




Invisible but not Forgotten: Freed Black Women in Antebellum and Postbellum Madison County, Kentucky

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ABSTRACT

Investigation into the lifeways of freedman George White suggest a successful farmer who purchased and kept approximately 600 acres, emancipated his family and built a safe community for them. Documentary research revealed small fragments about the female members of his family. Taking into consideration the multiple layers of social relationships and social constructions over time, how can archaeologists query the material traces of freed Black women? This paper considers how intersectionality and the resultant matrix of domination push for research that does not “yield to closure,” but asks acute questions concerning freed women and their experiences within developing power structures.

Résumé de recherche: La recherche sur le parcours de vie de l'esclave affranchi George White indique qu'il était un fermier ayant connu la réussite grâce à l'achat d'environ 243 hectares (600 acres) qu'il a conservés, puis par l'émancipation de sa famille et la construction pour elle d'une communauté sûre. La recherche documentaire a mis en lumière des fragments modestes sur les membres féminins de sa famille. En tenant compte des couches multiples de relations sociales et de constructions sociales au cours du temps, comment les archéologues peuvent-ils interroger les traces matérielles des femmes noires affranchies ? Cet article examine la manière dont l'intersectionnalité et la matrice de domination en ayant résulté font pression en faveur d'une recherche qui « se refuse à tourner la page », en formulant des questions ciblées portant sur les femmes affranchies ainsi que leurs expériences au sein de structures de pouvoir en développement.

Resumen: La investigación sobre la forma de vida del liberto George White sugiere un agricultor exitoso que compró y mantuvo aproximadamente 600

acres, emancipó a su familia y construyó una comunidad segura para ellos. La investigación documental reveló pequeños fragmentos sobre las mujeres de su familia. Teniendo en cuenta las múltiples capas de relaciones sociales y construcciones sociales a lo largo del tiempo, ¿cómo pueden los arqueólogos cuestionar las huellas materiales de las mujeres negras liberadas? Este artículo considera cómo la interseccionalidad y la matriz de dominación resultante impulsan una investigación que no “cede al cierre”, sino que plantea preguntas agudas sobre las mujeres liberadas y sus experiencias dentro de las estructuras de poder en desarrollo.

KEY WORDS

Intersectionality, Matrix of domination, Erasure, Invisibility

I will urge that we resist imposing meanings on our subjects: modern, disciplinary, uniform and universalist, and move instead towards honoring (instead of erasing) the evidence that will not yield to closure. Joan Gero Honoring Ambiguity (2007:312).

An effective means of white subjugation of Black people globally has been the perpetual construction of economic and social structures that deprives many folks the means to make homeplace. bell hooks, Yearning (1990:389).

Introduction: Two Projects; One Trajectory

In 1913, Berea College finalized its last purchases of land located along the Jackson, Madison, and Rockcastle County lines for: “timber production [and] concern over Berea College’s water supply” (National Historic Register Application 2003). These purchases contributed to what would become almost 9000 acres of mixed-use forest for one of the first formal forestry programs in the United States (Figure 1). The forest: “has contributed to the science of forestry and conservation practices... [and the] significance is defined by its distinctive combination of a commitment to education, along with its pioneering role in the development of American Forestry Science and conservation practice” (National Historic Register Application 2003). However, to date, little archaeological research has been conducted to understand the lifeways of Native American and historic inhabitants who lived within the Forest boundaries.

To better understand cultural resources contained in the Forest, two internally funded projects (2014 and 2017) were carried out to begin to reconstruct the lifeways of its past inhabitants. Funded by Berea College’s Undergraduate Research and Creative Project Program (URCPP) grant, the

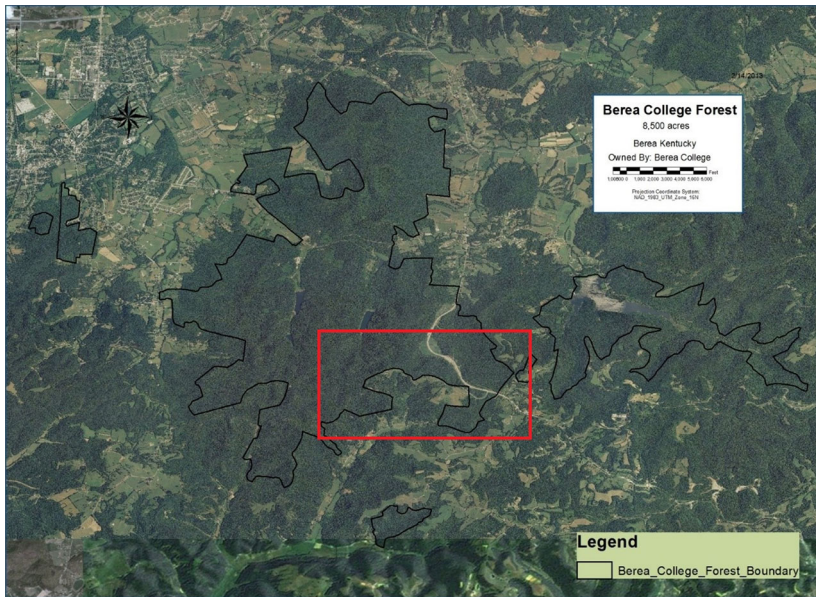


Figure 1. Berea College Property Map showing research area

2014 intensive summer archaeological project was centered on conducting a general survey of the cultural resources located within the forest. Following state guidelines, the project proposed following a standard Phase I survey, with Phase II survey if necessary. The target area for this project was at the top of “Big Hill” along Burnt Ridge Road which runs the ridge line in between two north–south state roads.

