

The Things We Leave Behind:  
A Study of Material Culture and Silenced Voices

By

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## Abstract

The Singletons were a pioneer family of Bedford County, Tennessee that eventually took part in the Civil War with a son, Robert, serving on the Confederate side and an enslaved individual, George, serving on the Union side. Just prior to the beginning of the Civil War, the Singleton family lost their patriarch and thus became a home operated exclusively by women until the year 1900. During the immediate years after the Civil War and through Reconstruction, George, the formerly enslaved individual, became a husband, father, landowner, and Civil War pensioner, exemplifying the radical changes possible for African Americans in America after emancipation. The white Singletons left behind household items found within the home, as well as letters written by many generations of family members, some that even mention George. Through careful study of these objects, written letters, and local, state, and federal records historians can uncover more about life after the Civil War on rural, middle-class farms and how relationships between former master and former slave changed during this time. This research can be applied to public history literature by presenting general audiences with the material in the historic home and through various other approaches.

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## Introduction: The Things We Leave Behind

Throughout time people have been defined by their material wealth. The objects they acquire reflect their social status, standing in the community, and their endearment to their loved ones. Ancient Egyptian tombs of pharaohs are adorned with elaborate items, a household's worth of goods to take with them into the afterlife. Their pyramids are covered with tales of their time on earth, tales of their greatness and triumphs. All of these items help historians piece together the person entombed below them. These items speak to the deceased's unique identity and serve as a reflection of their beliefs that helped them fit into a broader society. A society once lost to modern historians but now through their exhaustive cache of material culture and written text has been brought back to fill the minds and museums of the modern world.

Material culture is a category of historical evidence defined in the dictionary as “the totality of physical objects made by a people for the satisfaction of their needs *especially* those articles requisite for the sustenance and perpetuation of life.”<sup>1</sup> In the 1970s folklorists and museum curators broadened material culture study beyond a focus on elites to include objects and traditions from everyday citizens. Anthropologist James Deetz wrote *In Small Things Forgotten* as an invaluable source for early American history. Since then, scores of scholars, departments at universities, and societies have been formed to further research and examine the importance and impact of everyday objects and what they can tell us about the people of the past.

Objects open the door to study literate and non-literate people. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, public historians turned increasingly to material culture studies to understand

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<sup>1</sup> “Material Culture.” *Merriam-Webster.com*. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/material%20culture>. Accessed October 12, 2023.

people left to the shadows. Countless homes, pieces of furniture, pottery, clothing, and textiles have been crafted by enslaved men and women in America; material culture studies help to tell their story. Women whose lives were dedicated to raising children and caring for their homes can be seen in the recipes handed down through generations, or in the jewelry and objects they once possessed. By studying these items, those who might have been silenced, instead have an opportunity to be heard.

Interpreting material culture is difficult. An archaeologist might view a potshard as evidence of habitation in a house and can examine the glaze and style to determine a time frame of residence, but an art historian might take the potshard and interpret it as handmade by a well-known artisan, tying it to a local person and creating an altogether different narrative. At historic house museums, for example, historic site interpreters often present the visitor with a range of options. They can tour the house and hear about the lives of the primary family (typically the ruling white family), or they can hear about the enslaved people who worked there, or sometimes they can hear about the unique decorative arts that adorn the house, and the architecture of the home. Sometimes in the fall, visitors can even get a special ghost tour that might focus on telling fantastical tales of people who have died in the home. This variation is an example of how one site, one object even, can have many stories. However, the stories always coexist, and it seems more prudent to include all of these elements into a singular story as they all shaped the fabric of reality at the site. That is what I have I tried to do here in my analysis of the Singleton-Chapman property in rural Bedford County, Tennessee.

To understand any given site or object, we should evaluate various elements surrounding it. To properly assess the Singleton-Chapman home, I have researched family life, architecture, and material culture to better convey the site to potential visitors.

In the first chapter, I focus on the primary inhabitants of the house; outlining the time spent in the home and the objects they left behind. The second chapter highlights George Singleton and the many roles he played at the site and in the Singleton family. The third chapter discusses the history of both of the Singleton families within Bedford County and their role in the world around them. The fourth and final chapter looks at the historic house itself, the many transformations it has undergone, and what it says about the family living within it. Through all of these chapters, my aim is to untangle the story of two families living and working at one site through the items they left behind and expose the intricate interactions between them to show the importance of telling these stories simultaneously.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Graham, et. al. *The Chapman-Singleton House, New Hope Baptist Church Cemetery, Union Ridge Cemetery, and Hord Chapel A.M.E. Church, Bedford County, TN: Historic Structure Report and Preservation Assessments*, MTSU. Center for Historic Preservation, 2023.

## Chapter One: The Singletons

By closely examining the objects within a home, historians can gain better insight into the character of individual family members. The Singleton house has sat largely untouched for roughly a decade, and thus still contains many of the family's possessions that have been passed down from generation to generation. It has rooms that are filled with Gilded Age, ornate cherry wood beds and marble-top dressers, trunks full of books and clothes, and Victorian, green-painted furniture with an artist's delicate work visible on the tall bedframe. Robert Jr.'s prosthetic leg was found discreetly placed in a cubby along the wall going upstairs, and a desk that belonged to him sits obstinately on the enclosed dogtrot porch, crammed full of old letters, journals, bills of sale, and so on.<sup>3</sup> These items fill the space and overwhelm the visitor with vivid images of ladies adorned in long bell-shaped dresses and heavy wool scarves. The large library that fills the parlor and overflows into the dogtrot screams that the inhabitants of this place were highly educated. While some of the books speak to a more sinister identity of white-supremacist beliefs, many of the others are timeless classics. All of these items, combined, spin a tale about who once loitered in these halls and slept on these beds. The objects that remain in this home give the now-deceased owners a visceral apparatus to be explored. These are the things they've left behind.

On October 18, 1854, the Singletons moved into their new home, the last and final home the family would move into after a bustling ramble throughout Tennessee. Elizabeth began a letter to her daughter Kate about the move on October 15<sup>th</sup> and later finished the letter on the 25<sup>th</sup>, where she declared that they had moved into the "Davis place" a week before and that she had been so busy with the move that she hadn't had

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<sup>3</sup> As mentioned by Danielle Chapman to CHP staff at site visit on July 12, 2022.

time to finish her letter until then.<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth's oldest children— Mary, Kate and Martha— were away at school during the move, but her four younger children were all underfoot.

Out of the objects brought into the home when the Singletons first arrived, only a handful remain today. Purportedly, the oldest item in the home can be found standing just outside the kitchen—the pie safe. The pie safe was described by descendant Danielle Chapman as hailing from Wilmington, North Carolina, when the Scott family (Elizabeth's parents) migrated to Tennessee. Its rudimentary construction of simple straight legs, rectangular shape, and basic joinery indicates that it could possibly fit into the early 1800 period associated with the Scott family's new residence in middle Tennessee. It also features standard materials associated with food safes. Pie safes were typically constructed with hard wood such as oak, ash, and pine; it is difficult to determine what type of wood was used to construct the Singleton safe as it was painted white at a date later than its original construction. These safes were also often designed with tin panels featuring carefully punched holes in a decorative pattern after 1830, earlier safes utilized course linen or wire mesh screens. The safe in the Singleton house contains wire mesh on the front door panels and on the right side, but a singular tin panel is in place on the left side, making it difficult to accurately date this object.<sup>5</sup> Wire mesh and tin panels were used to allow the heat from freshly baked food items like cakes, bread, and pies to release while the food item was still protected from insects or vermin. Releasing the heat instead of trapping it also helped prevent mold from forming

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<sup>4</sup> Letter from Elizabeth to Kate Singleton dated October 15 and 25, 1854, Katherine Orme Williams collection, Tennessee State Library and Archives.

<sup>5</sup> Ronald Hurst, and Jonathan Prown, *Southern Furniture 1680-1830: The Colonial Williamsburg Collection. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.* (Williamsburg, Virginia: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1997) 490-491.

on the food. Pie safes were replaced by iceboxes in the early 1900s, rendering them relics to a bygone time. This explains the pie safes current use as a storage shelf.



*Pie safe found in the hall outside kitchen at Singleton home. Photo taken by CHP staff.*

Other items that could potentially fall into the category of arriving when the Singletons first moved into the home include the small, circa-1840s Federal-style table with two drawers in the dining room, the circa-1840s Empire-style chest of drawers in the master bedroom, as well as the one in the bedroom connected to the dining room.



*Circa 1840s Empire Chest, In half bath (R), in bedroom next to dining room (L)*





*Pre-Civil War Federal Style Maple table. Photo Taken by CHP staff.*

The Singleton house is largely a women-dominated space. After Dr. Robert Singleton died in 1858, Elizabeth Singleton became the head of the house and remained in this role until her death in 1900.<sup>6</sup> Within these walls, she cultivated a home and her presence, along with her husband and children and the many descendants that came after them, can be found among the vast array of objects at the dwelling.

For a widowed woman in the 1860s to thrive, she initially would have been forced to rely upon the men in her family to support her in various ways. Following the death of her husband, her oldest son, Robert Jr., temporarily assumed a head-of-house role, but he joined the Confederate army in 1861 and was away from his home for the next four years.<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth then ran the farm through the war years; so, once Robert Jr. returned from the war disabled, due to the loss of his leg, she kept control of the property. Robert

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<sup>6</sup> "Robert L. Singleton," New Hope Cemetery, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/94482099/robert-l-singleton>; Sara Elizabeth Singleton Obituary." "Mrs. Elizabeth Singleton," *Bedford County Times*, August 17, 1900.

<sup>7</sup> Robert L. Singleton, Seventeenth Infantry, *Compiled Service Records of Confederate Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of Tennessee*, Record Group 109, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), fold3 (accessed Sept. 10, 2023).

Jr. soon, in fact, moved to Shelbyville after being elected as Bedford County Clerk.<sup>8</sup> As the daughter and wife of a farmer living in rural Tennessee, it was a natural transition for Elizabeth to take over. She clearly knew her way around farming and livestock, as indicated in her many letters to family and friends describing the daily tasks of churning butter, harvesting produce, and managing their many livestock.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, it was a role she was already, in many ways, performing. However, her business dealings, such as trading and selling, and the manual labor required to operate the farm, were always handled with the assistance of a male. A dear friend of the family, L.P. Fields, is often discussed in her letters when Elizabeth is considering selling livestock or farm produce. He also often acted as a liaison between her and her young sons.

Fields was there to assist Robert Jr. in selling the farm goods as well the farm hands in Columbus, Georgia, but he was also there to encourage Elizabeth's younger son John to stay in college at Notre Dame and to assist Elizabeth in making the necessary transactions to support him in receiving this prestigious education.<sup>10</sup> Fields was a friend of Dr. Robert Singleton and represented the family in local dealings as the executor of his will and through the continued support as a neighbor and friend. However, Elizabeth also came to rely on a family that she had formerly enslaved, the family of George and Barbara Singleton. They remained close to the family of their enslaver and continued to work on the farm after they were emancipated. Without their labor and help and likely that of other African Americans, Elizabeth would not have been able to maintain the farm.

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<sup>8</sup> Graham, et. al., *The Chapman-Singleton House, New Hope Baptist Church Cemetery, Union Ridge Cemetery, and Hord Chapel A.M.E. Church, Bedford County, TN: Historic Structure Report and Preservation Assessments*.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Singleton to Mother, January 21, 1838, and May 18, 1856, Katherine Orme Williams Collection and Leonard F. Chapman Collection, TSLA.

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Singleton to John Singleton, March 1, 1866, Katherine Orme Williams collection, TSLA.

Although Elizabeth required the assistance of men in the public sphere, within her home she was the designer, the creator, and director. Her presence can be seen in every room but especially in the parlor where the family's vast library inhabits two large cases. Her affinity for books began before she ever stepped into the home she made here. In the 1830s, when Elizabeth was a student and young woman, she wouldn't have been allowed to attend university, but her family did provide her with a proper education at a boarding school, which may have fostered her love for reading. In many of her letters to her mother she requested books and mentioned reading various titles. Shortly after marrying Robert Singleton, Elizabeth wrote home on December 18, 1835, and described her lodgings, stating: "I have a library in my room with a great many interesting books at my service whenever I am disposed to read and I can have company by just stepping in the next room."<sup>11</sup> Then, in a letter dated August 3, 1837, she wrote "I [have] got altogether out of anything to read but one or two of my school books which I [have] taken up again." It seems her passion for reading is one that continued to grow and was passed down to her children, as they, too, often referred to books in their own letters.

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<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth Singleton to Mother, December 18, 1835, Katherine Orme Williams Collection. TSLA.



*A portion of the Singleton Library found in the parlor.*

The parlor library contains just a portion of the books to be found in the home. In the enclosed dogtrot, shelves have been crafted to store even more of the collection, and in an upstairs bedroom more shelves have been fitted to hold yet another portion. From this expansive collection of hundreds of volumes, one can see that the members of this family greatly enjoyed reading and highly valued education. Many of the titles were popular primarily in their age, like Sir Walter Scott's "Waverley Collection" of thirty-eight books (all of which are among the Singleton collection); Scott has been called the Scottish father of historical fiction. Many other classics like the twelve-book "Students Handy Shakespeare Collection," can be found in the Singleton home.<sup>12</sup>



*Entire Collection of Sir Walter Scott's books. Photo taken by CHP staff.*

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<sup>12</sup> Graham, et. al. "The Chapman-Singleton House,"



*Student's Handy Shakespeare entire collection. Photo taken by CHP staff.*

Music was important to the Singletons. The Singleton women acquired an 1873 Chickering piano and a music stand, now overflowing with sheet music for their use—both for entertaining guests and for their own enjoyment. Each Singleton girl was sent to boarding school and educated in etiquette skills.<sup>13</sup> Learning to play piano and sing were customary pieces of a Victorian woman's education, and therefore it is highly likely that each lady in the home was capable of playing the piano and possibly even accompanied one another at times. Interestingly, there is a book for guitar music within the music stand but no guitar now in the house.

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<sup>13</sup> "My Dear Martha," April 17, 1861, "My Dear Kate," March 15, 1857, Katherine Orme Williams, TSLA.



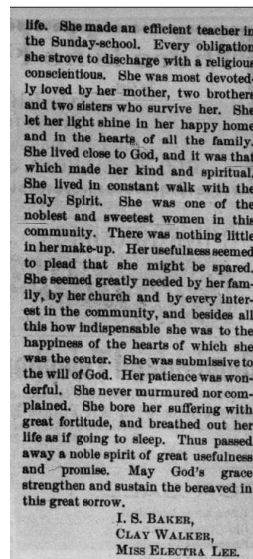
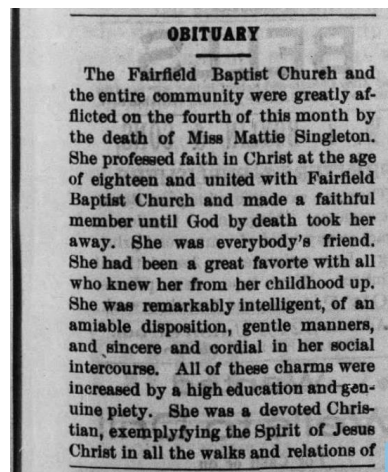
*Chickering Piano, 1873, in the Singleton home*



*Circa 1880 Music Stand with sheet music*

Family members often wrote to each other while they were away from home. Through these letters, we are able to get a glimpse of each individual, and through their belongings left in the house, we can infer even more. Robert and Elizabeth's oldest child, Martha, was born May 12, 1836; she was affectionately called Mattie by her family and friends in many of their letters to her. She spent her life living at the Singleton

residence and never married. She died on November 4, 1898, at the age of sixty-two. In her obituary, she was described as a devoted Christian and faithful member of the Fairfield Baptist Church where she taught Sunday school. She was a fastidious and studious lady who seemed to be a great help to all of her family.<sup>14</sup> Her headstone reads: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth. “Yea,” saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them” a passage from the book of Revelation in the Bible.<sup>15</sup> Within the vast array of things in the home, a subscription to a Christian magazine can be found. It’s likely that Mattie was the subscriber and supporter of such a subscription.



*Obituary for Martha Singleton. Photo from Baptist and Reflector.*

<sup>14</sup> “Obituary,” *Baptist and Reflector*, December 1, 1898. A lengthy obituary was written by her peers and published in this paper describing her as intelligent and as “one of the noblest and sweetest women in the community.”

<sup>15</sup> Revelation 14:13. The Bible; Find-A-Grave.com.

[https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/94582919/martha-d-singleton?.](https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/94582919/martha-d-singleton?), accessed October 5, 2023.



Robert and Elizabeth's next child, Mary, was born on April 21, 1838.<sup>16</sup> She married Alexander Alvin "A.A." Cooper on October 7, 1862.<sup>17</sup> Cooper was a family friend who worked closely with her brother Robert L. Singleton as a Deputy Clerk for Bedford County in Shelbyville and during the Civil War had been a Confederate purchasing agent.<sup>18</sup> The Coopers were also a well-known, founding family of the area. Mary and A.A. had five children in total, Robert S., Harry V., Alexander A. (Jr), Constance "Connie" Orme, and Elizabeth "Sarah".<sup>19</sup> Young Alexander A. Cooper Jr died at the age of thirteen, but their remaining four children all lived well into adulthood.<sup>20</sup> No known items can be attributed to Mary in the Singleton house as she had her own home and likely took most of her belongings with her when she married. In the 1908 last will and testament devised by Mary and A.A. they left their home, furniture, and kitchen furnishings to their unmarried daughter E. Sara Cooper.<sup>21</sup>

The third daughter of Robert and Elizabeth Singleton, Catherine, was born on January 29, 1840, and died October 23, 1890. In her last will and testament, she divided her belongings among family members, wishing Mary's oldest son, Robert, to take charge of her land and belongings. She willed her bureau and trunk to her sister Mattie, her jewelry to her niece Constance "Connie," and lastly her fine dress to Barbara

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<sup>16</sup> Family Bible records, Katherine Orme Williams Collection, TSLA.

<sup>17</sup> "Mary Singleton" in Tennessee Marriage Records 1780-2002, Ancestry.com, <https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/5202357:1169?tid=188910097&pid=212449233618>, accessed September 15, 2023.

<sup>18</sup> Katherine Orme Williams Collection, TSLA.

<sup>19</sup> 1880 Census for "A.A. Cooper," Ancestry.com. <https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/10235087:6742>, accessed October 5, 2023. There are several records (census and obituaries) misidentifying the names of the children but this one appears to be the most accurate. Constance Orme's daughter is who provided the Katherine Orme Williams collection to TSLA.

<sup>20</sup> Alexander Alvin Cooper Jr., Find-A-Grave.com, accessed September 15, 2023, [https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/94638500/alexander-alvin-cooper?\\_](https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/94638500/alexander-alvin-cooper?_); 1900 Census Record. "A.A. Cooper," accessed September 15, 2023, <https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/59963182:7602>.

<sup>21</sup>"Mary Cooper," Tennessee, U.S., Wills and Probate Records, 1779-2008, Ancestry.com.

Singleton, wife of George.<sup>22</sup> At the time of both Mattie and Kate's deaths, they were living in the Singleton residence. Therefore, it's possible that the bureau and trunk described in Kate's will is still within the home. There are only three bureaus in the home, two of which belong to a set of bedroom furniture. The last bureau can be found in the room connected to the dining room which holds an iron-framed, single-sized bed, a small writing desk, a circa-1930s folding card table,<sup>23</sup> and an 1840s Empire dresser. The bureau's two doors encase beveled mirrors and a locking mechanism; on its top is a tall ornate crown-molded piece, and beneath the doors lies a single drawer. There is no trunk in this room but there are five trunks throughout the house, one is engraved with Leonard Chapman's name, clearly belonging to him, one resembles a crate box, more than a trunk, but the other three are of a fine, feminine quality and could have easily belonged to Kate and then Mattie.

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<sup>22</sup> "Kate Singleton will," Tennessee, U.S. Wills and Probate Records 1779-2008, Ancestry.com. <https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/9176>, accessed September 1, 2023.

<sup>23</sup> *Card and Game Tables*. Catalog number 18. Ferguson Brothers Mfg Co. Hoboken Historical Museum Collections, <https://hoboken.pastperfectonline.com/archive/AE733144-73BA-4D6C-AFCF-673996778149>, accessed October 5, 2023.



*Two possible chests that could have belonged to Kate Singleton. Photo taken by CHP staff.*



*Wardrobe possibly belonged to Kate Singleton. Photo taken by CHP staff.*

The Singletons' next child, and first son, was Robert Lipscomb Jr.; he was born on September 29, 1842. He and his wife Sallie would be the last to call the Singleton place home. He began buying shares of the farm from family members beginning in 1903 and moved into the home with his family during this time. The family would live at the home until Robert Jr's death in 1919. As the last people to reside in the house full-time, much of the furniture now within the dwelling can be attributed to them and their

descendants, who continue to live in the home part time. The walnut desk with a green leather insert in the dogtrot appears to be a remnant from Robert Jr., the county clerk. It is a Wells Fargo desk, perhaps a gift or a purchase arranged between Robert and his sister and brother-in-law the Coopers, as their son, Harry, was a Wells Fargo agent.<sup>24</sup> At one time the desk contained land deeds, Confederate money, birthday cards, and even a diary written by John Scott detailing his livestock and the births and deaths of enslaved people he owned.<sup>25</sup> Today it holds land deeds, tax records, marriage certificates, photo albums, and railroad itineraries from the twentieth century. Robert Jr.'s framed portrait sits directly above it; it is the lone portrait hanging on the walls in the home of any family member. These items are relics of the masculine figure of the house, speaking to his work and importance as the head of his household.

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<sup>24</sup> Katherine Orme Williams Collection, TSLA; "Wells Fargo Mahogany Desk Circa 1900," <https://www.rejuvenation.com/products/wells-fargo-mahogany-desk-circa-1900>, accessed October 7, 2023.

<sup>25</sup> Danielle Chapman, "Many Singletons: War, Ownership, and Family Ties in Tennessee." *Oxford American*, Issue 102, September 2, 2018, 9-10. <https://oxfordamerican.org/magazine/issue-102-fall-2018/many-singletons>, accessed September 3, 2023.



*Portrait of Robert Singleton and Wells Fargo Desk in Singleton home. Photo taken by CHP staff.*



*Example of Wells Fargo Desk c. 1900. Photo provided by Williams-Sonoma.*

After Robert came Sally, born Sarah Isabella on February 14, 1845. Sally lived in the home with her mother until her mother's death in 1900. Then Sally moved in with her sister Mary Cooper. It's possible that Sally lived in the home on her own after the death of her mother and before moving in with her sister Mary. Once she vacated the premises, Robert and his family moved in. After her brother Robert passed away and his wife Sallie sold the family's land, she filed a suit against her sister-in-law for the interest due to her for the lands she still owned, suggesting that the two women were not on good terms. Sally died on March 18, 1927, and is buried next to her mother at New Hope Cemetery.

