of Ellington Agricultural Center.



Figure 5.15: Image of Brentwood Hall, circa 1956. Source: Photo Courtesy of Ellington Agricultural Center.

Historic Outbuildings at the Tennessee Agricultural Museum

A 2019 report on the historic outbuildings of the Tennessee Agricultural Museum evaluated the current and potential uses and their provenance. Museum visitors may explore three historic cabins during their self-guided tour: the South Cabin, North Cabin, and Dogtrot Cabin.¹⁸⁹ The cabins are less than thirty yards from the museum's entrance, so they are well within walking distance. However, the route is uneven and unpaved, so it presents accessibility issues.

¹⁸⁹ The South Cabin is a single pen cabin that measures 14' by 12'. It was likely a twentieth century restoration due to the cut of the logs. The North Cabin is a single pen cabin that measures 12' by 12'. This is a nineteenth century building based on the cut and notching of the logs. The Dogtrot Cabin is a double pen cabin that measures 37' long. The single pens measure 14' by 11' and the breezeway measures 15' by 15'. This is a late nineteenth or early twentieth century building based on the cut and notching of the logs.

The cabin's current interpretation is limited to artifacts without labels or interpretation. The cabins are furnished with artifacts from Tennessee or a nearby state. They are separated from the public by a gated half-door. The South Cabin and North Cabin are for viewing only. The Double Pen Cabin is used as an educational space during the museum's field trips. During the *Cabins and Wagons on the Cumberland* program (generally offered March through May) and *Summertime on the Farm* program (generally offered June and July), students use the porch and dog trot to engage in activities like butter churning, clothes washing, and nineteenth century games.

The South Cabin houses artifacts related to gardening. The building has one light bulb that is located above the door and two quarter-circle windows along the back wall that are not original. The North Cabin houses artifacts related to preservation. The building has one light bulb that is located above the door and two quarter-circle windows along the back wall that are not original. The north pen of the Double Pen Cabin houses artifacts related to kitchens and cooking. It contains a wood-burning stove and represents a farmhouse scene. The south pen of the Double Pen Cabin houses artifacts related to living quarters. It contains a bed, walking wheel, and household items.

Previously, the museum struggled with an overabundance of displayed items in the cabins. During the summer of 2021, the Center for Historic Preservation (CHP) sponsored a graduate intern, Sarah Robles, who inventoried every item in the cabin. She updated their existing records using PastPerfect software and partnered with the museum's curator, Sarah Williams, to create a more cohesive interior design. Robles created four dibond panels that interpret the history of the Ellington Agricultural Center (EAC) and provide information on the historic outbuildings. Her four panels describe

early indigenous land use and Euro-American settlement, the recorded history of the acreage comprising the EAC via the Ewings and Caldwell, the creation of the EAC, and basics on the preservation and identification of the historic cabins. These panels will be mounted to the interior of the four cabin doors and will be accessible during museum hours.

The 2019 report's major findings on the provenance of the Tennessee Agricultural Museum's historic outbuildings shed light on their historic uses and original placement. The cabins were here when the Tennessee Department of Agriculture moved in 1961. The smaller cabins had windows added during Caldwell's era (1930s) that match the museum's windows. There is a form of "v" notching in both cabins. In a report by architectural consultants Hulan Johnson in 1989, they record that the Dogtrot Cabin was moved here "about 1927." The two Adirondack-styled stone chimneys were added in the late 1920s/1930s, along with limited electricity. The notching is full dovetail. It is likely that the cabins would have housed tenant workers on the Caldwell farm, since Caldwell raised labor-intensive crops such as tobacco. Additionally, since Caldwell installed windows in the smaller cabins, that gives credit to the idea that they would have served as living quarters.

The historic cabins at the Tennessee Agricultural Museum are not currently serving their full interpretative potential. They do not offer historical context to the museum visitor through text or photos and the items inside are not arranged in any meaningful exhibit. Fortunately, the panels created by Sarah Robles will address the interpretive gaps, provide photographs whenever possible, and serve as a vehicle to opening public history discussions. These panels could serve as a catalyst for greatest

investigation in tenant farming in Davidson County and an examination of how changing technology, racial discrimination, and economic discrepancies between the landlord and the renter changed over time.



Figure 5.16: South Cabin at the Tennessee Agricultural Museum.
Source: Photograph by author, February 2019, Nashville, Tennessee.



Figure 5.17: Interior of South Cabin at the Tennessee Agricultural Museum.
Note the rounded logs. Source: Photograph by author, December 2021, Nashville, Tennessee.



Figure 5.18: North Cabin at the Tennessee Agricultural Museum.
Source: Photograph by author, February 2019, Nashville, Tennessee.



Figure 5.19: Interior of North Cabin at the Tennessee Agricultural Museum.
Source: Photograph by author, December 2021, Nashville, Tennessee.



Figure 5.20: Dogtrot Cabin at the Tennessee Agricultural Museum.
Source: Photograph by author, April 2019, Nashville, Tennessee.

Chapter Five: The Origins of the Tennessee Agricultural Museum

Chapter Four supplied background information on the Tennessee Agricultural Museum through an examination of the museum's immediate surroundings and built environment through the lens of the Ellington Agricultural Center. It revealed how the campus has changed over time by studying Rogers Caldwell, his construction of Brentwood Hall, and its development into the Ellington Agricultural Center. Multiple additional angles exist to study the Tennessee Agricultural Museum, such as researching its founding. Chapter Five adopts this angle and studies the museum's origins through the people involved, especially Oscar Farris. Chapter Five also asks how Farris' methodology and his career as Cooperative Extension Agent in the racially segregated University of Tennessee, Knoxville Extension Service affected the museum's material culture and collections policy. Biographical information on Oscar Little Farris is important in understanding the person who was largely responsible for initiating the Tennessee Agricultural Museum. His background, professional connections, and passion for rural history all played a role in his pursuit of a state agricultural museum and its nascent collection, making him an important figure in the intersection of Tennessee agricultural history and public history.

Oscar Little Farris was born on July 11, 1889 in Franklin County, Tennessee to John Thomas and Mary Ann Phillips Farris.¹⁹⁰ He grew up in an agriculturally based town, though his father was more of a merchant than a farmer. His father, John, sold cider

¹⁹⁰ Farris' childhood home, located at 903 North High Street in Winchester, is marked by the Historical Preservation Society. It was built in 1910. "1910 (CA.) Ramsey-Farris House..." *The Herald-Chronicle*, August 31, 2004, 10-A.

from a vending cart, earning the moniker “Johnny Cider.”¹⁹¹ Oscar Farris matriculated through Winchester Normal. He later enrolled in the University of Tennessee to earn a bachelor’s degree in agriculture in 1914 and a master’s degree in 1915 from the University of Missouri. While in Missouri, Farris made his first mark in the field of agriculture through his research on Brucellosis.¹⁹² In 1918, Oscar Farris married Mary E. Cochran.¹⁹³ Farris received distinction not only in his agricultural career, but also in his military involvement.¹⁹⁴ Farris served in World War I and World War II. He reached the rank of captain in WWI and was recognized for his exemplary conduct and received the Distinguished Service Medal and the British Military Cross.¹⁹⁵ In 1941, he rejoined the army and eventually attained the title of lieutenant colonel.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹¹ “1910 (CA.) Ramsey-Farris House...” 10-A.

¹⁹² “Oscar L. Farris is Dead,” *Tennessee Market Bulletin* (August, 1961): 3.

¹⁹³ Beatrice A. Collins, “The Oscar L. Farris Agricultural Museum and The Farris Family,” *Franklin County Historical Review* 21, no. 1 (1990): 37. Mary Cochran likewise holds a place in agricultural history, since she served as Franklin County’s first Home Demonstration Agent. She and Oscar had three children - Phillip Barrett, Richard Donald, and Mary Martha.

¹⁹⁴ In an unpublished letter, Farris singles out the members of the 114th Machine Gun Battalion of World War I as he expresses gratitude to those who attended his retirement luncheon in 1959. Certainly, the relationships he formed with those individuals was enduring. Unpublished Letter. “To Those Farm Bureau Members (140) Who Contributed to Making July 31, 1959 A Big Day for the Farris Family,” From “Mary C. Farris and Oscar L. Farris.” August 25, 1959.

¹⁹⁵ “Funeral Set Tuesday for Oscar L. Farris,” *The Nashville Banner*, June 19, 1961, 8.

¹⁹⁶ Collins, “The Oscar L. Farris Agricultural Museum and The Farris Family,” 37.



Figure 6.1: Oscar Farris.

Source: Photo Courtesy of the Tennessee Agricultural Museum.

Farris achieved success in agriculture through the University of Tennessee, Knoxville's (UTK) Cooperative Extension Service. UTK initiated the program in 1914 after the passage of the federal Smith-Lever Act, which launched the Extension Service as an educational component of the United States Department of Agriculture. The UTK Extension Service was racially divided from the outset, so Farris served White community members exclusively. The discriminatory policies of the UTK Extension Service undoubtedly limited Farris' contact with Black farmers and rural community members. He started as the agricultural agent for Maury County from 1916 to 1920.¹⁹⁷ In 1920, Farris transitioned to serve as the Davidson County agent, a post he would hold for

¹⁹⁷ "Funeral Set Tuesday for Oscar L. Farris," 8.