During documentary research and map analysis for the 2014 survey, something previously unknown to the College and the College’s archivist was discovered: some of the College land along the Burnt Ridge Road had been previously owned by a freed slave, George White, who purchased a large tract of about 300 acres prior to the Civil War. The focus of the 2017 URCPP research project was to continue the research on George White, attempting to locate one of three possible homestead sites through continued documentary research, drone flyovers, and ArcGIS geo-referencing. (Figure 2).

Overall, the initial research on George White suggested a successful farmer with the means to purchase and keep approximately 600 acres, to purchase and emancipate his family, and to contribute to building a safe community for his family and other free enslaved people in Madison County, Kentucky. White’s early life was pieced together using “A Sketch of the life and experience of George White—a colored man, and born a



Figure 2. Drone image showing possible foundation stones of dwelling within red rectangle

slave written by himself and lessons to his children” as well as early census records (Eastern Kentucky University Special Collections #DB3-54 N.58) From this document we know that after being born in 1790 in Maryland and sold as a child with his mother to John White of Madison County, Kentucky, George White purchased his freedom from John White’s children in 1830. White stayed in Madison County and purchased 3 parcels of land in two different sections of the county. One parcel, located near the estate of Cassius Clay along the Kentucky River, was purchased in 1829, before George White officially gained his freedom. A second parcel, also near the Clay estate, was purchased in 1836 from Jacob White, the son of his previous owner. A third parcel located further south near the town of Berea, known as Glades at the time, was purchased in 1858 from a family named the Goldens (Madison County Deed Books vol 9–10:509–510). George White moved the family to the southern tract of land sometime after the purchase and remained here until his death in 1872. White remained illiterate throughout his lifetime but employed legal counsel to secure his and his family’s property holdings (Figure 3).

While the documents revealed a good deal about George White’s ability to traverse the racial oppression of Antebellum Kentucky, there were only snippets of information about his female children. To better query the material traces of these freed Black women, intersectionality and the developing matrix of domination were applied in the analysis of legal records such as state census records as well as deeds, manumission or emancipation records, and wills to draw out as much information as possible about the female members of his family and their relationships with each other

dear country, My for and no canna
affection I bear my beloved children
to Mitchell White, Sophia White, Minnie
emancipated and forever set free
and children, and with them to
henceforth free from any claim
part, or on the part of any one else.
and and seal this the 25th of February
George White
Mark

Figure 3. George White Mark (Madison County Deed Book vol. 4–6, 1848–1852)

and the broader community. Pieced together, these snippets revealed a wealth of data about the ways in which freed Blacks navigated the latter half of the nineteenth century and into the early 20th. Because many of the documents were focused on property ownership, namely land holding, ideas about the power of property are intertwined throughout the paper. However, all the women discussed in these pages started their lives as property, erased of their personhood, but ended up as property owners, only to experience erasure by entering into and challenging class constructions meant to keep them oppressed. Land, then, must be interrogated as a way in which understandings and attitudes of white landowners, mainly men, conflicted with other ways and means of “seeing” and “experiencing” land.

Fannie Barrier Williams wrote in 1905 that: “The colored girl...is not known and hence not believed in; she belongs to a race that is best designated by the term ‘problem’ and she lives beneath the shadow of that problem which envelops and obscures her” (Hill-Collins, 2000:3 from Williams 1987:150). This paper attempts to bring to the fore the critical nature of finding the space in which women’s voices are heard and their personhood seen, despite the oppressiveness of white-constructed legal documentation and the continued racism of today. To achieve this, this paper tries to remain “open” and, not “yield to closure” in its analysis but also challenge previous questions and to “Tolerate dissonance... Tolerate ambiguity... [and to] Resist conformist pressures” (Gero 2007: 313). Earlier, Spencer-Wood (1990:30; 32) explained practices archaeologists need to “Tolerate dissonance. Emphasize data and interpretations that don’t fit

accepted models” and “Tolerate ambiguity. Develop more complex models and more than one model as needed to encompass the diversity and dialectical relationships among different people’s experiences and viewpoints.”

Erasure:Invisibility

Generally, my research is unified around the broad themes of erasure—the physical and ideological processes by which certain groups of people are removed and/or erased from the landscape in the past and the present (Anderson 2016). Capitalist in nature, erasure is practiced under the guise of programs and practices designed to “improve” socio-cultural, -political, and -economic conditions, especially for the “other.” But how are these seen materially? Where narratives, ideologies, and practices at our core, many of which are violent, have become acceptable, mundane, and normal and hide such practices, disentanglement is critical. I often remind myself of Martin Wobst’s adage, gently paraphrased “What isn’t there is often more important than what is” (2011). In other words, he pushes us to think more deeply about things that are invisible in the record as much, if not more than, what is there and why. The idea that we place so much weight on the materials we do find and not ask what we do not see is problematic and rooted in misogyny and racism as well as queerphobia, for example. Ambiguity, then, – the allowing for multiple avenues of inquiry as well as multiple answers—is critical (Gero 2007, Spencer-Wood 1990:32).