John Singleton was born on April 13, 1847. John attended Notre Dame college and earned a degree in art. He was an adventurer by nature, finding his way to

California by 1880, when he was working as a carpenter.<sup>26</sup> John found success when he discovered gold in 1895 at what would become the Yellow Aster gold mine in Randsburg, California. This discovery made him one of the wealthiest men in California; however, by the time of his death his wealth would be vastly depleted.<sup>27</sup> He lived a scandalous life, marrying twice, once to a woman nearly forty years younger, named Stella. Stella was a maid at the hotel John was staying in when the pair met, and a romance was sparked. However, the couple's romance was short-lived, and they separated in 1906.<sup>28</sup> He had two children, a son Edward, who died tragically of a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head in 1902<sup>29</sup> and one adopted daughter, Margaret, who he adopted in 1908.<sup>30</sup> He spent the rest of his days in California until his death on April 27, 1914. He is buried with his family at New Hope Cemetery, where his headstone names him as the joint discoverer of the Yellow Aster gold mine. He left \$50,000 to each of his living siblings, Robert, Mary, and Sally.<sup>31</sup> His mother retained his diplomas from Notre Dame; they can

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<sup>26</sup> "John Singleton," 1880 United States Federal Census, Ancestry.com.

<sup>27</sup> "Death of John Singleton in South," *Oakland Tribune*, May 31, 1914, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/79669518/?terms=%22John%20Singleton%22&match=1>, accessed October 5, 2023.

<sup>28</sup> "Miner and Wife's Ways Run Apart," *The Los Angeles Times*, July 14, 1906, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-los-angeles-times-john-singleton-di/133007534/>

<sup>29</sup> "Dies by His Own Hand," *Los Angeles Evening Express*, March 13, 1902, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/607751003/?terms=%22John%20Singleton%22&match=1>, accessed October 5, 2023.

<sup>30</sup> "Will of John Singleton," *The Tehachapi News*, June 20, 1914, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/835127285/?terms=%22Margaret%20Singleton%22%20&match=1>, accessed October 14, 2023; "Is Prima Donna at age of Ten." *The Sacramento Star*. September 15, 1915, [https://www.newspapers.com/image/607420097/?match=1&clipping\\_id=133433481](https://www.newspapers.com/image/607420097/?match=1&clipping_id=133433481), accessed October 14, 2023.

<sup>31</sup> "Leaves Fortune to Bedford Countians," *Tennessean*, June 4, 1914, <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-tennessean-john-sehorn-singleton-lea/131799439/>, accessed October 5, 2023.

now be found in the collection of items donated by his great niece, Katherine Orme Williams, at the Tennessee State Library and Archives.<sup>32</sup>

SATURDAY MORNING, JULY 14, 1906.

## MINER AND WIFE'S WAYS RUN APART.

*Romantically United, the Singletons Seek a Prosaic Separation for Year, and Maybe Forever—Royal Is Millionaire Husband's Settlement.*

JOHN Singleton, aged about 30 years, some time a poor prospector and later a millionaire and now a resident in his apartments in the Van Nuys Hotel, and receives his wife to all others.

Mrs. John Singleton, aged 23 years, healthy, rosy and with the fire of bounding health in her veins, is quick to see the waywardness of the continent carrying with her a heavy bundle of certificates of stock in the famous rich Yellow Aster gold mine.

Mr. and Mrs. Singleton have separated as husband and wife, and the romantic story of the miner and the mill owner ended.

The separation is for the period of one year, with the understanding that if both parties are of the same mind at the end of the year the thing will be made permanent.

Mrs. Singleton will receive money and literature in Europe, and endeavor to give out an afternoon upon the Internet.

At 4 per cent of a paltry \$100,000 for the coming year, Singleton will remain in Los Angeles and do his best to regain his health, for he is now a very sick man.

The separation of the Singletons, which as a country reporter in Angeles, and was accomplished very quietly and with the utmost pleasantness from both sides.

**MILESTONE IN CAREER.**  
This separation from the wife of his old age marks but another milestone in the romantic career of Singleton. From the day when he was grub-

staked about twice a year to prospect in the California goldfields up to the time he came upon the fabulously rich Yellow Aster, which made Handberg one of the standard mining corporations of the gold-bearing days, through the divorce proceedings against the wife of his power days, and up to his marriage to the golden-haired maid from Seattle, John Singleton led a life filled with stirring incidents and romantic actions, and finally capped the climax a few years ago by making a soul-

stirring splash into the inner circles of Los Angeles society.

The discovery of the Yellow Aster gold mine a score of years ago was the source of Singleton's wealth. In company with a man named Moore and another named Handberg, Singleton struck "big dirt" when Handberg saw steady. The mine is one of the richest in California, and it poured untold wealth upon the three poor prospectors. Time and again they were urged by corporate wealth to sell out, but refused and worked the mine privately.

The success of the strike caused the great rush of gold-seekers to the coast, and Handberg was founded almost in a night.

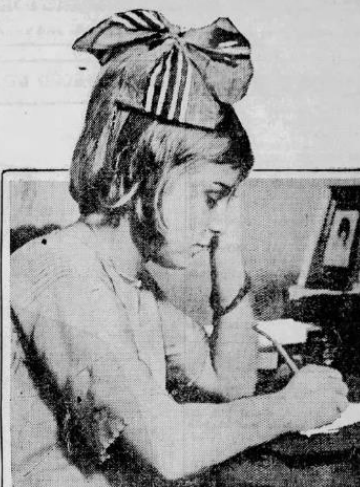
**ENTER THE PRETTY MAID.**  
Some time prior to this discovery Singleton had been divorced from his first wife. With the coming of unlimited wealth Singleton became widely known on the Pacific Coast as a man with a "heart," who was known in opening of Los Angeles, San Francisco and other cities. He had a fine physique and a stirring personality, and his two parties were stilling the story of the Yellow Aster and its seemingly unlimited gold.

These halcyon days soon passed upon Singleton and the state of single life grew wearisome. About this time he




MR. AND MRS. JOHN SINGLETON, who have parted for a year with the understanding that the separation may be made permanent, and "Singleton

### IS PRIMA DONNA AT AGE OF TEN



MARGARET LILLIAN SINGLETON, ten year old prodigy, who sings difficult arias in French and English, speaks French fluently and is familiar with Shakespeare's plays. Heir to a quarter of the famed Yellow Aster mine estate, Margaret has already spent five years studying music and languages in the Convent of Roule in Brussels. The war sent the child home to Los Angeles, Cal., where a court decree gives her \$14,000 to be spent on her education during the next eleven years. She was adopted in Jersey City in 1908 by John Singleton, who left her one-fourth of his estate at his death.

John, wife Stella, adopted daughter Margaret, and their large home known as Singleton Court featured in California newspapers. Photo credit to Newspapers.com

The last child was Fannie, born in December 1853. She married Fred "Jeter" Martin on May 2, 1877,<sup>33</sup> and together they had two children. Their oldest child, a

<sup>32</sup> Katherine Orme Williams Collection, TSLA.

<sup>33</sup> "Tennessee Marriage Records, 1780-2002, for Fanny Singleton,"

[https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/1169/images/VRMUSATN1780\\_026643-00661?pid=5206614](https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/1169/images/VRMUSATN1780_026643-00661?pid=5206614), accessed September 27, 2023.



daughter named Rosamond, died just ten days after she was born.<sup>34</sup> Their second child, Fred, would live into adulthood. Jeter and Fannie lived close by her mother and sisters, and Jeter helped Elizabeth work the farm. It's unlikely that the couple lived in the Singleton house as they are listed as living in a separate residence on the 1880 Census, but they likely lived within walking distance, perhaps in the caretaker's cottage.<sup>35</sup>

Fannie was an avid letter-writer and often fretted over small details. She became sick sometime after marrying Jeter and began seeking medical care, which meant she spent a lot of time away from home and her family. At one point, she was staying at the Saint Margaret's Hospital in Nashville, which was a Catholic organization ran by nuns and doctors. While staying there in 1880, she wrote a letter to her mother asking her to get three yards of fabric out of Jeter's trunk and ribbon from the second drawer of her bureau.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps one of the feminine-styled trunks in the Singleton home belonged to Fannie. Fannie died on June 16, 1893, with the cause of death listed on her death certificate as "Ner exhaustion" (i.e. nervous exhaustion.)<sup>37</sup> Jeter and Fred remained in the area but no longer lived on the Singleton farm, which saddened Elizabeth and Fannie's sisters who missed Fred.<sup>38</sup> Jeter remarried in 1900 before his death in 1905. Fannie and Jeter's son, Fred, eventually moved to Seattle, Washington, where he worked as a timekeeper. He died on July 29, 1905, by his own hand at the age of 21.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> New Hope Cemetery site visit, April 20, 2023.

<sup>35</sup> "1880 Census for F.J. Martin," <https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/15095786:6742>, accessed September 14, 2023.

<sup>36</sup> Katherine Orme Williams collection, TSLA.

<sup>37</sup> "Tennessee, U.S., City Death Records, 1872-1923 for Fannie S Marton." <https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/2527683:5076>. Accessed September 27, 2023.

<sup>38</sup> Letters between John Singleton and Elizabeth Singleton. Leonard Chapman Collection, TSLA.

<sup>39</sup> "Washington, U.S., Death Records, 1883-1960 for Fred S Martin," <https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/94409:1208>, accessed October 14, 2023.

## The Next Generation

After the death of matriarch Elizabeth Singleton, Robert Jr and his family moved into the home. Much of the furniture in the home today dates to between 1870 and 1920. Most likely Sally, the wife of Robert Jr., brought in their family's belongings when moving in and probably even purchased additional items to furnish the home according to her taste and needs at the time. Danielle Chapman, Sally's great-great granddaughter, described the green furniture in the front guest room as a French bedroom suite ordered from France. More likely, it was probably ordered from a furniture store here in the U.S. and Sally brought it with her into the home when they moved in. Sally also may have brought in the large rectangular dining table, ornate mirrored hutch, and glass china cabinet now found in the dining room. These items are all coordinated and made of oak; however, only the hutch has a maker's label to identify its origin from A.J. Warren's furniture store in Nashville. Nonetheless, due to their similar style, dates of origin, and grouping in the same room, it's possible that these items were all purchased together from the same store.

The glass china cabinet is topped with a decorative piece displaying a small inlaid mirror with beveled edges and scrolling woodwork for a simple yet elegant design. It also has two rows of plate runners, which allow owners to stand plates upright and display the family's fine china. Typically, if two runners are present, it is meant to display a large "dinner" plate in the back and the small "salad" plate directly in front of that. The cabinet in the Singleton home does not have any china standing upright in the cabinet; rather much of the china housed in the cabinet is an eclectic mixture of various styles, indicating a multi-generational collection. The glass is cracked on the left side of the

piece, and a second latch for locking has been added, perhaps because the key to the original lock was misplaced.



*Oak China Cabinet in Singleton Home, displaying crack in glass, two rows of plate runners, and additional latch. Photos taken by CHP staff.*

The dining table is an expandable square table that can hold up to three leaves, which likely measure between eleven and twelve inches each. These leaves allow the table to seat up to eight people when in use. Without the leaves, the table is a perfect square, suitable for four diners. One of the leaves has been altered to feature a lazy susan and this leaf currently sits in the center of the table. The lazy susan was bolted to the table, likely in the late twentieth century. Based on the moderately ornate design featured in the table it dates to the late 1890s to early 1900s. The set of twelve chairs found around the table and throughout the house are made of a dark cherry wood with brass adornments, and a bold green pseudo leather seat. Out of the set of twelve, eight sit around the table—including the two captain's chairs on each end of the table. Of the remaining four, two can be found in the corners of the dining room, and two can be found in the dogtrot area. They appear to date from the same period but do not match the table in seating arrangement, wood, or style so were likely not purchased with the table.



*Oak Dining Table displaying inserted leaves and attached lazy susan in center of table (R). Captain's chair from set of twelve in home (L). Photo taken by CHP staff.*

The hutch is a product of A.J. Warren's furniture and mattress wholesale business in downtown Nashville. The company used to be known as Weakley and Warren until Warren bought out Weakley in 1892 and started his own company, A.J. Warren Furniture. He advertised his stock of furniture as the best goods at the best/lowest price.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, the item featured in the Chapman-Singleton family's dining room was probably purchased in the late 1890s to early 1900s. It is a solid oak piece with three bottom cupboards and three drawers, one of which contains dividers to separate serving ware. This hutch also contained locking mechanisms on several of the drawers and cupboards; these locks were often used to prevent theft of finer dining china, such as silver serving ware. The hutch is ornately designed with added wooden motifs along the bottom cupboards and beautifully fluted columns to run alongside the double-mirrored top. The top piece is extravagantly designed with a cornice in the center, surrounded by two dragon heads facing outward. The entire piece sits on wooden wheels, allowing for easy maneuvering.

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<sup>40</sup> "Announcement Extraordinary," *The Baptist and Reflector*, May 26, 1892, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/586707348/?terms=A.%20J.%20Weakley%20warren&match=1>, accessed Dec. 9, 2022.



*Dining room Hutch from A.J. Warren's. Photo taken by CHP staff.*



*Post Card showing A.J. Warren Furniture Store in downtown Nashville. Photo taken by Amy NeeSmith.*

Other various items throughout the house can be attributed to Sally, one item of particular interest was the fireless cooker. The Ideal brand by The Toledo Cooker Co. produced fireless cookers, a precursor to today's crockpot, beginning in 1900 with heated soap stones. The logo of this brand can be found on the metal tag located on the front of the fireless cooker. The soap stones would be heated over stoves or fireplaces and then placed in the bottom of the well, which was then covered by the aluminum compartment that could be filled with a variety of food items, including meats,

vegetables, pastries, and bread. They could then be sealed with the included watertight lids and left to cook for up to 8 hours. The oak box was lined with an aluminum insert that was insulated with asbestos. Once electricity became widely available, the company offered an electric version. However, the Singleton version predates that and was produced in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>41</sup>

These fireless cookers were preferred to save on fuel, as well as to keep the temperature of the kitchen down during the hot summer months. It often came with a recipe book and tongs to use when removing the aluminum containers. The fireless cooker at the Chapman-Singleton house does not appear to have these extra items. A fireless cooker like this would have most likely been an item the family ordered and had delivered to their home after seeing it advertised in a magazine or a newspaper article, or possibly after seeing a traveling salesman perform a demonstration.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Terry Kovel, "Collectors' Concerns: Toledo Cooker," Feb. 23, 2011, <https://www.kovels.com/kovels-komments/collectors-concerns/toledo-cooker.html>, accessed November 2, 2022.

<sup>42</sup> Author unknown, "A Fireless Cooker: Demonstration being Given at Watt and Shands Store by Cooking Expert," *The Lancaster Daily Intelligencer*, March 18, 1914, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/556614402/?terms=fireless%20cooker&match=1>, accessed November 28, 2022.



*Fireless cooker in Singleton home. Photos taken by CHP staff.*

Sally probably also reconfigured the rooms in a way that best suited her family's needs. At the beginning of the twentieth century, her family consisted of her husband Robert Jr, herself, and their daughter Clare, as the two older boys had moved away from home on their own. Their daughter Clare would continue to use the home as a summer vacation house after her parents died and was described as "having many antiques and very old documents telling of land grants to various people after Tennessee became a state" in a 1970s county publication.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Paul Cross and Timothy Marsh, et al, "The Singleton Tavern," *The Bedford County Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 3 (Spring 1977): 18 Shelbyville, TN. NOTE: another publication (Bedford County Historical Society, *Doors to the Past: Homes of Shelbyville and Bedford County* (Shelbyville, TN: The Society, 1969), p. 57.) states "Mrs. Chapman [Clare] furnished the home with antiques," suggesting that Clare may have brought in other antiques. While this is possible, this is the only suggestion of Clare adding antiques to the house, so it is my belief that the writer misunderstood, and that Clare was decorating with antiques already in the home for the most part.

One item that Clare is credited with bringing into the home is the 1915 record player and the vast collection of records located in the dining room. From 1917-1924, Clare is known to have lived on the property part-time with her young family to help her ailing parents and infirm brother, John Sehorn Singleton.<sup>44</sup> According to Danielle Chapman, Clare's great-granddaughter, Clare brought in the record player and records.<sup>45</sup> The record player is a 1915 Model-A Edison Diamond Disc phonograph featuring a crank handle. By the early 1910s records were beginning to overtake the traditional cylinders, and households across the United States were investing in record players over the cylinder phonographs, much to Thomas Edison's chagrin. He reluctantly began to develop a record player in 1912 and by 1915 released the A-100 model.<sup>46</sup> At its opening, it was dubbed "the new standard," but its design was not well received and by the end of 1915, it was the cheapest phonograph on the market.<sup>47</sup> Undoubtedly the record player provided the Chapman and Singleton family with endless entertainment due to their vast library of records.

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<sup>44</sup> "Clare Chapman," 1880 United States Federal Census,

<sup>45</sup> Site visit July 12, 2022. CHP Staff; Graham, et. al. "The Chapman-Singleton House."

<sup>46</sup> "History of the Edison Disc Phonograph," Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/edison-company-motion-pictures-and-sound-recordings/articles-and-essays/history-of-edison-sound-recordings/history-of-the-edison-disc-phonograph/>. (Accessed November 4, 2023).

<sup>47</sup> George L. Frow, *The Edison Disc Phonographs and the Diamond Discs* (Sevenoaks, Kent, Great Britain: Flo-Print, 1982), 43.





*Edison Disc Phonograph 1915: Model A-100. Photo taken by CHP staff.*

The record collection is kept in a large chest, possibly a previous blanket chest that was turned into a record stand and fitted with legs. The rear left leg has broken off and has been replaced by two pieces of board propped beneath the chest to help support the weight of the records. Enclosed in the chest is a list that was partially handwritten and partially typed on a typewriter of the titles within. The collection has records that date as far back as the 1890s, the oldest record being “The Last Hope - Religious Meditation,” by Vesella’s Italian Band, which dates to 1897. The newest record “Oh What a Beautiful Morning (A) | Oklahoma (B),” by Alfred Drake, from the musical *Oklahoma* dates to 1943, indicating that the family continually added to their collection over time.<sup>48</sup>

Clare’s son Leonard spent his early childhood and many summers at the home and forever remembered it fondly. He enrolled at the University of Florida in 1931 and graduated in 1935 with a degree in mathematics. Upon graduating from the university, he was selected as the recipient of a Marine Corps officers’ commission, beginning his

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<sup>48</sup> Graham, et. al., “The Chapman-Singleton House.”

long career in the Marines. Reflecting upon receiving the commission in a 1967 interview for the *Tampa Tribune* newspaper, he stated:

“I had always been interested in the military. My grandfather was a private in the Confederate Army. Besides that was the bottom of the depression, you know, and there weren’t all that many opportunities. The \$125 a month the Marine Corps was offering was really a top wage for a college graduate.”<sup>49</sup>

During his early career he served as the lieutenant of the USS Astoria, overseeing the Marine detachment onboard; he was serving in this role when WWII began.<sup>50</sup> He married Emily Donelson Ford of Birmingham, Alabama, on December 27, 1937.<sup>51</sup> The couple had two sons—Leonard III and Walton, both of whom went on to serve in the Marines. Leonard Chapman Jr. attained the highest-ranking position available to a marine when he was appointed the twenty-fourth commandant of the marines by Lyndon B. Johnson in 1967.<sup>52</sup> He served in this role from 1967-1972. During his time as commandant, the United States was experiencing massive social change as the Civil Rights Movement swept through the nation. It was no different within the Marine Corps; Chapman faced division among the troops over the topic of race. In response to this division, he loosened the requirements for close-cut hair, allowing the more popular Afro style among African Americans at the time.<sup>53</sup> After retiring from the position of commandant in 1972, he moved back to his home state of Florida and took on the role of

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<sup>49</sup> Charles Stafford, “No. 2 Marine,” *The Tampa Tribune*, August 6, 1967, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/331587247/>, accessed October 30, 2023.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid

<sup>51</sup> “County Marriage Records, 1805-1967 for Leonard Fielding Chapman,” Ancestry.com.

<sup>52</sup> “LBJ picks Chapman as Head of Marines,” *The Fresno Bee*, December 5, 1967, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/703097806/?terms=Leonard%20F.%20Chapman&match=1>, accessed November 4, 2023.

<sup>53</sup> “Marines Order Steps-Taken to Ease Racial Tensions,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, September 4, 1969, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/829458932/?terms=%22Leonard%20F.%20Chapman%22%20%22Afro%22>, accessed October 28, 2023.

commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization Service in Miami; a position he was appointed to by President Richard Nixon.<sup>54</sup>

Chapman continued the tradition begun by his mother, Clare, and returned to the historic home in Fairfield in the summer months. Several objects found in the home can be linked to Leonard Chapman, notably the cedar chest with his name and rank engraved on the top, which is located in the primary bedroom. He died on January 6, 2001, in Falls Church, Virginia and is buried in the Arlington National Cemetery next to his wife and son Leonard Chapman III.<sup>55</sup>



*L.F. Chapman cedar chest in Singleton home. Photo taken by CHP staff.*

Leonard Chapman Jr's son, Leonard III died tragically in 1979 when an earthquake struck while he, his wife, and some friends were scuba diving off the coast of

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<sup>54</sup> "General Leonard Chapman Jr.: Oversaw Pullout of Last Marines in Vietnam," *The Miami Herald*, Jan 10, 2000.  
<https://www.newspapers.com/image/642977433/?terms=%22Leonard%20F.%20Chapman%22&match=1>, accessed October 28, 2023.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

Okinawa, Japan, where he was stationed. He left behind a daughter, three-year-old Danielle. After the death of her father, her grandfather Leonard Chapman Jr, took on the father figure role in Danielle's life, which meant she came along on the summertime trips to Fairfield. These idyllic summers were framed by the stories her "Papa" told her about her family's history.<sup>56</sup> She now lives in Hamden, Connecticut, with her husband and twin daughters and works as an English professor at Yale University. In 2015 she published a book of poetry titled *Delinquent Palaces*, and has also had several short stories about her experiences at the home in Fairfield featured in various publications.<sup>57</sup> In 2022, she reached out to the Center for Historic Preservation at MTSU for advice on preserving the home and possibly opening it up to visitors to tell the unique story of all the Singletons who can trace their ancestors to this historic site. This is what led to my study of the site and the many people connected to it, including the white and Black Singleton families. Today, the two families are acquainted with each other and have each participated in the others' family reunions, some of which occurred at the historic home in Fairfield.

The treasures of a well-lived life are often all that remain when people pass from this life to the next. As the tangible objects that helped people from the past traverse an ever-changing social, political, and economic landscape, artifacts found in historic houses are products of their time and markers of perceptions and inventions. Items passed down through generations show the value placed on family, as well as the longevity of a family's time in a certain place. These possessions can tell us tales about their former owners and provide insights into their lives beyond the written

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<sup>56</sup> Chapman, "Many Singletons"

<sup>57</sup> Danielle Chapman, "Danielle Chapman: About," <http://daniellechapman.net/about.php>. Accessed November 4, 2023.

word. Studying them within their proper context can provide historians with a wealth of information.

