Rippavilla: Telling the Whole Story of the Civil War-era Experience

Prepared for Rippavilla, Inc.

Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area

Laura S. Holder
Annabeth Hayes
Dr. Carroll Van West

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Rippavilla – A Place of Many Stories for Many Audiences

The vibrant history of Rippavilla spans almost 170 years. Compelling, complex, and multi-layered, the changes that Rippavilla and its inhabitants experienced since its completion in 1855 mirror the sweeping social and physical changes that occurred across the South.

Surrounded by approximately 200 protected acres of core Spring Hill battlefield property, Rippavilla retains much of its original splendor and agricultural setting, despite its location in the heart of a rapidly developing city. If properly maintained and interpreted, it has the potential to be one of Tennessee’s preeminent locations to tell the stories of the antebellum era and slavery; the home front, combat, and guerilla warfare during the Civil War; and the ways in which the Cheairs family and the formerly enslaved people that lived at Rippavilla survived the challenges they faced in the decades following the Civil War.

Project Summary

In January 2019, Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area staff members Dr. Van West, Laura Holder, Annabeth Hayes, and Savannah Grandey met with Rippavilla’s Executive Director Kate Wilson and Development Director Scott Smith to evaluate several structures on the property, as well as discuss the ways in which Rippavilla Inc. could update their existing
interpretation to tell a more inclusive, diverse, and documented history. This meeting led to a partnership between the two organizations, resulting in the following report that reflects a more well-rounded history of Rippavilla and its inhabitants.

Because much has been written and documented about the lives of the Cheairs family, including Maj. Nathaniel Francis Cheairs, Susan McKissack Cheairs, and their children Jennie Cheairs Hickey and William Cheairs, most of this report focuses on aspects of Rippavilla’s history that are not currently included in the existing tour and interpretation. A number of these stories merit additional research, as well as consideration for inclusion when updating tours and interpretation. In addition, the history of the McKissack family and their enslaved workers that most likely helped build Rippavilla is another area that would benefit from additional research.

These often lesser known yet important stories include the multi-year Cheairs family lawsuit before Rippavilla was built, life under occupation during the Civil War, the lives of formerly enslaved African Americans associated with Rippavilla, Susan Cheairs’ post-war lawsuit against her husband Nat Cheairs, and later property owners that put their own mark on Rippavilla once it was sold out of the Cheairs family.

This report is a road map for guiding future interpretation, including an updated interpreter training manual, interpreter training, and exhibits that tell a larger story of the
inhabitants that built and shaped Rippavilla. The Heritage Area is interested in supporting efforts, based on the research in this report, to expand public interpretation and exhibits at Rippavilla to enable the site to tell the whole story of the Civil War-era experience in Maury and Williamson counties, and in Middle Tennessee.

The Families of Rippavilla Before the Civil War

Portions of the story of the families that shaped Rippavilla are known but much more is unknown or incompletely explored. Consider, for example, Nathaniel (Nat) Francis Cheairs IV and his family’s lesser known wartime experiences, including his times as a prisoner of war, the dangers of life the home front, and his long road back to prosperity after the war add a more personal and intriguing layer to the Cheairs family history. Let’s start with the unexplored stories of Nat Cheairs’s family.

Born December 6, 1818 in Spring Hill, Maury County, Nathaniel “Nat” Cheairs grew up in one of the region’s most prominent and wealthy families. Nat married Susan Peters McKissack, daughter of William McKissack and Jeanette Thompson McKissack, on September 2, 1841. Upon inheriting property in Spring Hill from his father ca. 1851 after a multi-year family lawsuit, Nat began developing plans for his own grand showplace. In 1852, he and Susan began construction on the opulent home eventually known as Rippavilla, and moved their family in upon completion in 1855.1

We gain an invaluable insight into Nat Cheairs and his family through a long, contested lawsuit over the will of his father Nathaniel Cheairs III who died on October 2, 1846.2 Starting in 1847 Nat’s mother and his siblings contested the will in the Cheairs v. Cheairs court case that lasted to 1851. The court case showcases the family’s internal struggle for Nathaniel II’s estate down to the last cent. They argued about the division of the estate according to their father’s original will, their mother’s widow dower, the sale of 52 bales of cotton, the division of the

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1 Nathaniel Cheairs, FindAGrave.com.
2 Nathaniel Cheairs, FindAGrave.com.
enslaved people, and other topics. Two of his sons, Martin T. and John W., were named as the executors. In the initial documents, Nathaniel F. Cheairs was also listed as an executor, but he quickly either removed himself or was removed from the position. In the suit, M.T. and J.W. Cheairs were named as the complainants against their mother (Susan McKissack Cheairs), brothers Thomas D. and Nat Cheairs, sisters Nancy Cheairs Perkins (husband Constantine Perkins), Louisa Cheairs Campbell, and later Polly Cheairs Scott (husband Nathaniel). Polly Scott & her husband joined the case after its initial filing on the side of the defendants.

The defendants repeatedly referred to 57 bales of cotton that were sold at a lower price than desired. They optimistically asserted that when the market was high, the cotton could have garnered $.13 (per pound), however, they were sold at a much lower price later in the year when the market was not as ideal for cotton prices. (Economic studies of cotton prices in the 1850s have determined that 11.5 cents per pound was a normal rate of return.) They deposed multiple people to give testimony about the cotton market prices of the time, including opinions as to whether the family lost a considerable amount of money by waiting to sell the bales. In one of the documents, the executors’ inaction on the cotton sale was even referred to as “culpable negligence.”