For women, this invisibility and erasure is all too familiar, painful, and unproductive. In the 1990s, Suzanne Spencer-Wood argued for ambiguity on a myriad of levels with the intent of driving historical archaeology, specifically, and archaeology in general, into “seeing” its own process of erasure. Though focused on her own research, Spencer-Wood also addressed the overall practice of archaeology – not just in the field, but also in analysis. In 1989, she wrote “Women often disappear in generic categories that are represented by men, man or him. Generic male linguistic terms encourage thinking about and analyzing the past in terms of men and forgetting about women” (Spencer-Wood 1991: 234). In 1992, Spencer-Wood expanded these ideas when she wrote “women disappear in purportedly ungendered text that subsumes women within male linguistic categories...Women disappear by being subsumed in male-defined units of analysis...” (Spencer-Wood 1992: 99). In 1995 in the *World Archaeological Bulletin* Spencer-Wood argues that “women have often been disappeared from the past by being subsumed in male-defined language, theories, and categories of analysis...The focus is on men as the *only* social agents, the makers of history.” (Spencer-Wood 1995: 119). And in 1996, she points

not only to women in the historical context, but speaks to women's experiences in the field and on paper: "[androcentric] bias supports the representation of men as culturally normative, while making women invisible by excluding domestic work from history and by subsuming women in male-defined categories... Historic women's work both inside and outside the home has been devalued..." (Spencer-Wood 1996: 400) and "Feminist questions reveal overlooked data that expose and correct androcentric biases." (Spencer-Wood 1996: 404). Erasure is further rooted in the struggle and conflict with oral history and/or descendant stories because of weight placed on the material record and our desire for concrete answers. Ambiguity, then, allows for those stories to remain present, with value, to all stakeholders because such information "interrogates" the past instead of solving questions (Gero 2007: 313). These collaborations are inherently grounded in feminism and demand "in most instances a 'diffusion of power' at least in practice" (Conkey 2007:306). Here, intersectionality is crucial in that it supports the search for more than one perspective derived from "multiple subject positions from which 'the past' is and can be understood" (Conkey 2007: 306).

Intersectionality is not a way to answer the questions but instead, a way to formulate questions that query the moments where race, class, and gender create barriers for some and not for others in the past and the present. Kimberle Crenshaw described intersectionality as an exploration into "the various ways in which race and gender intersect to shape structural, political, and representational aspects of violence against women of color" (1995: 358). By highlighting the complex and ever shifting power dynamics that are at play, Crenshaw (1995: 376) draws attention to two processes in which power is manifest. One is categorizing or naming. The second is the material and social "consequences" resultant in the process of categorizing. Spencer-Wood uses a similar framework to get at the intersectionalities that shape our world. Her framework considers how "'Powers over,' 'powers under,' and 'powers with' together represent the diversity in 'powers to' create change through different kinds of social agency" (2010: 203 from Spencer-Wood 1997, 1999: 187, 2004: 247–252). In other words, a combination of hierarchical and non-hierarchical power structures reveals, more acutely, the intersections of race, class, and gender.

Patricia Hill Collins' take on intersectionality rests on the organization of oppressions, or "the matrix of domination", which allows for a more refined and multi-dimensional understanding of power (2002). Thus, while the recognition of intersections brings oppression further into the spotlight, considering "the overall social organization within which intersecting oppressions originate, develop, and are contained" supports an historical query as much as a contemporary one (Hill Collins 2002:227). The use of "large-scale, interlocking social institutions" in the subordination of Black

women within the structural domain of power has historical precedent in terms of preventing “full citizenship” (Hill Collins 2002:277). Further, Collins considers both the bureaucratic running of institutions and their employment of surveillance as disciplinary domains of power (280–281). The structures these combined disciplines create are not limited to the oppression of Black women, but also challenge us, the archaeologists, to consider our own roles in creating, maintaining, and resisting power, especially the power to categorize material culture and formulate answers. Such power is, as Collins reminds us, authoritative and carries weight; therefore, seeking the knowledge of the everyday becomes paramount (2009:8).

Intersectional lines of questioning combat the archaeological standard of “Privileging the material over the spiritual and the scientific over the religious” as the discipline has been situated in Western practice (Smith and Wobst 2005:5). We must query our own biases as we tend to “make other societies” look like ours (Wobst 2005:18). Franklin takes a similar line when she asked, ‘Has the Black archaeological past been colonized by white, middle class specialists?’ (1997:37). In other words, how we ask our questions, choose our sites, and interpret our finds can and often does contribute to the invisibility of marginalized populations when it fails to be critical. Archaeology and the results of uncritical research has serious consequences. Even archaeology conducted to give a voice to the voiceless perpetuates oppression (Battle Baptiste 2011:33). As Battle-Baptiste attests, “The voices have not been silent, just in constant communication with other marginalized and subjugated women” (2011:33). How, then, do we as researchers from the dominant class, seek to develop sensitive questions that interrogate the past and present cultural terrain upon which we live? As Gero implores, we should not be looking for uncomplicated answers, but ones, instead that refuse to “yield to closure” (2007:313). What this refusal means is situating ourselves in challenging and even uncomfortable positions in order to find a place for ambiguity that is definitively feminist in its argument – open to reflexivity and working to not erase the muddy, messy bits of data we have to consider (Gero 2007:323).

Moving into a discussion of the data, it is important to note that research on the White family and their property in southern Madison County is unfinished. Excavations planned for the summer of 2020 were cancelled due to Covid-19. The only material culture available to analyze, at this juncture, is the documentary evidence. With that said, this paper is purposefully ambiguous.

(In) Visibility: Contextualizing the Intersection of Race, Gender, and Class

In this section, analysis of census records in conjunction with a more detailed analysis of George White's legal documents, including a loan and manumission, contextualize the experiences of Black women of the Antebellum and Postbellum periods as they were transitioned from property to inheriting property. Legal documents, such as these, highlight the social relationships and social constructions that developed as freed Blacks accessed more power, including entrance into financial markets in which white men had power.

