Liberty Hill
Smyrna, Tennessee
Heritage Development Plan

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Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area
Dr. Carroll Van West, Director
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INTRODUCTION

Liberty Hill is the last remaining house from the now non-existent Colonial town of Jefferson, TN. The remaining property contains a Federal style home, two intact slave dwellings, and remnants of an additional outbuilding. The home is a Trail of Tears witness structure. It served as the site of a Civil War skirmish during Wheeler’s Raid and likely a provisional hospital and Confederate headquarters. The site bore witness to the Reconstruction Era murder of a free black man. Although the home has undeniable significant historical value to Rutherford County and the State of Tennessee, the home and property are in immediate danger from the threat of disrepair, the elements, and development. Liberty Hill, as originally named by the Weakley family, has also been referred to as the homestead of B.S. King, Johns-King home, or the King-Johns home.

METHODOLOGY

This report is a culmination of my research on Jefferson, utilization of the primary source documents available in the Rutherford County Register of Deeds office, Rutherford County Archives, Albert Gore Research Center, Tennessee State Library and Archives, oral history interviews with Jefferson’s former residents, and secondary writings about Jefferson, Native American history, and Liberty Hill. I would also like to thank Dr. Carroll Van West, John Lodl, Barry Lamb, and the Rutherford County Historical society for their valuable input.
LOCATION

Liberty Hill is located at 831 Old Jefferson Pike, Smyrna, Tennessee 37167, close to the intersection of Jefferson Pike and Old Jefferson Pike in Smyrna. Historically, the homestead was a mile away from where the Jefferson town square stood from 1803 until its destruction in the 1960s. The geographic coordinates of the main house are 35°59’38.5”N 86°28’40.4”W.

AERIAL VIEW

Figure 1 Estimated total boundaries of original property from descriptions of early deeds utilizing Jefferson Pike (Now Old Jefferson Pike), Sharp Springs road, and the East Fork of the Stones River as boundaries of the property. Google maps screen shot.
Figure 2 Aerial view showing historic buildings outlined. The largest outlined shape is the main house, the two above (north) it were slave dwellings, and a cellar/spring house that has now collapsed is to the northwest of the main house. Google maps image. The image is dated, house have now been constructed around the home.
Figure 3 Rough boundaries on aerial view of remaining property from Google maps screen shot. Notably this satellite image is old. There are now houses built up surrounding the property.
Figure 4 Plat Cabinet 30, Page 163 showing the development to the northwest of the home, a similar one is to the southeast.

Figure 5 Plat Cabinet 30, Page 163 detail shot. Location of Historic home is marked as:

"Reserved For Future Development Remaining Property of A.F. Johns et al."
Figure 6 Aboriginal Map of Tennessee, 1866. The map shows "Black Fox's Camp" in relative position of what is now Rutherford County.

PROPERTY HISTORY

Precolonial Inhabitants

Prior to colonization, the land upon which the house was constructed was inhabited by the Chickamauga Cherokee and ceded to white settlers as part of the 1785 Treaty of Hopewell. Notable indigenous figure Black Fox (also referred to as Enola, Inali, Enoli, or Inyali) was the Principal Chief of the original Cherokee Nation in the early 1800’s who resided a short distance away and eventually led a band of Cherokee to relocate, though some descendants still reside in the area. The Cherokee and Creek continued living in the area as evidenced by newspaper reports of settler’s and Cherokee conflicts.¹

¹ “Nashville, August 18, 1802,” Tennessee Gazette, Nashville, Tennessee, August 18, 1802. Report stating that over the past two weeks inhabitants along the Stones River had horses stolen three times and was then believed to be done by Cherokee or Creek individuals.
Colonial Period

December 12, 1801 Robert Weakley and Thomas Bedford were named as the assignees of a land grant consisting of 3,840 acres for their service during the Revolutionary War. By 1802 there were enough settlers living in the area that they petitioned the state government to form a new county. In 1803, Robert Weakley and Thomas Bedford founded the town of Jefferson, which served as the county seat of the newly formed Rutherford County from 1805 until 1811 when Murfreesboro became the more logical and accessible choice with the addition of the railroad.