Furthermore, the court case reveals some of the estate was entangled in another dispute concerning the Merchant Trust & Insurance Company in Nashville. Since at least the early 1840s, the family had made numerous deposits and withdrawals from the company, but in 1847, it abruptly closed when it was sued by the State of Tennessee. The company was accused of acting outside of its charter by positioning itself as more than an insurance company by also undertaking banking operations, which included taking “large sums of money upon deposit” and the subsequent interest. In doing so, the MTIC made their business in these operations when they had no right to do so. Ultimately, the state decided that although the

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3 Scan 158, Cheairs v Cheairs
4 238, Supreme Court of TN Court Case
company violated the law, it was declared an “honest mistake in the construction of the charter.”

Because of this court case, however, it appears some of the Cheairs money was tied up in the company until it was resolved, and the defendants of the Cheairs v Cheairs case deposed multiple people, including depositors and employees from the Trust Company, to declare their opinion of the reputation and supposed solvency of the company was before it came under scrutiny. The defendants wanted to determine if the executors (aka their brothers) were knowingly risking family money in a company that had an illicit reputation. It appears that the MTIC ultimately lost money because they were buying and selling on credit that was not insured and did not ultimately exist.5

The court case also shows that Nathaniel III owned 85 enslaved people at the time of his death followed by the distribution of these people to Nathaniel’s wife and only a few of his children (Appendix B). The 85 people were valued at $32,169. In the will, only Sarah Cheairs and five of Nathaniel’s children (Martin, John, Thomas, Nathaniel F., and Louisa Campbell) were entitled to the division of the enslaved people. Nat F. received two “lots” of enslaved people that totaled 23 people which was far more than any of his siblings (Appendix C).

The family used a unique system to calculate the value of the enslaved people that makes their monetary value appear quite low compared to what the actual value probably was. When there was a minor discrepancy in the total value of the enslaved that each Cheairs child received, the monetary balance had to be paid to whoever received less than their sibling.

One enslaved family in particular is mentioned more than any other enslaved person or persons. Henry, Martha and their children (Phoebe is the only one mentioned by name) are mentioned multiple times in various paperwork. Even though Nat F. ultimately inherits them in the will and the new division of the enslaved, he still writes to his brother John W. Cheairs multiple receipts for their hiring for various years. It appears that the division of the enslaved

5 Verify, Jacob McGavock testimony pg 4, unscanned documents, Maury County Archives.
was not truly settled until the court case ended in 1851. From 1846-1847, Sarah Cheairs hires them and then subsequently Nat hires them from 1847/8-1851 as evidenced by the yearly receipts. In what appears to be the decision of the court, they are mentioned again by name.

In Polly’s 1851 complaint, she stated she was left out of the will, and only received “but slight advancements” from her father during his lifetime. “She rcvd two negro girls was all at the time given about $750 or 800 – or – a [cow?] with about $75.00 and a cow worth about $10.00 – This is all she ever got from him. This bill directs her to have $100.00.” Her children were also given $400 each. Polly was the eldest of Nathaniel II’s children, therefore, it is possible her father thought she was settled enough in life she did not need a large inheritance.

In the midst of the complex family court case, life still carried on for Nat Cheairs. In 1847, Nat Cheairs was elected to the Democratic Convention for the 22nd District. In 1849, he was also a faculty member of Jackson College. According to secondary sources, Jackson College was located near Manual Training School located near the property of Martin Cheairs, Nat’s brother. Additionally, members of the Cheairs family were noted as attending the school which later became Union Seminary.

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6 Columbia Beacon, April 9, 1847.
7 Maury County Intelligencer, Jan 11, 1849, Maury County Newspapers Abstract, pg. 81
In the 1850 U.S. Census and Slave Schedule, Nat Cheairs was listed as owning 31 enslaved people, and by 1860, that number grew to 75. According to that slave schedule, 20 of these people were children under the age of 7 and the next largest group were 12 teenage boys. These people would have worked on N.F. Cheairs' properties both at Rippavilla and in Mississippi and Alabama.

According to the 1860 Census, his property in Maury County was 1,087 acres and valued at $86,100. The 34 young men and boys (12 of whom were between the ages of 13 and 19) owned by Nathaniel Cheairs probably worked this farm and they would have also probably been skilled at animal husbandry and farming. The census notes the livestock was the second most valuable property on the farm at $7,576, far more than his neighbors, and he also had 6,000 bushels of Indian corn. The census also denotes the farm also produced wool, cotton, and butter as well as smaller amounts of wheat and rye crops.

Building and Naming “Rippavilla”

Construction on Rippavilla began in 1852. Despite its size and elaborate Greek Revival style, the architect for the structure remains unconfirmed, although existing evidence points to F. Stratton of Virginia who also designed the nearby Ferguson Hall). Stratton is listed as an architect in the 1850 census residing within the household of the physician John Haddox at Ferguson Hall. Like Haddox, Stratton was a Virginia native born there in 1810. He has not been associated with any other buildings in the area.