Census Records

According to the Second Census of Kentucky of 1800, Madison County is listed as having a population of 10,490 with 8761 whites, 1726 slaves and 3 free "coloreds" (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MZB2-J5J>). By 1850, Madison County had 33 free Blacks and 37 free Mulattoes, and in 1860 those numbers had more than doubled. Though the county is listed as having 34.5% of its population as slaves, these figures suggest enslaved and free Blacks lived alongside whites prior to the Civil War. Deed records, using coding for colored (C), mulatto (M), and freed Black (FB) confirm Black owned property adjacent to that of whites.

Census records also afford the first recognition of the female members of White's family. In 1830, the year that George White gained his freedom, he is listed in the census as the only free African-American slave owner, owning 4 slaves, with a total of 6 people in his household. Two of the enslaved are female and under the age of 10, with one female being between 24 and 35. In 1840, the census lists 2 free female "colored persons" under the age of 10, and 2 between the ages of 10 and 24. The household is listed as composed of 8 members.

Loan and Deed of Emancipation (Manumission) Documentation

In 1836, however, a mortgage for a loan for \$1200 to purchase property is issued between White and Jacob White, a son of his former owner. His enslaved children are listed as the final option should he not be able to pay his debts:

and if there should still not be sufficient to satisfy said security debts then the above named slaves are to be hired out for a sufficient length of time to raise the whole of said money but in no event are they to be sold they being

the children of the said George White (Madison County Deeds (MCD) vol. W-Y 1835-1840:195)

The children listed in the mortgage were: “Jackson about 16 years of age. Emily about 12 years of age, Spicy about 8 years of age, Mitchell about six years of age and Sophia about 4 years of age” (MCD vol. W-Y 1835–1840:196). With this information, we can establish that Emily and Spicy are likely to be the enslaved females listed in the 1830 census at under 10, and the 2 freed female children aged 10–24 from the 1840 census. Sophia would be the correct age for the child still under that age of 10 in 1840, and Miriam would then be the second child under 10. Despite being his children, George White uses what would be considered valuable property, enslaved children, who could still be captured, turned over, and auctioned off, despite the stipulation against their sale. The same statement could also suggest the status of George White either in terms of the relationship between buyer and seller or within the community. Loans of this nature also suggest White had successfully entered into the property markets dominated by white men.

In 1850, the Deed of Emancipation for White’s children was filed with Madison County and most of his children were freed (MCD vol 4–6:436–437). In this document, though, only three female children are listed: Spicy, Sophia, and Miriam. Emily, who appeared in the mortgage (1836), is not listed. Based on the information from the 1836 mortgage, Emily’s age can be estimated at 26 years old in 1850. We know that Emily married a Pinkston, with one account listing that date as 1862, making her 40 years old. While it may account for her not being mentioned in White’s will (registered in 1862), it does not account for her missing from the Deed of Emancipation. Further research is needed to understand her route to freedom.

The Deed of Emancipation also offers some additional information. Contained in the document are detailed descriptions of the children being freed. Spicy is listed as being 22 years of age in 1849, 5 feet $\frac{3}{4}$ inches high, has long straight hair, is of “copper color” and has a small scar on the inside of her right wrist. Her sister Sophia is 17 years old in 1849, 5 feet 1 and $\frac{1}{4}$ inches, is of copper color, has straight hair, and has “rather high cheek bones.” Maryam (Miriam), the youngest, is 15, and is just over 5 feet tall, is copper colored, and has kinky hair (MCD vol4-6:437). Much like the bills of sale for enslaved persons, these detailed descriptions are about recording the property exchanging hands and thus reinforcing Black people as objects (Figure 4).

The earliest records pertaining to the George White family underscore the importance of property in relationships within free Black families and between white families and Black. Analysis highlights an interesting but no

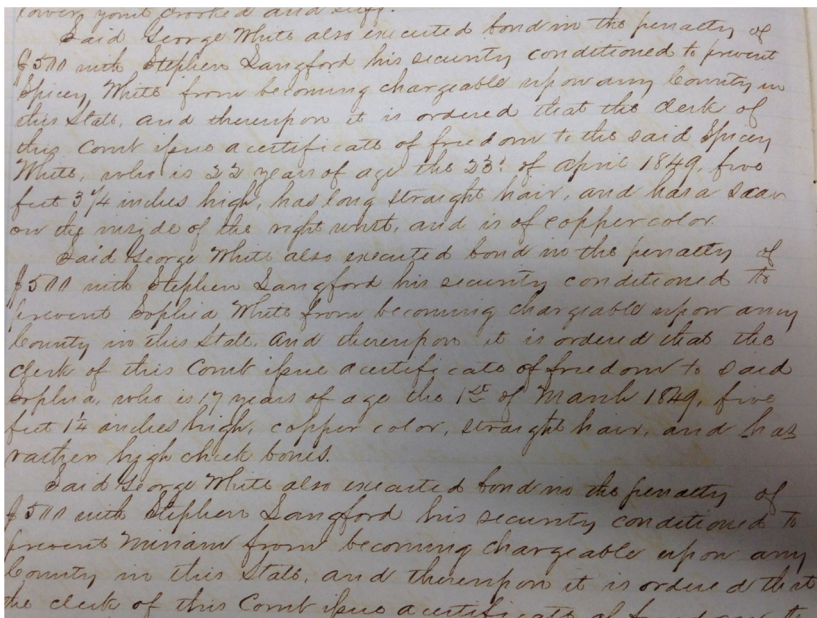


Figure 4. Emancipation of George White’s children and specific description of daughters Spicy, Sophia, and Miriam (Madison County Deed Book vol. 4–6, 1848–1852)

less troubling transitional experience for White’s female children first as property, albeit of their father and as collateral in a property agreement, before finally gaining freedom. Even in their emancipation documents, the descriptions, just as those for auction bills and bills of sale for enslaved people, show the White children are still functioning as objects. Labels such as “FB,” “mulatto,” “colored,” and “negro” across all documents examined, reinforced structures of power through racial categories.