Jefferson was situated between the forks of the Stones River, located in the Central Basin Province and sat atop a limestone geological substrate. Limestone rock is easily dissolved by rain water that has mixed with carbon dioxide in the air, resulting in the ‘karst’ topography visible in the Middle Tennessee area. The terrain found in karst areas consists of sinkholes, sinking streams, caves, and springs. This caused frequent flooding, rich farmland, swampy terrain, and eventually contributed to the destruction or removal of every building in Jefferson with the exception of one.

Jefferson founder Robert Weakley built Liberty Hill c. 1805 with the utilization of slave labor. The home is a prime example of the Southern Colonial style of building homes. The main home was originally a two-story log cabin with a central entrance and two rooms on both floors. According to tax records for 1809, Robert Weakley is listed as owning four properties, 4,394 acres, and two slaves. The 1813 record shows the land, but not the enslaved individuals.

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3 “Karst Geology,” Greenway Path informational signage, Town of Smyrna, Tennessee, Parks and Recreation Department.
4 Some documents suggest the construction date as early as 1805 or as late as 1807.
When Robert Weakley died in 1848, 35 slaves were passed as a part of his will.\(^5\) By 1860 there were 11 slave dwellings listed as part of the property of the Weakley family, though there is no clarification which properties they resided on.\(^6\)

Jefferson, now referred to as “Old Jefferson,” and Jefferson Springs\(^7\), a resort-camp town about a mile and a half down stream, are often used interchangeably, even by the former residents.\(^8\) Despite being lost in public memory, Jefferson had a fair deal of historical importance.\(^9\)

Rather than growing up organically, the town was planned and divided into 150 residential lots and a public square, which included a courthouse, jail, stocks, and a whipping post. Within a few years, the settlers of Jefferson also built a school, church, jail, and general store. The school was significant: built under provisions for public schools in the Act of 1806, it was the first public school in Rutherford County and possibly the first one as part of the act in the state of Tennessee.\(^10\) The small community was insular and eventually widened to include outlying farms, like Liberty Hill.

Liberty Hill was a working farm ranging from sixty acres to over one hundred thirty acres at different times. An 1878 map of Rutherford County references “T.M. King, Farmer and

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\(^5\) Rutherford County Taxable Property 1809, Rutherford County Archives, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.
\(^6\) District 6, 1860 Slave Census, by N.W. Carter, Rutherford County Archives, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.
\(^7\) Jefferson Springs was originally called Sulpher Springs or Sulphur Springs; both spellings are present in older photographs, letters, and material culture.
\(^8\) This also holds true in the oral history interviews of residents from the area. More often than not, Jefferson Springs is folded into Jefferson, rather than the reverse. However, residents do define a division when speaking about an adjacent community, Hickory Grove, which was a predominantly African American community.
\(^9\) Darby Campbell, Lost to the Lake: The Promises of the TVA, the Percy Priest Dam project, and the displacement of the people of Jefferson, Tennessee, 2018.
Breeder of Fine Stock.” Tax records from the 1800s corroborate that livestock was the main industry conducted at the site.

Originally given the name “Liberty Hill,” the home has also been called the Johns-King home or the King-Johns home referring to the family that has held the property for the majority of time since before the Civil War and continuously since early 1900s. Today the property rests in the hands of “Liberty Hill Partners” a development group owned by the Johns family, that has built many of the surrounding homes in the area on what was originally the property’s farmland. At present, these developments have surrounded the property on each side, creating a small historic island in a body of suburbs. Liberty Hill is about a mile away from where the Jefferson town square once resided and an equal distance to the Davis plantation.