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The name “Rippavilla” is unique and not easily translated into a specific meaning. One of the earliest references to the home’s moniker can be found in an original poem by Nat’s daughter Jennie Cheairs. Dated 1860, the poem references Rippa Villa. A *Columbia Herald* article dated December 9, 1870 also makes a reference to the home by this name when describing the wedding between Nat’s son William to Mary Lou Pointer, whose reception was held at the “palatial residence of Maj. N.F. Cheairs, ‘Rippo Villa.’” Later newspaper references to the home seem to drop the home’s more formal name, typically referring to property as the Cheairs farm or the Cheairs place.

Secondary accounts often claim that the bricks for Rippavilla may have been made by enslaved craftspeople belonging to William McKissack of Giles County, since he was the father of Nathaniel IV’s wife Susan, who owned a local brickyard. There were no identified primary sources from the early 1850s making such a link. A 1878 court case between Nat and Susan Cheairs, some 25 years later, does identify a few enslaved McKissack-owned craftsmen who likely helped construct the house including Dick and Billy who were carpenters and William who was a brick mason.

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11 Maury County Archives Rippavilla file, photocopy of Jennie’s poem.
12 *Columbia Herald*, December 9 1870.
The relationship between Dick, Billy, and William to the later famous African American architectural firm of McKissack and McKissack is uncertain. In the *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, historian Linda Wynn details the history of the firm of McKissack and McKissack:

Moses McKissack (1790-1865) of the West African Ashanti tribe, was sold into slavery to William McKissack of North Carolina and became a master builder. In 1822 he married Mirian (1804-1865), a Cherokee, and they had fourteen children. The ninth child, Gabriel Moses McKissack (1840-1922), continued in the building trade he learned from his father. Like his father, Gabriel Moses II taught the building skills to his son, Moses McKissack III (1879-1952).

Moses McKissack III was born in Pulaski and received his formal education in the segregated Pulaski public schools. He initially worked with his father, but in 1890 a Pulaski architect employed him to draw, design, and assist in his construction business. Moses III’s adroitness in the trade earned him a reputation as an excellent craftsman. From 1895 to 1905 he built houses in Decatur, Alabama, as well as in Mount Pleasant and Columbia, Tennessee.

In 1905 Moses III moved to Nashville and opened his own construction business. That same year, he built a residence for the dean of architecture and engineering at Vanderbilt University. This led to commissions to design and build other residences in Nashville’s West End area. McKissack’s first major commission was in 1908 for the construction of the Carnegie Library at Fisk University. In 1909 he advertised as an architect in the Nashville City Directory. By 1920 McKissack was designing buildings for clients throughout Nashville and the state.

McKissack’s brother, Calvin Lunsford McKissack (1890-1968), assisted on most projects. In 1921, when the state professional registration law became effective, the McKissacks were among Tennessee’s first registered architects. A year later Calvin joined his brother as a business partner, and McKissack and McKissack became Tennessee’s first professional African American architectural firm.

Moses McKissack is the founder of the firm and his name was not recorded by the Cheairs family in the 1878 case. The claim that Rippavilla was built by the founders of the McKissack and McKissack architectural firm is not grounded in the primary sources.

The War Approaches

Just a few years after Rippavilla’s completion, the Cheairs family found itself facing the uncertainty of a rapidly approaching war. According to descendant and author Nathaniel Cheairs Hughes, Jr., Nat “viewed Lincoln’s election in 1860 as a revolution, but, reflecting the attitude of most of his fellow Tennesseans, he believed secession equally revolutionary. Thus,
as Cheairs explains in his ‘Personal Experiences,’ he voted against secession in the special state referendum held in February, 1861.”

Despite his initial anti-secessionist views, Nat enlisted on May 16, 1861 and was commissioned as a major in the 3rd Tennessee Volunteer Infantry. During the February 1862 Battle of Fort Donelson, the 3rd Tennessee Infantry served under Brown’s Brigade in Buckner’s Division. After Gen. Simon Buckner’s preparation for the formal act of surrender, Nat brought the surrender request to U.S. Gen. Ulysses Grant. Benjamin Franklin Cooling wrote of Cheairs’ interaction with Grant:

When queried by the general as to the Confederate strength, Cheairs noted only seven or eight thousand. Grant cut him short: ‘I didn’t ask you for a falsehood, sir.’ Cheairs flared at this aspersion to his honor and replied that while Grant might be the enemy commander, his father had taught him to take insult from no man. He started to remove his coat as if to fight. Grant smiled, thought better, and apologized, but the unrepentant Cheairs had the final word. . . Then the major led Grant and his staff to Dover and to the fateful meeting with Buckner at the hotel near the upper steamboat landing.”