Laws and the resultant documentation, which attempted to control a population seen as “property” did not completely prevent White from working the system. Despite being illiterate, White used the law to his and his family’s benefit. In the analysis of his last will and testament, discussed below, White’s goals were to leave his children his property with dwellings, adding value to the land. With assistance from his lawyer Stephen Langford, White effectively bypassed Kentucky and federal laws, namely the Married Women’s Acts in 1846 and 1868, enabling his female children, in particular, to inherit and then hold onto his property through trust in the southern half of Madison County (see Roberts 1922 *Property Rights of Married Women in Kentucky*).

The Last Will and Testament of George White

George White’s will also contributes to the reconstruction of the remaining female members of his family. Each of his children is labeled a “free man” or “free woman of color” as required by law. However, it is important to note that White does not leave anything directly to his heirs. Instead, he places Stephen Langford, a white lawyer from Rockcastle County, as trustee: “I will and bequeath to Stephen Langford in trust” or “as trustee” (Madison County Wills Book U: 605). Because the will is written in 1862, prior to the 13th Amendment freeing enslaved peoples and the Married Women’s Act 1868, White ensures that his property will remain in the hands of his family (See Roberts 1922 *Property Rights of Married Women in Kentucky*). The will clearly stipulates that should an inheritor die before he does, that the property goes to his grandchildren or great-grandchildren. Further, the will stipulates that at the female inheritors’ death, the property would remain in the family, being passed on to brothers or sisters, or children, depending on longevity. For each example following, Stephen Langford is named trustee. (Figure 5).

To his daughter Spicy, White left “one half of the old Adams farm—one hundred acres including the improvement thereon except the west end of the house situated in Madison County at the top of the big hill...” (MCWB U 605–6). To Sophia, he left “one hundred acres of my Lane farm including the improvements thereon now occupied by my daughter Sophia lying in Jackson County Kentucky...” (MCWB U 606). It is presumed that

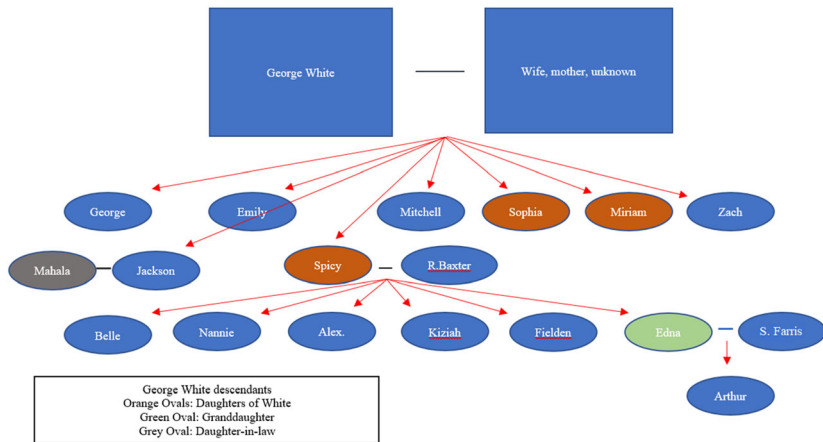


Figure 5. George White Family tree

Sophia already had a dwelling in which to live. Mary Ann (Miriam or Mary Am) is willed “one hundred acres the balance of the Lane Farm” but also stated is that he will build her a dwelling. The will continued that should he die before the dwelling is built that Langford should use any money from the sale of property not attributed to his children to build a dwelling and out houses for his daughter that will “render her equal to my daughter Sophia” (MCWB U 606).

Two other women appeared in White’s will who are not directly related to him. His daughter-in-law Mahala, wife of his son Jackson, is left 50 acres should he die before making any other provisions. Here, White stipulated the property as “fifty acres of the Adams farm that part which lays between the Big road” and what is left in trust to Spicy (MCWB U:606). Delphy Smith, whom we know nothing about, also gets land adjoining Spicy’s: “... the west end of the dwelling house on the Adams farm and about thirty acres of said farm which lays between my daughter Spicy’s land and Mr Cox farm including a cleared field of about ten acres, a strip of woodland containing about 20 acres on which is a spring” (MCWB U:607).

White dies in 1872, after the 13th Amendment is signed, so all property laws apply to the White inheritors. Kentucky law dictated that female inheritances transfer to their husbands at the time of their marriages, and upon their husbands’ deaths, return to them. This is certainly the case for Spicy, who married Richmond Baxter, a freedman and tanner, and later, her daughter Edna, who married Stephen Farris. From 1872 to 1901, we know that Spicy retained the land inherited from her father. Spicy Baxter’s will, dated 1901, states that her holdings be equally divided among her sons and daughters (Belle, Nannie, Alexander, Kiziah listed as “Kizzie”, Fielden, and Edna) (MCWB W: 405). Edna (Farris) was bequeathed the “old homeplace where we lived” in her one-sixth parcel. The Beers Map of 1876 (published 4 years after White’s death) clearly shows that 3 members of the Baxter family were living in proximity of each other along Burnt Ridge Road, or the county road, and within the boundaries of the tract of land White purchased in 1858. (Figure 6). Because the Beers maps were produced to show property ownership, we can use the “Baxter” depictions to support that one family member was the property owner as designated by a dwelling, but related members occupied adjoining properties.