## Chapter Two: George Singleton Family

From their first arrival on the soil of what is now known as the Singleton Tavern, the Singleton family traveled with and coexisted alongside individuals who had no choice in their destination, endeavors, or even their future. When the Singletons arrived in the 1830s, they arrived with enslaved people whose destiny was to work the land or be sold and traded for cash or services whenever the Singletons had need. The numerous transactions of such labor is documented in countless letters between family, friends, and acquaintances inquiring about possible trades or alerting the family of new “negroes for sale” at estate sales and auctions.

Date	Description	Amount
1815	Balance over	244.02
Oct 7	1/2 yr Bullion	75
	3 Bolls corn	2.40
	hire of bearing in 1/2 year	18.22
	hire of 1/2 yr of 1815	317.99
	hire of 1/2 yr of 1814	120
	hire of John & Lewis from June 1, 1814 to June 1, 1815	50
	hire of 1/2 yr of 1815	26.67
	hire of 1/2 yr of 1814	10.50
	hire of 1/2 yr of 1815	22.97
	hire of 1/2 yr of 1814	104
	due to	391.17
	due to	38.25
	due to	353.50
	due to	406.68
	due to	386.50
	due to	19.60
	due to	62.78

Account record detailing the Scott family's bills, for "sundries" and credits "for hire of John and Lewis from June 1, 1814, to June 1, 1815." Photo taken by Amy NeeSmith.

Another example of this can be found in a letter from November 5, 1846, between John Scott and Robert Singleton. John Scott wrote and described the family's

recent financial endeavors and standing. At one point John stated that his son Thomas's credit has been injured by a Mr. Hancock and that "if [he] will draw on him in 4 or 6 months for the rent of Josh (an enslaved man) he will endeavor to pay so that whatever Fanny (an enslaved woman) sells for will go towards paying Hancock."<sup>58</sup> This example provides a practical look at the way enslavers viewed the human chattel they possessed and how they made decisions in regard to their hired labor and sales.

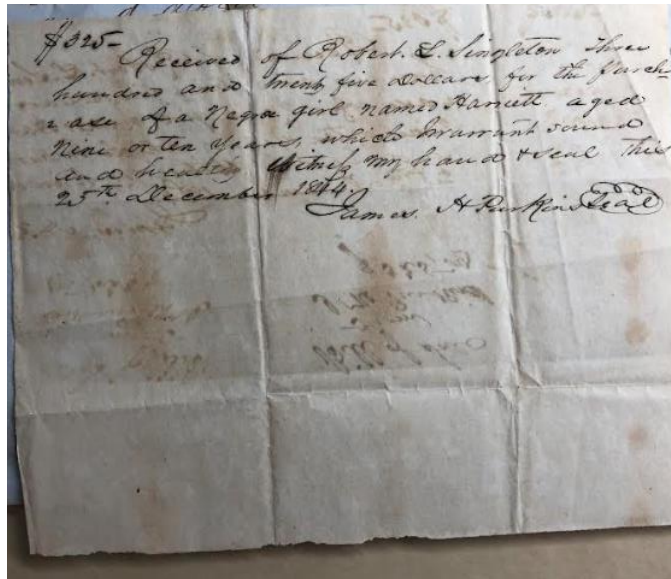
The most prolific tradesman would be the doctor, Robert L. Singleton, who was described in one letter by Samuel W. Smith dated July 1850 as "a trading man whenever [he] could get a chance and sometimes without a chance."<sup>59</sup> Smith was writing to Robert from Columbia, Tennessee to enquire about a potential purchase and this phrase suggests that Robert was very enmeshed in the practice of slave-trading.<sup>60</sup> Robert also often brokered deals for sundries and other household items, with payment being the sale of the labor of the enslaved people in his possession. Sales of the enslaved Black families meant separating them for months or sometimes a year to pay for sundries and other items purchased for the white family or the running of the farm. All that can be determined about this host of individuals can be found in the numerous bills of sale within the Leonard F. Chapman Jr. family papers at Tennessee State Library and Archives. The bills of sale contain only a scant amount of information about these individuals including their age, sex, trade and the price that was paid for their bondage. Some bills of sale were for children as young as five years old, who came alone, while others were for blacksmiths who would be put to work in the mills and on the farm.

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<sup>58</sup> "Letter from John Scott to Robert Singleton," November 5, 1846, Leonard Chapman Collection, TSLA.

<sup>59</sup> "S.W. Smith, Columbia, to Dr. Singleton," July 21, 1850, Leonard Chapman Family Papers, TSLA.

<sup>60</sup> Graham et al, "The Chapman-Singleton House."



*Bill of sale to Robert Singleton "for purchase of Harriet, a girl nine or ten years old." Photo taken by Amy NeeSmith.*

This transactional relationship between master and slave is how things operated on the Singleton farm until the Confederacy was defeated at the end of the Civil War and enslaved people gained freedom and the right to pursue their own happiness. After the Civil War, the white Singleton family's relationship with the enslaved people on their land changed; this change can be seen most evidently in their continued relationship with George Singleton.

The tale of George Singleton is a singular story of bravery, compassion, and strength. George started his life on the Singleton farm in Bedford County Tennessee, the son of enslaved parents Jack and Kittie, on October 4, 1841. He grew up in the household of his master and enslaver, Dr. Robert L. Singleton; he spent his youth likely working but also serving as the designated playmate of the doctor's oldest son, Robert Singleton, Jr. The two boys were separated in age by only one year. As teenagers, Robert Jr. went away to school, while George was required to remain in Fairfield and



work on the farm. When the Civil War began in 1861, the pair were young men with clearly different interests in the war's outcome.

Robert Singleton was eighteen in 1861 and had begun to take on a much larger role within his family due to the death of his father in 1858.<sup>61</sup> By 1860 he assisted his mother, Elizabeth, with operating the land and property of both of his parents. The family farm included over 900 acres, numerous heads of cattle, various crops, and eleven enslaved people, including George.<sup>62</sup> However, when war broke out Robert Jr. would be among the young men who enlisted in the Confederate Army in September of 1861.<sup>63</sup>

While serving as a private in the Confederate Army in Company G of the 17<sup>th</sup> Tennessee Infantry, Robert found himself without help in performing menial tasks such as laundry. Therefore, in the fall of 1862 he wrote home to his mother:

“Ma, I would like to have George this winter if he wants to come and you can reasonably spare him. The Negroes are all gone from this company and I find it very hard to get my washing done. I have never done washing but I will have to try it this morning as tired as I am. If you conclude to send him Ma send him with Lieut. Scruggs' boys [sic] return but you must not deprive yourself of his services if you need him. I send you 30 dols Ma and I will send you more when we draw and I expect that it will be soon. From your son. Bob.”<sup>64</sup>

So, George was sent to Murfreesboro to serve Robert as an enslaved worker.

The bloody Battle of Stones River occurred between December 31, 1862, and January 2, 1863.<sup>65</sup> During this battle, Robert was hit in the leg with a Minnie ball and as

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<sup>61</sup> “Robert L. Singleton,” <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/94482099/robert-l-singleton>. Accessed Feb. 18, 2023.

<sup>62</sup> “Sallie Singleton,” U.S. Census for 1860, Bedford Co., TN, Ancestry.com; “Sarah Singleton,” Slave Schedule for 1860, Bedford Co., TN, Ancestry.com.

<sup>63</sup> “Robert L. Singleton,” Compiled Service Record.

<sup>64</sup> Chapman. “Many Singletons.”

<sup>65</sup> <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/civil-war/battles/stones-river#:~:text=Rutherford%20County%2C%20TN%20%7C%20Dec%2031,of%20casualties%20on%20both%20sides>.

a result lost his leg. Once the fighting stopped, George Singleton scoured the battlefield to find Robert and took him to Union medics for aid. According to the family's oral tradition, George also petitioned the Union soldiers to allow Robert to return to his home, only 15 miles away, to recover from his injuries. However, Robert's military record and letters written between he and his mother, Elizabeth Singleton, and between fellow Confederate soldier and physician, Dr. John Gannaway, and Elizabeth, suggest that Robert was housed between a Mrs. Gannaway's house and at a hospital in Murfreesboro for seven months before being transferred to Ohio to the Camp Chase prisoner of war camp.<sup>66</sup> George Singleton joined the Union Army on January 23, 1863.<sup>67</sup>

The relationship between master and slave could be complex as shown here and in other testimonies given by formerly enslaved people provided through the Federal Writers Project narratives, conducted in the 1930s. Abram Harris, who was enslaved in South Carolina before the war, described his reaction to hearing the news that his enslaver "Marse Hampton" had been killed in the war to Federal Writers Project interviewer Watt McKinney in 1937. He stated: "Us was boys togedder, me en Marse Hampton, en wus jist er bout de same size... Hit sho did hurt me when Marse Hampton got kilt kase I lubed dat white man."<sup>68</sup> The dynamics between an enslaver and an enslaved person were not always the same across the spectrum; some relationships forged lasting bonds within the tight compounds of farms, despite the social pressures of the day and the devastating effects that living under the systemic enslavement by other

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<sup>66</sup> Singleton, R.L., "Auxiliary Register, Military Prison, Camp Chase, O., Prisoners Received Feby. 1862 to Aug. 25, 1863, p. 256, in U.S., Civil War Prisoner of War Records, 1861-1865, Ancestry.com. Robert L. Singleton, Seventeenth Infantry, Compiled Service Records; John Gannaway, Surg., CSA, to Elizabeth Singleton, Murfreesboro, March 17, [1863], Leonard F. Chapman Collection; Graham, et. al.

<sup>67</sup> George Singleton Pension Record, "Request for widow's pension," August 2, 1926, National Archives.

<sup>68</sup> Leon Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 7; WPA - Slave Narrative: Abram Harris. Vol. 2, Arkansas, part 3 168-175, Library of Congress.

people brought on. Despite his experience of slavery, George Singleton later acted with empathy toward the white Singleton family.

During George's time in service, he rose from the rank of private in the 17<sup>th</sup> Tennessee Infantry of the United States Colored Troops to the rank of sergeant when he mustered out, a rank he worked diligently to earn as evidenced by his service record.<sup>69</sup> The role of many Colored Troops in the U.S. military was primarily to perform guard duty, which entailed patrolling the commissaries, saw mills, and woodyards.<sup>70</sup> At one point in his service, he contracted measles which had a lifelong impact on his voice, often reducing it to a whisper.<sup>71</sup> In the August 1864 muster roll, George's rank was reduced from corporal to private with no listed cause, but it may have been due to the loss of his haversack which amounted to him owing the military 33 cents. Perhaps this is when he contracted measles as it is the only blemish on his record. However, by October 1864 his rank had been restored to corporal and George continued to attain higher and higher ranks until he reached the rank of second sergeant. [OBJ]

The first battle George's unit was involved in was the Battle of Nashville, as well as the ensuing pursuit of General John Bell Hood as he retreated along the Cumberland River. George's unit saw action on the first day of battle under the leadership of Colonel William Shafter. Shafter attempted to move forward on the Rebel line, but unknowingly sent his men, including the 17<sup>th</sup> USCT infantry, into a trap that would expose them to the direct line of sight for Confederate soldiers to easily fire upon them. Once the USCT soldiers were trapped, the Confederates opened fire and seeing that the soldiers were

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<sup>69</sup> George Singleton, Seventeenth U.S. Colored Infantry, *Compiled Service Records*.

<sup>70</sup> Graham, et. al. "The Chapman-Singleton House."

<sup>71</sup> George Singleton Pension Record, "Request for widow's pension," August 2, 1926, National Archives.

Black seemed to only entuse the rebels to engage more vigorously.<sup>72</sup> However, in the face of this ruthless and seemingly hopeless stage of the battle, the USCT soldiers continued to perform their duty and engage the enemy. At the end of the first day, the 17<sup>th</sup> USCT unit had suffered the most losses, with 17 men killed or mortally wounded and 67 wounded.<sup>73</sup> However, the next day would see even more fighting and the 13<sup>th</sup> USCT would lose 40% of its 556-man unit.<sup>74</sup>

The valor and gallantry shown during this battle gained the USCT soldiers the following opinion of one of their superior commanding officers, Colonel Thomas J.

Morgan:

Colored soldiers had fought side by side with white troops. They had assisted each other from the field when wounded, and they lay side by side in death...The day that we had longed to see had come and gone, and the Sun went down upon a record of coolness, bravery, manliness, never to be unmade. A new chapter in the history of liberty had been written. It had been shown that marching under a flag of freedom, animated by a love of liberty, even a slave becomes a man and hero.<sup>75</sup>

The Union army would go on to win this key battle, in part due to the courage, bravery, and sacrifice made by the Colored Troops present there.

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<sup>72</sup> Moore, Kenneth B. "United States Colored Troops," Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culutre, <http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/united-states-colored-troops/>. Accessed November 10, 2023.

<sup>73</sup> Noah Andre Trudeau, *Like Men of War: Black Troops In The Civil War 1862-1865*, (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1998), 344.

<sup>74</sup> Moore, Kenneth B. "United States Colored Troops."

<sup>75</sup> Trudeau, *Like Men of War: Black Troops In The Civil War 1862-1865*, 344.



*George in his Union Army uniform. Photo Courtesy of TSLA.*

George Singleton's career as a soldier in the Union Army ended in April 1866; his muster-out card stated that George retained his arms or equipment for a charge of \$6.00, which was taken out of the \$8.86 balance due him.<sup>76</sup> Upon leaving the army, George returned to Bedford County, where his parents and siblings had remained for the duration of the war. Throughout his time in service George would have been offered furlough periods and it's possible that he returned to the Singleton farm during this time to visit his family and assist with farming needs. However, when he returned, he found the farm devastated and his family, as well as the white Singletons, starving. Therefore, according to family tradition on both sides, he used the pay he received for his service in the army and bought seeds to begin to rebuild the farm. By the time Robert returned

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<sup>76</sup> George Singleton, Seventeenth U.S. Colored Infantry, *Compiled Service Records*.

from his imprisonment and subsequent release probably in late summer of 1865,<sup>77</sup> the farm was producing income. This new era found Robert and George on new ground.

### **The Homefront**

After the battle of Stones River, the Confederate army retreated to Shelbyville and Wartrace. Here they fortified the cities and encamped between the months of January and June of 1863.<sup>78</sup> During this occupation, it is possible that Robert's mother and siblings were required to supply the army with provisions which would have impacted their stores. Additionally, at some point the mill known as Davis' mill, which was at one time operated by the Singleton family, was destroyed by the military units present in the vicinity.<sup>79</sup> The occupation of military units in the area also halted much of the trains and trading routes that farming families relied on.<sup>80</sup> All of these disruptions greatly impacted families in Middle Tennessee, including the Singletons. On June 24, 1863, General Rosecrans decided to attack the Confederates at Hoovers Gap, just shy of 10 miles northeast of the Singleton home. The Confederates were able to hold their position for two days but then fell and were forced to retreat to Tullahoma.<sup>81</sup> Fairfield lies directly

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<sup>77</sup> "Robt. L. Singleton," Soldier's Application for Pension, TSLA. The application states that he went to Washington DC to pledge allegiance to the United States in July 1865 "on way home," assuming he traveled directly home after this he would have made it home by late summer.

<sup>78</sup> Paul Avery. "Surprise! A Newly Discovered Civil War Earthwork in Bedford County, Tennessee." Tennessee Council for Professional Archaeology, September 18, 2018. <https://tennesseearchaeologycouncil.wordpress.com/2018/09/18/surprise-a-newly-discovered-civil-war-earthwork-in-bedford-county-tennessee/>

<sup>79</sup> Amanda Jane Townes. "Material Culture as a Primary Source for Understanding Bedford County Tennessee during the Civil War Era." PhD dissertation, Middle Tennessee State University, 2011. The Official Records of the War of Rebellion (<https://ehistory.osu.edu/books/official-records/034/0433>) do not state which army destroyed the mill, while [Bedford County Historical Society, *Doors to the Past*, states that the Union army destroyed the mill. It is known that both armies worked to disarm mills to prevent their use by the opposing forces.

<sup>80</sup> Robert Brandt, "Tullahoma Campaign," Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture, October 8, 2017. <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/tullahoma-campaign/>. Accessed November 4, 2023.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

between the two cities, and it is very likely that during their retreat both armies would have destroyed or taken much of the crops and property in the area, leaving the citizens of the town barren and destitute.



*Sketch of Environs, Shelbyville 1863, by Capt. N. Michler. Courtesy of Library of Congress.*

Additionally, it's likely that George's family members, including his parents Jack and Kittie and siblings, were also staying on the farm. There is no record of how Jack and Kittie endured this time, but other accounts have been documented by people in similar situations. Mary Boykin Chestnut, who lived in Charleston at the time of its invasion, wrote in her diary about the demeanor of the enslaved people laboring for her while the battle raged mere miles away. She wrote:

Not by one word or look can we detect any change in the demeanor of these Negro servants. Lawrence sits at our door as sleepy and as respectful and as profoundly indifferent. So are they all. They carry it too far. You could not tell that they even hear the awful noise that is going on in the bay, though it is dining in their ears night and day. And people talk before them as if they were chairs and

tables and they make no sign.” She later ponders “are they stolidly stupid or wiser than we are, silent and strong, biding their time?”<sup>82</sup>

Based on the relationship between maintained the white and Black Singleton’s after the end of the war, its possible that Jack and Kittie may well have behaved similarly to the enslaved servants residing with Mary Chestnut. The Singletons likely sustained a semblance of life before the war, serving the white people before them to ensure their survival, all the while hoping that their freedom was on the precipice. And in the case of Jack and Kittie, they were likely praying for the safety of their son George, who was putting his life on the line in the cause of their release from bondage. Unlike his white counterparts, it’s probable that neither George nor his parents were literate, and therefore even the simple reassurance of sending a letter home to comfort his parents was not a possibility.

Jack, George’s father, was born in Halifax, Virginia, but found himself traveling to Tennessee with Dr. Singleton, when he moved there in the 1830s. In Tennessee, Jack met Kittie, who was enslaved by a different family (also possibly from Virginia).<sup>83</sup> Perhaps their meeting was arranged, but it is also possible that Jack met Kittie while serving on the farm where she resided, as Dr. Singleton often loaned Jack out for monetary gain.<sup>84</sup> However, the pair met, they ended up together on the Singletons farm, where they formed a family. They had a total of five children, all born into slavery with the threat of separation forever hanging over them. Once they attained freedom Jack and

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<sup>82</sup> Leon Litwack, *Been in the Storm too Long: The Aftermath of Slavery*, 4; Excerpt from the diary of Mary Boykin Chestnut, *A Diary from Dixie*, Edited by Isabella Martin and Myrta Lockett Avery, (New York: D. Appleton and Co, 1906.) <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/60908/pg60908-images.html>. Accessed November 4, 2023.

<sup>83</sup> In the 1880 Census Jack lists his birthplace as Virginia and Kittie states she was born in Virginia, but her parents were born in North Carolina. In 1870 Census Kittie is shown as born in Tennessee.

<sup>84</sup> Leonard Chapman Collection, TSLA.



Kittie were legally married on July 29, 1866.<sup>85</sup> Kittie allegedly lived to the age of 111, outliving all of her children and Jack.<sup>86</sup> Throughout their lifetimes Jack, Kittie, and George all experienced the excruciating suffering that the practice of slavery forced upon Black people in America; they were all born to parents who were already enslaved and thus all were deemed property from their inception. Jack and Kittie were possibly separated from their biological families as indicated by their responses on later Census records and forced to relocate and start anew.<sup>87</sup>

They lived through, and in George's case, fought in the Civil War, where they gained freedom from enslavement but not freedom from harassment and humiliation. In the aftermath of the Civil War, white southerners refused to accept the new order of things and continued to seek out retribution against Black men and women. It's very likely that Jack, Kittie, and their children endured racism, but through an alliance with his former enslaver, George was able to provide for his family and even prosper during this era.

In June of 1878, Jack attained a fifteen-acre piece of property for the sum of \$75 in hand and \$25 to be paid at a later time from William Scott, also a Black man.<sup>88</sup> He later purchased an additional thirteen acres from L.P. Fields in November of 1888 for the sum of \$400.<sup>89</sup> Thus, Jack, Kittie, George, and the rest of their family made a new start

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<sup>85</sup> *Tennessee, U.S., Marriage Records, 1780-2002*, Ancestry.com.

<sup>86</sup> "Kittie Singleton," Headstone in New Hope Cemetery, site visit April 20, 2023; Kitty surviving all of her children is to the best of my knowledge as two of her children, Benjamin and Mary do not have death certificates on Ancestry.com.

<sup>87</sup> As evidenced on Census records where they both indicate their parents were from Virginia (Jack) and North Carolina (Kittie). 1880 Census, Ancestry.com.

<sup>88</sup> Deed between Jack Singleton and William Scott, June 24, 1878, Bedford County, TN, Deed book 3, p. 93-94; witnessed by Robert Singleton, who was the county clerk.

<sup>89</sup> Deed between Jack Singleton and L.P. Fields, Nov. 20, 1888, Bedford County, TN, Deed book 4, p. 337-338.

in America. Then in 1897 Elizabeth sold George 7 acres for the sum of \$1 and services rendered.<sup>90</sup> Additionally, in 1899, Robert, the former enslaver and Confederate soldier, sold George sixteen-and-a-half acres of land, where George and his wife Barbara built a house.<sup>91</sup> Here, the couple would raise their sixteen children and establish themselves as successful citizens, building a legacy that would endure for generations to come.



*Image 1: George and granddaughter Odie Kaye, unknown date// Next image: Photo of Barbara unknown date*

George Singleton and Barbara Walker were married on June 15, 1866, in Coffee County at “Mr. Will Walker’s place,” by Reverend B. Williams.<sup>92</sup> Before emancipation, Barbara had been enslaved by William Walker, whose farm was just a short distance from the Singleton farm; Barbara stated that she was born in Matt’s Hollow in Coffee

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<sup>90</sup> Deed between Mrs. E.S. Singleton & others and George Singleton, 23 Jan. 1897, Bedford County, TN, Deed Book 5, p. 13-14.

<sup>91</sup> Deed between R.L. Singleton & wife and George Singleton, 26 April 1899, Bedford County, TN, Deed Book 6, p. 362-363.

<sup>92</sup> George Singleton Pension Record, “Request for widow’s pension,” August 2, 1926. National Archives.

County on September 7, 1843, on her widow's pension application.<sup>93</sup> However, according to the 1860 Slave Census William Walker only owned two enslaved men, aged 14 and 16, so it's possible that Barbara was among the other fourteen enslaved people owned by William Walker's extended family in 1860, such as his mother Mary, two older brothers, Robert and Joseph, and his younger sister Emily.<sup>94</sup> Due to the timing of their wedding and George's muster-out date of April 1866, it seems likely that the two began a relationship either before George enlisted in the Union army or while he was serving in the army. He and Barbara were married for a total of sixty years at the time of George's death. Together they had fourteen children: unnamed twins (one boy, one girl), Louisa, Mary Ella, John Benjamin, Sarah Elizabeth, Mat Walker, Robert George, William Henry, Clarence, Kitty Francis, Sydney "Syd" Houston, Blanch, and Lillian, ten of whom lived to adulthood.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid

<sup>94</sup> "William Walker," 1860 Slave Census Coffee County, TN, Ancestry.com.