39 years. His lasting accomplishments include establishing the Nashville Farmers' Market, helping to launch the Tennessee Agricultural Hall of Fame, and creating a local scholarship fund for rural youth.¹⁹⁸ Farris also kept his connections viable through participating in organizations such as the Tennessee County Agents' Association, of which he served as president.¹⁹⁹ The National County Agricultural Agents Association later honored Farris with the Distinguished Service Award.²⁰⁰

Farris' collaborative agricultural exhibit at the 1958 Tennessee State Fair also ranks as one of his premier achievements during his time as the Davidson County Extension agent. Farris was already in discussion with the governor, Buford Ellington, about establishing a state agricultural museum. From September 15 to 20, 1958 Farris' state fair exhibit served as a dress rehearsal for an eventual museum building. The fair exhibit included "numerous implements and household utensils" and advertisements piqued the interest of visitors by claiming that the utility of these pieces "are probably a mystery to present generation farmers."²⁰¹ The fair exhibit was collaborative in nature because Farris borrowed pieces from friends and colleagues. Fortunately, he continued these collaborations in his future endeavors to create a state agricultural museum, since

¹⁹⁸ Basic definition – "The Tennessee Agricultural Hall of Fame, chartered by State Legislature in 1937, is housed within the Oscar L. Farris Museum. Recognition is conferred by a commission of nine members. Large bronze plaques, within the museum, designate the persons or groups who have been so honored." Collins, "The Oscar L. Farris Agricultural Museum and The Farris Family," 39.

¹⁹⁹ "Highlights of his career include the first testing of cattle for Bang's disease in Tennessee; long and hard successful efforts to get electric lines extended to rural areas many years ago; establishment of the Tennessee Agricultural Hall of Fame; encouraging his county to put its agricultural activities on a budget plan; getting a local Scholarship Fund established to help rural youth go to college; building up the Tennessee State Fair; and – a crowning achievement – helping conceive and bring into existence the Nashville Farmers Market and Davison County Agricultural Center." "Two Familiar Personalities Close Long, Outstanding Extension Careers," *Tennessee Extension Review* 43, no. 2 (August 1959): 1-2.

²⁰⁰ "Two Familiar Personalities Close Long, Outstanding Extension Careers," 2.

²⁰¹ "Old Time Farm Equipment to Show at State Fair," *Tennessee Market Bulletin* 30, no. 6 (June 1958): 3.

visitors appreciated the fair exhibit and “many offers of additional pioneer Tennessee furniture and farm implements were received.”²⁰²

Discussion about a state agricultural museum was already underway before Farris hosted his 1958 State Fair Exhibit. As early as 1957, the Tennessee Department of Agriculture’s internal publication *Tennessee Market Bulletin* announced that the “Commissioner of Agriculture Buford Ellington, who early announced his interest in the project, says that he is certain adequate space can be provided, and, it is suspected, he already has it.”²⁰³ The space turned out to be a 14,300 square foot barn on the grounds of the Rogers Caldwell Estate in south Davidson County – later renamed the Ellington Agricultural Center.²⁰⁴

After securing the space, Farris legalized the museum. In March of 1959, the Tennessee Agricultural Museum was “officially recognized by the State by an Act of Legislature.”²⁰⁵ The 1959 bill was number 43-2601. As early as June of the same year, Farris initiated operations of the Tennessee Agricultural Museum.²⁰⁶ The museum functioned under the auspices of the Tennessee Department of Agriculture.

Farris’ approach to collection-building and interpretation complimented the rustic atmosphere of the renovated horse barn at the Ellington Agricultural Center. Farris’

²⁰² “Agricultural Museum with its Homemade Farming Implements Brings Back Memories of Pioneer Days,” Department of Agriculture, State of Tennessee. Forty-Third Biennial Report (1959-1960): 154.

²⁰³ “Start Made for State Agricultural Museum,” *Tennessee Market Bulletin* (December 1957): 2.

²⁰⁴ The state of Tennessee gained ownership of the 207-acre property through a protracted legal process. The Department experimented with different farming prospects on the site throughout the years, from raising cattle to harvesting hay. Tennessee was the first state to locate its Department of Agriculture on a working farm.

²⁰⁵ “Agricultural Museum with its Homemade Farming Implements Brings Back Memories of Pioneer Days,” 154.

²⁰⁶ “Museum Spotlights Farm Memorabilia,” *The Tennessean*, May 19, 1981.

prioritization of farm implements and their relationship with changing technology, from plows to tractors and from wagons to motor vehicles, fit into the historical context of the mid-century public history practice. Sites like the Henry Ford and the Farmers Museum took a progress-oriented approach. Because of this, the collection and interpretation of the material culture associated with farm life and the social history of agriculture were far from Farris' mind.

It is difficult to trace Farris' methodology in collecting artifacts for the museum. The Tennessee Department of Agriculture's work logs, letters, and articles announcing the museum's public opening identify Farris as the linchpin of the operation. Between March, April, and May of 1961, the Tennessee Department of Agriculture recorded that Farris traveled over 940 miles, collecting and "seeing old-time farm and farm home utensils."²⁰⁷ Importantly, Farris did not own and donate the majority of the artifacts. Instead, he "made many trips to farm homes to inspect family heirlooms" and "secured them for the Museum."²⁰⁸ Some of the pieces remained loaned items, while others were gifted outright. Farris developed a mythology around his actions that depict him as a crusader for antique farm equipment across the state. He was known as the "unofficial Curator of the Tennessee Agricultural Museum," and museum supporters described his artifacts as a "representative and rare collection of early agricultural implements and furnishings for the pioneer home."²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ "Agent Farris Travels Miles to Find Ancient Specimens for State Agricultural Museum," Department of Agriculture, State of Tennessee. Forty-Third Biennial Report (1959-1960): 156.

²⁰⁸ "Agricultural Museum with its Homemade Farming Implements Brings Back Memories of Pioneer Days," 154-155.

²⁰⁹ "Oscar L. Farris is Dead," 3.

After 43 years of extension work, 39 of which were spent in Davidson County, Farris retired on August 1, 1959.²¹⁰ Over 400 friends and colleagues attended a reception for him in Nashville on July 31.²¹¹ They gave him personalized gifts, such as a “desk, chair, typewriter, wristwatch, and funds to pay for paving his driveway and extending city water to his rural home.”²¹² In an unpublished letter, Farris expressed his gratitude for the reception and gifts. He praised his new driveway, wrote that he had allocated some of the funds to install access to city water at his house, and mentioned that he used his new typewriter and desk every day.²¹³ He concluded by adding that his gift-givers “made Christmas come on July 31.”²¹⁴

Farris’ career and retirement were marked by the renaming of two sites – the Nashville Farmers Market and the Davidson County agricultural building. The state government extended its gratitude for his service through renaming the Farmers Market Administration Building.²¹⁵ The resolution was number 2-59-41 and passed in the April term of 1959. Shortly before Farris’ retirement, the Davidson County Court “passed a resolution commending Farris’ specific achievements” and renamed their agricultural building the “Oscar L. Farris Building.”²¹⁶

²¹⁰ “Davidson County Quarterly Court Honors Davidson County Agent,” *Tennessee Market Bulletin* 31 no. 7 (July 1959): 2.

²¹¹ “Funeral Set Tuesday for Oscar L. Farris,” 8.

²¹² “Two Familiar Personalities Close Long, Outstanding Extension Careers,” 2.

²¹³ “The black top road is a reality now and Jesse can drive up and visit us without injury to his rear system. City water has replaced a well that has been an unfailing servant for generations. The desk and typewriter are in daily use. The watch was badly needed, since I had lost mine.” Unpublished Letter. “To Those Farm Bureau Members (140) Who Contributed to Making July 31, 1959 A Big Day for the Farris Family.”

²¹⁴ Unpublished Letter. “To Those Farm Bureau Members (140) Who Contributed to Making July 31, 1959 A Big Day for the Farris Family.”

²¹⁵ “Davidson County Quarterly Court Honors Davidson County Agent,” 2.

²¹⁶ “Two Familiar Personalities Close Long, Outstanding Extension Careers,” 2.

Unfortunately, Farris did not live long after his dream for a state agricultural museum was realized. He passed away from a heart attack on June 17, 1961.²¹⁷ His services were scheduled for June 20 at Martin Funeral Home and he was buried at Nashville National Cemetery.²¹⁸ Farris was survived by his wife, two sons, one daughter, three grandsons, and one granddaughter.²¹⁹ Upon Farris' passing, numerous agricultural leaders offered their condolences and commended Farris' legacy and character. The current Commissioner of Agriculture, W.F. Moss, praised Farris' work with the Tennessee Agricultural Hall of Fame and noted that "his strong belief that men eminent in their State's Agriculture [sic] deserved historic recognition by their State, [sic] made him an active and enthusiastic proponent of a Tennessee Agricultural Hall of Fame."²²⁰ Moss also celebrated Farris' efforts to collect the museum's artifacts, writing that Farris was "untiring in his efforts" and that the collection was "representative of Tennessee's agricultural, industrial, and educational prominence."²²¹ Farris' decades of service to the residents of Davidson County and to Tennesseans in general culminated in his investment in the Tennessee Agricultural Museum.