For each daughter as well as one daughter-in-law and a woman yet to be identified, White bequeathed land with either a standing dwelling or leaving directions for one to be built. It is on this land that his female children and grandchildren work towards establishing themselves as property owners in postbellum Madison County. This ownership, while giving the women power as property owners, challenges the status quo of white dominant society where men were seen as heads of family. While state law

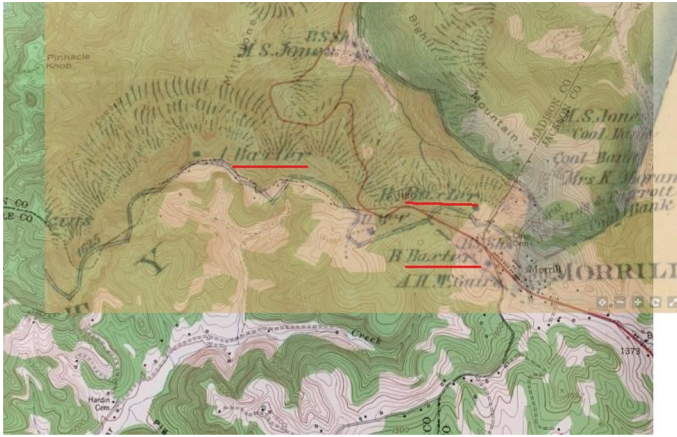


Figure 6. ArcGIS georeferenced Beers Map 1876 and USGS Big Hill Quad map indicating locations for Baxter dwellings along Burnt Ridge Road and in Jackson County

transferred the property to Spicy and Edna's husbands, the land did return to them, as indicated by their wills, thus, their power was maintained.

Why, though, did George White purchase property in this area of the County in the first place? There is no evidence to date to determine White's decision to purchase property in this area of the county, but George White and his family were not the only free blacks to move to the Glades, as it was known then. Both abolitionists and freed blacks followed John G. Fee, the founder of Berea College, to this area. While working at Camp Nelson during the Civil War, which was located north of the Glades area and near Lexington, Fee conceived of the need for free Blacks to own property. He wrote in his autobiography:

in the midst of an immense colored population, and in a region fertile and beautiful...I tried to induce others to buy lands there, parcel out and give facilities for a self-sustaining community. No one would do so. My own patrimony was spent. By my wife selling what land she had in a free State (where there was progress) and myself borrowing five hundred dollars, we could then secure there for the purpose suggested, 130 acres of land. Knowing that the investment must be relatively and largely a sinking fund, we secured the land, and divided it into lots and small tracts. Forty-two families have now their own homes there, and thus give home patronage to school and church. (Fee 1891:183)

Other free soldiers followed, helping to create at least 6 different Black communities within and around what would become the town of Berea. Farristown, Middletown, Bobtown, and Peytontown contained businesses, schools, and churches that were accessible by the Whites/Baxters/Farrises living nearby. With Berea College already established but not yet fully functioning, like minded white and Black people populated the area. From its inception in 1855 to 1904, Berea College was the first institute of higher learning in the South to educate both black and white, male, and female. Together with the land policy of Fee, the intent of the College was to provide equity to all.

Although there are questions as to why White would purchase land separate of his initial holdings, his purchase of the tract in Southern Madison County underscores his ability to continue to engage in financial transactions across racial lines. No notation appears indicating the Goldens as being “colored” or a “free man of color” as it did for White. Regardless, Black ownership of property at the turn of the century came with risks involved including visibility.

Class and Race Intersections: Momentary Visibility

After 1901, something shifted in Madison County as well as in the White/Baxter/Farris family that resulted in George White’s descendants selling the remaining tracts of land, thus beginning a disruption of their place on the landscape. To date, however, little is known about the financial situation of the Baxters or Farrises except that sales to HM Penniman, acting on behalf of Berea College, began in 1903 with a sale of 367 acres by Spicy for \$367 (MCD Vol 50:491) (Figure 7). From 1904 to 1916, the remaining White property is sold to the College. In a series of deeds, below, the transfer of property to Berea College through sales is significant.

In 1904, Fielden Baxter, Spicy’s son, and Simpson “Bud” Gentry, another family member, continue the sell-off of land for \$50 and \$10 respectfully, but no acreage amount is given (MCDB vol 51: 455). The tract is described as being purchased by George White from the Goldens, was known as the “Adams Farm,” and in the document the parties have agreed that “waste has been committed upon said land by certain parties and any and all right of action which we may have by reason of same we hereby transfer and assign to said Penniman” (MCDB vol 51) There is no evidence to clarify why Fielden sold the property nor is there any evidence as to what “waste” could have happened. Based on Spicy’s deed with Penniman, acreage was valued at \$1 per acre, therefore the tracts being sold could be 50 and 10 acres. Is the agreed price determinant upon “waste” of the land?

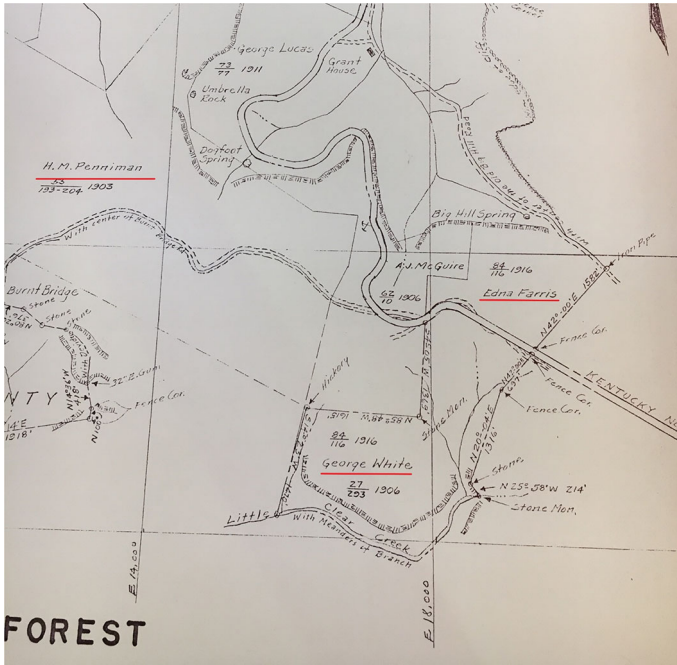


Figure 7. Fay Forest Map showing Penniman property (remainder of Baxter and White properties; Edna Farris property; George White as original owner). Printed with permission from Berea College Special Collections