After the fall of Fort Donelson, Cheairs, along with fellow officers and enlisted men, were taken prisoner and sent to Fort Warren near Boston. In the aftermath that followed, the enlisted prisoners suffered greatly. Cooling writes:

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15 Benjamin Franklin Cooling, *Forts Henry and Donelson: The Key to the Confederate Heartland* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 210
The Federal government did not know how to handle the first sizeable prisoner haul from Forts Henry and Donelson. They turned former northern training camps into POW compounds. Here the prisoners remained confined until summer and early fall when Union officials moderated their opposition to prisoner exchange. Meanwhile, Henry-Donelson prisoners faced poorly fabricated facilities, camp areas alternately quagmires in spring and dustbowls in summer, with few opportunities for escape.\textsuperscript{16}

Officers such as Nat, however, had a very different experience. Despite the cold climate at Fort Warren, senior officers fared much better than their enlisted counterparts. “Major Cheairs explained that the prison commandant, Colonel Justin Dimmick, could furnish the best rations cigars, liquors, and such for the seventy two inmates if they paid him $2.00 apiece per week.”\textsuperscript{17} The Tennessee State Library and Archives’ research on Civil War prisons also notes the vast difference between experiences for enlisted men as compared to officers. “Fort Warren (Boston, Massachusetts) housed officers and Confederate diplomats. Most had a "comfortable" stay. Major Nathaniel F. Cheairs, Company F, 3rd Tennessee Infantry Regiment, enjoyed fine wine and cigars, hosted lavish dinners for Union officers and fellow prisoners, and was occasionally given free rein of the city.”\textsuperscript{18} Despite his imprisonment and concern for his family back home, Nat appears to have enjoyed a remarkably comfortable existence during his first experience as a prisoner of war at Fort Warren.

Several months later, Nat obtained his release on July, 31 1862 and was transferred to Fort Monroe, VA to be exchanged. The 3\textsuperscript{rd} Tennessee (Clack’s) Regiment reorganized in Jackson, MS on September 26, 1862.\textsuperscript{19} Cheairs was not reassigned to the regiment as major; as a result, he returned to Rippavilla where he unsuccessfully tried to organize his own cavalry command.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 225.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, 259.
\textsuperscript{18} Tennessee State Museum website.
Still anxious to serve, he remained at home until finding a role on C.S. Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest’s staff in 1863. Forrest at the time was encamped at Rippavilla. Later assigned to purchase supplies in West Tennessee, Nat was captured again in February 1864 and sent to Camp Chase, Ohio. Unlike his first foray as a prisoner in Fort Warren, his stay at Camp Chase proved to be a much more difficult and painful experience.

Nat’s correspondence with family members offer insight into their wartime experiences. He wrote often of his frustration at being held in camp while his family suffered occupation, deprivation and danger. “Cheairs also fretted about Federal devastation of his beloved Rippo Villa near Spring Hill, Tennessee.”

Early in the war in 1862, U.S. Gen. “Bull” Nelson occupied Rippavilla. His occupation is specifically referenced in Nat’s letters, when Nat decries his home being used as a hospital and the resulting concern that this brought the danger of smallpox to the family. He expressed anger at Nelson for appropriating the parlor and Susan’s bedroom for his own personal use, as well as demanding to know what provisions Nelson took for his army and any damage he might have caused.

Several interesting excerpts offer small glimpses into the challenges the Cheairs women experienced at Rippavilla. In the spring of 1862, Nat wrote to his sister, stating, “I am truly glad to learn that the ladies of old Maury are so well calculated to defend & take care of yourselves. I am also delighted to know that Jennie acted so coolly yet so heroically during her negotiations with the Federal army for Thomas’ pony . . . You will also present my regards to Genl. Negly [U.S. Gen. James Negley] for his kind treatment towards Jennie & yourself.” Hughes’s sympathetic biography on Nat offers additional details, referencing a letter written by Gen.

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21 Hughes, 96.
22 Hughes, 97.
23 Cooling, 261.
24 Hughes, 61, 66.
Negley that states that he yielded to Jennie’s request to return the family’s pony from a desire to be kind and courteous.\textsuperscript{25} In addition to witnessing the already well-documented Battle of Spring Hill, guerilla warfare plagued the county and Rippavilla. Nat wrote of dangerous squads of thieving scouting parties, as well as local killings including the murder of William J. “Jay” Briggs, son-in-law of local Unionist Tom Beard.\textsuperscript{26}

In another letter to his sister sent from Camp Chase, Ohio in the spring of 1864, Nat wrote of his concern regarding this guerilla violence near Rippavilla:

\begin{quote}
I am very, very sorry to hear of the death of Ed. Pointer and Mr. Owen. I am sorry you didn’t mention who the other man was that was killed at the time Pointer was. We fear it was Duval McNairy. If so two of the most promising young men of our country have been murdered and that by a disorganized band of thieves who make no pretentions of being Federal soldiers further than to wear the uniform and who (I indulge the hope and belief) would be finished by the Federal soldiers as soon as by our own. I hope they may soon meet with retributive justice.\textsuperscript{27}
\end{quote}

Another portion of the letter delves again into the dangerous environment that the women at Rippavilla found themselves in as the war continued to rage around them. In response to an unknown incident that clearly required self-defense, Nat wrote to his sister:

\begin{quote}
I am proud to know that you have the courage to defend yourself. If I could have been close by when you were pounding that scoundrel in the back I might have been tempted to exclaim “Lay on Nancy.” Oh! How I wish you had a good Bowie knife so as you might cut his heart out. Any man that would rob a women deserved the most ignominious (sic) death. I am glad you succeeded in getting back some of your stolen property and having the scoundrel arrested. I would like to know what the commanding officer did with him.\textsuperscript{28}
\end{quote}

Although the names of those involved were not included, the document nonetheless offers a glimpse of what the Cheairs women at Rippavilla endured, and their personal courage and vulnerability in the face of threats and violence.