The administrative history of the Tennessee Agricultural Museum is complicated because of the lack of consistent sources and the abundance of people who contributed via volunteer work or paid involvement. The idea for the museum originated with Farris

²¹⁷ "Oscar L. Farris is Dead," 3. A separate source claims that he died from a cerebral hemorrhage. "Funeral Set Tuesday for Oscar L. Farris," 8.

²¹⁸ "Oscar L. Farris is Dead," 3.

²¹⁹ "Oscar L. Farris is Dead," 3. The full list is: "Wife; Daughter – Martha Stafford in Nashville; son - Dr. R. D. Farris – vet for the Division of Animal Industries with TDA; son, Philip B. Farris – Aledo III; Two sisters – Portia Duckworth of Winchester and Mrs. Keith Webb of Washington DC; Three unnamed grandsons and a granddaughter."

²²⁰ "Oscar L. Farris is Dead," 3.

²²¹ "Oscar L. Farris is Dead," 3.

and his state-wide collection road trips. In that regard, it was certainly a grass-roots institution.²²² It transitioned to a legal entity with the approved legislation in 1959. The museum originally operated with 10 “directors.”²²³ The directors stipulated that the museum existed to “collect, preserve and display the home furnishings, farm implements, machinery, and other tools used by our forefathers in carving the State of Tennessee out of a wilderness.”²²⁴

Primary sources on the years between Farris’ involvement with the Tennessee Agricultural Museum and the present can be found in newspaper articles and publications disseminated by the Tennessee Department of Agriculture. Farris left some documentation addressing his involvement with the renovation process. Farris submitted a record of tasks to the Commissioner of Agriculture, informing him that he was overseeing the “transfer of exhibits that had been locked in stalls on the first floor of the Museum” and the eventual removal of these stalls.²²⁵ While the stalls were only located on the first floor of the barn, the entire structure required remodeling. After Farris’ death in 1961, *The Tennessean* noted that Jesse Page, a Tennessee Department of Agriculture employee, operated the museum “for the next several years.”²²⁶ During Page’s tenure, the

²²² For example, the former Commissioner of Agriculture, Jere Griggs, wrote in 1981 that “through the tireless efforts of Oscar Farris, the Agricultural Museum was begun in 1957.” “Agri. Museum to Re-Open May 21,” *Tennessee Market Bulletin* 54 no. 2 (March-April 1981): 1.

²²³ “The directors are: W.F. Moss, Commissioner of Agriculture, Ex-Officio; Wallace Darden, Chairman, Springfield; J. Hampton Hyder, Elizabethton; Harold C. Meacham, Franklin; Tom Hitch, Columbia; Denton Fly, Milan; Woodson King, Morrison; Wayne Varnell, Cleveland; Edward G. Humphries, Cordova; John M. Upchurch, Paris.” Unpublished Tennessee Department of Agriculture Handout from the Files of the Tennessee Agricultural Museum on the September 1958 Tennessee State Fair.

²²⁴ Unpublished Tennessee Department of Agriculture Handout from the Files of the Tennessee Agricultural Museum on the September 1958 Tennessee State Fair.

²²⁵ Type-Written Inventory of Tasks by Oscar L. Farris from the Files of the Tennessee Agricultural Museum. “Report to Commissioner W.F. Moss, Work Done on Agricultural Museum, March 1961,” 4. Property of the Tennessee Department of Agriculture.

²²⁶ “Museum Spotlights Farm Memorabilia.”

museum continued its transition from a horse barn to a public space. A museum brochure from the late 1960s described the process, writing that the “renovation was done with the thought always in mind that the Tennessee Agricultural Museum is part of our great Tennessee history.”²²⁷

Haywood P. Norman IV followed Page and served until 1981.²²⁸ In a 1979 interview with *The Tennessean*, Norman described the current condition of the Tennessee Agricultural Museum. Norman’s chief complaints were the lack of central heating and air. He added that the temperature reached “123 degrees one day back in the summer,” so readers “can imagine how cold it gets in the winter.”²²⁹ He noted that the artifacts require consistent temperatures to avoid deterioration.²³⁰ Norman eventually circled back to the point of the interview, which was to encourage visitation and interest in the museum. The Tennessee Department of Agriculture installed central heat and air in 1980.²³¹ Additionally, the Department brought the museum into compliance with fire codes and met the current “state and federal requirements for the handicapped.”²³² Norman also requested volunteer help in constructing exhibits. The *Tennessee Market Bulletin* published an article calling for “persons with practical experience of early American farm

²²⁷ Unpublished Tennessee Agricultural Museum Brochure with Unlisted Publication Date, Circa 1968-1971 from the Files of the Tennessee Agricultural Museum. The brochure contextualizes the renovations, but adds that the “hundreds of items on display will remind those who visit the Museum that our forefathers lives [sic] were not easy and of the great challenge they left with us for the future.”

²²⁸ “Little Known Museum Started as Fair Exhibit,” *Tennessean*, February 4, 1979.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ Norman’s exact phrasing was, “all this means we have things rusting faster on the inside of the building that they would on the outside. All this will change after the renovation.” “Little Known Museum Started as Fair Exhibit.”

²³¹ The exact month of installation is debated. The article, “Museum Spotlights Farm Memorabilia” claims that it was done in June of 1980, while the article, “Volunteer Workers Needed for Agric. Museum,” claims it was done in February of 1980. “Volunteer Workers Needed for Agric. Museum,” *Tennessee Market Bulletin* 53 no. 4 (April 1980): 1.

²³² “Volunteer Workers Needed for Agric. Museum,” 1.

life who could supply ideas” so the museum would promote “authenticity” through new exhibits.²³³ The museum’s slow shift to social history was underway.

Two major changes occurred for the Tennessee Agricultural Museum in 1981. The museum hired its first full-time curator in January - G.W. Oldham.²³⁴ A source from 1982 notes that Oldham was from Hartsville, Tennessee and that he served as a previous employee of the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, but within a different capacity. Oldham also worked as a farmer, and dedicated “hours researching various articles” and is credited with labeling “almost every item by title and date.”²³⁵

In May of 1981, the museum received a new name, the Oscar L. Farris Agricultural Museum.²³⁶ Based on the 1981 Senate Joint Resolution 58 of the 92nd General Assembly, the museum was renamed “in honor of a great and generous friend of agriculture.”²³⁷ The *Tennessee Market Bulletin* wrote that the commemoration coincided with major renovations that fulfilled Farris’ ideas for education and outreach. The article stated that the museum had “restored its potential as envisioned by Oscar Farris to effectively link the past and present of Tennessee Agriculture, to educate young and old in our rich farming past, and to further public consciousness of this state’s agricultural heritage.”²³⁸ The Tennessee Department of Agriculture hosted a ceremony on May 21,

²³³ Ibid., 1.

²³⁴ “Museum Spotlights Farm Memorabilia.” The TDA has since employed Dot Curtis, Anne Dale, Gregory Phillipy, and Elaura Guttormson as Museum Director and Tirri Parker and Sarah Williams as Museum Curator.

²³⁵ Ann Throneberry, “Oscar L. Farris Agricultural Museum,” *Tennessee Magazine*, January 1982, 6.

²³⁶ “Be it resolved by the Senate of the 92nd General Assembly, the House of Representatives concurring, that the Tennessee Agricultural Museum is hereby designated the Oscar L. Farris Tennessee Agricultural Museum, in honor of a great and generous friend of agriculture.” “A Resolution to Designate the Tennessee Agricultural Museum in honor of Oscar L. Farris.” Senate Joint Resolution 58. 1981.

²³⁷ “Agri. Museum to Re-Open May 21.”

²³⁸ Ibid.

1981 at 10 a.m. at the Ellington Agricultural Center, under the leadership of Commissioner Jere Griggs.²³⁹ The ceremony included speakers who knew Farris and who praised his efforts to create the museum.²⁴⁰

Around the time of the museum's renaming, museum supporters discussed the benefits of a non-profit institution to bolster the site and its public outreach. As early as 1980, advocates promoted an association to "assist in the overall program of the museum" and to possibly create a "country store and gift shop offering handmade items of Tennessee craftsmen."²⁴¹ Within the decade, these discussions turned to action and proponents created the Oscar Farris Agricultural Museum Association (OFAMA). The Association included seventeen incorporators,²⁴² with twelve original board members,²⁴³ and with five people serving on the original board of directors.²⁴⁴ They filed the charter on March 2, 1988 under control number 0200470. The OFAMA continues to support the Tennessee Agricultural Museum through public outreach and through funding many of the museum's festivals and educational opportunities.

²³⁹ "Museum, Animal Industries Buildings will be Dedicated to Farris, Porter," *Farm Bureau News*, May 5, 1981.