<sup>95</sup> George Singleton Pension Record, "Request for widow's pension," August 2, 1926, National Archives.

1860 U.S. Federal Census		Tennessee							
4		1	8	2	B				
5		1	5	2	B				
6		1	3	2	B				
7	Wm M <sup>c</sup> Michael	1	25	2	B			1	W
8	Maria M <sup>c</sup> Michael	1	18	2	B				
9	Maria M <sup>c</sup> Michael	1	22	2	B			1	
10	Robert Walker	1	13	2	B				
11	Robert Walker	1	23	2	B				
12		1	16	2	B				
13		1	12	2	B				
14		1	6	2	B				
15		1	4	2	B				
16		1	2	2	B				Wm
17		1	4/2	2	B			1	
18	S. F. DeLaud	1	17	2	B				
19		1	15	2	B			1	
20	Mary Walker	1	25	2	B				J
21		1	20	2	B				
22		1	16	2	B			2	D. H. J.
23	Joseph Walker	1	16	2	B				
24		1	12	2	B				
25	Wm Walker	1	16	2	B				
26		1	10	2	B				J
27	Emily Walker	1	16	2	B				
28		1	9	2	B				
29									

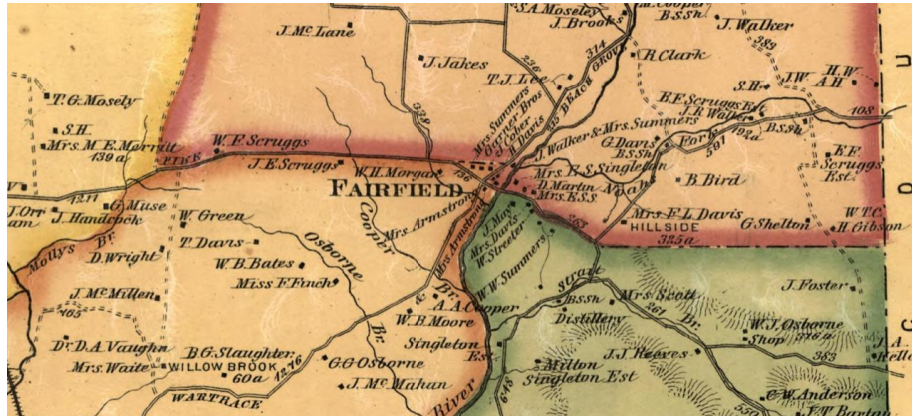
1860 Slave Census for the Walker family. Photo courtesy of Ancestry.com.

Between the end of the war and the purchase of their home and land, it appears that George and Barbara lived in Bedford County, with George often working as a farm laborer and renting his home. On the 1870 Census, they are listed as living in district two, just on the other side of town, and on the 1880 Census, they are listed as living back in the first district of Bedford County.<sup>96</sup> In George Singleton's pension application, he stated on each reapplication that he had always lived on the Singleton farm.<sup>97</sup> The Singleton farm lies in the corner of districts one, two, and three, due to the farm's close proximity to these districts, it's possible that George and Kittie still resided on the Singleton farm but in a different district. Oftentimes, freed men and women decided to

<sup>96</sup> "George Singleton," 1870 Census, and 1880 Census, Ancestry.com

<sup>97</sup> George Singleton Pension Record.

stay in the local vicinity, choosing to remain close to friends and family and sometimes even returning to work, for pay, for their former enslavers. It appears that by 1870, George and Barbara were in fact living on the Singleton farm and working for their former enslavers.



Close-up of the area that the Singleton families primarily resided in (see Mrs. E.S. Singleton and E.S.S. properties in pink area), Beers Map, 1878. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Barbara (pronounced Barbary) stayed home with the children and was an active farmwife helping in the production of agricultural crops for the duration of her adult life. This is significant, as many women of color were forced to go back into the labor force to help provide for their families. In the United States, roughly 31% of married Black women participated in the labor force in 1870, and 35% participated in 1880.<sup>98</sup> Perhaps Barbara was a handy craftsperson, or better yet a skilled seamstress, who was able to ply her craft from her home. It is very possible that she attained a skill in some regard, as the auction of her home and estate brought out many attendees.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Claudia Goldin, "Female labor force participation: The origin of black and white differences, 1870 and 1880," *Journal of Economic History* 37(1977): 87-108.

<sup>99</sup> Lynn Norment, "The Unusual Legacy of George Singleton," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, February 16, 2019.

George learned to read and write at some point in his adult life, possibly while serving in the Union army, but Barbara possibly only learned to read as she signed her name with an “X” on her widow’s pension applications but is listed as able to read and write on the 1880 census.<sup>100</sup> George and Barbara both ensured the education of all of their children. The federal Freedmen’s Bureau was created at the end of the war to help formerly enslaved individuals acclimate to life after slavery. The bureau began in the Middle Tennessee area as early as 1866 and established the first schools in the area to serve African American children and adults. The Bureau also created other organizations, such as hospitals and orphanages, and offered legal assistance to aid the Black community in coping with the upheaval of life after the Civil War.<sup>101</sup> However, the physical and emotional cost to operate these organizations was quite high; oftentimes “teachers were insulted on the streets, attacked in their homes or boarding houses, and driven out of town,”<sup>102</sup> all because they dared to educate Black individuals.

After a failed attempt to implement a statewide public school system between 1867 and 1869,<sup>103</sup> the Tennessee General Assembly passed into law a mandate for a new public school system to exist in every county and be open to all citizens on March 6, 1873; the bill was entitled “An act to establish and maintain a uniform system of public schools.”<sup>104</sup> This meant that newly emancipated families could send their children to

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<sup>100</sup> George Singleton, 1880 Census, Ancestry.com.

<sup>101</sup> Kathleen Zebley, “The Freedmen’s Bureau,” *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, <http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/freedmens-bureau/>. Accessed October 15, 2023.

<sup>102</sup> Paul David Phillips, “White Reaction to the Freedmen’s Bureau in Tennessee,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (1966): 50–62.

<sup>103</sup> Cynthia Griggs Fleming, “Elementary and Secondary Education,” *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, <http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/elementary-and-secondary-education/>. Accessed November 11, 2023.

<sup>104</sup> *Lipscomb v. Dean*, 69 Tenn. 546 (1878), Tennessee Supreme Court,

school to be educated in reading, writing, and arithmetic. These schools were, of course, segregated, and the “free colored schools” were taught by Black teachers, of which by 1885 there were 21 males and 16 females in the county. In the same year there was a total of 9,867 students enrolled in school and 2,901 of those students were Black.<sup>105</sup> The ratio between Black teachers and students was one teacher for every 78 students. The town of Fairfield was home to a singular free colored school for African American children, and there were at least two “colored schools” in the second district of Bedford County in 1878. Between these three schools, the Singletons were able to send all of their children to school to be educated.<sup>106</sup>

While the opportunity to be educated was a landmark advantage for many Black families in the South, the school system that was implemented was incredibly flawed. The Black public schools were understaffed, housed in near inhabitable structures, and open for far shorter seasons due to the demand for labor placed on the young children. W.E.B. Dubois described his time as a teacher in rural Tennessee on the outskirts of Nashville during the summers of 1887 and 1888, while he was attending Fisk University.

The schoolhouse was a log hut, where Colonel Wheeler used to shelter his corn. It sat in a lot behind a rail fence and thorn bushes, near the sweetest of spring. There was an entrance where a door once was, and within, a massive rickety fireplace; great chinks between the logs served as windows. Furniture was scarce. A pale blackboard crouched in the corner. My desk was made of three boards, reinforced at critical points, and my chair, borrowed from the landlady, had to be returned every night. Seats for the children,—these puzzled me much. I was haunted by a New England vision of neat little desks and chairs, but, alas, the reality was rough plank benches without backs, and at times without legs. They had

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<https://cite.case.law/tenn/69/546/>\* This court case was brought against the state due to the citizens of Shelbyville feeling that the law enacting the public school system was unconstitutional as it required they pay taxes to educate everyone, not just their own children.

<sup>105</sup> Goodspeed, Weston A., *History of Tennessee: Bedford County*, (Nashville: Goodspeed Publishing Company: Nashville, 1886), 861-884, 1126-1189.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

the one virtue of making naps dangerous,—possibly fatal, for the floor was not to be trusted.<sup>107</sup>

He further described having to track down the children at times and convince their parents to allow them to attend school, stating: “When the Lawrences stopped, I knew that the doubt of the old folks about book-learning had conquered again, and so, toiling up the hill, and getting as far into the cabin as possible, I put Cicero pro Archia Poeta in the simplest English with local applications, and usually convinced them—for a week or so.”

Throughout the postwar years, there are few documents that shed light on the relationship between George and Robert, but we can look to one document to see that despite the vast and varied changes taking place around them, the families remained close to one another, within the parameters of a segregated society. On June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1897, Robert wrote an affidavit for George to include with his pension application for his service in the Union Army. Robert wrote:

I have known the applicant George Singleton all of my life. He is not related to me he was born on the premises of my father and has been on intimate terms and in closest friendship with me ever since my birth. I see him frequently, he comes to my house in Shelbyville and I never fail to see him when I visit my mother. He lives on the lands that belong to my family.<sup>108</sup>

This description of the relationship between the two men, as well as Robert’s submission of such a document, suggests that George and Robert Singleton maintained longstanding affection for each other, although they remained on different socioeconomic levels.

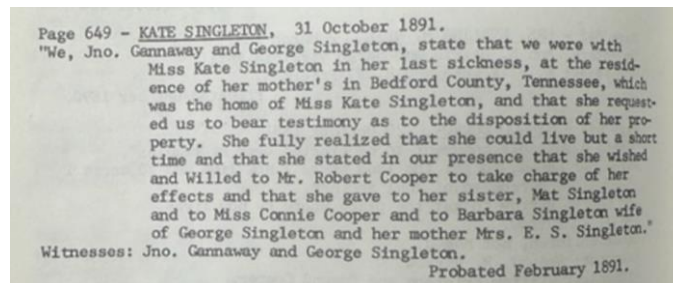
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<sup>107</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, “A Negro Schoolmaster in the South.” *The Atlantic Journal*, January 1899, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1899/01/a-negro-schoolmaster-in-the-south/400028/>.

<sup>108</sup> “General Affidavit,” George Singleton Pension application, National Archives.



The same affection can be seen among other members of the Singleton family as well. In her October 1891 will, Robert's older sister, Kate Singleton, gave items to members of her family and friends; among the list of six to be endowed was Barbara Singleton, "wife of George Singleton" who acted as a witness to the will alongside John Gannaway. By including Barbara in her will, Kate solidified the significant role that George and Barbara played in her life and likely the life of her other siblings and family members.



Page 649 - KATE SINGLETON, 31 October 1891.  
"We, Jno. Gannaway and George Singleton, state that we were with Miss Kate Singleton in her last sickness, at the residence of her mother's in Bedford County, Tennessee, which was the home of Miss Kate Singleton, and that she requested us to bear testimony as to the disposition of her property. She fully realized that she could live but a short time and that she stated in our presence that she wished and Willed to Mr. Robert Cooper to take charge of her effects and that she gave to her sister, Mat Singleton and to Miss Connie Cooper and to Barbara Singleton wife of George Singleton and her mother Mrs. E. S. Singleton."  
Witnesses: Jno. Gannaway and George Singleton.  
Probated February 1891.

*Typed Will of Kate Singleton, 1891. Photo Courtesy of Tim Marsh. Handwritten will describes that Barbara received a "fine dress."*

### **Life After the Civil War in Tennessee**

At the end of the Civil War, the Radical Republican party was in control of the House of Representatives in Tennessee, headed by former circuit rider, evangelist, and newspaper publisher Governor William G. Brownlow from Knoxville. Due to his pro-Union policies, Tennessee was the first former Confederate state to be readmitted to the United States. This early enfranchising of African American citizens allowed Tennessee to escape the military occupation set forth in the requirements to rejoin the United States by the U.S. Congress after Confederate States passed Black Codes and used violence against formerly enslaved people. However, many citizens of the state were not fully

supportive of Black men voting and thus an atmosphere of resentment began to fester.<sup>109</sup>

With the advancement of Black men in the South came the swift movement of white citizens to moderate and repress these newfound freedoms. On May 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> of 1866, white mobs descended upon newly organized Black neighborhoods in Memphis, Tennessee. What ensued resulted in forty-six people losing their lives, two white lives among them, five women were raped, 285 people were injured, and over one hundred buildings and homes were reduced to ash. As a result of this race riot, a Congressional committee investigated the unrest and produced a report that helped endorse and ultimately pass the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution in June of 1866, which granted formerly enslaved people equal civil and legal rights and citizenship in the United States.<sup>110</sup>

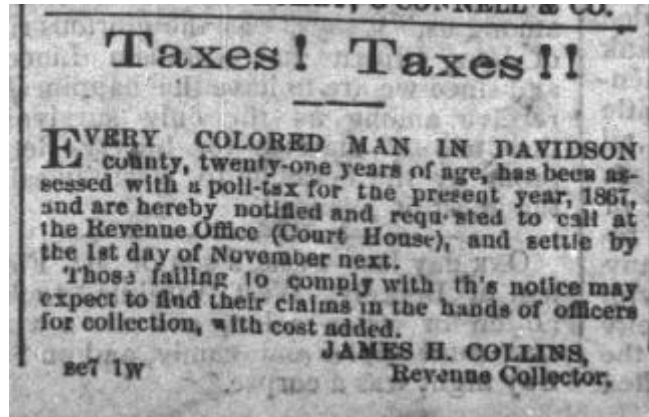
Beyond the obscene violence faced by Black citizens in America, southern elected government officials took steps to deny African Americans the civil rights guaranteed them as free people under the Constitution. By 1889, the Tennessee General Assembly passed what became known as the Disenfranchising Laws. The four laws that made up the disenfranchising laws were the Myers Law, the Lea Law, the Dortch Law, and the creation of a poll tax. Each of these laws specifically targeted Black

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<sup>109</sup> Robert Tracy McKenzie, "Reconstruction," *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, <http://tennesseencyclopedia.net/entries/reconstruction/>. Accessed April 2023.

<sup>110</sup> Bobby Lovett, "Memphis Race Riot of 1866," *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, <http://tennesseencyclopedia.net/entries/memphis-race-riot-of-1866/>. Accessed October 14, 2023; Mackenzie Lanum, "Memphis Riot, 1866." Blackpast.org, November 2011, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/memphis-riot-1866/>. Accessed October 14, 2023.

voters and worked to destabilize the brief progress made during the years following the end of the Civil War.<sup>111</sup>



*Article discussing Poll Tax in The Tennessean, September 10, 1867. Photo courtesy of Newspapers.com.*

Despite these measures both George and Jack were enumerated as voters in the federal 1891 Enumeration of Male Voters.<sup>112</sup> Earning the right to vote was a top priority for newly freed people in the Reconstruction era, but it was a right that only a few were able to attain due to the strenuous barriers put in place by Tennessee's lawmakers.

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<sup>111</sup> Connie Lester, "Disenfranchising Laws," *Tennessee Encyclopedia History and Culture*, <http://tennesseencyclopedia.net/entries/disenfranchising-laws/>. Accessed November 7, 2023.

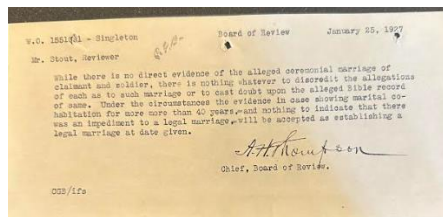
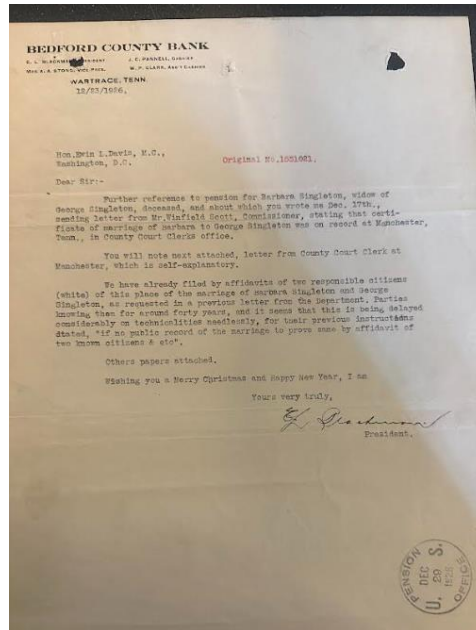
<sup>112</sup> "George Singleton" in the Tennessee, U.S., Enumeration of Male Voters, 1891. Bedford, Co., TN, Ancestry.com

*Jack and George both listed on the Male Enumeration list. Photo courtesy of Ancestry.com.*

The discrimination within the government body of America can be seen in Barbara Singleton’s widow’s pension application as well. After George Singleton’s death on June 25, 1926, Barbara made several attempts to collect the widow’s pension offered by the government, a continuation of the soldier’s pension that George had received while alive. The process to receive a widow’s pension was often laborious and required Black women to produce verifiable proof of their marriage and good standing in their communities.<sup>113</sup> Barbara received several affidavits from lawyers, bankers, and family associates stating that she was the legal wife of George Singleton; however, government officials in Washington continued to deny her request because she was unable to provide a marriage certificate due to a fire in the Bedford County courthouse. On December 23, 1926, E.L. Blackman, president of Bedford County Bank, wrote a vehement letter stating: “it seems that this is being delayed considerably on

<sup>113</sup> Holly Pinheiro Jr., “Black Women and Civil War Pensions,” Black Perspectives, September 1, 2021, <https://www.aaihs.org/black-women-and-civil-war-pensions/>. Accessed November 7, 2023.

technicalities needlessly..."<sup>114</sup> By January 26, 1927, Mr. Blackman had received a reply stating that the approval for Barbara Singleton's pension request was finally pending.



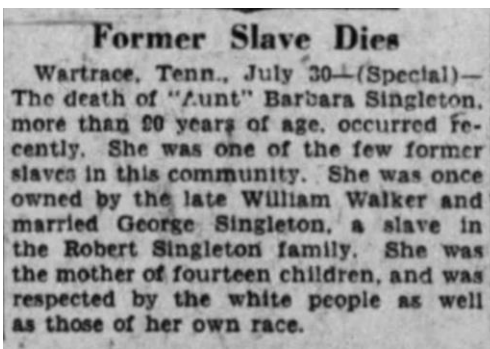
Records from George Singleton Pension File. Photos taken by Amy NeeSmith.

After Barbara died on July 19, 1934, her children sold the family farm and home located on Kellertown Road to E.E. Wiser at auction.<sup>115</sup> However, several descendants of George and Barbara remained in Bedford County and continued to maintain a

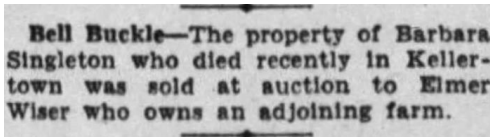
<sup>114</sup> "George Singleton," Widow's pension application.

<sup>115</sup> "Barbara Singleton," Tennessee, U.S., Death Records, 1908-1965, [https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/2376/images/33113\\_257990-01916?pid=200690](https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/2376/images/33113_257990-01916?pid=200690). Accessed April 2023; *Nashville Banner*, November 25, 1934, <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/121410018/barbara-singleton-property-sold/?xid=637>. Accessed April 2023.

friendly relationship with the descendants of Robert Singleton Jr.<sup>116</sup> Today the descendants of both families are working to preserve the history of their respective ancestors which includes preserving the historic home, the objects within it, and conveying the tale of the Two Singleton families in Bedford County on a plot of land which contains less than 3 acres and the house which still stands, clinging to its Victorian vision of beauty and class.



*Obituary of Barbara Singleton in Nashville Banner, July 30, 1934. Photo courtesy of newspapers.com.*



*Sale of Barbara Singleton's Property mentioned in the Nashville Banner. Photo Courtesy of Newspapers.com.*

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<sup>116</sup> Danielle Chapman writes that her papa, Leonard F. Chapman brought Odie-kay, George and Barbara's granddaughter, a plant every time they visited in "Many Singletons."

### Chapter Three: The Singletons in Bedford County

A native of Wilmington, North Carolina, John Scott, married Sarah Blythe on December 19, 1799, and together they had ten children. Among them was Sarah “Elizabeth” Scott. By 1810 John Scott had moved his family to Tennessee and by 1838 he owned 275 acres, as well as 13 enslaved people.<sup>117</sup> However, this number would eventually swell to 38 enslaved people,<sup>118</sup> a farm valued at \$7000, and personal property valued at \$12,000 by 1860— just before the onset of the Civil War.<sup>119</sup> John Scott was a voracious businessman, who devoted himself to a multitude of interests. He was a farmer, a veteran of the War of 1812, a land speculator, and a slave merchant. Many land acquisitions can be found in the deed book of Bedford County containing his name, some for tracts as small as 15 acres while others are in the hundreds of acres, solidifying his wealth and status among the community.<sup>120</sup>

Dr. Robert Lipscomb Singleton was from Halifax, Virginia, but came to know Bedford County through his correspondence with John Scott. Once in Tennessee he met Scott’s daughter Elizabeth and they married on June 25, 1835.<sup>121</sup> Together the couple had seven children: Martha Dorothy, Mary Elizabeth, Catharine Scott, Robert Jr., Sally

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<sup>117</sup> *Tennessee, U.S., Early Tax List Records, 1783-1895* for John Scott. Pg.45.

[https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/38566:2883?tid=&pid=&queryId=12c82dc4d2e1866f2ea53859688d0f1b&\\_phsrc=WzU673&\\_phstart=successSource](https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/38566:2883?tid=&pid=&queryId=12c82dc4d2e1866f2ea53859688d0f1b&_phsrc=WzU673&_phstart=successSource). Accessed August 14, 2023.

<sup>118</sup> “Scott, John,” 1860 Slave Schedule, Bedford Co., TN, U.S. GenWeb, <http://www.us-census.org/pub/usgenweb/census/tn/bedford/1860/slave.txt>.

<sup>119</sup> “Scott, John,” *1860 United States Federal Census* for John Scott, Bedford Co., TN, U.S.

<sup>120</sup> “John Scott,” North Carolina and Tennessee, U.S., Early Land Records, 1753-1931, [https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/14249:2882?tid=&pid=&queryId=12c82dc4d2e1866f2ea53859688d0f1b&\\_phsrc=WzU685&\\_phstart=successSource](https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/14249:2882?tid=&pid=&queryId=12c82dc4d2e1866f2ea53859688d0f1b&_phsrc=WzU685&_phstart=successSource). Accessed August 14, 2023.