**African American History**

There are two slave dwellings on the remaining property of Liberty Hill. Deeds from the mid-1800s detail the sale, purchase, and loan of enslaved people by the Johns family. Among them are a 25-year-old woman named Patsy and “her child name and age not remembered,” Eliza Rebecca and her 6-month old child, a 23 or 24-year-old woman named Fanny and “her sucking infant child,” and a single “boy named Jordan of copper colour aged about seven or eight years.” During their time, the families that owned this property enslaved almost 50 individuals at a time.

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12 1850 Rutherford County Census, 1880 United States Federal Census, Rutherford County Archives.

13 Deed Book (hereafter DB) 7, page (hereafter P)382, DB 8 P147, DB 9 P422, Rutherford County Register of Deeds, Murfreesboro, Tennessee. The way “Eliza Rebecca is written could be the two part name of the mother (likely) or possibly the name of mother and child. 1850 Slave Census, Jefferson District, September 20, 1850, by
The 1880 census shows “colored” individuals making up 57% of the population of Jefferson, which is an indication of how prevalent slavery had been in the area.

Hickory Grove was an African American community that grew up adjacent to Jefferson, the community center was the Hickory Grove Missionary Baptist Church, which relocated about a mile away after the communities were displaced by the TVA. This community would have likely been the home of many of the enslaved workers after the Civil War.

Another important facet of the homes’ African American history is the murder of a free black man during the Reconstruction Era. According to historian Mary B. Hughes, Joseph F. Johns fled to Texas after a freedman was shot. The exact date is not certain, but many accounts have recorded the incident occurred at some point shortly after the Civil War, at which point Ben S. King purchased the homestead. Earliest date given is 1863, unfortunately due to the destruction of Rutherford County records in Murfreesboro during the Civil War, there is no way to corroborate that account. Joseph F. Johns was on record showing a sale of eighty-four acres and twelve slaves in October of 1872. I believe that is the likely year the murder occurred. This is not the only piece of racially charged history the home was witness to.

Trail of Tears

An almost entirely overlooked portion of Jefferson’s history is the small city’s inclusion as a portion of the Northern Route of the Trail of Tears. After decades of conflict and several broken treaties, the Indian Removal Act of 1830 passed. During the last week of October and

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R.H. Mason, Rutherford County Archives, Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Elizabeth Weakley is listed as owner of 49 slaves, 30 males and 19 females ranging from 2 to 85 years of age.

14 Hughes, Mary B., *Hearthstones: The Story of Historic Rutherford County Homes*, Midsouth Publishing Co. Inc., 1942. All accounts of this event are written in passive language, but the inference is that Johns shot the man and successfully fled repercussions by moving to another state.
the first week of November 1838 a group split into two detachments at Woodbury and one of those groups went to the north along the Stones River and passed through Jefferson. According to Nancy DeGennaro, “During the winter of 1838, a detachment of 4,000 Cherokee passed by Liberty Hill.” They originally planned to go through Murfreesboro to the south, but a toll road made that path more costly so they traveled through Jefferson instead.\textsuperscript{15} The Cherokee would have passed along the section of road that formed the southwest boundary of Liberty Hill. If they had looked up the hill, they would have seen a grand statement house complete with carriage lane, gardens, and slave cabins. The home, and no doubt the family, would have stood witness to the column marched across the original view shed.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Figure_7_Trail_of_Tears_d Detachment_Route_Through_Jefferson.jpg}
\caption{Trail of Tears detachment route through Jefferson. Screen capture of Google maps aerial view. Yellow dot represents site of Liberty Hill’s home.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{15} Nancy De Gennaro, “Bill to save Smyrna’s historic Johns-King home fails in Tennessee General Assembly,” \textit{Daily News Journal}, April 23, 2018. https://www.dnj.com/story/news/2018/04/23/bill-ketron-mike-sparks-liberty-hill-johns-king-home-cherokee-trail-tears-civil-war/528260002/ (accessed April 24, 2018). One of the few mentions was a recent article in the \textit{Daily News Journal} arguing for the preservation of one of the few surviving historic homes in the area. In my interview with Toby Francis, he talks about race relations and how some of the Native Americans, mostly women or young girls, “left behind” were married to residents and had children that remained in the area. He uses his own family tree as an example.
Figure 8 Trail of Tears Route according to 1832 Matthew Rhea map. Vanderbilt University.