²⁴⁰ An unpublished roster of the dedication ceremony records that Agriculture Commissioner Jere Griggs opened the event and introduced the speakers. He was followed by Mr. Page, an unofficial curator of the museum and G.W. Oldham, curator of the museum. They were then followed by Dr. Lloyd Downen, who served as dean of the UT Agricultural Extension Office. The final speaker was Phil Farris, Oscar Farris' son. Unpublished Roster of the Speakers at the Dedication of the Tennessee Agricultural Museum as the Oscar Farris Agricultural Museum. May 21, 1981. Property of the Tennessee Agricultural Museum.

²⁴¹ "Volunteer Workers Needed for Agric. Museum," 1.

²⁴² The seventeen incorporators are as follows: Charles Allen; A. C. Clark; Dorothy Curtis; Angelia Gacesa; Floyd Griffith; Barbara Lacey; Mark McBride; William F. Moss; G. W. Oldham; Terry Oliver; Bettie Pitts; Jesse Safley; Mary Martha Seymore; Bobby Vannatta; Cherry Lane von Schmittou; Thomas Womack; and Anne Dale.

²⁴³ The twelve board members are as follows: Charles Allen; A.C. Clark; Dorothy Curtis; Angelia Gacesa; Floyd Griffith; Barbara Lacey; Mark McBride; William F. Moss; G.W. Oldham; Terry Oliver; Bettie Pitts; and Anne Dale.

²⁴⁴ The five individuals serving on the board of directors are as follows: Jesse Safley; Mary Martha Seymore; Bobby Vannatta; Cherry Lane von Schmittou; and Thomas Womack.

Farris and the Tennessee Agricultural Museum's Material Culture

The field of material culture studies is particularly helpful in interpreting agricultural history. Farming tools that were once part of the average American's daily tasks are now relegated to unkempt fencerows or the back corners of dusty barns. Moreover, statistics show that Americans have moved away from the countryside and are no longer associated with the process required to cultivate food and fiber. For example, the intellectual historian Paul Keith Conkin records in his monograph, *A Revolution Down on the Farm: The Transformation of American Agriculture since 1929*, that farm operators decreased from "6 million in the 1930s to less than 350,000" in 2008.²⁴⁵ Therefore, antique agricultural tools appear more archaic with each passing year.

Material culture studies allows practitioners to grasp the meaning of the artifact within the broader historical context of its creation, use, and provenance. In James Deetz's *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life*, he writes that material culture is "roughly synonymous with artifacts, the vast universe of objects used by mankind to cope with the physical world, to facilitate social intercourse, and to benefit our state of mind."²⁴⁶ While it is not always clear how an artifact viewed through the lens of material culture studies can benefit our "state of mind," Deetz' definition provides a flexible foundation. He further added that material culture is "useful in emphasizing how profoundly our world is the product of our thoughts, as that sector of our physical environment that we modify through culturally determined behavior."²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵ Conkin, *A Revolution Down on the Farm*, xi.

²⁴⁶ James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1977), 24.

²⁴⁷ Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten*, 24.

Agricultural historians have readily adopted the idea that artifacts can teach us about culturally determined behavior. People adapted and invented many of the tools and household items associated with rural living in order to reduce the amount of physical labor – for example, tractors supplanted plows, which supplanted hand-harvesters. Therefore, anyone who has prepared a field for planting or cared for livestock can speak to the desire to alleviate the physical labor component and would understand the culturally determined behavior behind altering or improving machinery and tools.

Debra A. Reid has devoted much of her career to demonstrating the significance of studying agricultural artifacts through the lens of material culture studies. She currently serves as the Curator of Agriculture and the Environment at The Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan. Reid also divides her time by serving as a professor emeritus in the Department of History and Historical Administration Graduate Program and the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences at Eastern Illinois University. Reid’s article, “Tangible Agricultural History: An Artifact’s-Eye View of the Field” promotes a working methodology for applying material culture studies to agricultural artifacts. The essay uses a milk can, ceramic pitcher, and sorghum tin as case studies to address how objects can speak to their historical context, creation, regional history, and more.²⁴⁸

Reid’s article is valuable for its analysis of her artifacts and for the nearly pathbreaking approach she applied in connecting agricultural history to material culture

²⁴⁸ Reid concludes that “these three objects, the pitcher, the milk, and the sorghum can, in combination, indicate an alternative story of change in agriculture and rural life in southern Illinois between the 1930s and the 1950s.” Debra A. Reid, “Tangible Agricultural History: An Artifact’s-Eye View of the Field,” *Agricultural History* 86, no. 3 (Summer 2012): 72.

studies. She provided two applicable insights. The first is when she notes that “historians who augment textual evidence with material culture produce more thorough scholarship.”²⁴⁹ Although this understanding is foundational to the point of appearing unnecessary to include, many historians do not take the extra steps to study the artifacts that relate to their research. In her article, Reid provides the historical context for each piece and shows how their inclusion in the process augments the study.

Secondly, Reid insists that “context...means more than function.”²⁵⁰ Many historians initiate their interpretation by supplying information about the operation of the artifact – especially when it is utility-based, as many agricultural artifacts are. “Tangible Agricultural History: An Artifact’s-Eye View of the Field” encourages public and academic historians to find value in the material culture approach so that the artifacts are utilized to provide stories, connection points, and relevance. While it is necessary to understand the function of an object, it does not encompass its full interpretative worth. Reid further interjects that “additional background research allows researchers to position the object to other evidence about the thing or the process or activity at a particular time or along a time continuum.”²⁵¹ Equipped with an understanding of material culture studies from Deetz and with an understanding of its intersection with agricultural history through Reid’s article, it is now possible to delve into a case study of how an agricultural museum and its collection originated.

The Tennessee Agricultural Museum owes its existence to numerous individuals throughout the years – from its inception as a grass-roots projects in the 1950s to the

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 58.

²⁵⁰ Reid, “Tangible Agricultural History,” 69.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 69.

volunteers who contribute to its vitality today. One supporter stands out among the rest: Oscar Farris, who shaped the early collections of the museum. Museum lore holds that much of the early collection was a direct donation from Farris. Later, published accounts reinforced that legend. An article from 1990 noted that “a few years before his death in 1961,” Farris “gave a large personal collection of old farm machinery, tools, and household items to the state, and they were installed in a large barn building on property that Tennessee utilizes as an agricultural center.”²⁵² Actually, Farris donated less than twenty personal items to the Tennessee Agricultural Museum. But Farris acted as the catalyst for others to donate items. He orchestrated what was sought and what was accepted. The historian J.T. Schlebecker argues that “what the student can learn depends to a great extent on what experiences the examiner brings to the object, and also on what the observer wants to learn.”²⁵³ Based on Schlebecker’s observation, we can learn about the collection of the Tennessee Agricultural Museum based on what Farris brought into the museum in terms of artifacts and what he proposed to museum supporters as he encouraged them to seek items for the collection.

Fortunately, the Tennessee Agricultural Museum has records indicating how Farris moved forward with his initial petitions to start the museum and gather accompanying artifacts. Farris’s early efforts are best recorded in four sources – an unpublished letter from Farris to Tennessee vocational agriculture teachers; the publications that cover his temporary exhibit of antique farm tools at the 1958 Tennessee

²⁵² Collins, “The Oscar L. Farris Agricultural Museum and The Farris Family,” 37.

²⁵³ J.T. Schlebecker, “The Use of Objects in Historical Research,” *Agricultural History* 51 no. 1 (January 1977): 202.

State Fair; articles published by the *Tennessee Market Bulletin* that highlight the early acquisitions; and a letter from Farris to one of the donors.

In an unpublished letter from November 4, 1957, Farris wrote to the vocational agriculture teachers across Tennessee to inform them of his plans to create a state agricultural museum and of his need for their assistance. He includes his previous conversations with Commissioner of Agriculture Buford Ellington, in part to prove his sincerity and authority and to clarify that the project would operate under the auspices and approval of the State. Farris goes so far as to note that Commissioner Ellington “entered into the project wholeheartedly and stated that he would see that space for such an institution was provided.”²⁵⁴ Farris then adds “at that time, and on several other occasions, I made the statement “that if the Museum is established that the Agricultural Workers would fill it.”²⁵⁵ Here, Farris is intimating that those who addressed the necessity of a state agricultural museum (in all likelihood – the vocational agriculture teachers) should now step forward and offer their assistance.

In the November 4, 1957 letter, Farris lists exactly what he wants the vocational agriculture teachers to find. The list is important for many reasons. As Schlebecker argued, Farris’s list is a manifestation of what he understands to be the crux of Tennessee agricultural history. These artifacts also represent the Tennessee Department of Agriculture’s priorities in relating the story of rural life and reveal Farris’s familiarity with agricultural history. Farris writes that he hopes the letter and accompanying list

²⁵⁴ Letter. “To All Vocational Agriculture Teachers.” From Oscar L. Farris, County Agent. November 4, 1957. Tennessee Agricultural Museum.