<sup>121</sup> Family papers, genealogical chart from family records, Katherine Orme Williams collection, TSLA.

Isabel, John Scott, and Fanny Clementine.<sup>122</sup> Dr. Robert Singleton, was known as one of the few respected doctors in the area, as well as a farmer. In addition to these ventures, he participated in the ownership, buying, selling, and trading of human beings. In fact, he arrived in Fairfield with at least one man who was enslaved to him, Jack.<sup>123</sup> Jack, as discussed earlier, went on to play an important role in Robert and Elizabeth's lives as well as their children's lives.

During the 1830s to 1850s Tennessee was undergoing an extraordinary amount of change and growth in agriculture, transportation, and the expansion of slavery. Agricultural practice was diverse: corn, hogs, grains, cattle, fruits and vegetables, as well as hemp and tobacco were among some of the crops produced in Tennessee. In fact, Tennessee was the top producer among the entire continental U.S. of corn in 1840 and was the top supplier of hogs in 1850.<sup>124</sup> With this growth came the expansion of the "peculiar institution" of slavery. In 1830, there were 141,603 enslaved people in the entire state and in 1850, just twenty years later, there were 239,459.<sup>125</sup> Changes in the daily lives of the Singleton family mirror these statewide patterns.

After their marriage, Dr. Robert and Elizabeth Singleton lived in Rutherford County and invested in land in Coffee County.<sup>126</sup> However, in the mid-1840s, the Singleton's came to Bedford County and began to establish lifelong roots. In 1846 Robert L. Singleton bought 153 acres from William Hancock for \$1846; a grist mill and

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<sup>122</sup> *Singleton-Scott Family Tree*, [https://www.ancestry.com/mediaui-viewer/collection/1030/tree/114937158/person/322383902134/media/56ea36dc-f521-492f-bb13-ae4f8d67867b?\\_phsrc=WzU736&\\_phstart=successSource](https://www.ancestry.com/mediaui-viewer/collection/1030/tree/114937158/person/322383902134/media/56ea36dc-f521-492f-bb13-ae4f8d67867b?_phsrc=WzU736&_phstart=successSource). Accessed August 16, 2023.

<sup>123</sup> Chapman collection, TSLA.

<sup>124</sup> No Author, *Tennessee Blue Book: A History of Tennessee*. P. 560.

[https://publications.tnsosfiles.com/pub/blue\\_book/17-18/17-18tnhistory.pdf](https://publications.tnsosfiles.com/pub/blue_book/17-18/17-18tnhistory.pdf). Accessed August 10, 2023.

<sup>125</sup> 1850 Census, Tennessee, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1850/1850c/1850c-04.pdf>. Accessed August 10, 2023.

<sup>126</sup> Family genealogical chart, Katherine Orme Williams Collection, TSLA.



sawmill were included within this tract of land. Then in 1849 Robert purchased from John G. Walker 62.5 acres “together with a sawmill and fixtures” for \$1,610.<sup>127</sup>

The property Robert Singleton acquired included an earlier tavern, established circa 1790 by a tavern keeper identified only as Mr. Heidt. In the early 1800s, William Henry Davis obtained the tavern as property and began to make improvements, including a grist mill and established the Fairfield post office.<sup>128</sup> When Robert and Elizabeth purchased the Heidt tavern they decided to build an addition directly in front of the circa 1790 tavern and attach the two structures with a dogtrot. By 1854, the construction was completed.<sup>129</sup> The Singletons took over the operation of the mills on the property in addition to establishing a farm while Robert maintained his work as a physician. These transactions marked the beginning of the Singleton family in Bedford County, Tennessee, and signified the family’s prominence in the community of Fairfield.

This home was just about a mile down the road from Elizabeth’s childhood home and parents, John and Sarah Scott. Elizabeth Singleton maintained a close relationship with her mother as indicated by the numerous letters written between the two women.<sup>130</sup> Letters between Dr. Robert Singleton and his father-in-law John Scott indicate that they discussed a range of topics, including both family and business matters, especially slavery. Scott wrote to Singleton in a letter dated May 29, 1848:

“The trading of Negroes I don’t like anyhow, my will is made and I don’t like to [alter it.] The children are attached to Harriet and to change her for another would throw a greater burden on Sarah— John is put in your hands to do the best you

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<sup>127</sup> Chapman Collection, TSLA.

<sup>128</sup> Weston A Goodspeed, *History of Tennessee: Nashville*, (Nashville: Goodspeed Publishing Company, 1886, 861-884, 1126-1189, <https://homepages.rootsweb.com/~khopkins/GdspdBedford.html>. Accessed August 20, 2023.

<sup>129</sup> Letter from Elizabeth to Kate, October 15, 1854, Katherine Orme Williams Collection, TSLA.

<sup>130</sup> Katherine Orme Williams Collection, TSLA.

can with him and to get a plough boy about the size of Richard. And the balance to [assist] you in discharging the notes you have given for your land.”<sup>131</sup>

John Scott did not like trading enslaved people, because it would inconvenience him to trade one person for another when he had grown accustomed to the benefit of a specific person’s abilities. While John disapproved of replacing a specific enslaved woman, Harriet, because the children are fond of her and his daughter, “Sarah” relied on her help to tend to them, he clearly sent another man, John, to Robert and advised him to find yet another man based solely on his size and ability to work on the farm.<sup>132</sup>

Notably, Elizabeth Singleton was active in the farm’s management and may have owned her own properties including hogs. In an 1838 letter she reported to her mother: “The boys arrived safe (with the exception of one of my pigs which they lost at the river), on Sunday evening.”<sup>133</sup> In another letter dated January of 1851 she reported to her husband: “I had my hogs killed the first of this month[,] I had a good spell to kill in and very nice meat. I have had my Irish Potatoes dug. I think there is 10 or 12 bushels. I am saving all of them as I think there will be a great demand for them.... This morning the dogs killed one of my sheep[,] I have had them killed, so you see I have my troubles.” Then in March of the same year, she wrote again to her husband and discussed another set of livestock on the farm but referred to them as “his mules.”<sup>134</sup> Clearly, she was distinguishing between the different crops and livestock.

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<sup>131</sup> Letter from John Scott to Dr. Robert Singleton, May 29, 1848, Chapman Papers, TSLA. It’s possible that this is the same Harriet referred to in Chapter two, in the purchase made by Dr. Robert Singleton on December 25, 1844. In the bill of sale, it states that she is a girl of nine or ten, so here four years later as a teenager, at least one of her roles in the household is to care for the children.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Sarah Singleton to “My Dear Mother,” January 21, 1838. Katherine Orme Williams collection. TSLA.

<sup>134</sup> Sarah Singleton to “My Dear Husband,” Jan. 26, 1851, and E.S. Singleton to “My Dear Husband,” March 1, 18[51?], Chapman Collection, TSLA.

Elizabeth Singleton's apparent management of her own property is significant as married women were not able to own property under the common law known as coverture that was practiced at this time.<sup>135</sup> Many states across the United States began adopting laws in the 1840s that would allow a woman to retain her rights to property given to her by her father, and that creditors were not allowed to remove such property for the payment of a husband's debt. In the state of Tennessee, however, the legislature of 1849 ruled that "women did not have independent souls and therefore should not own property"<sup>136</sup> so Elizabeth's entitlement to these possessions would have been null and void legally.

It's not clear whether Elizabeth came into the marriage with any possessions, but it can be inferred from the status and wealth of her father, John Scott, and her reference to her crops and livestock that she likely did come into the marriage with some assets. These properties could have been anything from livestock, tangible money, land, or even enslaved persons. Whatever the case, it seems that even if Elizabeth couldn't be legally recognized as the owner of such property, she did at least operate within her home as the owner of the property and took part in the daily operations of the farm to the extent that she was informed of happenings and took control of day-to-day decisions when her husband was away from home.

Elizabeth also presumably oversaw the running of her home in regards to deciding what meals should be prepared, clothing herself and her children, deciding their

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<sup>135</sup> Richard H. Chused, *Married Women's Property Law: 1800-1850*. Digital Commons at New York Law School, New York Law School, 1982.  
[https://digitalcommons.nyls.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1279&context=fac\\_articles\\_chapters](https://digitalcommons.nyls.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1279&context=fac_articles_chapters). Accessed August 10, 2023.

<sup>136</sup> Sue Heineman, *Timelines of American Women's History*, (New York: Berkley Publishing, 1996), 21.  
<https://books.google.com/books?id=5kjkZjvnl-sC&pg=PA21#v=onepage&q&f=false>. Accessed August 8, 2023.

education and social engagements, and decorating the home. When the couple moved into the old tavern, they decided to build a more modern addition to the front, south facing side of the tavern to give it a more appealing look. Two large rooms with twenty-foot ceilings were added as well as a parlor room. This “modern” look was done in the style of Federal and Greek Revival architectural standards. An open dogtrot breezeway connected the two buildings.

Robert and Elizabeth Singleton would spend twenty-three years in matrimony before Robert died on January 30, 1858.<sup>137</sup> After her husband’s death, Elizabeth helped lead the family farm with the assistance of her eldest son, Robert Lipscomb Singleton, Jr. Sixteen-year-old Robert Jr. was thrust into the family business with ferocity and was quickly schooled in its dealings—mainly trading, selling, and buying of livestock, goods, and enslaved people. When his father died in 1858, Robert Jr. was just a teenager attending school. His mother, Elizabeth, would change this and help him become the farmer and businessman he would remain for the duration of his life.

One of his early experiences is outlined in an 1861 letter he wrote to his mother while away on a business trip with his father’s friend and executor of his will, L.P. Fields. He describes the trading as slow, with grim disregard for the wellbeing of the enslaved people he is removing from their homes and selling to strangers. He states “I have no news to tell you Ma, but I am obeying your orders...trade is very dull here but I am in fine spirits...I didn’t sell very many mules while [Mr. Fields] was gone but it was not my fault. People want mules here on a credit and most of the traders sell that way... John and

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<sup>137</sup> *Dr. Robert L. Singleton*, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/94482099/robert-l-singleton>. Accessed August 17, 2023.

Rufus<sup>138</sup> are sold for twenty-one hundred and fifty dollars, it was pretty cheap but the man that they were sold to is the only man in Georgia that has got that much money.”<sup>139</sup>

Robert Jr’s mention of following his mother’s instructions and the assistance of a family friend are all indicative of his youthfulness and inexperience. Despite his youth, as the oldest male member of the family, his role was shifted to one of provider upon the death of his father.

Within a few years of assuming this role, Robert Jr. found himself living in a time of upheaval with a country torn in two over deciding whether or not to abolish slavery. In Tennessee this was actually quite a contested topic and had been for some time. As early as the 1790s Tennessee was home to a small free Black community and would continue to attract abolitionists throughout the next century, even establishing a newspaper, the *Manumission Intelligencer*, that educated readers on how to manumit and free enslaved people.<sup>140</sup> When the Civil War began, Bedford County sent almost as many soldiers to the Union line as it did to the Confederate side, demonstrating just how divided the people of this community were.<sup>141</sup>

As a white southerner whose wealth depended on agriculture, which required grueling labor and long hours performed by enslaved people, Robert Singleton Jr., was unabashedly proslavery. He joined the Confederate Army in September 1861 as part of

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<sup>138</sup> John and Rufus is a reference to enslaved people that Robert is selling.

<sup>139</sup> Robert L. Singleton to Elizabeth Singleton, March 5, 1861, Chapman Collection, TSLA.

<sup>140</sup> Tara M. Mielnik, “Manumission Intelligencer and Emancipator,” *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Society, 2018), <http://tennesseencyclopedia.net/entries/manumission-intelligencer-and-emancipator/>. Accessed August 10, 2023.

<sup>141</sup> Amanda J. Townes, “Material Culture as a Primary Source for understanding Bedford County Tennessee in the Civil War Era.” PhD diss., Middle Tennessee State University, 2011.

Company G of the 17<sup>th</sup> Tennessee infantry.<sup>142</sup> He fought in the battles of Camp Wildcat, Fishing Creek, Munfordville, Perryville, and lastly the Battle of Stones River in nearby Murfreesboro, TN.<sup>143</sup> This battle was widely regarded as one of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War. In fact it was so brutal that Union soldiers began referring to one area of the battlefield as the “slaughter pen” because it reminded them of the slaughter pens at the stockyards in Chicago.<sup>144</sup> Robert Singleton Jr lost his leg in the battle and would have likely lost his life as well if not for the actions of his boyhood companion—his enslaved servant, George Singleton, the son of Jack Singleton and Kittie Scott.

At Stones River, George Singleton rescued Robert, helping him to safety. George managed to locate Robert on the battlefield and took him to a Union medic who was able to save Robert’s life by amputating his leg. Three weeks after the battle, George Singleton enlisted in the Union Army. Robert Jr became a prisoner of war and after spending seven months recovering from his wound and possibly a secondary infection in a hospital in Murfreesboro<sup>145</sup> he was sent to Camp Chase in Ohio. He arrived at Camp Chase on August 7, 1863<sup>146</sup> but would only stay until February of 1864 when he was moved, along with 1,773 other men, to various Union camps throughout the North.

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<sup>142</sup> National Park Service, *Battle Unit Details for the 17<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Tennessee Infantry*. <https://www.nps.gov/civilwar/search-battle-units-detail.htm?battleUnitCode=CTN0017R101>. Accessed August 20, 2023.

<sup>143</sup> Robert L. Singleton, Seventeenth Infantry, Compiled Service Records; “Robt. L. Singleton,” Soldier’s Application for Pension, Ancestry.com; National Park Service, *Battle Unit Details for the 17<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Tennessee Infantry*.

<sup>144</sup> National Park Service, *The Slaughter Pen*, <https://www.nps.gov/stri/learn/history/culture/slaughterpenhttps://www.nps.gov/stri/learn/historyculture/slaughterpen.htm>.htm, Accessed August 20, 2023.

<sup>145</sup> Robert L. Singleton, Seventeenth Infantry, *Compiled Service Records*.

<sup>146</sup> Singleton, R.L.,” Auxiliary Register, Military Prison, Camp Chase, O., Prisoners Received Feby. 1862 to Aug. 25, 1863, p. 256, in U.S., Civil War Prisoner of War Records, 1861-1865, Ancestry.com.

Robert Jr was sent to Camp Delaware on Pea Patch Island on the Delaware River;<sup>147</sup> while there, he became ill and for the last two months of his imprisonment he stayed in the hospital. On September 28, 1864, Robert was paroled and sent to Varina, Virginia to be exchanged. His exchange took place on November 20, 1864. However, after arriving in Varina he was still unwell and thus continued to recover from his illness at both a hospital in Richmond and his grandmother's house in Halifax, Virginia, roughly 100 miles southeast of Richmond. Then, in July 1865, Robert was discharged from the army and his military career was ended.<sup>148</sup>

According to family oral tradition in both Singleton family factions, once Robert managed to make his way home, he found that when the war was over in 1865, George Singleton returned to the farm, but found his former mistress, Elizabeth Singleton, and the rest of her family, and then his own parents and other slaves who stayed in a destitute situation. Crops were destroyed and as summer neared starvation was possible. Elizabeth had managed to save some money, but it was Confederate bills and consequently useless. George Singleton, however, had directed the farm's recovery as his former master Robert recovered from his wounds.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Ivy, "Camp Chase, Columbus, Ohio, 1861-1865," p. 84; Robert L. Singleton, Seventeenth Infantry, *Compiled Service Records*.

<sup>148</sup> Robert L. Singleton, Seventeenth Infantry, *Compiled Service Records*; "Singleton, R.S. [sic]," *Hospital Records G. 1864-1865, Ft. Delaware, Del., Aux. Reg. No. Contains 5870 Names...*, U.S., Civil War Prisoner of War Records, 1861-1865, Ancestry.com.

<sup>149</sup> Site Visit July 12, 2021. A lot can be inferred here. George may not have been capable of buying his own land immediately following the conclusion of the Civil War and therefore returned to the Singletons and did the most effective thing he could do, work the land that had been his home and provide for his family as well as the White family in this way. By staying on the land of his former enslaver and working for her, he was able to ensure his family was fed and protected from persecution. Perhaps George and Elizabeth came to some sort of agreement that allocated a certain percentage of the crops go to him. An arrangement of this nature was common between former masters and enslaved persons to help each person recover from the steep losses endured during the war but retain a semblance of the working order before emancipation.

Robert's recovery became more pronounced once he adopted the use of a prosthetic leg. By November 1866 Robert Singleton Jr. was among at least fifty-five men who received a prosthetic limb through the sponsorship of the Ladies' Benevolent Association of Tennessee. He was fitted by James W. Morton.<sup>150</sup> The Ladies' Benevolent Association of Tennessee was founded by Felicia Grundy Porter, daughter of former United States senator Felix Grundy. Mrs. Porter was known for her volunteer work and organizational efforts to assist Confederate soldiers. During the occupation of Nashville beginning in 1862, she formed the Women's Relief Society which aimed to provide aid for sick and wounded Confederate soldiers, after the war she organized the Ladies' Benevolent Association to assist amputees in receiving a prosthetic limb. She later formed the Ladies' Memorial Society which focused its efforts on finding suitable grave sites for Confederate soldiers at Mount Olivet Cemetery in Nashville.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> "Benevolent Association of Tennessee", *Nashville Republican Banner*, November 22, 1866, Newspapers.com, [https://www.newspapers.com/image/604877487/?match=1&clipping\\_id=130178371](https://www.newspapers.com/image/604877487/?match=1&clipping_id=130178371). Accessed on August 12, 2023.

<sup>151</sup> "Felicia Ann Grundy Porter," <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/54901002/felicia-ann-porter>. Accessed November 17, 2023; Carole Stanford Bucy, "Quiet Revolutionaries: The Grundy Women and the Beginnings of Women's Volunteer Associations in Tennessee," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* Vol. 54 (Spring 1995), pp. 40-53; "Letter from Felicia Grundy to John Pettus," January 14, 1862, The Civil War and Reconstruction Governors of Mississippi, Mississippi State University, <https://www.cwrgm.org/item/97464>. Accessed November 17, 2023.



**BENEVOLENT ASSOCIATION OF  
TENNESSEE.**

**REPORT OF ARTIFICIAL LEGS MADE BY  
Jas. W. Morton, for the Benevolent Association  
of Tennessee;**

NASHVILLE, TENN., Nov. 20, 1866.

Michael Johnson, Davidson county,	250
H. C. Hallam, "	150
John O'Donnovan, "	150
Junius Cloud, "	150
Thomas Welch, "	150
James Campbell, "	150
Patrick Mulloy, "	125
John W. Rooker, "	125
William F. Holmes, Rutherford county,	150
John R. Farr, "	150
Charles K. Felts, "	150
William M. Spain, "	150
James M. Barchett, "	150
Thompson Wood, "	125
Francis A. Mays, Maury county,	150
James M. Hickey, "	150
William T. Edwards, "	150
E. F. Stone, "	125
Warren Hinson, Williamson county,	150
James R. Neely, "	125
Merleth Winstead, "	125
William R. Nevius, leg remodeled,	70
John D. Lynch, Franklin county,	150
John G. Hannah, "	125
Amos Speck, "	125
Thomas G. Miller, "	125
H. H. Wells, present living in Lyon co. Ky.,	125
James L. Goodman, Bedford county,	125
Rufus L. Davidson, "	125
Robert L. Singleton, "	150
John W. Stewart, Sumner county,	125
Frederick V. Gates, "	125
Patrick E. Hall, "	125
John S. Cloyd, White county,	125
Gardner Green, "	100
James M. Taylor, Stewart county,	150
Pinkney Nelms, "	125
M. M. Standill, "	150
Thomas Hennessee, Warren county,	125
Harbert H. Whitehead, Wilson county,	150
Geo. H. H. Thompson, "	125
James W. Johnson, DeKalb county,	150
Jas. S. Roberts, "	150
Robert H. Anthony, Coffee county,	125
James M. Kimbro, "	125
Liberty S. Duncan, "	125
Benj. W. Bllentine, Montgomery county,	125
Noah H. Gibbons, Perry county,	125
John H. Balthrop, Robertson county,	125
Benjamin F. Marberry, Humphreys county,	125
James M. Moore, Giles county,	125
A. B. Mills, "	125
Thos. T. Foster, at present living in Alabama,	150

\$3,675

Total number of Legs furnished..... 7,495  
Due J. W. Morton on above amount..... 1,050

Cash paid Morton to date..... \$7,415  
P. S.—On the above amount for Legs delivered  
there is due me by the Association, One Thousand  
and Eighty \$(1,050) dollars.

I have also on hand the Association orders for  
twenty-four Legs, which are partly completed.

I have also, letters from thirty-one persons, who  
wish to take the benefit of the Association, making  
a total of fifty-five Legs to be made; requiring funds  
to the amount of Seven Thousand Four Hundred  
and Twenty-Five Dollars.

Yours, Respectfully,

JAMES W. MORTON.  
To Mrs. F. G. PORTER, President Benevolent Asso-  
ciation of Tennessee. [nov:21-66]

*Newspaper Clipping showing Robert Singleton received prosthetic leg from the Benevolent Association of Tennessee.  
Courtesy of Newspapers.com.*

The family kept the prosthetic leg, which is now in the "Innovation" collection of the  
Tennessee State Museum.<sup>152</sup>

<sup>152</sup> Tennessee State Museum, Collection: *Innovation*.

<https://tnmuseum.org/TN225/artifacts/050?locale=en>. Accessed August 12, 2023.



*Wooden Leg of R.L. Singleton. Photo courtesy of Tennessee State Museum.*

Elizabeth Singleton would spend her remaining days living in the house she and her husband had built, running the family's farm with the assistance of three of her daughters (Mattie, Sallie, and Fannie) as well as hired African American laborers, including George and his wife Barbara Singleton. Elizabeth never remarried; three of her daughters also never married— Mattie, Kate and Sallie.<sup>153</sup> They all lived in the family home in Fairfield. The continual presence of George and his family on the farm indicates that the two families remained bonded with each other.<sup>154</sup>

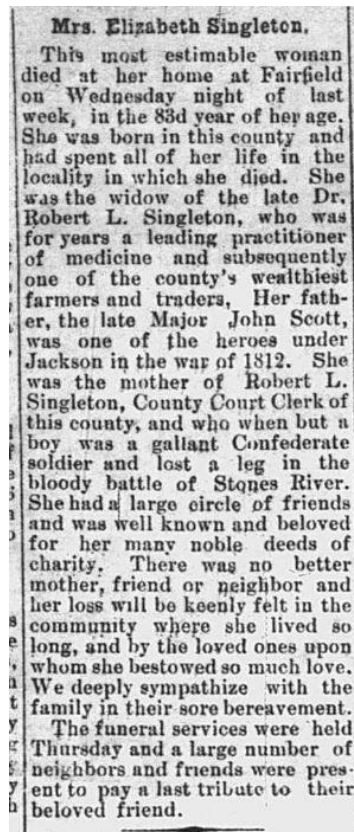
In August of 1900, Elizabeth passed away. Her obituary recognizes her affiliation with some of Fairfield's founding members including her father and her husband, as well as Elizabeth's deep love and commitment to her community and fellow neighbors.