In 1916, a final deed is issued between Edna Farris and Berea College. Listing off several other tracts of land and dates of sale, this deed marks the end of ownership by the descendants of George White. No price for the tract of land is listed for the 50 acres. A lack of price for the acreage does not fit with the other deeds examined and leaves many unanswered questions. However, weighed against correspondence between the president of Berea College at the time, William G. Frost, and William Smith, a lawyer, this deed and the letter suggest a strained relationship between the College and Edna Farris. What is problematic, though, is that while information in the letter corresponds with some information in the deed, the dates do not match up. The letter, dated 1902, is fourteen years before the deed is issued in the court books. Further, this letter predates the first sale of property to the College via HM Penniman by 1 year.

The letter is interesting in and of itself. Edna is described as being “in an anxious state of mind” over property she feels she owns. The letter reads:

Mrs Edna Farris comes to me in an anxious state of mind about the land on Big Hill. She claims to inherit 50 acres. Prof. Penniman claims to have bought this, but I have nothing to do with the controversy. Outside of this 50 acres there was another 140 acres in which her mother had a life interest. On her death it fell to her six heirs, of whom Edna is one. Berea College had bought out the shares of all the other heirs. Now the question is the partition of this 140 acres in which she has an undivided sixth interest. Letter to Honorable William B Smith, from William Frost, Berea College President Berea College November 1902 (Berea College Special Collections RG3.03)

The letter continues with Frost's suggested offers of sale and exchange to her, which he feels is fair:

First, I will buy her 73 1/3 acres at \$7 an acre. Second, I will sell her our 119 acres at \$7 an acre. Third, I will give her 10 acres of the Madison county land and the balance in Rockcastle. This I consider very fair. She would really have a right to only 1/6 of the Madison county land which we both desire and 1/6 of the Rockcastle land which we both consider less desirable. (Berea College Special Collections RG3.03)

Here, prices are listed counter to the 1904 deed with Baxter and Gentry, but it is nearly impossible without additional research to determine which sections of property were being exchanged or to know why the property is being sold. Further, because the letter is written by men in positions of leadership and power, the descriptions of Edna Farris must be considered with caution. The visibility, however, of Edna Farris and her family, as owners of property desired by Berea College is clear.

But why is the property desired? Leading a push to acquire property for a forestry program, Berea College followed in the footsteps of Cornell University and the Biltmore Estate at establishing an institutional forestry program. Berea's desire was that "The management goals of wood, water, wildlife and recreation would become the standard 'multiple-use' goals that would define American forestry by mid-century" (NHR 2003 7/12). However, these goals were counter to what was presently seen as mismanagement or "waste," as indicated in the deed between Fielden Baxter and "Bud" Gentry. Here, the land is described as "'...so much grazed that it has not been seeded up at all"; "...many years of cropping."; "...cut over so severely..."; and "...has suffered severely from fires..." (NHR 2003: 8/22). The practice of acquiring land for conservation and education was not new, with municipal and federal institutions amassing millions of acres for access to resources like water and timber, or parks and recreation (Barnes 2011a, b: 698; Horning 2004). In Appalachia, especially, standing in the way of industrialization and the leisure that came with capitalist production were its poor population, white and Black.

Despite the College's history of equal education, it was not immune to the changing attitudes about race or patriarchal attitudes towards class. A distinct shift in 1904, with the signing of the Day Law, which segregated Kentucky schools, and with a concerted effort by the college president William G. Frost to prioritize educating white Appalachians is evident through the College's policy of land purchases. Their targets were not happenstance. Though Berea College followed national and regional trends of conservation, this process required the removal of residents occupying the landscape, which were predominantly poor and/or Black, and in this case female.

In this section, I have attempted to trace the subtle but developing attitudes towards land and property among abolitionists as well as men (namely white) in leadership roles. Where the female descendants of the White family were visible in their ownership of property, an underlying notion of patriarchy in terms of the gifting of land and caring for land erased the descendants of George White from the landscape. This patriarchal attitude was derived from at least a century or more of relationships with land, beginning with English settlers in New England associating land ownership with masculinity (see Beranek 2012). While white women certainly inherited and maintained property across the country (refer back to Fee's quote above), Black women presented a new challenge.

Poverty and Blackness: Visibility to Invisibility

Accompanying this shift is how the dominant culture constructed poverty around race so that Black was equivalent to poor. While the documentary evidence of property sales suggests the Baxter and Farris families could be struggling financially, it cannot be said that they were poor. A look at both Spicy and Edna's wills do not reflect families living on the edge. Property in the form of land as well as specific material culture, like the sewing machine, suggests otherwise. Sewing machines were gateway material culture, that is, specific items which allowed women to take in work from the community to make money as well as make and repair clothing, saving money. Sewing machines offered access to resources and other materials that might not have been accessible otherwise. During the 2014 excavation, a brass patent plate or shuttle cover plate, probably from a nineteenth century sewing machine, with numbering was recovered. The family from which the sewing machine was recovered was contemporary to the Baxters as they are both depicted on the Beers Map only a couple of miles apart. (Figures 8 and 9).