²⁵⁵ “To All Vocational Agriculture Teachers.”

provide “an idea of what we need.”²⁵⁶ He then includes the following items for potential accessioning:

- Frow;
- Adz;
- Tongue & Groove Planes;
- Wooden Axles for Wagons;
- Cradles;
- Grease Lamps;
- Reapers; Broadax;
- Bull Tongues & Earlier Plows;
- Candlestick Moulds; [sic]
- Ox Yoke;
- Coffee Mill;
- Roasted Skillet & Top;
- Corded Beds;
- Looms; Spinning Wheels

Farris’ list largely consists of tools connected to cultivating the land, often in conjunction with farm animals like oxen. He did not stress clothing, home décor, or paper items, such as diaries, newspapers, or farm journals. Interestingly, he mentioned pieces associated with farm women and domestic labor, such as looms, candlestick molds, and

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

spinning wheels. Although Farris did not address gendered labor explicitly in the list or in later publications, his inclusion of items generally associated with the female sphere pulls in a welcome layer of diversity to the story of agriculture – which is often perceived as a masculine occupation and field. The list represented only the initial call for items and should not be considered Farris’s complete “wishlist.” But his emphasis on tools is noteworthy and points to the idea that rural history is associated with the history of changing technology. Farris later conceded that supporters have yet to create a museum association to act as a legal and official authority. However, he reassured the vocational agriculture teachers that until the governing board existed, he volunteered to accept artifacts and answer questions. He encouraged them to “address all correspondence to me and I’ll pass it on when proper authority is designated.”²⁵⁷

Farris understood the need for basic collection management practices. He admitted that if the “Museum materializes, it will be glad to accept articles on any terms, donation, loan, or any otherwise specified manner.”²⁵⁸ He stressed that the museum will require a “complete history of same, donor, manufacturer, etc., which will be placed on the article in the Museum and donor given credit.”²⁵⁹ Farris did not ask for financial support, but he wanted to identify the desired artifacts. He encouraged the teachers to approach his letter and its requests with urgency, since in “another generation it will be almost impossible.”²⁶⁰ Farris closed with an understandable plea to the teachers and to

²⁵⁷ “To All Vocational Agriculture Teachers.”

²⁵⁸ “To All Vocational Agriculture Teachers.”

²⁵⁹ While Farris was proactive in requesting information, donors were not always cautious to include the provenance. Those accepting the early museum pieces, both before and after Farris’s death, likewise did not always press for suitable context. *Ibid.*

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

those on whom he is counting to help him with the monumental project of starting a collection for a state museum. He concluded, “please do not let me down.”²⁶¹

Along with Farris’s November 4, 1957 letter to vocational agriculture teachers across the state, the second key primary source – materials related to exhibits at the Tennessee State Fair from September 15 to 20, 1958 – underscored his collection priorities. Farris listed his early acquisitions:

- A pioneer lock made entirely of wood, Curtis Smallin.
- Wooden mold board Plow, [sic] by Mr. and Mrs. E.M. Bond of Goodlettsville.
- Grain cradle, from Bob McCostland of Goodlettsville.
- A tar-pole handmade two horses wagon with wooden axles and hubs. Pine tar used for lubrication, all iron hand forged in local blacksmith shop. Had more than 100 years use.
- A sprout puller; a knife for cutting green field stalks-the ancestors of our modern silage cutters; and a pair of wooden hames. All these were given by Virgil Owens, Adairville, Kentucky.
- A handmade wooden lock for a barn door, from Curtis Smallings, Assistant County Agent, Shelbyville.
- Replica of McCormick’s 1831 reaper (reproduced in 1931 for the Centennial Celebration of International Harvester’s Company) by their District Promotional Manager, R.J. McCaffrey, Nashville.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

- A set of six molding planes over 100 years old, by Stone Reynolds, Nashville. “I purchased these years ago,” he said, as he presented them, “and kept them for just such a purpose as an Agricultural Museum.”
- A sturdy two-foot bench, with flax hackle (or hatchel), to separate the coarse or refuse parts of flax or hemp from the fine, thread fibers. This came from Hugh Childers, former County Agent Putnam County [sic].²⁶²

The exhibit items relate to Farris’s 1957 wish-list by revealing his success in securing certain tools, but the fair exhibit did not portray the gendered division of labor since it did not include pieces like spinning wheels. Documentation does not inform us whether the artifacts associated with domestic labor were difficult to locate or whether Farris and his associates simply prioritized other artifacts. The exhibit pieces likewise leverage farm tools and machinery over other possible items and emphasizes the physicality of farm life. In the future decades, the museum leadership would create a collections management policy, but Farris did not set parameters. He only included lists of items that were the top of his priority. When writing to someone about the museum, Farris noted that “we want everything that our ancestors used on the farm, home, etc.” because “if it’s not old today, it will be tomorrow.”²⁶³

A third key primary source on the early collection of the Tennessee Agricultural Museum is the *Market News Bulletin*. The Tennessee Department of Agriculture published the bulletin for public audiences to disseminate information on the Department and to connect readers to resources, such as farm equipment for sale and the dates of

²⁶² “Old Time Farm Equipment to Show at State Fair,” 3.

²⁶³ Letter. “To: My Dear Mr. Hoffer.” From Oscar L. Farris. March 1, 1961. Tennessee Agricultural Museum.

special fairs. The first *Tennessee Market Bulletin* story on the collection highlighted three artifacts: a wooden lock, a wooden mold board plow, and a mail buggy. Curtis Smallin donated the wooden lock of uncertain provenance, but it was suggested that it was created during pioneer times.²⁶⁴ The article stressed its high quality, noting that it employed ““tumblers” which were operated by the wooden key” and that with the “key partially withdrawn, the lock was fully as secure as locks of modern design.”²⁶⁵

The *Tennessee Market Bulletin* also emphasized the wooden mold board plow and praised its design, noting that when the “iron and steel plows came into use...their shape was much the same as the wooden mold board shown here.”²⁶⁶ The plow belonged to Marshall Tate Bond of Houston, Texas, who received it from his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Edward M. Bond of Goodlettsville. The plow was “made by Mrs. Bond’s great grandfather, Zacchary Tate, born July 10, 1786, died January 26, 1881, and buried in the family’s cemetery at Mt. Juliet.”²⁶⁷ Therefore, Marshall Tate donated an heirloom passed down from his great-great grandfather. Tate’s plow in some ways represents exactly what Farris hoped to show the public as he connected material culture with the history of Tennessee agriculture.

The fourth and final source base for understanding Farris’s approach towards collecting is the Tennessee Agricultural Museum’s one remaining letter that Farris directed to a donor. In March 1961, Farris penned a missive to Harry G. Hoffer of

²⁶⁴ “A pioneer lock made entirely of wood, Curtis Smallin.” “Typical Farm and Home Tools used by the “Embattled Farmers” when The War for Independence was being Fought and Won,” *Tennessee Market Bulletin* 30 no. 6 (June 1958): 1.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

²⁶⁷ “Plow Has a Long History,” *Tennessee Market Bulletin* 30, no. 6 (June 1958): 3.

Rutledge, Tennessee, who donated a mail buggy. The mail buggy is the final piece to receive special recognition and was one of Farris's favorite artifacts. Farris wrote that all the museum's artifacts "are appreciated but the wagon is the one that will attract most attention, I think."²⁶⁸ Farris's initial assessment of the buggy falls more under the category of description than interpretation. In a letter to Hoffer, Farris spells out the history of the artifact and notes that it was an "early Official Rural Free Delivery Buggy."²⁶⁹ Hoffer purchased the buggy in 1915 for \$150. Interestingly, Hoffer did not relegate the buggy to a back corner of a barn but continued to use for several years on Route 7. Hoffer served as a mail carrier in Rutledge and used the Rural Free Delivery buggy during his tenure. Farris was delighted with the Hoffer's addition of an electric light, since it spoke to the mail carrier's long hours and ownership of the piece.²⁷⁰ Overall, Farris recorded that the buggy was in good condition and made a note that "we have been searching for the R.F.D. wagon for three years."²⁷¹ Farris' inclusion of the R.F.D. wagon opened the door to numerous social history interpretative possibilities. The museum could use the wagon as a fulcrum to initiate conversations on changing technology and its impact on the relationship between animals of labor and laborers, the inclusion of rural people in the discussion on contemporary events because of its new accessibility, and the necessary changes to country roads and communities.

²⁶⁸ Letter. "To: My Dear Mr. Hoffer," Tennessee Agricultural Museum.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Type-Written Inventory of Tasks by Oscar L. Farris from the Files of the Tennessee Agricultural Museum. "Report to Commissioner W.F. Moss, Work Done on Agricultural Museum, Thursday, May 4, 1961," 4. Tennessee Department of Agriculture.

Historian Debra Reid argued that the Tennessee Agricultural Museum should interpret the Rural Free Delivery Buggy through the lens of material culture studies and ask why Farris sought the piece for three years. Farris's enthusiasm for the piece alone sets it apart. Farris strove to connect Tennessee's agricultural communities to the urban settings and to provide them with agency. His mission can be seen in his continued efforts as an extension agent, through his advocacy for the Farmers' Markets, and through his dedication to the museum that would relate the stories of rural people. The mail wagon represents many of these agendas – since it embodies the bridge between the rural and urban. Before 1896, rural residents only received mail when they travelled into town and stopped by the post office or another central location – like a bank or church.²⁷² In contrast, free mail delivery for in-town residents started as early as the mid-1860s. Therefore, the Rural Free Delivery Buggy, used primarily in the first quarter of the twentieth century, allowed agriculturally based families to modernize and stay informed on the news, community events, and other affairs. Reid's methodology for material culture studies complements the study of the Rural Free Delivery Buggy and also adds insights to Farris' partiality.