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<sup>153</sup> Singleton-Scott-Chapman Family Tree; "Jeter Martin," *1900 U.S. Census, Population Schedule, Bedford Co., TN*, Ancestry.com; Helen C. and Timothy R. March, *Newspaper Vital Records of Bedford County, Tennessee* (Shelbyville: Marsh Historical Publications, 1984), p. 107; "Elizabeth Singleton," *1900 U.S. Population Schedule, Bedford Co., TN*, Ancestry.com.

<sup>154</sup> "George Singleton," Pension Application File. National Archives, Washington D.C.

“There was no better mother, friend, or neighbor and her loss will be keenly felt in the community where she lived so long, and by the loved ones upon whom she bestowed so much love.”<sup>155</sup>



*Sara Elizabeth Scott Singleton Obituary, Bedford County Times, August 17, 1900.*

Robert Jr. assisted running the family farm in the immediate years following his return home from the northern prison camps, but in 1870 he successfully ran for the position of county clerk of Bedford County. With this position came an office at the county's courthouse in Shelbyville, fourteen miles southwest of Wartrace, so Robert Jr. relocated there.<sup>156</sup> He remained in this influential position until 1882 and then again between the years of 1890 and 1902. He married Sally Erwin Sehorn, daughter of the

<sup>155</sup> Sara Elizabeth Scott Singleton, *Bedford County Times*, August 17, 1900.

<sup>156</sup> Graham et. al., "The Chapman-Singleton House"

jeweler around the corner from his downtown office, on December 18<sup>th</sup>, 1877. The pair had three children, Robert Lipscomb III, John Sehorn, and Clare. By 1880 the young family presumably lived on the outskirts of town as they maintained roughly 18 acres of tillable land and 10 acres of wooded land. Here they produced crops of corn, Irish potatoes, and sweet potatoes and ran a family homestead that contained just one horse, one milk cow, plus 5 hogs and 35 hens.<sup>157</sup> They occasionally visited Robert's mother and sisters at the old family home and stayed in touch by writing letters back and forth.<sup>158</sup>

During his second stint serving as the county's clerk, Robert Jr. was investigated by Revenue Agent T.B. Johnson. He was found delinquent in paying several taxes and ultimately owed more than \$8,000 to the county and state, all of which was paid in full.<sup>159</sup> In December of 1903 he announced his intention to run for the position of Bedford County representative to the general assembly. He ran as a democrat in support of re-electing William Bate to the state senate.<sup>160</sup> By election time in November, Robert was not listed on the ballot and fellow democrat B.D. Kingree secured the seat.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> "Robt. L. Singleton," *1880 U.S. Census, Agricultural Schedule*, Bedford Co., TN, Ancestry.com; Graham, et. al., "The Chapman-Singleton House."

<sup>158</sup> Clare Singleton to Martha Singleton, July 2, 1895, Chapman Collection, TSLA.

<sup>159</sup> "State Paid in Full," *The Tennessean*, October 5, 1901, [https://www.newspapers.com/image/604236185/?match=1&clipping\\_id=135456313](https://www.newspapers.com/image/604236185/?match=1&clipping_id=135456313). Accessed November 10, 2023.

<sup>160</sup> "Robert Singleton Enters Race," *Nashville Banner*, December 28, 1903, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/603683609/?match=1>. Accessed November 17, 2023; "Candidate for Legislature," *Knoxville Sentinel*, January 14, 1904, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/585908433/?terms=%22Singleton%22%20general%20assembly&match=1>. Accessed November 17, 2023.

<sup>161</sup> "Official Election Returns: Bedford County," *The Tennessean*, November 16, 1904, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/604246080/?terms=Bedford%20county%20general%20assembly&match=1>. Accessed November 17, 2023.

## STATE PAID IN FULL

Revenue Agent Johnson Secures Money Due From Robt. Singleton, of Bedford County.

Revenue Agent T. B. Johnson yesterday filed with State Comptroller King the report of his examination of the books of County Court Clerk Robert L. Singleton, of Bedford County, upon which he had been engaged for some time. Every dollar due the State was paid and there is now nothing due either the State or the county from that officer.

At the outset of his investigation Mr. Johnson discovered that Mr. Singleton was delinquent to the State to the amount of \$418.92, on which had accrued fees which made the total \$669.18. Inheritance tax amounting to \$371.75 and a commission of \$55.75 was also delinquent.

Mr. Singleton owed Bedford County and the school fund the following amounts: privilege county tax, \$2,663.65; privilege school funds, \$3,009.86; commissions, \$752.03.

While at this investigation Mr. Johnson found in the Circuit Court Clerk's office unclaimed witness and officers' fees amounting to \$1,012.78, which he turned over to the Trustee. Unclaimed funds to the amount of \$179.46, due from former Clerk and Master J. S. Butler were collected.

The result of Mr. Johnson's visit to Shelbyville was a total collection of \$8,559.87.

## ROBERT SINGLETON ENTERS THE RACE.

Special to the Banner.

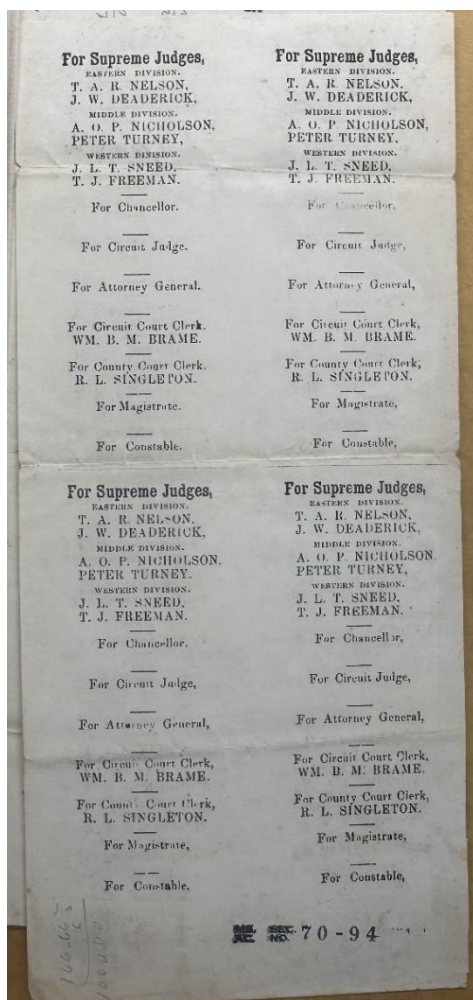
Shelbyville, Tenn., December 28.—In political circles here the announcement of Robert L. Singleton as a candidate to represent Bedford County in the next General Assembly has created a stir. The friends of Mr. Singleton are enthusiastic and confident. Those opposed to him, while realizing that they have a job on their hands, are nevertheless certain they can accomplish his defeat.

At present Mr. Singleton is opposed only by B. D. Kingsee, a talented and popular young Democratic lawyer here, but there "are others" who would like to serve in the next Legislature and the prospect is that there will be a field full of candidates before the day of the primary.

### Bedford County.

SHELBYVILLE, Tenn., Nov. 15.—(Special.)—The official returns for this county, as given out to-day by the Board of Election Commissioners, stand thus: Parker 2,864, Roosevelt 1,361; Frazier 1,978, Littleton 1,289, Ray 3; Railroad Commissioner, Enloe 1,962, Poston 1,716; Congress, Houston 2,079, Brown 1,188; Senator, Hickerson 1,990; Representative, Kingree (D.) 1,590, Shofner (R.) 1,241; Joint Representative for Bedford, Moore and Lincoln, Bean (D.) 1,567, Miller (R.) 796, Taylor (Ind.) 858.

Article detailing the investigation findings. (R) Announcement of Robert entering race for the General Assembly (Top left) Election Results revealing B.D. Kingree as the winner (Bottom left)



*Docket showing R.L. Singleton elected as Bedford County Clerk. Photo taken by Amy NeeSmith <sup>162</sup>*

During the 1880's Robert began his involvement in various Confederate veteran's activities. He joined his first Confederate veterans' group in 1887, serving as one of the William Frierson's bivouac's founding members, and quickly took on a leadership role serving as the group's first Corresponding Secretary and on the Committee on Credentials. He later served as president for the organization for the 1893-1894 year. This group eventually joined the United Confederate Veterans organization as the Wm.

<sup>162</sup> Katherine Orme Collection, TSLA.

Frierson Camp No. 83.<sup>163</sup> Robert was very involved in this group, writing remembrances, locating and researching burials of Confederate soldiers, organizing reunions, decorating graveyards, and raising funds for the erection of monuments to fallen soldiers.<sup>164</sup>

His wife Sally and later his daughter Clare would also help establish equivalent ladies' groups such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy. In fact, Clare served as the president of the Annie Coleman Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy in Orlando, Florida, and was a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution at the time of her death in 1964.<sup>165</sup> Robert and Sally eventually moved back to Fairfield as indicated in his 1908 application for his soldier's pension. Prior to applying for this pension, Robert had spent several years purchasing the property from his family members and deeding it to his wife Sally to appear as if he had limited resources, which was necessary to demonstrate in order to attain the pension. His work at the UCV had allowed him to see the system at work in regard to such requests so it is no surprise that he was awarded his pension.<sup>166</sup>

In 1910, Robert's daughter Clare married Leonard F. Chapman, a Methodist minister from Texas at the Singleton home before they moved south to Florida.<sup>167</sup> Over the next several years Robert's health took a turn for the worse, he spent some time in

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<sup>163</sup> *Minutes of the Wm. Frierson Bivouac No. 8, Shelbyville, Tenn.* (Shelbyville: The Bedford Co. Historical Society, n.d.,) pp. 1-3.

<sup>164</sup> Graham, et. al., "The Chapman-Singleton House."

<sup>165</sup> "Mrs. Clare Chapman Dies," *Orlando Sentinel*, December 25, 1964, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/223803850/?terms=Clare%20Singleton&match=1>. Accessed August 22, 2023.

<sup>166</sup> Graham, et. al., "The Chapman-Singleton House."

<sup>167</sup> *Tennessee Records, Marriage Records, 1780-2002, Clare Singleton*, [https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/1169/images/VRMUSATN1780\\_026648-00958?pid=5214503](https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/1169/images/VRMUSATN1780_026648-00958?pid=5214503). Accessed August 22, 2023.

Florida in hopes of recovering but eventually returned to Tennessee.<sup>168</sup> On August 24, 1919, at the age of seventy-six Robert Lipscomb Singleton Jr. died of kidney disease and was buried in New Hope Cemetery<sup>169</sup> next to his parents and grandparents.

Robert was the last Singleton to call Fairfield his full-time home. Sally would spend the rest of her years living between her children, a boarding house in Nashville, and the family home, which she ended up selling so she could get a widow's pension and later repurchasing. In October 1919, just a few months following the death of her husband, Sally filed for a widow's pension. She was denied her first attempt which resulted in her being forced to sell the majority of the farm to H.H. Good on December 27, 1921 (for which her sister-in-law, also Sally Singleton, sued her due to owing her interest on the property). However, it seems there may have been an arrangement in place as only a week after the purchase on January 6, 1922, Sally's son Robert III bought 2.46 acres, including the home, back from Mr. Good.<sup>170</sup> With the loss of her farm and home, Sally was able to attain the widow's pension on her second attempt in October 1929. It was only after she had secured this pension that she bought the home back from her son in February 1930.<sup>171</sup> She would sell the home one last time to her daughter Clare Chapman in July 1937 before Sally died on February 4, 1942, while living in Florida.<sup>172</sup> She is buried next to her parents at Willow Mount Cemetery in

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<sup>168</sup> Graham, et. al., "The Chapman-Singleton House."

<sup>169</sup> "Robert Lipscomb Singleton," <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/94590941/robert-lipscomb-singleton>. Accessed on August 23, 2023.

<sup>170</sup> Deed between Mrs. RLS and H.H. Good, for 4 acres for \$1.00, Dec. 27, 1921, and Deed between H.H. Good and RLS [III], 2.46 acres for \$400, Jan. 6, 1922, Deed Book 28, pp. 462, 592, Bedford County Register of Deeds.

<sup>171</sup> Deed between RLS [III] and Mrs. RLS Sr., 2.36 acres for \$400, Feb. 18, 1930, Deed Book 34, p. 438, Bedford Co. Register of Deeds; Graham, et. al., "The Chapman-Singleton House."

<sup>172</sup> Deed from Mrs. RLS, Sr., to Mrs. Clare Singleton Chapman for 2.46 acres for \$400, Jul. 28, 1937, Deed Book 40, p. 370, Bedford County Register of Deeds Office; "Mrs. Sallie Singleton," *Chattanooga Daily*



Shelbyville.<sup>173</sup> Clare Chapman and her family then used the house strictly as a vacation home in the summers during the 1940s and 50s. Her son Leonard Jr. would continue that tradition once he retired.<sup>174</sup>

Each family member that has resided in the home, even those who only spent their summers there, have left their mark on it. Items from the entire family can be found within the house, and each descendant has faithfully ensured that the home is taken care of, and that necessary maintenance is done to preserve this part of Tennessee's history. The site, along with the stories of the people whose lives unfolded here, provides historians with greater context to interpret the past.

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*Times*, February 5, 1942. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/24866333/sallie-singleton>.  
<https://www.newspapers.com/image/Mrs.SallieSingleton>. Accessed on August 20, 2023.

<sup>173</sup> "Sallie Sehorn Singleton," <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/24866333/sallie-singletonnewspapers.com>.

<sup>174</sup> Graham et. al., "The Chapman-Singleton House."

## Chapter Four: The Singletons Home

The historic house itself can be a source of information when discussing its inhabitants throughout the centuries. The architecture of the Singleton family home is quite interesting. The original building dates to circa 1790 when it was used as both a home and a tavern for travelers. The tavern was located close to the Nashville-Chattanooga trace as well as the Duck River which would have provided the then-owners with periodic visitors.<sup>175</sup> Inside the tavern, guests could find food and two separate bedrooms to sleep in. The two upstairs rooms were utilized by travelers from the building's inception all the way through the Civil War. At one time signage was attached to the building advertising beer and other strong drinks for potential customers.<sup>176</sup>

The style and layout of the original tavern reflects the influence of a center-aisle type of vernacular design, with a possible porch on the front. Builders considered porches a “semipublic buffer space— a place to greet and deal with visitors (and those of lower social status) without admitting them inside.”<sup>177</sup> It's very possible that a porch on the original tavern became the open space between the tavern and the new 1854 addition.

The 1854 Greek Revival-style front addition implies that the Singletons were concerned with their outward image and wanted to identify themselves as successful, respectable individuals by having their home reflect the popular style among the planter

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<sup>175</sup> Lynn Hulan, “Heidt Tavern/Singleton Residence,” National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Wartrace, Bedford Co., TN, 1991. <https://npgallery.nps.gov/NRHP/AssetDetail/52781d1b-fa10-45c7-9f66-c05b5a996104>. Accessed August 28, 2023.

<sup>176</sup> “The Singleton Tavern,” *The Bedford County Historical Quarterly*, (Summer, 1977), 44.

<sup>177</sup> Foster Grant, *American Houses: A Field Guide to the Architecture of the Home*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004), 108.

elite. The symmetrical three-bay façade, with a Greek Revival-style portico is typical of the style in middle class homes of Middle Tennessee. In addition, there are two discreetly placed chimneys, and a paneled entrance with rectangular side lights and decorative transom lights, which are typical details found in vernacular Greek Revival dwellings. Typically, Greek Revival homes were painted white. It seems that this was the original color of the home as remnants of white can be seen under the flaking, pale yellow paint today.<sup>178</sup>



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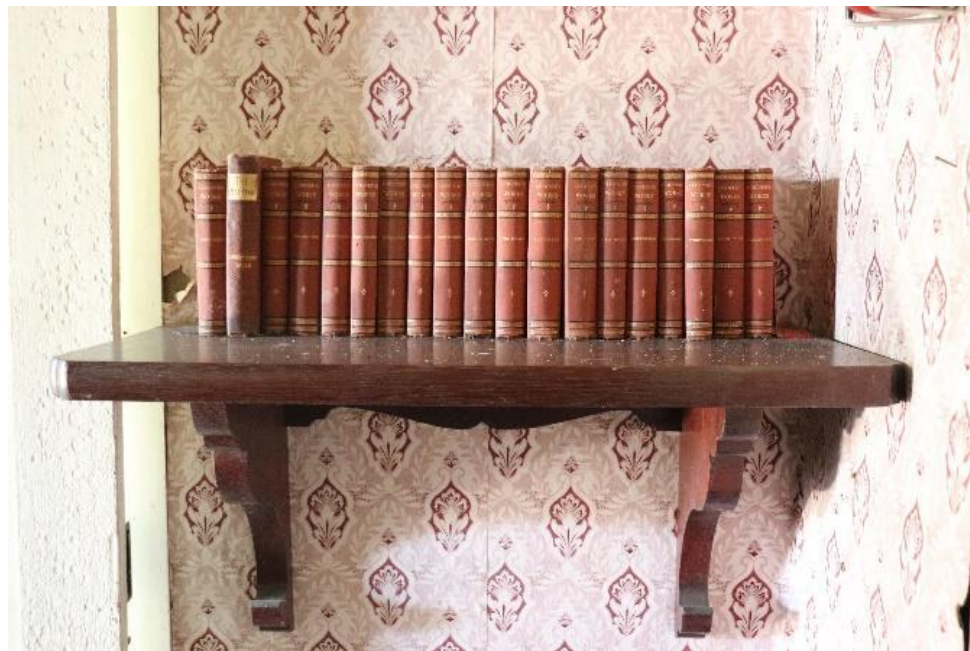
*Front exterior of Singleton House, Greek Revival addition. Knesu, Center for Historic Preservation, 2022*

The choice to construct a home in the Greek Revival style was quite a popular choice for the gentry class of Americans in the early 1800s. In fact, it was so popular that well-known author James Fenimore Cooper stated his disgust with the country's infatuation with the style in his 1835 book *Home As Found*. He divulged that his

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid, 232.

hometown of upstate New York was littered with Greek temples devoted to pagan gods, and he found Americans' lack of ingenuity quite discouraging. Additionally, Cooper believed that America's elites were the social superiors over the lower classes and thus should be the crafters of cultural trends. Furthermore, he believed that social order should be followed by the trends set in place by this hierarchical system.<sup>180</sup> Simply stated, he believed that only the elite were entitled to self-expression and that people who belonged to the middle and lower classes should emulate the privileged top earners in every way possible to their respective abilities. Among the vast library within the Singleton home is a collection of James Fenimore Cooper's writings. At least eighteen of his thirty-two books can be found on the shelves of the library. Therefore, the choice of constructing a Greek Revival styled home can be indicative of the Singleton family's social adherence to a hierarchical system.



*James Fenimore Cooper's books in the Singleton Library*

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<sup>180</sup> Duncan Faherty. *Remodeling the Nation: The Architecture of American Identity, 1776-1858*, (Hanover: University of New Hampshire Press, 2007), p. 120-141.

The Singleton family can trace its lineage to a Revolutionary War soldier through its matrilineal line. Dr. Robert's maternal great, great grandfather, John Watkins, fought in the Revolutionary War against the British.<sup>181</sup> This link to America's founding days instilled a strong sense of patriotism in his descendants, as well as a strong tie to the democratic political system installed in America's formative days. Evidence of this includes Singleton family members strong affiliations with various associations like the Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution.

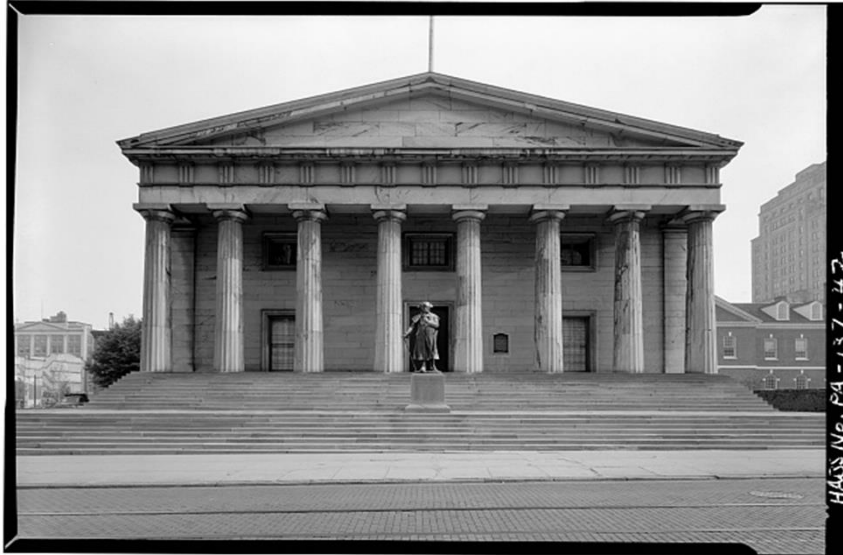
However, historians today link Americans' fascination with Greek architecture to the ancient association between Grecians and democracy. As citizens of a newly founded country, still ascertaining its own, separate identity, Americans were attempting to link their character with a prosperous and well-recognized ancient civilization, which also implies that all Americans, of every class, should be free to express their individuality in any way they deem suitable. The Greek influence in America comes through most visibly in the early architectural structures built in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>182</sup> Consider The Second Bank built between 1818 and 1824 by well-known architect William Strickland, who also famously came to Nashville and constructed the state capitol after the Erechtheum and the Tower of Lysicrates, two ancient Greek

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<sup>181</sup> U.S., *Sons of the American Revolution Membership Applications, 1889-1970 for Robert Lipscomb Singleton*; Sons of Revolution application for Leonard F. Chapman filed on June 4, 1941, [https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/1246339:2204?tid=&pid=&queryId=0ff36c643264399b5217ae8f25b4cf35&\\_phsrc=WzU849&\\_phstart=successSource](https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/1246339:2204?tid=&pid=&queryId=0ff36c643264399b5217ae8f25b4cf35&_phsrc=WzU849&_phstart=successSource). Accessed August 15, 2023.