Figure 9 Historic Photograph, Colorized "Tollgate, Nashville Pike, near Forts, Murfreesboro, Tenn." Trail of Tears Tennessee, National Park Service.
Civil War

At the end of December of 1862, Liberty Hill was the site of a skirmish as a part of what is referred to as Wheeler’s Raid. Joseph Wheeler’s forces left Murfreesboro, traveled to Jefferson, then to LaVergne before taking a circuitous route back to Murfreesboro. Several supply trains were burned or captured in an upwards of a million dollars’ worth of damage.¹⁶

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Edward Longacre provides the best account compiled from the diaries and letters of Confederate soldiers:

“Wheeler’s troopers were tired, wet, and cold from their recent exertions, but more hard work was in the offing. Close to midnight on December 29–30, Bragg ordered the cavalry to pass around the Union left by a circuitous route. The objective was to overtake and waylay supply trains traveling between Nashville and the rear of the Army of the Cumberland. A heavy blow to his communications might distract and discomfit Rosecrans at a critical time, facilitating the attack Bragg planned to launch against his right flank. Wheeler was instructed to conduct the mission with the four regiments and two battalions of his own brigade plus Wiggins’s battery. Lt. Col. James E. Carter’s 1st Tennessee Cavalry, which had not served under Wheeler since the Bolivar expedition, was a late addition to the strike force. Wheeler started out in the sodden murk of early morning, trotting north along the turnpike to Jefferson. ‘The rain was falling,’ recalled an officer in the 8th Confederate, ‘and the darkness so dense that a man could not see the comrade riding at his side.’ By daylight, now inside enemy lines, the column neared Jefferson, which Wheeler’s scouts reported to be in enemy hands. Wheeler had been ordered to cut communications, not fight a pitched battle, and so he detoured around the town along a country trail south of the turnpike. A few minutes of travel brought the head of his line to a ford near Neal’s Mill, where the [now Old Jefferson] pike crossed Stones River. On the far side, the column veered north until it again approached the [now Jefferson Pike] turnpike, along which the scouts sighted a supply train, sixty or so wagons long, defending in front, attacking in rear moving toward Jefferson from the
west. The train was lugging the baggage and provisions of Col. John C. Starkweather’s infantry brigade, a part of Thomas’s wing. ‘We attacked vigorously,’ Wheeler reported, ‘[and] drove off the guards,’ of which there had been few, then swarmed over the wagons, setting fire to many and disabling others by shooting down their teams or capturing their drivers. A few escapees rushed word of the attack to Starkweather at Jefferson, who promptly ordered two of his outfits, the 21st Wisconsin and 79th Pennsylvania, to drive off the raiders. Instead, they were driven back by Wheeler’s dismounted rifle-men. And when Starkweather sent a picked force of fifty men to take the raiders in flank, Wheeler’s scouts detected its approach in time to thwart it. Falling back in haste, the flanking party joined the rest of Starkweather’s command in throwing up a line of works opposite Wheeler’s front. Unable to drive off the Federals, even with well-placed shells from Wiggins’s guns, Wheeler ordered his men to clear out. Their job was done—the four-hour fight had cost Starkweather twenty wagons and between fifty and ninety of his men, taken prisoners (estimates of the total number vary widely).”

Some stories have the Confederate Soldiers lying in wait inside the house and rushing the Federal Soldiers as they approached the home, but as the above account states, it was much more likely that the Confederate Cavalry only caught up with the supply train and raiding party in front of Liberty Hill (the home is in sight of the turnpike as noted and would have been the only one for a distance). The family left the bullet holes from musket fire during the conflict

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as marks of the home’s history. Following the skirmish, the Confederate troops would have used the home as a provisional headquarters and hospital to treat the injured soldiers from both sides of the conflict. The home may have received wounded Confederate soldiers after the Battle of Murfreesboro sent the less critical soldiers to homes in the area once they couldn’t take any but the seriously wounded.