Nat’s early letters in 1862 contain frequent references to the “negroes” and “servants,” asking to be remembered fondly to them. By 1864, after emancipation had been announced, his

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{25} Hughes, 71, 81.
\textsuperscript{26} Hughes, 109, 131.
\textsuperscript{27} Hughes, 102-103.
\textsuperscript{28} Hughes, 103.
\end{flushleft}
tone had changed dramatically. Nat remarked to his sister Nancy: “You spoke of the Negroes stampeding of late. Would to God they would all stampede out of the Country, for I am sure the Citizens would be much better off without them, than to have them there under there [sic] present discipline. I think I know enough of the habits and character of the Negro to know that they are obliged to be a nuisance to the country in the present condition.”

Clearly since the enslaved had been leaving in droves, they preferred the “present condition” of emancipation to slavery.

One of the most familiar and popular stories about Rippavilla stems from a breakfast allegedly held at Rippavilla on the morning of the November 30, 1864, after the disaster at Spring Hill and before the battle of Franklin. C.S. Gen. John Bell Hood awoke that morning to the realization that U.S. Gen. Schofield’s troops had eluded him during the night, moving up the Columbia Pike under the cover of darkness and passing right through the Confederate troops camped alongside it. Conflicting accounts among his Confederate generals pointed the finger of blame at each other, and there is no doubt that this missed opportunity produced great anger and frustration for Hood. However, no written documentation exists to prove it happened.

Historian Stanley Horn in 1965 wrote of Hood that morning: “When he realized what had happened he was, as General John C. Brown later said, ‘wrathy as a rattlesnake.’ Hood and several of his generals ate breakfast that morning at the nearby home of Major Nat Cheairs, and there are legends of a violent quarrel at that breakfast table.” Then Horn interjected his own doubts: “Whether there were actually any such angry accusations and recriminations cannot now be established. It is safe to say, however, that there was a distinct feeling of frustration and disappointment at the events of the preceding twenty-four hours.”

In his 2013 award-winning biography on John Bell Hood, historian Stephen Hood noted: “In addition to its vagueness, the

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29 Ibid., 103.
entire account is simply local lore. Neither Mrs. Cheairs, nor Hood, Forrest, Cheatham, or any staff officers wrote a word about it.”31 In his definitive history of the battles for Spring Hill and Franklin *For Cause and For Country*, Eric Jacobson also notes that information about the Rippavilla generals’ breakfast is “sketchy at best,” noting that the story had been verbally passed down and formal written documentation by any of the supposed participants is non-existent.32

**Rippavilla restored to Nathaniel Cheairs**

While still in imprisoned at Camp Chase, Cheairs often shared concerns about his release and what the future held. In a letter to his wife, he wrote, “Again I am under bond with security for a large amount to the Confederate government & were I to take an oath renouncing that Government before settling my liabilities with it, would not only ruin myself pecuniarily, but would ruin my securities also. Better far I should suffer on in prison, than to bring disgrace and reproach upon myself and family.”33

After receiving his parole in May 1865, Nat returned home to a home that bore little resemblance to the one he had left in 1861. A recollection by one of Nat’s friends published in the *Maury Democrat* shared details about his return:

The war being over, the Major returned home to find all of his large estate swept from him save alone his lands, and they in the hands of Yankees who claimed them as abandoned lands. This is not all he found; he found his wife and children drawing rations from the government. A few days after his return home a deputy marshal called on him to serve a capias on him for treason, which of course he failed to do, but he didn’t fail to make the best time from the Major’s front door to his front gate that was ever made before or since, not excepting Star Pointer’s race . . . A few days after this race, the Major went to Washington to see President Andrew Johnson, who gave him a pardon for all of his rebellious acts, also an order for the restoration of his home and farm. He went to work and gathered a pretty fair crop of cotton.34

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33 Hughes, 119.
34 *The Maury Democrat*, September 30, 1897.
After Cheairs appealed to President Andrew Johnson, he received a special pardon on October 6th, 1865. A letter from Brig. Gen. Clinton B. Fisk, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, stated: “Nathaniel F. Cheairs, of Maury County, Tenn., having received a special pardon from the President of the United States, you are hereby directed to restore, so far as the jurisdiction of this Bureau extends over it, the property formerly owned by him which you now hold as abandoned,” except in the case where leases had already been made, then the leases would continue to their expiration.35

**Post-war Recovery and Transformation**

With President Johnson restoring his land, Cheairs and his family were still plantation owners, but the world they lived in was vastly different without slavery as an institution. Cheairs pursued positions of respect and authority. He served as Chairman of the Board of Trustees for the Spring Hill Male Academy in the late 1860s and early 1870s. When a former teacher Thomas H. Peebles was accused of embezzling from the school, Nat Cheairs publicly came to his defense.36

Like other former Confederates who lived nearby at the Cleburne Farm and Ewell Farm, Cheairs also embraced the gospel of agricultural progressivism. In 1870, he brought a thoroughbred Durham bull named General Forrest to Spring Hill from Kentucky with the intent “to improve the stock of this county.”37 He became a member of Maury County Agricultural, Mechanical, Horticultural, and Live Stock Society.38 He supported the formation of the Maury County Agricultural Club.39 He also dabbled in fishing, installing a pond at the residence while

35 Photocopy of letter from Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, File Folder L00007, Rippavilla Archives.
local newspapers recorded his success as an angler, and the many places and people that Nat Cheairs traveled to and with while fishing.