<sup>182</sup> Virginia Savage McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses: The Definitive Guide to Identifying and Understanding America's Domestic Architecture*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 252-264.

structures.<sup>183</sup> Or think of Andrew Jackson’s home, the Hermitage, which was completed in 1818, in a more commonly seen family home style.<sup>184</sup>



*Photograph of the 2nd Bank of the United States, Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, HABS PA,51-PHILA,223—42*



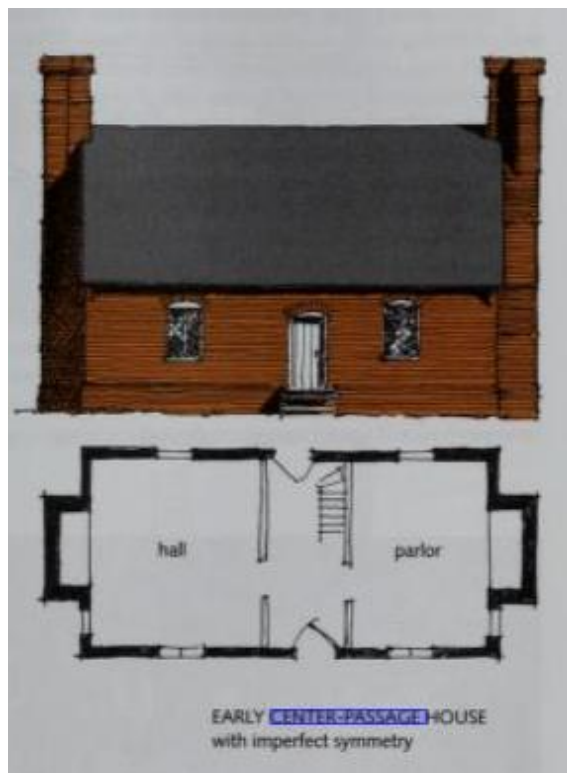
*Photograph of the Tennessee State Capitol shortly after its completion, TSM Collection*

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<sup>183</sup> Jennifer Watts, “TN 225: William Strickland, the Capitol’s Architect,” Tennessee State Museum, February 8, 2022. <https://tnmuseum.org/junior-curators/posts/tn225-william-strickland-the-capitols-architect?locale=en>. Accessed September 17, 2023.

<sup>184</sup> For additional examples see *A Field Guide to American Houses* by Virginia Savage McAlester.

The circa 1790 tavern section of the Singleton home is built in the Center Passage Plan, a popular style during the 1700s brought to the Middle Tennessee area from Virginia. This plan features two rooms— a hall and a parlor— as well as a center passage area that is walled off. The walls used to create the passage created privacy that was previously not present in homes designed in the previous styles. This plan also features step chimneys on each side and was often not symmetrical in the placement of doors or windows, or even roof lines. The most common material used to build these homes was weatherboard, but due to the short lifespan of such a material, not many examples remain today.<sup>185</sup> The Singleton tavern is a rare example of such widely seen plans, preserved for posterity.



*Image of a Central Hall Passage Floor plan from American Houses: A Field Guide to the Architecture of the Home.*

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<sup>185</sup> Grant Foster, *American Houses: A Field Guide to the Architecture of the Home*, 108.

## Learning from Interiors

Homes constructed in the antebellum South mirrored the gender and racial divisions of the time. As architectural historian David Handlin noted: “In the modern family father, mother, children, and servants had distinct roles, and the spaces of the home were designed and shaped specifically to accommodate them. Even in the living and dining rooms—areas for the whole family—places were set aside for each member according to his or her importance.”<sup>186</sup> As a house of many generations, the Singleton home is not so easy to understand. The function of these rooms evolved over time as the status and dwellers within the home changed, but the original structure and footprint remains intact today.

Upon entering the Singleton home through the front door, visitors immediately encounter a central hall-like room but one much larger than usual and at least today, ornately decorated as a parlor room. Having a parlor as an entrance was an unusual feature for middle and upper class houses built in the first half of the nineteenth century, indicating that this room was likely turned into a parlor by a later generation. Parlors were used as an inviting, yet elegant space to keep guests as they waited for their host to greet them. It could also be used, particularly in middle-class homes, as the area where hosts would visit with their caller. In the Singleton home, the parlor is the most highly decorated room of the house, these rooms were broadly referred to as the “best room” due to their elaborate décor.<sup>187</sup> The lower portion of the walls are covered with an alternating dark and pale maroon, and white wallpaper adorned in a damask pattern,

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<sup>186</sup> David P. Handlin, *The American Home: Architecture and Society, 1815-1915*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), 352.

<sup>187</sup> Katherine Grier, *Cultures and Comfort: Parlor Making and middle-class Identity, 1850-1930*, (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1988).



that likely dates to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>188</sup> The remaining height of the ceiling is left as exposed whitewashed boards. The incredibly tall ceiling in this room may have been intentionally created to provide better ventilation within the home. Despite the obvious difference in material, the extra height provides an element of grandeur to the space. Additionally, the late 1800s Victorian-style furniture and items in the room convey an image of sophistication and education that was valued by the Singletons at least by the twentieth century.



*Image of Parlor Room at Singleton House. Image taken by CHP staff on initial site visit, July 12, 2022*

To the immediate left of the entrance lies the main bedroom which is reserved for the head of the house. This room has three different doorways, the first door provides access to the room from the parlor, the second door was once connected to the

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<sup>188</sup> "Wallpaper Within a Restoration Process." *National Park Service: Wallpapers in Historic Preservation*, April 2007, [https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online\\_books/tpsd/wallpaper/sec3.htm](https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/tpsd/wallpaper/sec3.htm). Accessed November 15, 2023.

previously open dog trot-style porch, which then led into the dining room. This area has since been converted into a half bath and used for storage. The third door in the room leads to a private side porch, which opens exclusively into this main bedroom. All of these portals provide the resident with access to the parlor, the porches, and essentially the dining room, allowing easy entry to several social settings. Having this much accessibility to public spaces within the home was customary in home building for the middle and upper classes during the early 1800s as family members were often required to attend to business matters or unannounced guests. The primary bedroom provided homeowners with a unique space dedicated to their privacy, as well as a place to exhibit their own personal style and comfort. This was something that was once only afforded to the wealthiest members of society.

Within this room is a highly styled circa 1870s to 1880s Eastlake bedroom set containing a full-size bed, a marble top dresser with a swivel mirror, a smaller dresser, used as a wash stand with a swivel mirror, and a large double mirrored wardrobe. The ornate furniture is cut from dark walnut and crowned with pink marble, a somewhat unique feature. In each piece of furniture quality products and sophisticated style is evident, creating an elegant look for this primary bedroom.



*Eastlake marble top dresser and washstand in primary bedroom. Photo taken by CHP staff.*



*Eastlake bedframe and wardrobe in primary bedroom. Photo taken by CHP staff.*

The private bedroom for the middle class provided the head family members with some privacy while they slept and dressed. However, the social mores placed on middle-class families of the mid-1800s required that they be available to entertain their guests and tend to family duties readily, therefore their private chambers often also provided them with easy admittance to the social centers of the house.<sup>189</sup>

Countless floor plans detailed this assumed aesthetic in magazines and ladies' guidebooks like *House Beautiful*, but one is comparable to the Singleton home in that it also provided the head of the house many pathways to public spaces and the addition was added to the front of the home. Gervase Wheeler, a well-known architect and designer of the nineteenth century, published a floor plan for a front addition to a farmhouse in his 1855 book *Homes for the People*. Within the plan, the main bedroom, identified as room number 3, contains a back door which leads to the older house, an entrance into the dining room (labeled room 4), which also connects to the parlor room (labeled room 2), thus allowing the proprietor easy access to several social settings to entertain guests and attend to family duties.<sup>190</sup> The Singleton family built their addition onto the front of their home and provided their main bedroom with similar access points as described in the floorplan by Wheeler, published just a year after the addition. This situates the family's thoughts on the construction of homes squarely within the social expectations of the mid-1850s.

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<sup>189</sup> Elizabeth Collins Cromley, *American Home Life 1880-1930: A Social History of Spaces and Services*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 120-141.

<sup>190</sup> Elizabeth Collins Cromley, "A History of American Beds and Bedrooms," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 4 (1991): 177-86, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3514233>.

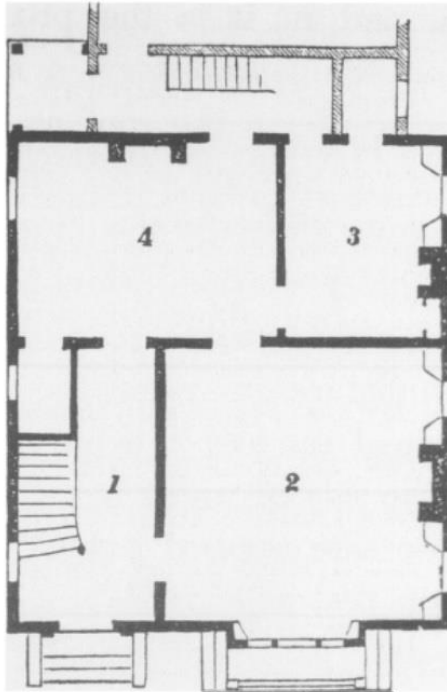


Fig. 1. This plan of an addition to a farmhouse places the bedroom in direct communication with both dining room and a back door. (From Gervase Wheeler, *Homes for the People in Suburb and Country* [1855; rpt. New York: Arno Press, 1972], 387)

The left side bedroom would have certainly been reserved for the head of the family, Robert and Elizabeth Singleton. If the pair shared the room, they could have implemented a variety of sleeping arrangements. One possibility is that the couple shared the room but not a bed while the other option is that they shared the room as well as a bed. However, they could have also had separate rooms as a second room is just on the other side of the parlor; all were customary options for the dynamic times of the 1850s.<sup>191</sup>

The right-side bedroom is equally decorated with items from circa 1880, but with a more feminine style of furniture. The room contains a detailed and elaborate seven-piece set of classic Victorian painted furniture; painted furniture of this kind is known as

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

the Victorian Cottage style. The entire set is painted a sage green and delicate montages of bundles of flowers can be seen emblazoned on each piece. The large headboard on the full-size bed frame has an original custom-painted scene added to it. It's possible that this addition to the headboard can be attributed to the noted "plain painter" Fred Swanton.<sup>192</sup>

Swanton came to the Middle Tennessee area in the mid-1880s on the Chattanooga and Nashville Railroad as a former circus painter. He initially stayed with local families and was a private art instructor. However, his alcohol addiction soon prevented him from continuing this work, and he then started painting interiors as a for-hire painter. Swanton's earliest known work can be traced to Tullahoma, Tennessee.<sup>193</sup> Tullahoma was a place that the Singleton family visited and where Clare Singleton, daughter of Robert Jr, went to school in the 1890s.<sup>194</sup> While there, Swanton painted the over mantle painting in the James G. Carroll house. He then moved to Lynchburg, where he did work in the Greene-Evans farmhouse. Finally, Swanton worked in the Bedford County area between 1886 and 1888, where he is known to have done the wallpapers of the Maple-Dean Farm. He died in the Bedford County jail in Shelbyville on April 4, 1888. In the coroner's report his identified cause of death was from "the long and continued use of ardent spirits."<sup>195</sup> One of Swanton's signature motifs was depicting broken tree

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<sup>192</sup> A plain painter as defined by John Michael Vlach is "a painter that was either self-taught or given very little instruction and where the art they produced contained the conventions of fine art... but were not fully developed." John Michael Vlach, *Plain Painters: Making Sense of American Folk Art*, (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Press, 1988), xii-xv.

<sup>193</sup> Carroll Van West, "Middle Tennessee Houses and the Plain Painter Tradition: The Work of Fred Swanton in the Late Victorian Era," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (1994): 56-63, Accessed Dec. 19, 2022. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42628358>.

<sup>194</sup> Clare Singleton to "Mother," May 18, 1895, Chapman Collection, TSLA.

<sup>195</sup> *Shelbyville Gazette*, April 12, 1888; West, "Middle Tennessee Houses and the Plain Painter Tradition" p. 56-63.

branches in many of his paintings.<sup>196</sup> The artwork on the Singleton headboard features a broken tree branch in the forefront of the image.



*Painted Headboard possibly by noted plain painter Fred Swanton. Photo taken by CHP Staff.*

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<sup>196</sup> West, "Middle Tennessee Houses and the Plain Painter Tradition," p.56-63.



*Victorian Cottage style bedroom set. Photo taken by CHP staff.*



*Victorian Cottage Wardrobe*



The feminine aspect seen in this room can also be found in the presence of an 1873 Grand Chickering square piano<sup>197</sup> and even the two child-size rocking chairs indicate that the space was used primarily for a woman, possibly a mother. The painted furniture dates to the late 1800s, which correlates with the presence of Swanton in the area. The late date of these items indicates that the room was possibly used in a different way between 1854 and the 1880s; the presence of the piano points to it potentially being used as a sitting room or family room during that time.



*1873 Chickering Piano. Photo taken by CHP staff.*

Additionally, by the time the Singletons moved into their home here on present day Clyde Gleaves Road, Elizabeth had birthed her last baby two years before and although it's not clear if Elizabeth and Robert ever shared a bed with their children, it is likely that

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<sup>197</sup> Graham, et. al., "The Chapman-Singleton House."

they would have at least shared the room with their youngest child at any given time.

Elizabeth wrote to her mother in 1838 discussing the construction of a new crib for either her babe on the way or her older child Martha, who was between one and two years old at the time.<sup>198</sup> The use of a crib indicates that the child would sleep outside of the parents' bed but still within their room.

As for the other members of the family, the three older girls, now aged between twelve and sixteen, were away at school at the time the Singletons moved to this home. The younger children, aged between eleven and five (all except the youngest), would have likely been relegated to separate nursery rooms that would have been designated according to their gender—a boy's room versus a girl's room. However, the youngest member of the family, two-year-old Fanny, would have either slept in her parents' room or in a nursery where her mother or an enslaved housemaid could easily tend to her throughout the night.<sup>199</sup>

It was common for farming families to keep nurseries on the first floor, near the kitchen, between the 1830s to 1850s, so that mothers and enslaved laborers would be able to readily attend to the children throughout the day while performing family chores and household duties, which typically took place in the kitchen.<sup>200</sup> In Lucy Ellis's 1847 plan, she stated "If there are a number of small children, it is very important that there be a nursery upon the first floor, connected with a bathing room, and as near the dining

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<sup>198</sup> Letter from Elizabeth Singleton to Sarah Scott, 1838, Katherine Orme Collection, TSLA.

<sup>199</sup> Sally McMurry, *Families and Farmhouses in Nineteenth-Century America: Vernacular Design and Social Change*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) 120-141, <https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.mtsu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=294793&site=eds-live&scope=site>. Accessed September 17, 2023.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid*, 120-141.

room and kitchen as possible, that the mother should be spared all *unnecessary* steps in attending to her duties in these several departments.”<sup>201</sup>

However, by the 1860s nursery spaces began to move away from the kitchen, and playrooms began to appear for school-aged children. In the Singleton home, it seems that a possible nursery room might have been located on the second floor of the original tavern house as the door frame surrounding the right-side room is adorned with a hand painted rendition of the phases of the moon. Additionally, the latest descendants to use the home reserved the upstairs room on the left for the youngest member of the family, and the remaining items in that room include toys and children’s books that would belong to a young child such as toys and children’s books.<sup>202</sup> Notably, the Singletons used a nanny to help Elizabeth care for her young children and as a slave-owning family, their nanny would have undoubtedly been an enslaved African American woman or girl. As indicated in chapter three a young, enslaved girl, Harriet, helped Elizabeth with the children and in later census records a Black servant girl named Lucy Coble is listed as living with the family.<sup>203</sup> Perhaps one of these upstairs rooms was reserved for them.

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid, 180.

<sup>202</sup> Site visit, July 12, 2022.

<sup>203</sup> Letter from John Scott to Robert Singleton, May 29, 1848, TSLA; 1880 Census for Fannie Martin, Ancestry.com.



*Right side upstairs room used for youngest descendant Danielle Chapman. Photo taken by CHP staff.*



*Moon painting on left side room upstairs. Photo taken by CHP staff.*

In the later years of Elizabeth's life, during the 1880s and 1890s, daughters Martha, Kate, Sallie, and Fannie lived on the property with her.<sup>204</sup> The designation of rooms is uncertain, but if patterns from other southern houses held true, Elizabeth occupied the large bedroom to the left of the central hall parlor. Two daughters may have shared the second downstairs bedroom off the parlor, leaving the bedroom in the former

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<sup>204</sup> "Sarah Singleton," 1880 U.S. Census, Population Schedule, Bedford Co., TN, Ancestry.com

tavern and the two upstairs rooms for other daughters and visitors. We know that Robert Jr and his family visited occasionally and would have stayed in the house. Fannie married in 1877 and is thought to have moved to another house (not extant) on the property.<sup>205</sup> Fannie fell ill and spent much time away from the house at hospitals, so the home would have been primarily occupied by her husband Jeter and son Fred, who helped Elizabeth farm the land.<sup>206</sup>

When Robert Jr and wife Sallie Singleton moved into the home around 1903, they cared for their son John Sehorn Singleton between the years 1917 and 1918. His sister Clare Chapman, who had moved to Florida following her marriage in 1910, often assisted her family with tending to her sick brother John and ailing father Robert Jr. John Singleton had returned home after serving abroad in the Philippines during World War I, where he caught tuberculosis. His illness would ultimately leave him resigned to his bed and in the end would claim his life.<sup>207</sup> Various remaining objects, now mostly in an upstairs bedroom, mark the years he spent at the Singleton residence. However, one wonders if he would have been in one of the downstairs rooms, where his family would have been better suited to take care of his needs.

Once the home was under the care of Leonard Chapman, husband to Clare Chapman, he hired a local couple to maintain and care for the property during the Chapman family's long absences and presented them with the option of living in the caretaker's cottage. The cottage is a small structure still standing roughly 300 yards from

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<sup>205</sup> Tennessee, U.S., Marriage Records, 1780-2002 for Fanny Singleton, Ancestry.com. [https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/1169/images/VRMUSATN1780\\_026643-00661?pld=5206614](https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/1169/images/VRMUSATN1780_026643-00661?pld=5206614). Accessed September 20, 2023; "Fannie Martin," 1880 U.S. Census, Population Schedule, Bedford Co., TN, Ancestry.com.

<sup>206</sup> Katherine Orme Williams Collection, TSLA; "Sarah Singleton," 1880 U.S. Census, Population Schedule, Bedford Co., Ancestry.com.

<sup>207</sup> "John S. Singleton," Death Certificate, Ancestry.com.

the main house and was supposedly at one time attached to the main tavern portion of the house and used as the kitchen. It was later moved the 300 yards away to prevent fires from spreading to the main house.<sup>208</sup> The couple is dubbed “Frank and Irma” in Danielle Chapman’s 2017 essay “The Country Way,” but she states that she has provided these monikers to protect the couple’s identity. She described the woman as smelling of cigarettes, never leaving the surrounding county, and using foul language. The man was tall and skinny, and surprisingly debonair despite his haggard appearance. The pair were devoted to each other and took their roles as caretakers seriously, tending to the home until they passed. At the loss of the last caretaker, the house was left largely on its own until the summertime when descendants visit for short stints and enjoy the subtle and simple lifestyle afforded to those who lived before them.<sup>209</sup>

### **Introducing Technological Advances into the Home**

Throughout the decades, the Singleton home has undergone many renovations and updates. One of the biggest updates brought to farmhouses everywhere in the early twentieth century was the introduction of indoor plumbing and electricity. Household bathrooms as we know them today with sinks, toilets, and tubs didn’t come about until after World War I.<sup>210</sup> The 1890s-1920s saw the health reform movement sweep through the United States. After the scientific breakthrough of Louis Pasteur (roughly in the 1850s) and Robert Koch’s discovery of the tuberculosis pathogen in the 1880s proving

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<sup>208</sup> Hulan, “Heidt Tavern/Singleton Residence.”

<sup>209</sup> Danielle Chapman, “The Country Way: Sketches of Tennessee,” *Oxford American*, 98 (September 5, 2017), <https://oxfordamerican.org/magazine/issue-98-fall-2017/the-country-way>. Accessed September 20, 2023. In this article, Danielle Chapman has changed the names of the original caretakers for their privacy and never uses their last name. I have used the names she generated for them to maintain her intention of preserving their privacy.

<sup>210</sup> Thomas J. Schlereth, *Conduits and Conduct: Home Utilities in Victorian America, 1876-1915*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 234; Thomas J. Schlereth, *Victorian America: Transformations in Everyday Life, 1876-1915*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992).

the link between diseases and microorganisms, Americans everywhere began to take steps to protect themselves.<sup>211</sup> These sanitary measures included installing citywide sewage systems and establishing health standards across the nation. One of the health standards was daily bathing and washing of hands after using the bathroom, which led to the installation of restrooms in homes and public facilities as we know them today. With this new advent of cleanliness to prevent death and sickness, manufacturers began to embrace a new market for home goods. Porcelain tubs, sinks, and commodes began to appear abundantly in newspapers and magazines claiming to make “the bathroom beautiful and sanitary.”<sup>212</sup> In part due to this movement, the leading cause of death in America changed from influenza/pneumonia, tuberculosis, and gastroenteritis in 1900 to heart disease, cancer, and intracranial lesions in 1940.<sup>213</sup>

Therefore, the two bathrooms in the house would have likely been installed while Sallie Singleton, wife of Robert Jr., was running the home after Elizabeth’s death in 1900. Off the back of the primary bedroom is now a bathroom that has been constructed in the dogtrot that attaches the tavern to the 1854 addition. This half-bath contains a toilet and sink but no bathtub. An antique empire chest dating to the 1840s stands off to the side, indicating that it was used possibly as a dressing area as well. The most recent descendant, Danielle Chapman, specified that the space was used as a closet before being converted into a bathroom and the presence of the empire chest certainly

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<sup>211</sup> “The History of Disinfection: The Discovery of Bacteria,” <https://corporate.evonik.com/en/the-discovery-of-bacteria-138063.html>. Accessed September 26, 2023.

<sup>212</sup> April D.J. Garwin, “Coming Clean: The Health Revolution of 1890-1920 and Its Impact on Infant Mortality,” (Knoxville: Master’s Thesis, University of Tennessee, 2000). [https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk\\_gradthes/4240](https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_gradthes/4240); *The House Beautiful Magazine*. January 1913 edition. Pg. 9. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=chi.102834464&seq=83>. Accessed September 26, 2023.

<sup>213</sup> “Leading Causes of Death, 1900-1998,” Center for Disease Control, [https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/dvs/lead1900\\_98.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/dvs/lead1900_98.pdf). 67; 54. Accessed November 1, 2023.

corroborates this function. A second full bath was also added to the room in the very back of the house across from the kitchen.<sup>214</sup>



*Circa 1840 Empire style chest of drawers in half bath. Photo taken by CHP staff.*

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<sup>214</sup> Site visit on July 12, 2022.



E HOUSE BEAUTIFUL xiii

**“Standard”** GUARANTEED PLUMBING FIXTURES

To make the bathroom beautiful and sanitary with “Standard” ware, brings the joy of cleanly living to the whole household and teaches the gospel of the daily bath to young and old alike.

Genuine “Standard” fixtures for the Home and for Schools, Office Buildings, Public Institutions, etc., are identified by the Green and Gold Label, with the exception of one brand of basin bearing the Red and Black Label, which, while of the first quality of manufacture, have a slightly thinner enameled, and thus meet the requirements of those who demand “Standard” quality at less expense. All “Standard” fixtures, with care, will last a lifetime. And no fixture is genuine unless it bears the guarantee label. In order to avoid substitution of inferior fixtures, specify “Standard” goods in writing (not verbally) and make sure that you get them.