Removing the Black ownership of the land re-establishes the dominant culture's idea about land use. This attitude falls in line, again, with the



Figure 8. Brass patent plate from 19th century sewing machine

trends of the time (see Barnes 2011a and b). In these instances, the act of erasure or making invisible certain segments of the population is an important process in maintaining socio-economic and socio-political relationships between white and Black and male and female at the turn of the nineteenth century. Berea College was just one small participant in a national trend: “At the start of the twentieth century, African Americans relinquished title to all but 4 million of the 17 million acres of land that they had held, and African American poverty and land loss have, by many accounts, a high correlation (Barnes 2011a, b:37 from Browne 1973; Geisler 1995).

These last unclear traces of the lives of the female members of George White leave more questions than answers and demands more research. What does seem to be clear is that the selling of the land equates to the physical erasure of the White female inheritors, namely Spicy, Delphy, Mahala, and Sophia. While the Fay map does denote Edna Farris’ property (see above concerning her will), we have no record of how to locate her on the landscape. We must also assume that the land listed under “Penniman” was once that of the remaining female inheritors above. Thus, without additional evidence, locating dwelling sites might not be possible.

Above, I mentioned the physical erasure of the White family and descendants from the landscape, but erasure is also ideological. In the case of the White family and especially the female members written about here, erasure is performed across multiple dimensions. The decisions of William G. Frost, president of Berea College, to focus on the education of the white Appalachian population and supporting the purchasing of land owned by Black women (and other poor whites and Blacks) is ideological erasure.

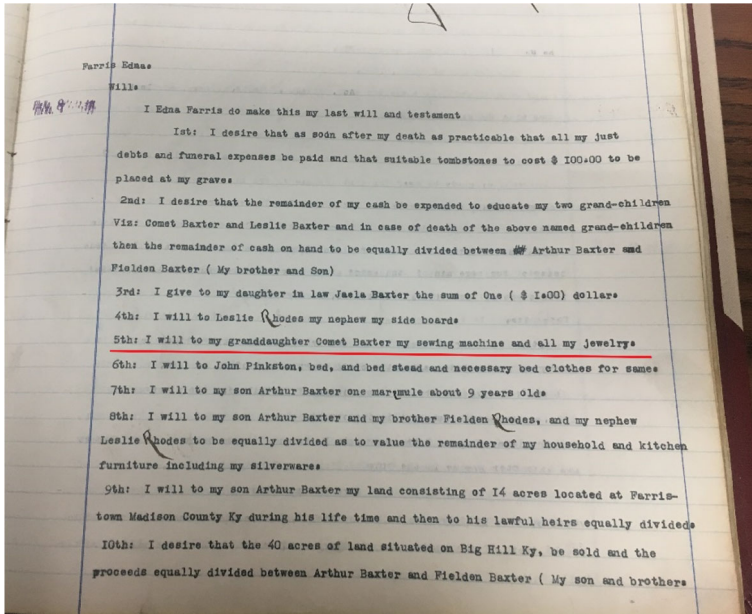


Figure 9. Edna Farris' will leaving her sewing machine to her granddaughter Comet (Madison County Will Book vol 1 1901–1905)

The development of the College Forest, though not outwardly racist, is a reflection of national and regional trends concerning land management, but those trends were constructed around distinct constructions rendering Blacks as “monolithic” and Appalachian whites as poor. (Barnes 2011a). The specific focus on improving the condition of the white, poor populations of Appalachia, as promoted by Frost, for example, erases the White family.

Erasure is not limited to past constructions of race, class, or gender. In other words, not only is there erasure of their personhood through the process of becoming/being property as enslaved, and then again as property owners after they sold their property, but there continues to be a process of erasure in how the documents in which they appear are handled. Availability of some of the documentation of the White family is problematic. Archival conditions for many of these documents is poor to the extent that books have gone missing and or pages disintegrating. The conditions of the documentation in the county archives speaks to the struggle of some rural counties to preserve written documentation, but it may also speak to the structural racism, which grew out of tensions at the turn of the century. Structural racism may explain why documents about the White fam-

ily have been allowed to deteriorate while other archival material is well preserved.

Conclusions

At the beginning of this paper, I set out to present results of early research on a freed Black family in which the female members were not well documented but could offer insight into how freed Blacks, and especially the women, navigated shifting terrain of racism, classism, and gender constructions. Intersectionality and the construction of a matrix of domination, in this case developing oppressive attitudes towards race and property, gender and ownership, and class and management of land, aided in the tracing of the relationships between Black and white, male, and female but also the material traces which broadcast such shifts. With this said, throughout all this is an underlying experience I consider critical to this ongoing project. Battle-Baptiste wrote in *Black Feminist Archaeology* about her home space as her “environment, the spaces that sharpened experiences and memories” (2011: 95). While we do not have direct access to the memories of George White’s children nor of his grandchildren who held onto this land, we can begin to query the spaces that shaped their lives. Starting with the documents required of them by the white dominant society, we can begin to “see” the materiality of oppression, racism, and violence under which they lived. Ideas of property help construct a clearer material “picture” of how resistance formed in response to “the perpetual construction of economic and social structures that deprive many folks of the means to make home-place” by the dominant white culture (hooks 2008:70). Addressing these constructions, the documentary record should be considered as a part of the processes of erasure, and as such, the ceasing of a process of invisibility/visibility for the White women.

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