In his crop production, Cheairs turned from cotton to wheat, with his prominence as a wheat farmer noted in a Nashville newspaper in 1875. The article complimented his “large plantation” which they also described as being “foremost in the work of improvement.”40 He invested in a factory at Vale Mills along with buying a building on the east side of the Pulaski public square where they sold flour and other goods.41 While the production surrounding the Vale Mills factory is still vague, it appears that wool and other items were produced there.42 In 1875, the Columbia Herald made note of Nat Cheairs traveling north to purchase mill machinery, and by 1880, the Pulaski Citizen remarked that Nat Cheairs promised to push Vale Mills to “vaster proportions” until it became “the first of its kind in the South.”43 That same year, he also remarked to the Pulaski Citizen that “the crops [looked] unusually promising.”44 In 1884, his red wheat was one of the winners in the Giles County Fair where he also served as a judge.45 Although to a lesser degree, Susan Cheairs was also mentioned in the newspapers for

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40 “Farm and Garden.,” Nashville Union and American, April 8, 1875.
43 “Maj. N.F. Cheairs is pushing…,” The Pulaski Citizen, December 2 1880.
44 “Maj. N.F. Cheairs of Spring Hill…”, The Pulaski Citizen, August 26, 1880.
45 “The Fair.”, The Pulaski Citizen, October 9, 1884.
her own agricultural ventures. In 1873, *The Herald and Mail* described her as “an excellent horticulturist,” who not only “always has the best vegetables” as well as strawberries.46

In 1876 Susan McKissack Cheairs filed a suit against her husband over an inheritance from her father William McKissack.47 According to her father’s will, she inherited 18 enslaved people who were valued at about $15,000 in addition to $16,500 in cash. Nat sold 2 of these people (most likely Isaac, age 61 and Martha, age 41). The remaining people (Appendix A) ranged in ages from 2 to 65 years old. Many were skilled craftsmen, including William a brick mason, Theodore a barber, Paul an apprentice, and Billy and Dick who were carpenters. The remaining men and women were listed as farmhands except for three small children under the age of 4 who were described as “small and not worth anything for hire.”

According to the will, this inheritance was to belong exclusively to Susan for “her sole and separate use”. However, Nat was the executor of the estate, and Susan asserts that within a month of two of the probate, he took control by spending the money and managing the hiring, selling, and work of the enslaved people until many fled after Union occupation during the Civil War. During that time, however, he used the money from their hiring (amount to almost $2,000/yr) and the cash inheritance for “his own use and benefit.” She explains that he made property investments using her money in Maury, Giles, and Lawrence counties in Tennessee and in Francis County, Arkansas along the Memphis and Little Rock Railroad. Some of these properties specifically mentioned are the building on the East side of the Pulaski town square (as previously mentioned) and the Vale Mills in Pulaski.

Most interestingly, Susan asserted that her husband was in severe debt, and part of this debt was the $65,000 he owed her for a return of her inheritance with her interest. Because

46 “Spring Hill Items,” *The Herald and Mail*, May 2, 1873.
47 “Cheairs McKissack, Susan P. vs. Cheairs, Nathaniel F. Et al, 1876,” Chancery Court Case, Maury County Archives. 1-117.
most of the property and investments he made was with her money, she claimed that he is was indebted to her before anyone else. Nevertheless, even if Nat sold all of his property, he still would not have been able to pay her back. Therefore, she said she was willing to take a loss as long as she had a lien of equity on the property with the right to choose if she were ultimately paid by obtaining the deeds to the properties, in cash, or by a trust with possible rights to his life estate.

In this court case, Susan’s lawyer called for a response from two of her and Nat’s sons, W.M. and Thomas G. Cheairs. The two sons claimed “no interest in the litigation and controversy between the complainant, their mother, and the Defendant, N.F. Cheairs, their father.” Their concerns laid elsewhere, with the will of their grandfather Nathaniel Cheairs which stated that some of the family land inherited by Nat Cheairs was to be then inherited by his male heirs upon Nat’s death. They wanted to be sure that their rights and interest in the estate were protected throughout the litigation between their mother and father.

In Nat Cheairs’ answer to his wife’s accusations, he admitted that he used her inheritance for his own use properties and for monetary gain and “never accounted to [Susan] for the same or any part of it.” He claimed that he had a “considerable estate of his own,” but
had merged these accounts together and used funds from both estates to make purchases and investments. He stated that he received a little over $10,000 from the clerk and master at the time of the estate settlement and gave a receipt to Susan. He admitted the ownership of the multiple properties Susan listed, and stated that the Vale Mills property was largely purchased with her money. He knew that Susan’s inheritance was to be hers alone and knowingly used it for his own benefit, but he always believed he would have been able to pay her back at any time she asked for it. The war changed that assumption since his property was largely damaged or destroyed and he had lost the high value of his slaves. Since then, he stated he had been “laboring earnestly… to pay all his debts” and he would have been able to had it not been for hard times and a depreciated real estate market.