The Twentieth Century

In the early 1900s, the resort-camp town of Jefferson Springs drew tourists and those seeking recreation in the sulfur water that was then believed to have medicinal properties. Jefferson Springs was also rumored to be a stop for Chicago mobsters during the Prohibition era. Eventually the springs dried up and the popular dance hall (and likely speakeasy) closed its doors, eventually burning down. During World War II, the U.S. Army practiced maneuvers in the Jefferson area, mostly in outlying fields of the nearby farms like and possibly including Liberty Hill.

The once fortuitous placement on the river that led to Jefferson’s early success as river town is what eventually led to its destruction. According to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ records, Congress authorized Stewarts Ferry Reservoir in 1946 as part of the Flood Control Act.

19 Kate Cumming, A Journal of Hospital Life in the Confederate Army of Tennessee: From the Battle of Shiloh to the End of the War: with Sketches of Life and Character, and Brief Notices of Current Events During That Period, Louisville, KY: John P. Morton & Co., [c1866]
21 Ruth Dunn, interview by Louis Kyriakoudes.
22 Rutherford County newspapers from this time show that moonshining and bootlegging was very common in the area, as do the several of the oral history interviews.
23 Fires were extremely common in the oral histories interviews and evidence suggest that buildings burned down frequently in the area.
In 1958, the Tennessee legislature changed the name to J. Percy Priest Dam and Lake in honor of the late Congressman J. Percy Priest. The project was conducted under the purview of the TVA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which still maintains the dam, lake, and recreation area. Construction began in 1963, and the dam was completed in 1967 creating Percy Priest Lake. In the 1960’s, almost every building was destroyed or relocated. Another contemporary home, the Lenoir House was moved prior to Jefferson’s destruction and is now in present-day Smyrna. Liberty Hill is the only remaining historic home that was a part of Jefferson.

In 2009, the Murfreesboro Post named the home one of “Rutherford County’s Top 10 Endangered Sites.” Likewise, in 2015 the Tennessee Preservation Trust named it as one of the “Ten in Tenn”, a list of the top ten most endangered sites in Tennessee. Today the home’s history can be read in the street signs of the surrounding community. Names of the Johns and King family, remnants of Jefferson and individuals who lived there, frequently appear. The name of the subdivision currently engulfing is appropriately enough named “Liberty Hill.”

HOUSE DESCRIPTION

Main House

The Liberty Hill main house is a two-story cedar log and frame dwelling with an asphalt shingle gable roof that rests on a combination concrete block and stone piers and continuous concrete and brick foundation. The original floors were wide knotty pine and the original roof was cedar shingles.

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25 This section includes excerpts from Darby Campbell, “Lost to the Lake: The Promises of the TVA, the Percy Priest Dam project, and the displacement of the people of Jefferson, Tennessee,” 2018.

Figure 11 Front Entrance, Southwest exposure, outbuildings visible in relation to the home

Figure 12 Eastern corner foundation, stone, cement, and metal
From a preliminary exterior assessment, the east end and west end of the dwelling consists of two-story, half-dovetailed notched log sections, which were later extended by way of a frame central section into a central-hall, (likely cedar or pine) clapboard-encased dwelling.
The result of the center two-story addition was to create a typical Middle Tennessee interpretation of Federal style that has a central entrance with sidelights flanked by two symmetrical bays. Two chimneys bookend the house as well, contributing to this style.

Figure 15 Front door sidelight window

Figure 16 Chimneys on northwest (left) and southeast (right) sides of the house
The dwelling had a historic L-wing on the west end of the north elevation, as indicated in a c. 1891 photograph of the house. That two-story wing was removed c. 2010. A two-story, four-post classical portico was added to the dwelling c. 1930. Approximately two acres of the original plantation exist today.