²⁷² "Rural Free Delivery," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 2018.



Figure 6.2: Rural Free Delivery Buggy at the Tennessee Agricultural Museum.

Source: Photograph by author, December 2021, Nashville, Tennessee.

From the four extant sources - Farris's 1957 list to the vocational agriculture teachers, the articles published on the temporary exhibit at the 1958 Tennessee State Fair, the *Tennessee Market Bulletin* articles emphasizing the museum's early pieces, and Farris's letter to the donor of the Rural Free Delivery buggy – we have a basic understanding of what Farris collected. It is more difficult to understand the exact narrative which Farris, and by extension the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, wished to preserve and promote. Farris's lists, missives, and the publications surrounding the early collections of the Tennessee Agricultural Museum have three main points of emphasis in their early interpretation: the value of something as a relic, its representation of the difficulty of rural life, and the nebulous idea of technological and social progress.

Farris often expressed interest in an item simply because of its age, as though the item gained relic-status with increased years. A 1958 article from the *Tennessee Market Bulletin* concurred, describing the artifacts as “interesting relics of Early American Life” and praising the Department for providing a permanent home for them.²⁷³ Farris and later generations of museum supporters likewise accentuated the artifacts’ connection to hard work and manual labor. Rural history is often linked with difficult physical conditions. For some, the artifacts exist to “remind those who visit the Museum that our forebears’ lives were not easy.”²⁷⁴ The Tennessee Department of Agriculture supported this interpretation, since the Commissioner of Agriculture Jere Griggs of Gibson County (1979-1981) included it in his speech during the renaming ceremony for the museum as it transitioned to the Oscar Farris Agricultural Museum. Griggs wrote that the “agricultural memorabilia” serves to teach audiences about “what our ancestors worked with and the improvements that have been made in the past 20 years.”²⁷⁵ His words also play into the third and final emphasis of interpretation - representations of technological and social progress.

Farris and museum supporters hoped that the artifacts would teach people about change over time. However, Farris and TDA categorized change as progress. The 1959-1960 Tennessee Department of Agriculture’s Forty-Third Biennial Report proposes that the artifacts tell the story of how farming adapted from basic technology to its ever-

²⁷³ “Typical Farm and Home Tools used by the “Embattled Farmers” when The War for Independence was being Fought and Won,” 1.

²⁷⁴ Throneberry, “Oscar L. Farris Agricultural Museum,” 7. The mythology of Farris was still strong well into the 1980s. Throneberry sets the stage for the museum’s purpose by writing that Oscar Farris “spent long hours and traveled thousands of miles collecting many of the items which are on display,” 7.

²⁷⁵ “Museum, Animal Industries Buildings will be Dedicated to Farris, Porter.”

advancing state. It argued that the story - “the change from primitive tools used by the pioneers to the present improved machines” – describes the momentum of “agricultural progress that has taken place since the days of the early settlements.”²⁷⁶ The stress was on how these artifacts are at once tools of drudgery for contemporary farmers, (since the current tools are the best), while simultaneously asserting that these same tools were advanced equipment for their users since they represented progress from the years proceeding it. Moreover, the artifacts were frequently referred to as “conveniences.”²⁷⁷

In many ways, Reid acts as a guide when studying agricultural artifacts and museums and their relationship to material culture studies and public history in general. In her article, “Agricultural Artifacts: Early Curators, Their Philosophy and Their Collections,” Reid provides a thorough analysis of the methods of some of the earliest collectors and preservers of agricultural artifacts. She investigates the most common perspectives on these museum collectors and collections, as Chapter Five did with Oscar Farris and the Tennessee Agricultural Museum. Like Schlebecker, Reid cautions public historians to understand their own bias when approaching interpretation.

Reid also encourages historians not to rely on the interpretation of progress as the selling point of the pieces, since audiences may infer that those who used the earliest artifacts were somehow less intelligent, motivated, or ingenious than later generations. This approach “naturally leads to “technological determinists” and the interpretation fails

²⁷⁶ “Agricultural Museum with its Homemade Farming Implements Brings Back Memories of Pioneer Days.”

²⁷⁷ “Among the articles of yesteryear on display are...Conveniences (?) for the pioneer housewife such as churns, washing machines, reels, looms, washboards, apple peelers, cherry seeds and many more.” Unpublished Tennessee Agricultural Museum Brochure with Unlisted Publication Date, Circa 1968-1971. Tennessee Agricultural Museum.

to relate information about the article's historical context, narrative, and relevance. Instead, it tends to "argue that the past was always simpler than the present, the mind-set and machinery less effective and less dependable and life always less complicated."²⁷⁸ By showing how life was simpler and less advanced, the "earliest curators of agricultural museums believed that their museums needed to show progress."²⁷⁹ Although Farris did not spell out his prerogatives, it is clear that he and the Department of Agriculture hoped to advertise an attractive, modern field of agriculture by juxtaposing the field with its earlier versions. In some regard, perhaps agricultural museum supporters hope to attract new audiences to the current study of agriculture by showing that it is no longer as labor intensive.

In conclusion, the history of the early collection of the Tennessee Agricultural Museum speaks to the value of grassroots efforts and dedicated volunteers. Farris' records provide insight into what was initially sought and accessioned. The publications from the *Tennessee Market Bulletin* likewise provide a lens by which to understand how the pieces were prioritized and interpreted. The historian Darwin P. Kelsey, in "Outdoor Museums and Agricultural History," stresses the importance of preserving agricultural artifacts, an attitude with which Farris would readily agree. Darwin adds that agricultural artifacts are significant not only in the museum setting, but for the wider realm of academic research. He writes that the "original artifacts themselves are valued as primary research documents, capable of supplementing the written record and on occasion

²⁷⁸ Debra A. Reid, "Agricultural Artifacts: Early Curators, Their Philosophy and Their Collections," Association for Living History, Farms, and Agricultural Museums Proceedings 2010, 33 (North Bloomfield: ALHFAM, 2011), 45.

²⁷⁹ Debra Reid, "Agricultural Artifacts: Early Curators, Their Philosophy and Their Collections," 45.

preventing faulty inferences resulting from inadequate written records.”²⁸⁰ Fortunately, Farris’s efforts to initiate the Tennessee Agricultural Museum and promote its interpretive strength through a solid collection base resonate with Kelsey’s propositions that artifacts are valuable primary sources. It is now the responsibility of current public history practitioners to work with those artifacts that Farris collected and to relate a more thorough story of Tennessee agriculture through accessioning artifacts that address a more diverse history – such as the history of Black farmers, sharecroppers, and others. Agricultural museums are uniquely leveraged to speak to the relevance of rural history and to serve as the bridge between contemporary audiences and the stories of those who constitute the rural Southern communities.

²⁸⁰ Darwin P. Kelsey, “Outdoor Museums and Agricultural History,” *Agricultural History* 46 no.1 (January 1972): 122.

CONCLUSION

The history of agriculture in Tennessee is accessible, culturally assorted, and chronologically vast, making it suitable for interpretation at most public history sites in the state. Nearly every historic home, museum, or living history site has some connection to rural history. However, as the dissertation illustrated, the interpretation of agriculture in Tennessee is largely inconsistent, shallow, and disjointed. Numerous mediums exist to increase awareness of this history in both the academic and public spheres and to prioritize its interpretation.

It should be the mission of the Tennessee Agricultural Museum to act as a vehicle to increase awareness of rural history and to serve as an example to other sites on how to interpret the history of farming in the state, its change over time, and its variety based on region. To address this challenge, the Tennessee Agricultural Museum recently installed panels that detail a chronological timeline of agriculture. The panels incorporate the underrepresented narratives discussed in the dissertation, such as the displaced Native American Nations and the role of slavery. Likewise, in the spring of 2021 the museum installed a new exhibit that features people and historic sites as the focal point for agricultural eras – such as Nancy Ward’s powerful position with the Cherokee Nation and her introduction of dairy cows to their cultural diet. By providing a personal story and photograph (when possible), the museum diversified its interpretation and used visual media to attract visitor interest. Additionally, the museum plans to install an exhibit in 2022 that will address tenancy in Middle Tennessee through the lens of the Caldwell estate.

Although the Tennessee Agricultural Museum has taken definitive steps towards improving its visitor experience and addressing complex and previously neglected narratives, the museum displays many of the key deficiencies identified at other historic sites. These include a lack of labeling, an overabundance of similar artifacts, and a prioritization of White-centric settlement history. The inherent Whiteness of Farris' interpretive approach and collections policy was no doubt intensified by the racial division evident in the Cooperative Extension Service. This racial divide would have limited Farris' contact with Black farmers and donors, as well as from their stories and perspectives. The Cooperative Extension Service's policies "led to a conscious marginalization of African-American interests in the program" that translated into the public history field through Farris' self-appointed curatorship.²⁸¹

For decades, the Tennessee Agricultural Museum did not interpret the state's agricultural dependence on slavery and Black labor. It failed to represent personalized accounts of those whose lives were upended through the capitalization of the agricultural market through electrification, chemical usage, and urbanization. Many of these topics are still untold at the museum. However, by prioritizing staff training in the difficult eras of agricultural history, ensuring the multiplicity of historic voices, and engaging in a more rigorous and diverse collections policy, the museum can continue in its educational mission and lead the way for other historic sites.