Nat Cheairs claimed debts of roughly $46,000 to multiple people. He and his partner intended to sell the property to pay back certain debts, but this litigation prevented him from moving forward with that deal. Indeed, he stated that it would take all he owned to pay Susan back, especially if the court decreed he only had a life estate in the land he inherited from his father, which is also the land his sons were concerned about inheriting.

The court case officially closed in 1888 when Susan asked for it to be waived, and no official settlement is offered in the file in the Maury County Archives.

Despite this obvious tension between Nat and Susan, it appears family life remained civil at Rippavilla. In 1874, their daughter Sallie Cheairs married Dr. James Moore of Brentwood in the front yard. The Columbia Herald described the large wedding in detail and described the home as a “palatial residence.” The couple had 12 attendants each and they hired the Hill’s String Band out of Nashville. It appears the newlyweds continued to live at Rippavilla and that he even operated his practice part-time out of the house.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ “Dr. J. M. Moore,” The Herald and Mail, Nov 24, 1876.
Nat lived his twilight years quietly, traveling to Texas periodically to visit his daughter Jennie. In April 1893, the *Columbia Herald* noted that Susan had been sick for several days,\textsuperscript{49} and while she was thought to have recovered, she died in June of that year. Nat continued his fishing expeditions,\textsuperscript{50} but by 1902, his partner in business in Pulaski bought him out.\textsuperscript{51} Just before Nat’s death at age 95, a note in the *Tennessean* in 1913 reported that he was the oldest resident in Maury County.\textsuperscript{52} In late 1913, he was visiting his daughter Jeannie and other family and friends in Texas where he fell ill.\textsuperscript{53} A month later, he died in Waco, Texas.\textsuperscript{54} He was buried in the Rose Hill Cemetery.\textsuperscript{55}

**Rebuilding After the War: Jennie Cheairs and William Cheairs**

Born June 22, 1842, Nat and Susan’s daughter Janette “Jennie” Cheairs engaged 2nd Lieutenant Thomas “Tommy” Tucker while, allegedly, visiting her father and the 3rd Tennessee Infantry Regiment in Bowling Green in 1861. When the unit reorganized in 1862, Lieutenant Tucker defeated Nathaniel Cheairs in the election to be major of the regiment. Tucker’s military career proved brief; he died at the Battle of Chickasaw Bayou, December 31, 1862.\textsuperscript{56}

Judging from the many affectionate letters that Nat wrote to her from prison, Jennie remained one of his confidantes during the war. After the war, Jennie married Austin Carter Hickey on October 20, 1866. The couple moved to Texas and had seven children during their time there. Jennie died on January 10, 1917 in Waco, TX, but is buried in Columbia.

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\textsuperscript{49} “Spring Hill,” *The Weekly Columbia Herald*, 21 April 21, 1913. m
\textsuperscript{50} Columbia Herald, 16 Dec 16, 1892, and March 26, 1897.
\textsuperscript{51} *Iron & Machinery World*, 1902, Vol 92, p 46.
\textsuperscript{52} Nashville Tennessean, Dec. 9, 1913.
\textsuperscript{53} “Major Cheairs Was Stricken,” *Houston Post*, Dec 5, 1913.
\textsuperscript{54} “Major N.F. Cheairs Dead,” *Houston Post*, Jan 4, 1914.
\textsuperscript{55} Nathaniel Cheairs, FindAGrave.com.
\textsuperscript{56} Cheairs Family Collection, Special Collections, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.
William McKissack Cheairs

Born in 1849, Nat and Susan’s son William eventually took ownership of Rippavilla. He purchased the estate from his father in 1895, making his own mark in Maury County as one of the region’s most prominent farmers and community leaders. By 1887, it was thought William Cheairs was the largest wheat farmer in the state. From his involvement on the board of directors for several local banks, his partnership in developing a new phosphate mine, incorporating the Spring Hill Bank of Maury County, and his support for the Spring Hill Male Academy, William remained highly influential in financial, agricultural, and educational endeavors across Maury County. He owned Rippavilla for 25 years; upon his retirement from farming, he made the decision to sell the property out of the family.

Just two years after he sold Rippavilla, William passed away at age 73 at Beaver Dam Springs in July of 1922. His obituary noted that he had “long been known as one of the wealthiest and most progressive of Maury County farmers,” carrying on his family’s agricultural legacy. It also lauded William for his involvement in the Methodist Church, as well as his commitment to furthering education in Maury County. An interesting commentary occurs halfway through his lengthy obituary, when the writer notes that “Mr. Cheairs was too young to enter the Civil War, but took a prominent stand for the rule of white men in the days following the war, when carpetbagger rule threatened the state.”