Figure 17 Northwest side with visible hewing marks on cedar logs
Figure 18 Outbuildings viewed from the north corner of the main house. For clarity, the building on the left will be referred to as the north slave dwelling and the building on the right will be the northeast slave dwelling.

Outbuildings

To the northwest of the dwelling are two historic outbuildings. A log cabin, with half-dovetail notching, dates c. 1830. A second log cabin, also c. 1840, was extended by a new brick/concrete addition to its entrance, c. 1960. The north slave dwelling is a windowless one-room log cabin; it has a dirt floor and was built without a chimney.
Figure 19 North slave dwelling exterior

Figure 20 North slave dwelling interior
The northeast slave dwelling also has a similar construction and dirt floor, but includes two windows and a stone fireplace. A brick structure was attached to the front of the northeast building.
Figure 22 Northeast slave dwelling from the northwest side showing brick built alongside the log construction

Figure 23 Northeast slave dwelling stone fireplace exterior from northeast side/rear of cabin
Figure 24 Northeast slave dwelling interior from northwest window
The remains of a third outbuilding structure are partially intact, although the roof has collapsed and it is now open. It appears to have been a cellar or springhouse.
Grounds

Historic photographs indicate that a brick walkway once ran around the front, northwest side, and probably a portion of the back, likely matching the walkway leading to the house from where the carriage lane would have been, below the retaining wall.

Figure 27 Path leading up to the main entrance where the carriage lane would have likely looped at the top of the hill
Figure 28 Retaining wall, possibly from the 1800s

Figure 29 View shed from the steps of the brick path, road visible is Old Jefferson Pike where Wheeler’s Raid took place and the Trail of Tears passed in front of the home
Figure 30 Property includes several old-growth, indigenous trees that might be as old as the home.

Figure 31 Two stone gateposts at the entrance to the driveway.
IMMEDIATE NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The house has suffered from serious neglect in the past ten years. In order to stabilize the structure, attention is needed to adequately close the building to the elements and to repair drainage issues that have allowed water damage to the dwelling, especially at the south and north corners.

Figure 32 Damage caused by downspout on south corner
The back needs to be closed where the earlier addition has been removed. The chinking in the exposed logs needs repaired.

Figure 33 The back of the house needs to be closed where the addition was removed, photo from earlier survey.
Several of the windows need replaced or at minimum boarded up until they can be replaced.
After the house has been stabilized and there is funding for a second phase the primary renovation effort would need to include the removal of the portico and additional structures on the outbuildings. The portico is rotting and was added c.1930, so it is not in line with the Federal style of architecture or Colonial Period.

![Figure 35 Portico water damage](image)

Given the property’s significant history connected to the area and the cities of Jefferson and Smyrna, the property should be turned into a place where local residents can appreciate and learn about their local history. Ideally, the property would be acquired by the city of Smyrna and turned into a pocket park connected to the Smyrna greenway system for the enjoyment of residents.
Figure 36 Smyrna Greenway map with the addition of Liberty Hill as a pocket park and suggested route for connecting it to the Smyrna greenway system.
Figure 37 Google Map showing where the suggested Liberty Hill Park and greenway addition would connect to the existing system

AREAS FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION

- Given the area’s history as a working farm, complete with slave dwellings, and place along the Trail of Tears route, I believe the property could be rich for archaeological findings.

- The city of Jefferson and the Jefferson Springs area have a great deal of rich history, still awaiting discovery. A survey of families that lived in the area and collecting diaries and letters into one collection could tell a broader story. A particularly rich resource would
be “Samuel Anderson Weakley Papers and Genealogical Collection, 1789-1971” housed at the TSLA.

- The stories of African Americans that lived at Liberty Hill and in the Hickory Grove Community have barely been scratched beyond the surface. A great deal of research still needs done in this area.

**INTERPRETATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS**

This site has a full history that spans race, class, and generations. In order to tell that story, I recommend setting up a self-guided walking tour and companion website/audio tour with points to discuss the:

1. Indigenous Cherokee and Trail of Tears
2. City of Jefferson- both its history and people
3. Slave dwellings, enslaved African Americans, and community of Hickory Grove
4. Wheeler’s Raid
5. The home, farm, and Colonial Era in Tennessee

**NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION**

A. This site is associated with the broad themes of:
   1. The Civil War
   2. Agriculture
   3. African American History
   4. Indigenous History and the Trail of Tears/Cherokee Removal

B. The main house was built by and the home of Colonel Robert Weakley (Revolutionary War), a major figure in the history of Rutherford County and a Tennessee Senator.
The home was the site of a skirmish in Lieutenant General Joseph Wheeler’s Raid (Civil War).

C. The main house is a prime example of the Southern Colonial interpretation of the Federal Style of Architecture, originally built as a half dovetail notch log structure with ax hewn logs. The hand quarried limestone used as foundation stones is also distinctive to the time and area.

The two slave dwellings were also half dovetail notch log cabins.

D. The site was a working farm and has two intact slave dwellings. This combined with the Trail of Tears passage means that the site is rich for archaeological findings.

Attributes of Integrity

Location

The home is in the original location. The main house and slave dwellings are the only buildings original to Jefferson, Tennessee that are still in their original location.

Design

The architecture and placement on the landscape are true to the Federal Style of statement homes in the South.

Setting

There are two acres of the original farm left. However, the old growth trees create a screen from the surrounding subdivision. The retaining wall and part of the garden path remain.

Materials

The main house and outbuildings are constructed with materials indigenous to the area. The logs and original roof were cedar and the floors and wood frames were pine, both trees that grow local in this area of Tennessee. The limestone was likely quarried locally as well.

Workmanship

The logs bear ax markings which testify to being hewn by hand rather than milled. The limestone piers also show the use of hand tools. The bricks were also likely constructed on site. All of these examples of craftsmanship were likely the product of slave labor.
Feeling

The main house rests on top of a hill, built in the imposing Federal style. The overall effect is striking. It immediately brings to mind an old plantation house and an air of wealth and authority. The proximity of the slave dwellings is closer than most plantation homes in the area, creating a small pocket of a lost era. If the exterior was restored and landscaping was done correctly to close off the view of surrounding homes, you could feel as though you stepped back in time.

Association

This home was built by Robert Weakley, a major figure in the founding of Rutherford County and Jefferson and Tennessee Senator. The property is directly associated with Wheeler’s Raid during the Civil War and still bears the bullet holes as physical evidence. The property is directly associated with the Trail of Tears. The property is directly associated with the Reconstruction Era murder of a free black man by a white man.
1850 Rutherford County Census, Rutherford County Archives. Murfreesboro, Tennessee.


1850 Slave Census, Jefferson District, September 20, 1850, by R.H. Mason, Rutherford County Archives, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.


Cumming, Kate. A Journal of Hospital Life in the Confederate Army of Tennessee: From the Battle of Shiloh to the End of the War: with Sketches of Life and Character, and Brief Notices of Current Events During That Period, Louisville. KY: John P. Morton & Co., [c.1866].


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District 6, 1860 Slave Census, by N.W. Carter, Rutherford County Archives, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.


Jefferson Springs and Hickory Grove Subject Folder, Albert Gore Research Center. Middle Tennessee State University. Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

Jefferson Springs Oral History Project, Albert Gore Research Center, Middle Tennessee State University. Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

“Karst Geology,” Greenway Path informational signage, Town of Smyrna, Tennessee, Parks and Recreation Department.


“Nashville, August 18, 1802,” Tennessee Gazette, Nashville, Tennessee, August 18, 1802.


Rutherford County Archives “Old Jefferson” subject folder.

Rutherford County Taxable Property 1809, Rutherford County Archives, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

Rutherford County Taxable Property 1813, Rutherford County Archives, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.