Furthermore, public history sites can utilize agricultural history as a lens by which to study other issues and events. For example, in 2019 the Tennessee Agricultural

²⁸¹ Carmen V. Harris, "The Extension Agency is not an Integration Agency": The Idea of Race in Cooperative Extension Service," *Agricultural History Society* 82, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 193.

Museum installed a temporary exhibit that discussed the popularity and value of local farmers' markets. Along with stressing the need to support farmers and small businesses, the exhibit emphasized inner-city inhabitants' restricted access to green space and fresh food. It also acknowledged that farmers' markets recently transitioned to accept The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). By using farmers' markets as a starting point, it is possible to delve into many contemporary issues, especially those connected to food equality.

Fortunately, the Tennessee Agricultural Museum is not alone in its efforts to share rural history through education and interpretation. Additional resources exist in the form of professional organizations like the American Association of State and Local History (AASLH). AASLH's *Interpreting History* series equips readers with tools to communicate this narrative and create engaging dialogues with visitors through programming. Debra Reid's 2017 *Interpreting Agriculture at Museums and Historic Sites* adds provides valuable case studies. Along with AASLH, other organizations like the National Council on Public History, The Association for Living History, Farm and Agricultural Museums, The Agricultural History Society, The American Historical Association, and the American Alliance of Museums serve as resources for the entire gamut of interpretation – from gathering sources to engaging with the public. Furthermore, regional groups, like the Inter-museum Council of Nashville, offer innumerable benefits. Public historians should not diminish the value of networking with others in these organizations. Most cultural institutions in Tennessee do not operate with a large staff from which they can reliably source every project. For example, they often need to borrow artifacts, leverage research, or partner together with other sites for

success. Regional public history groups can address these gaps and give professional support.

This dissertation is an exercise in the value of inter-museum partnerships through the inclusion of numerous museums and historic houses. As I studied each site, I met with the staff and learned about their unique struggles. Fortunately, I was also privy to their success stories. For example, as I met with Kelley Weatherly-Sinclair at the Historic Ramsey House, I learned more about East Tennessee farming practices and how these changed over time. I also learned about the ongoing difficulty the site faces in recruiting Board members and volunteers – something which I frequently encounter. Although I was unable to resolve the issues prevalent at each public history site, it is my hope that the networking was symbiotic.

Along with evaluating the interpretation of the history of agriculture in Tennessee, the dissertation showcased the history of the Ellington Agricultural Center and the Tennessee Agricultural Museum, with special attention to Oscar Farris and his early museum acquisitions. The EAC is well-positioned to expand its interpretative value through the Tennessee Agricultural Museum. The museum has a long history of community outreach through school fields trips and events. The current staff are building on the momentum through interpretive exhibits that delve into social history and through a targeted social media presence.

Public history sites in Tennessee should be encouraged by rural history's accessibility— it is present in every county. Although many visitors may be initially disconnected to agriculture, it would not take much to connect audiences to such a broad topic. Furthermore, even if museum visitors do not have an immediate interest in an

agricultural topic, such as sharecropping, it is the responsibility of the public historian to bring history 'to life' and to demonstrate its relevancy. The aforementioned public history sites and their case studies will hopefully shed light on some of the successful means of communicating rural history to various audiences, as well as challenge public historians to address the areas of interpretive weakness and strive to tell a more diverse, balanced, and complete story.

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APPENDIX A: TIMELINE OF THE TENNESSEE AGRICULTURAL MUSEUM

- 1854 – Creation of the Tennessee Department of Agriculture
- 1920 to 1959 – Oscar Farris Serves as Davidson County Extension Agent
- 1937 – Tennessee State Legislature Creates the Agricultural Hall of Fame
- 1957 to 1961 – Farris Collects Farm Artifacts (approximately)
- 1957 to 1959 – Commissioner of Agriculture, Buford Ellington, allows Farris to Store Farm Artifacts at the Previous Caldwell Estate
- 1958 – Farris Present Farm Artifacts at the Tennessee State Fair
- 1959 – State of Tennessee Sanctions the Creation of the Tennessee Agricultural Museum
- 1959 – Farris Retires
- 1959 to 1963 - Buford Ellington serves as Governor of Tennessee
- 1961 – Farris Dies from Stroke
- 1961 – The Tennessee State Legislature Renames the 207-acre Caldwell Estate the Ellington Agricultural Center and uses it as the new headquarters for the Tennessee Department of Agriculture
- 1960s - Jesse Page Oversees Museum Collection (approximate)
- 1970s – Haywood P. Norman IV Oversees Museum Collection (approximate)
- 1981 – G.W. Oldham Museum Serves as Curator (approximate)
- 1981 – The Tennessee 92nd General Assembly Renames the Museum the Oscar Farris Agricultural Museum
- 1980s – Dot Curtis Serves as Museum Director (approximate)

- 1988 - Museum Supporters Create the Non-Profit Group, the Oscar Farris Agricultural Museum Association (OFAMA)
- 1989 – Dot Curtis adds Anne Dale as Staff Member
 - Curtis and Dale also worked with Floyd Griffith
- 1995 – 2019 Tirri Parker Serves as Museum Program Coordinator
- 1998 – State of Tennessee Renames the Museum the Tennessee Agricultural Museum
- 2014 to 2018 - Greg Phillipy Serves as Director
- 2015 to 2018 – Elaura Guttormson Serves as Museum Program Coordinator
- 2018 to Current – Elaura Guttormson Serves as Museum Director
- 2019 – Tirri Parker Serves as Curator
- 2019 to 2020 – Sarah Williams Serves as Museum Program Coordinator
- 2020 to Current – Sarah Williams Serves as Curator
- 2020 to Current – Museum Operates without Museum Program Coordinator
- 2021 – Sarah Robles and Hannah Brown Serve as Summer Interns

APPENDIX B: COMPENDIUM ON PUBLICATIONS ON THE HISTORIC CABINS AT THE TENNESSEE AGRICULTURAL MUSEUM

External Publications on the Historic Cabins at the Tennessee Agricultural Museum

- Forty-Third Biennial Report from the Department of Agriculture, State of Tennessee
- Transcript of Interview with Shirley Caldwell Patterson – Rogers Caldwell’s niece

Internal Publications on the Historic Cabins at the Tennessee Agricultural Museum

- “Welcome to the Ellington Agricultural Center!” summary of site. From the files of Tom Womack. Revised 12-21-2012
- Tennessee Agricultural Museum’s website (as of 2/27/2019)

Timeline of Renovations on the Historic Cabins at the Ellington Agricultural Center

1993, April – Contract between OFAMA and H. & H. Construction Associates

- Restoration of 3 historic cabins
- South Cabin
 - On the front of the South Cabin remove the chicken wire; remove the screen wire and hardware cloth window; chink logs where necessary; find and install new sash with divided glass panes; remove old and install new fascia boards.
 - On the south side of South Cabin remove existing plumbing pipe, remove 1 x 8’s at the foundation; remove old and install new fascia boards.

- On rear of South Cabin remove electrical conduits; remove screen wire and hardware cloth windows; remove and install two new eave boards; remove 2 x 6 blocks; remove old and install new fascia boards; install new window glass in two quarter round windows.
- On north side of South Cabin reset the foundation pier next to fireplace; repair one floor joist; remove 1 x 8 at foundation; remove old and install new fascia boards.
- On inside of South Cabin remove tin; remove chicken wire; remove plywood on windows; remove electric light and conduit; remove ceiling joist; repair beaded ceiling estimated at 100 square feet (exact amount cannot be determined until tin is removed); clean fireplace – hearth and face; patch floor where old plumbing fixtures are removed; whitewash beaded paneling.
- North Cabin
 - On the front of the South Cabin remove the chicken wire; remove the screen wire and hardware cloth window; chink logs where necessary; find and install new sash with divided glass panes; remove old and install new fascia boards; on right side of cabin front door, replace log approximately 4 feet off ground; on left side of cabin door, replace log which is approximately 5 feet off ground.
 - On the south side of North Cabin remove existing plumbing pipe, remove 1 x 8's at the foundation; remove old and install new fascia boards.