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New York, 25 West 2nd Street  
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Philadelphia, 22 N. 2nd St.  
St. Louis, 28 N. 5th St.  
Cleveland, 221 Market Street  
Boston, 22 N. State St.  
San Francisco, 220 S. Market St.  
Portland, 221 W. 1st St.  
Washington, D.C., 220 1st St.  
Pittsburgh, Pa., 220 1st St.  
St. Paul, Minn., 220 1st St.  
St. Louis, Mo., 220 1st St.  
St. Petersburg, Fla., 220 1st St.  
Tampa, Fla., 220 1st St.  
Jacksonville, Fla., 220 1st St.  
Orlando, Fla., 220 1st St.  
Miami, Fla., 220 1st St.  
Fort Lauderdale, Fla., 220 1st St.  
Birmingham, Ala., 220 1st St.  
Mobile, Ala., 220 1st St.  
Savannah, Ga., 220 1st St.  
Atlanta, Ga., 220 1st St.  
Nashville, Tenn., 220 1st St.  
Memphis, Tenn., 220 1st St.  
Cincinnati, Ohio, 220 1st St.  
Columbus, Ohio, 220 1st St.  
Indianapolis, Ind., 220 1st St.  
Cleveland, Ohio, 220 1st St.  
Detroit, Mich., 220 1st St.  
Milwaukee, Wis., 220 1st St.  
St. Paul, Minn., 220 1st St.  
Chicago, Ill., 220 1st St.  
Pittsburgh, Pa., 220 1st St.

Ad from *The House Beautiful*, January 1913 edition.

Prior to the conception of indoor plumbing and toileting, rural families used privies that were placed outside of the home. As with many life-changing adjustments, the introduction of indoor bathrooms concerned many families, and they were hesitant and somewhat skeptical of the “new fangled white crock flushers.”<sup>215</sup> The Singletons embraced the installation of bathroom facilities as they added a half-bath and a full bath circa 1915. It does, however, seem that they still considered the previous notions of miasma theory surrounding germs by fitting the half bathroom in an open-air area complete with a window and an additional half-door to let fresh air in.<sup>216</sup> The side window

<sup>215</sup> Philip Seitz, “The Privy Problem: Rural Urban Conflicts and Sanitary Reform,” *American Home Life*, 235

<sup>216</sup> Miasma theory is the belief that “miasmas are poisonous emanations, from putrefying carcasses, rotting vegetation or molds, and invisible dust particles inside dwellings. They were once believed to enter the body and cause disease.” John Last, *The Encyclopedia of Public Health*. November, 2023.

opening to the outside could also indicate their attempt to implement health strategies popular during the 1910s to 1920s concerning clean air and its effect on the body.<sup>217</sup> Between 1917 and 1918, a young John Sehorn Singleton was laboring at home battling a tuberculosis diagnosis and, despite Koch's discovery of the tuberculosis bacterium, it was still believed in the early twentieth century that stagnant air caused tuberculosis. As there was still no cure for the disease, the common method for treating tuberculosis patients entailed housing them in rural, mountainous locations, in open air rooms (like sunrooms or porches), promoting exposure to the outdoors, exercise, and a healthy diet.<sup>218</sup> The Singleton dogtrot seems to fit this description quite well. Despite these measures, at least fifty percent of patients who entered sanatoriums of this nature still perished, as did John Sehorn Singleton in 1918.<sup>219</sup>

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<https://www.encyclopedia.com/education/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/miasma-theory>. Roughly it was the belief that bad air causes sickness.

<sup>217</sup> John Last, *Encyclopedia of Public Health*; Garwin, "Coming Clean: The Health Revolution of 1890-1920 and Its Impact on Infant Mortality."

<sup>218</sup> Sadie Levy Gale, "The History of Sanatoriums and Surveillance," (London: November 29, 2022). <https://wellcomecollection.org/articles/Y3UlvxAAAGXXTsFx>. Accessed November 10, 2023.

<sup>219</sup> Gale, "The History of Sanatoriums and Surveillance;" "John Sehorn Singleton," *Find-A-Grave.com*. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/94584423/john-sehorn-singleton>. Accessed on November 10, 2023.



*Half bath located in dogtrot and next to primary bedroom. Photo taken by CHP staff.*

The next major adjustment to consider revolves around the implementation of electricity within the home. When electricity came about, the entire home had to be wired and retrofitted for electricity. This was a major job. By the 1910s, private electric companies had begun to service more densely populated areas of Tennessee but claimed that servicing the rural communities was too costly, both in initial supply costs and in monthly service fees for would-be customers. President Franklin D. Roosevelt disagreed and established the Tennessee Valley Authority on May 18, 1933, and later the Rural Electrification Administration on May 11, 1935. With the help of these two organizations and a Congressionally approved loan of \$100 million to be administered through TVA, Bedford County farmers formed the Bedford County Electric Membership Corporation in 1935. This Co-op grew to encompass all or portions of sixteen counties and thus changed its name to the Duck River Electric Membership Corporation, which is

still in operation today. On November 1, 1936, the electric company serviced its first member.<sup>220</sup>

All of the light fixtures within the Singleton residence were originally oil lamps and it appears that the family chose to keep the original oil lamp light fixtures already in place and simply retrofit them with modern equipment and light bulbs to function as electric lights. This transition left quite a remarkable change on the landscape and connectivity of rural Tennessee. With the implementation of widespread electricity homes began to feature telephone lines, radios, and more. Prior to the invention of manmade light and electrically powered tools, rural family's daily activities and work schedules would have been determined by the number of daylight hours. However, with this new advent, men were better able to tame the wilderness, manage their time, and bring the outside world into their homes.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> "Our Electric Cooperative Story," Duck River Electric Membership Corporation, <https://www.dremc.com/our-electric-cooperative-story/>. Middle Tennessee Electric; "Electricity for All," <https://mte.com/MTEhistory>; "Tennessee Valley Authority Act 193," National Archives. <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/tennessee-valley-authority-act>. Accessed September 26, 2023.

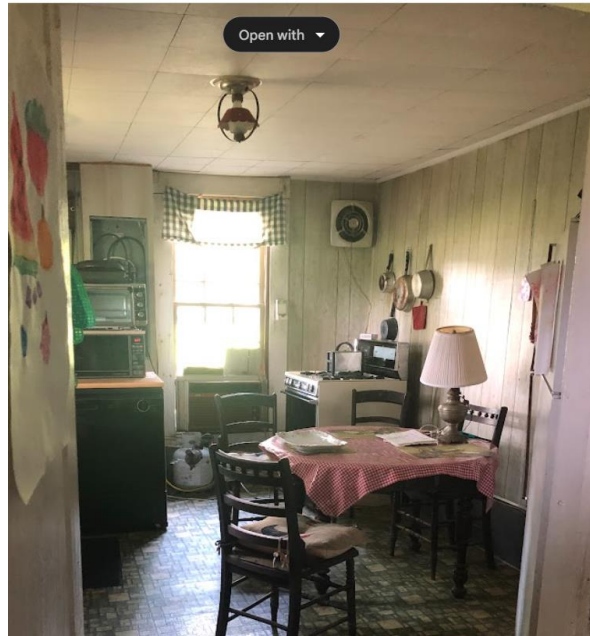
<sup>221</sup> Carroll Van West, *Tennessee's New Deal Landscape: A Guidebook*, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press), 2011.



*Dining room light fixture retrofitted with modern bulb. Photo taken by CHP Staff.*

The room most affected by the advent of electricity was the kitchen. This space, above all others, has undergone the most tremendous transformation with the implementation of electricity. The Singleton residence has an array of both modern and antique kitchen cabinetry and appliances, showcasing the steps family members have taken to modernize their dwelling. Upon entering the kitchen, you find two Hoosier cabinets lining the left wall, both filled with food items and recipe books. Directly next to the second Hoosier cabinet is an early 1950s ceramic sink encased in a metal cabinet, then next to this is a dishwasher that has several small appliances stacked on top of it, including the quite recent addition of a toaster oven indicating the home's use by recent inhabitants. Continuing around the room to the other wall, lies the circa-1980s Vesta brand, gas-burning stove; next to that is a small round dining table. Last, the refrigerator is snugly placed in the next corner. The floor has been covered in a green checked

linoleum, likely an early twentieth-century addition, but could date to anywhere between 1870 and 1950.<sup>222</sup> All of these features are additions that came along at various times.



*Image of kitchen from hall showing dishwasher with various items stacked atop, the stove, and dining table. Photo taken by CHP staff.*

The first item to appear in this kitchen would have been the Hoosier cabinets. These cabinets were popular from the late 1890s to the 1930s. They were a lauded invention that radically changed the kitchen area. Marketed as saving the homemaker steps and labor by centralizing all of the necessary items that one needed to cook with, these cabinets soared in popularity until built-in cabinetry replaced them in the late 1940s.<sup>223</sup> For the Singletons, it's possible that the cabinets were bought separately as the family's need for storage grew, but it could be that one was purchased by one of the four women living in home in the 1890s and the other was moved into the home when

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<sup>222</sup> Linda Gross, "The Evolution of Linoleum," The Hagley Library Newsletter, March 19, 2018, <https://www.hagley.org/librarynews/evolution-linoleum>. Accessed September 26, 2023.

<sup>223</sup> Nancy Hiller, "Famous Furniture: The Hoosier Cabinet," *Woodcraft Magazine*, Issue 77, May 26, 2017, [https://www.woodcraft.com/blog\\_entries/famous-furniture-the-hoosier-cabinet](https://www.woodcraft.com/blog_entries/famous-furniture-the-hoosier-cabinet). Accessed September 26, 2023.

Sallie and Robert Jr. moved in. The ad below describes the features offered by a Hoosier cabinet.<sup>224</sup> Inside one of the cabinets a family recipe book was tucked away.



*Hoosier Cabinets in the Singleton Home. Photo taken by CHP staff.*

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<sup>224</sup> Nancy Hiller, "The Hoosier Cabinet and the American Housewife," *Indiana Magazine of History* 105, no. 1 (2009): 1–30. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27792949>.



This Hoosier Manufacturing Company advertisement appeared in several publications during 1910. Ads often stressed the practical necessity of the new cabinet—a Hoosier to a housewife would be like a plow to a farmer.  
 Courtesy of Henry County Historical Society, New Castle, Indiana

*1910 ad for Hoosier Cabinet*

Next in the evolution of kitchens we see built-in cabinetry. In post WWII America, steel manufacturers were turning to new ways to use their stock, and steel-framed cabinets seemed a suitable fit. The cabinet with the sink in the Singleton residence is a Youngstown steel-framed sink base that likely dates to the late 1940s to early 1950s. The unique and highly collectible boomerang shaped handles are a hallmark feature of these units. Oftentimes families bought this cabinet first and then purchased other sets as they were able to afford them. As this item was made after Sallie's death, it is likely that Clare Chapman had it installed when she used the house as a summer vacation home. By the mid-1960s, wood cabinetry replaced steel cabinets as the more popular design choice for kitchens. This replacement of steel for wood cabinets was largely due to their low maintenance, the ability to repaint them easily, and the homey effect they



afforded the kitchen space compared to steel that rusted, dented, showed fingerprints easily, and gave a more sterile effect to the kitchen.<sup>225</sup>

For her this Christmas...  
a lovely *Kitchenaider*




*Kitchenaider 66" Twin-Deluxe*

**to replace her old-fashioned sink**

**STRIKE** the perfect holiday note! Give her a lasting holiday from kitchen drudgery with a beautiful new Youngstown Kitchenaider Cabinet Sink. See these 1938-model Kitchenaiders that have all the latest features and include all the very newest and best ideas developed by the world's largest makers of steel kitchens!

She'll love the rugged steel construction that can't warp, rot or splinter. The soap-panels, acid-resisting porcelain-enamelled top is as easy to clean as a saucer. Rinse spray and swinging faucet speed dishwashing... there's storage space to spare in roomy compartments and drawers that open easily on brass runners.

Best news of all! A Kitchenaider costs only a few dollars a month, financing through bank or dealer. You have 11 luxury models to choose from at 11 wonderful low prices. See your Youngstown Kitchen dealer today.

**MULLINS MANUFACTURING CORPORATION**  
WARREN, OHIO  
World's Largest Makers of Steel Kitchens

Free for the Christmas Tree surprise! A gift-wrapped, plastic miniature of the Deluxe model you select. Your dealer will complete the actual installation any time you desire.



**STEEL**  
*Youngstown Kitchens*  
**BY MULLINS**

Call Western Union Operator 25, and without charge get the name of a nearby dealer.

**GET THIS GORGEOUS BOOKLETT!**  
20 pages featuring beautiful Youngstown Kitchens to meet the demands of Youngstown's elite and give an irresistible gift to any kitchen. Includes 100 color plates. No sample plates.

I plan to build  or remodel

I want a free home demonstration of the Youngstown food waste disposer

I would like to see my kitchen planned in silhouette

Youngstown Kitchens  
Mullins Manufacturing Corporation  
Dept. W-1240, Warren, Ohio  
Please send me your Youngstown Kitchen booklet 1 unless 10¢ in cash, to cover cost of mailing.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ PLEASE PRINT \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_  
COUNTY \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Woman's Home Companion 139

Ad for Youngstown Sink and cabinet from *Woman's Home Companion Magazine*. 1949.

The remaining items in the kitchen equally display the Singletons efforts to adapt the house into a modern home. Directly next to the steel sink is a hot water heater and an electric panel box with a 1980s dishwasher placed directly in front of it; a similarly dated microwave, and a modern toaster are stacked directly on top of the dishwasher.

<sup>225</sup> *Woman's Home Companion*, (Springfield, IL: Crowell-Collier, 1949), 139.

<https://www.etsy.com/listing/1534526780/1949-youngstown-kitchen-christmas-decor?gpla=1&gao=1&>

The stove and refrigerator are also likely 1980s additions to the house. The stove probably replaced an older model.

Despite the kitchen being predominately a female domain, and the sanitary drive of the early twentieth century being driven primarily by women, men still held the reigns within the home on many fronts, particularly what money was spent on. As shown in the ads above, we see that women are the main focus (the Youngstown ad is found in a women's magazine), but the sale is subtly pitched to the husband— not the wife, instilling the belief that the man of the house would ultimately decide whether or not to purchase the items. Additionally, the use of these items within the home would have an ironic effect for women performing housework. By consolidating what used to be several tasks carried out by several people, male and female, the housewife was left with more work. Ruth Schwartz Cowan provides a great example in her book “More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave,” she says by replacing the fireplace with a stove to cook on, manufacturers eliminated the task of chopping and carrying wood and broadened the scope of things that could be cooked so the male and children's role of providing chopped wood was eliminated while the housewife's work of preparing food was expanded.<sup>226</sup>

Over the decades the Singletons continuously updated and modified the home to meet the needs of its inhabitants and to keep it in a livable condition. It is a fluid representation of times gone by and how a family adapted to their surroundings and times.

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<sup>226</sup> Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave*, (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 63.

## Conclusion

Elizabeth Singleton oversaw the running of this house for fifty-two years. Here, she raised her children, administered her farm, and developed and maintained friendships and family ties. She was an educated woman, dedicated to nurturing her family and sustaining the livelihood of the family business. She was a respected member of her community, but even in her obituary she is remembered for her connections to the men in her life who were afforded the opportunity to practice medicine, own property outright, attend university, and fight in wars. However, her story can be told today within the walls of the home she ran so effectively.

Elizabeth's son, Robert Singleton Jr. was a dedicated Confederate veteran and maintained his belief in the Lost Cause narrative developed in the aftermath of the Civil War as evidenced in his ties to the local chapter of the United Confederate Veterans group and other documents strewn among his belongings.<sup>227</sup> In the post emancipation South, many white southerners were forced to reconcile the new social structure, which allowed formerly enslaved people autonomy, with their previous notions of African Americans and the institution of slavery. Many former enslavers had begun to think of themselves as benefactors who provided their enslaved people with much needed financial support and moral guidance before the Civil War, but this thought began to grow even more after the Civil War. This delusion led many white citizens to assume a paternal role in the lives of their recently freed fellow man, allowing them to continue to utilize the Black labor for a minimal fee and maintain a superior interpretation of their role in this new society.

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<sup>227</sup> Minutes of the Wm. Frierson Bivouac No. 8, Shelbyville, Tenn. (Shelbyville: The Bedford Co. Historical Society, n.d.), p. 1-3, TSLA.

Despite George Singleton's service in the United States Colored Troops during the Civil War, Robert Jr. maintained a friendship with his enslaved boyhood companion, and that bond has left a remarkable story to be told. Through the small but significant paper trail left behind by George and Barbara in public records, and the vast collection of letters and documents left behind by both the white Singleton women and Robert Jr., we have been able to uncover the lives traversed by these two families and see how they were intertwined. By studying the written material, the material culture left behind, and the home itself, we are able to better understand middle-class life on a rural farm and the dynamics between former master and former slave in the years after the Civil War.

The story of George Singleton—the story of a single family's travails through the violent and volatile era of Reconstruction and its aftermath is remarkable. His family's ability to maintain a sense of autonomy and create a space that allowed them to thrive is an accomplishment that few Black families were able to attain, even into the twentieth century. This can be credited to his service in the Union army, which resulted in him receiving a pension in his elder years, and to the relationship established and maintained between the two Singleton families. Elizabeth, a white woman living on a rural farm trying to support her three grown daughters, crippled son, and three smaller children, required help to till the ground, plant the crops, and tend to the livestock. She needed the help of George, and he trusted that she would treat him with some form of dignity and mutual respect, and that she would pay him what they agreed upon. This doesn't mean that Elizabeth was suddenly a supporter of equal rights, as seen in letters where she and her brother discussed firing an entire "stock of negroes" and hiring "a

good woman to cook for [her],”<sup>228</sup> but it does show the intimate nature between enslavers and the enslaved that sometimes formed on smaller family farms and then continued after slavery ended. The smaller spaces and rural nature of their lives meant they were closer, both in proximity and relationally, to one another. The tale of these two families is overwhelmingly interconnected, as is America’s association with slavery. Exploring these families endeavors to acclimate after the Civil War can help historians uncover more about American history and the transition to Black Freedom.

Before the Civil War, white slave-owning families were able to attain wealth through the purchase and labor of African American enslaved people. Therefore, these families owed much of their wealth to these individuals. The homes they were able to build and the household items they were able to purchase to adorn their home were because of the wealth they gained from this labor. Even after the Civil War, Black families were offered limited opportunities, and many were forced to continue laboring in service roles strikingly akin to the roles seen in antebellum times. The unbalanced wealth distribution between Black and white families continued for decades after emancipation and certainly contributed to the wealth of the Singleton family in Bedford County, Tennessee.

The home of the Chapman-Singleton family and its objects illustrate the complex and diverse influences of popular culture, social norms, gender identity, and the availability of merchandise. Each item makes a statement about its owner and the space they inhabited. In public spaces of the house, family members placed furnishings and objects that exhibited their social status. By choosing the most expensive and highly

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<sup>228</sup> Letter between Elizabeth Singleton and brother James Singleton, March 5, 1867, Chapman Collection. TSLA.

decorated bedroom suite for the man of the house, they also made a statement about hierarchy within the family. Showcasing their vast collection of books and records was yet another attempt to show their level of education and sophistication, even if they were living in quite a remote part of the country (and perhaps they consciously decorated the home in reaction to this remoteness). All of these inferences can be made from looking at the possessions of the Chapman-Singleton family over time. The mixture of furniture styles demonstrates the family's longevity in the house. The antiques and other possessions help tell the story of a pioneering Tennessee family that benefited from the ownership and work of enslaved people and their descendants. The belongings of at least five generations of Singletons remain within the home, and these objects exhibit the family's strong ties to both their built environment and their past. Each piece adds additional layers to the story and helps modern-day historians better understand the context of living life in the heartland of Middle Tennessee from the 1840s to the present.

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## Appendix

The following is an incomplete list of known individuals who were owned by the John Scott and Robert L. Singleton families.

**Enslaved people known to be owned by John Scott** and often hired for months to a year for payment of debts and monies:

Mingo

Clarisa

Frankey

Evelina

Levy: bought for \$487 on November 15, 1805, in Wilmington, NC, from Simpronions Rhys (?) or someone with the last name Wright

Jin or Jinny: bought for \$200 from Henry Horkins or Haskins in Wilmington on February 26, 1803

Cupid: possibly a young girl, hired out for \$50 a year, September 30, 1837

A family of enslaved: \$4727, November 3<sup>rd</sup>, (18)62 bought from I.S. Davis

From correspondence:

Abeck: sick

Levy and Charlotte's children all better

Penelope in a bad way

### **Dr. Robert L. Singleton enslaved list**

Martha: bought on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1851 (no amount listed) just states that she does neat work and can sew anything

Sold for \$700 June 11<sup>th</sup>, 1853, to Jas Word, described as "a girl with sound mind and body and a slave for life"

June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1853, Martha (aged 24) and 3 children: Candass, (aged 6), Catharine (aged 4), and Eli (12 months) bought(?) for \$1,700 from Dr. J.H. McGrew

Hariett: bought for \$325 on December 25, 1844, from James Purkins, She was 9 or 10.

Jesse: 35 years old, bought for \$725 on February 20, 1851, from D.J. Jernigan

Raseacca(?): \$700 "aged above 13" sound in mind and body and a slave for life. June 10<sup>th</sup>, 1853, sold to R.N.(Bob) Jones

Sandy: twelve-year-old boy bought on June 9, 1852, for \$800 from D.S. Evans

Lina: 5-year-old boy sold for \$700 on June 7, 1853. Signed Martha Cruthcher, money received from Dr. J.H. McGrew



Sally Sims: Sold on March 24, 1853, for \$1,500 by Elizabeth Singleton (wife)

Arnold: dark complected man, 22 years old, bought for \$1250 on September 25, 1836, in Georgia from Chritopher Brounce

Enely: 15-year-old girl, bought for \$1,000 on September 25, 1836, in Georgia from Christopher Brounce

Uz (Vincent?) Paton: Blacksmith, 30 years old, valued at \$1,200.

Seely: woman came with her son.

Maney: 2 years old, bought together with his mother for \$800 from Benjamin Mosley

Dave: male, 23? September 10, 1856, dark complexion, \$1050, Bought by Meriwether?

Harry: 22 years old, \$1100

Turn: 14 years old, \$1000

Ceney: 22 years old, \$1100

Inley: 17 years old \$1100

Amor: 26 years old, \$900

Francis?: 24 years old \$900

All six above bought together from Jake Thompson on August 4<sup>th</sup>, 1856, for a total of \$6,100

**PAYMENT FOR SELLING ENSLAVED PEOPLE:**

\$5,304 for sale in Sommerville from Matt Martin (no month) 27<sup>th</sup>, 1851

\$6,233.75 for sale on May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1851 (no place), from Matt Martin

**In Georgia sale between Brewster and E.G. Fleming**

Louisa: 22 years old of black complexion

Fanny: 7 years old of black complexion

Emily: 13 years old of yellow complexion