- On rear of North Cabin remove electrical conduits; remove screen wire and hardware cloth windows; remove old and install two new eave boards; remove 2 x 6 blocks; install new window glass in two quarter round windows; remove and install fascia boards; replace log which I approximately 5 feet off ground.
- On north side of North Cabin reset the foundation pier next to fireplace; repair one floor joist; remove 1 x 8 at foundation; remove old and install new fascia boards; replace sill log.
- On inside of North Cabin remove tin; remove chicken wire; remove plywood on windows; remove electric light and conduit; remove ceiling joist; repair beaded ceiling estimated at 100 square feet (exact amount cannot be determined until tin is removed); clean fireplace – hearth and face; patch floor where old plumbing fixtures are removed; whitewash beaded paneling.
- Double Pen Cabins – Left and Right
 - On front of Left Cabin chink at top log; remove 4 x 4 pressure treated posts on front porches and replace with five rough cut cedar posts furnished by the Museum; install three new stepping stones.
 - On front of Right Cabin replace the sill log.
 - On south end of the Left Cabin chink where necessary; remove the plywood at the foundation; remove conduit; replace one floating rafter; add two pier footings under Left Cabin.

- On rear of Left Cabin replace log sill; reproduce and install entire window sash and trim.
- On rear of Right Cabin reproduce and install entire window sash and trim.
- On north end of Right Cabin remove the plywood from the foundation.
- On the inside of Left Cabin repair beaded ceiling; remove clay pipe in chimney; clean fireplace- hearth and face; remove electrical wires, etc.; whitewash inside of cabin.
- On the inside of Right Cabin remove existing floor and install new flooring furnished by the Museum; furnish and install new floor joist; replace sill log at front; remove 2 x 6's; remove electrical wires, etc.; repair beaded ceiling; reinstall fireplace mantel; whitewash interior of cabin.
- In dog trot of Double Cabins remove old flooring and install new flooring furnished by the Museum; remove pier footings; reproduce and install rear railing to match front railing; remove electrical wires, etc.; replace two (2) vents; remove old and install new 15 foot log in dog trot.
- Original Compensation to Contractor - \$14, 300.
- Amendment to Project
 - In May, the Museum proposed additional renovations:
 - Termite damage treatment (\$562)
 - Chink and daub the interior of the North Cabin and the double pen cabins, left and right.
 - Replace the roof of the North Cabin.

- Darken the ceilings of the dog trot area.
- Clean all interiors with a pressure hose where necessary
- Repair flooring in double dog trot cabin left side where boards, now exposed with removal of sill log, show decay.
- Installation of a 40' x 8' porch in front of double dog trot cabin
- Amendment Compensation to Contractor - \$10, 143.

1996 – Renovation work done by Bond's Historic Preservation

- Repair of unspecified Log Cabin
 - Remove dirt from under log cabin (second phase of dirt removal) to allow for installation of floor joist and create enough ground clearance to prevent future moisture problems.
 - Install new pressure treated floor joist.
 - Repair bad wood in door casing caused by termite damage.
- Proposed cost of \$774.

1999, May – Pesticide Treatment

- All log cabins treated with Bora-Care.

2000, June – Bid to Repair Damaged Roof on Double Pen Cabins

- Proposed Cost - \$275 by H. & H. Construction Associates.
- Roof was damaged by a storm.
- No further information available.

2001, May - Contract between OFAMA and H & H Construction Associates

- Proposed cost of \$6, 272.20
- Remove the existing wood shingle roof and install a new wood shingle roof on the Double Pen Log Cabin.
- Remove wood shingles down to deck and pull all remaining nails.
- Nail one layer #30 felt over deck.
- Install No. 1 Blue Label cedar shake shingles using galvanized nails with 18” roll of #30 felt between each course.
- Clean up trash & debris at end of each work day. Haul away all shingles, nails, trash, and debris when project is completed.
- Amendment to original contract:
 - After inspection of roof rafters, the Tennessee Agricultural Museum agrees with H & H Construction that the tail endings of eleven (11) rafters over the front porch are rotten. The Museum is in agreement with H & H Construction that these rafter endings be removed and spliced with good wood that will match existing rafters. New rafter endings will be notched, shaped, and stained to match original rafter endings for a cost of \$300.

- The Museum agrees that the rafter tails on the back west side of the log cabin be repaired by boxing rafter tails and staining to match at a cost of \$650.

2001, June - Contract between OFAMA and Kurt Musfeldt Masonry

- Repair of the two single log cabins and the Double Pen Cabin
- South Cabin
 - Proposed Cost \$2,000
 - Tuck up perimeter stone foundation walls and piers. Install termite shield. (per verbal agreement) Stabilize any piers in danger of base-soil erosion.
 - Supply major concrete support slab for fireplace chimney to arrest settling. Slab is to be 20” below finish grade and 10” thick steel reinforced (\$1200 per each)
 - Supply central support post for middle floor beam.
 - Tuck up chimney and space between cabin.
- North Cabin
 - Proposed Cost \$2,000
 - Tuck up perimeter piers. Stabilize any piers in danger of base-soil erosion.
 - Supply major concrete support slab for fireplace chimney to arrest settling. Slab is to be 20” below finish grade and 10” thick steel reinforced (\$1200 per each)
 - Tuck up chimney and space between cabin.
- Double Pen Cabin

- Proposed Cost \$700
- Tuck up support piers.
- Remove wooden floor post supports and replace with steel.
- Tuck up chimneys.

2001 – All cabins are treated with Bora-Care

2003, March - Renovation work done by H & H Construction Associates

- Cabin is not specified.
- Renovation work included
 - Replace interior log over fireplace and the bottom inside of front door on both sides
 - Furnish & install tie collar at each roof rafter (wood pegged)
 - Remove wood strips at chinking between logs and install new cement chinking
 - Reinstall mantel and trim at fireplace
 - Reinstall trim on windows and door
 - Re-nail flooring and install flat base at walls
 - Make minor repairs to fireplace hearth
- Proposed cost of \$7,500.
- Additional renovations to unspecified cabin:
 - Remove existing wood shingles on roof and replace with new hand split cedar shakes. (Note – no wood decking replacement included)

- Proposed cost of additional renovations of \$3,000.

2007, October – Renovation work done by Tim Miller of Miller Renovations

- Double Pen Log Cabin Renovation
 - Demo and replace decking at front of Double Pen Log Cabin with random width 1” poplar with wrought nails
 - Replace one 3 x 6.5 x 12 poplar joist and nailers at post
 - Applied 5 coats of Penetrate (Bug Protection)
 - Dig out floor joists and haul away
 - Fill in groundhog holes
 - Stain deck
 - Proposed cost of \$2, 295.

2008, December – Renovation work done by H & H Construction Associates

- Double Pen Log Cabin Renovation
 - Remove wood shake down to deck; install rosin paper over deck, using stainless steel staples to fasten CCA heavy wood shake with 18” felt at each course over rosin paper. Clean up and haul away all trash and debris from roof job. 2 year labor warranty.
 - Proposed cost of \$12,595.

- (This file was included with other bids and it's thought that this one was the selected contractor. Tirri Parker helped confirm 2/25/19)

2011, April - Contract between OFAMA and Tim Miller of Miller Renovations

- Double Pen Log Cabin
 - Three large holes near piers (northern side) and one small hole next to the chimney foundation under the log cabin and breezeway will be filled with large gravel mixed with mortar.
 - Using piers as a starting point, dig 16 inches to 24 inches away from piers with a depth of 3 inches to 4 inches and secure hardware cloth to ground with cleats. Cover with dirt. This is to discourage animals from digging.
 - Foundation pier in back center of breezeway will be restacked with new footer.
 - Remove stacked wood and other debris from under the cabin.
 - Inspect all footers within reach.
 - Report any other potential problems.
 - Proposed cost of \$775.

2013, April – Replacement of roof of North Cabin

- H. & H. Construction Associates
- Bid description:
 - We purpose to furnish labor and materials for wood shake shingle replacement by removing existing shingles, installing black felt paper,

then installing new cedar shake shingles (hand split top with machined bottom side). Old shingles will be disposed in onsite dumpster.

- 3 separate costs proposed - \$6, 582.74 / \$4,500 / \$5,363 – unsure of final cost

2013, November - Contract between OFAMA and Tim Miller of Miller Renovations

- Double Pen Log Cabin Renovation
 - Proposed Original Cost of \$2,000
 - Remove 8' x 40' porch decking
 - Save existing decking of random poplar boards to reinstall.
 - Replace any existing poplar boards that are damaged with compatible poplar of same dimensions/size.
 - Before installing porch decking, level ground and fill ground hog tunnels.
 - Install 2' x 4' wire fencing across the leveled ground turning the outside wire edges on all four sides @ 90 degree angle. [sic] Pig-tie the wire sections adequately to prevent ground hogs from digging under. Peg adequately. Call Special Projects Chairman to see wire installation before installing decking.
 - Remove any potential problems before proceeding with installation of porch decking.
 - Remove splintered boards, nails, and debris from work site.
- Amendment to original contract
 - After inspection of the joists and seeing the level of dirt, the contractor agrees with the Special Projects Chairman that level of dirt is too close to

joists. Therefore, the Tennessee Agricultural Museum and the OFAMA is requesting contractor to remove at least two (2) inches of dirt from under the cabin porch floor joists before pegging wire and covering with rock.

- Additional cost of \$300.

2019, May – Renovation work done by Tim Miller of Miller Renovations

- Replacement of cedar planks in the dogtrot porch. Miller donated \$1,290.00 in supplies and labor for the project. OFAMA paid \$600.00.