During the final two years of his life following the sale of Rippavilla, William made his primary home with his daughter Susie Cheairs Hughes, on 24th Avenue South in Nashville. In 1899, the 25-year-old Susie had married William Hughes in an extravagant ceremony at Rippavilla. William Hughes, a Union City native educated at the Webb School and Vanderbilt,

58 *The Tennessean*, February 3, 1901, and *The Tennessean*, November 14, 1899.
59 *The Tennessean*, July 23, 1922.
served as principal at the Brannon and Hughes Academy in Spring Hill. Upon her husband’s
death, Susie moved with her children to Nashville, where she was eventually joined by her
widowed father.60

Despite the significant value of his estate (estimated to be close to $400,000), William
Cheairs died in 1922 without a will, and the court empowered N.F. Cheairs to take possession
and control of William’s estate, settle any debts, and “having settled up said estate, to deliver
the residue thereof to those that have a right thereto by law.”61 William had already sold
Rippavilla with no clear distribution of any remaining effects, and surviving family members were
scattered from Nashville to Texas. As a result, the family’s association with the home that
Nathaniel F. Cheairs IV had so elaborately and thoughtfully constructed came to an end.

African Americans at Rippavilla after the Civil War:

In the years after the Civil War, Nat Cheairs continued to farm the vast acreage around
Rippavilla. The area that most likely had once housed the enslaved cabins became known as
the “Cheairs Quarters” or simply “the quarters” after the war’s end, and developed into a small
community of freedmen and their families that worked and lived on the Rippavilla property.
Based on existing descriptions of the quarters, it appears that it was primarily a location for
workers employed by the Cheairs family, rather than for sharecroppers.

60 Ibid.
Interestingly, an 1880 newspaper article from the Freehold, NJ *Monmouth Democrat* provides one of the earliest descriptions of the quarters. The newspaper ran a series of articles about visiting Middle Tennessee, called “From Freehold to Tennessee.” The paper’s section about “Rippavilla Springs” had the following description:

On the other side, adjoining the Greenlawn [sic] tract, is the large and stately brick farm house of Maj. Nathaniel F. Chaiers [sic]. This tract contains about 1500 acres, and is known as the Rippavilla Spring farm so called from the great number of natural springs that flow upon it . . . We visited what they call “the quarters.” This is the place where the main buildings stand and where the cabins are built for the colored laborers. I think I counted twelve huts beside the overseer’s house. It looks like a small town: the Major employs ten colored men the year round, to whom he pays ten dollars a month, finds them a hut with rations of eight quarts of meal and four pounds of bacon per week, all other articles necessary for the family’s use, they have to provide for themselves.62

The quarters’ tenant houses sat on the back section of the farm. Houses contained one room with a kitchen, inside stairway up the wall, and a loft. Each was equipped with a fireplace, houses made of log with exterior boards, painted white with a lime whitewash. A video interview with Laura Bond Dale, daughter of former Rippavilla foreman Peter Bond and granddaughter of former Rippavilla foreman Sam Bond, confirms this description. Her memories of the Cheairs Quarters included eight to ten houses provided for tenant workers on the farm. She noted that they were all alike, with one main room, a lean-to, an upstairs loft, and a front porch; Mr. Cheairs provided a free lunch to workers in addition to their pay.63

It is unclear when the quarters ceased to operate as a community for Rippavilla’s farm workers. A newspaper article about the sale of the farm to Birmingham entrepreneur John Whitfield in 1920 references the quarters, but it is not mentioned in subsequent articles about sales of Rippavilla. The last reference to it (outside of Laura Bond Dale’s interview) can be found in a 1986 TDOT Connector Highway Report.

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The TDOT report refers to the “Cheairs Quarters” by name and includes it in a map of the property. It notes that two remaining tenant houses that were present when this report was written meet the 50-year criterion for eligibility, but the modern buildings surrounding them severely diminished their historic setting.64

Jerry Cheers – From Slavery to Freedom:

Born into slavery in Maury County ca. 1848, Jerry Cheers (later referenced in the 1920 census as Jerry Cheairs) personified the way that formerly enslaved African Americans strove to build new lives and maximize new opportunities that freedom provided. In the following transcription of written correspondence from William Cheairs included in Jerry Cheers’ pension application file, Nat Cheairs brought an enslaved young man named Jerry, (then little more than a teenager) with him to war to help care for himself and his horse:

To Whom It May Concern:

Jerry Cheairs col., belonged to my father N.F. Cheairs who was Maj. of the 3rd Tenn. Infantry. Jerry cooked for my father and cared for his horses – was a grown man then. Jerry stole my father’s horse on a (unknown?) and joined the Yanky army – the best horse I ever saw. I finally heard that Jerry joined the Yanky army and was in their service til the close of the war. I do not know his exact age but I do know that he is over 70 years old. He was a faithful good negro in the Rebel army as cook and from which I have heard was a valuable man in the U.S. army after

64 U.S. Department of Transportation, Proposed Connector Highway from State Route 6 (Highway 31) to I-65 to Serve the Saturn Corporation Plant, Maury and Williamson Counties. 1986, pg. 19.
he deserted the Rebels and went to the Yankys. He stayed with the U.S. army to the close of the war.

I have not seen Jerry in 40 years. I have heard and believe it is true that he was afraid at the close of the war to come home because he knew he stole the best horse in Tenn., my father’s saddle horse Old Henry and took him and turned him over to the Yankys. If there is an old Negro in the state who is entitled to a pension old Jerry is that “negro.” I believe he was a good soldier because he was a good faithful slave. All this I am willing to swear to and furnish abundant proof that he is over 70 years old. His age as well as I can calculate is 72 years old on his next birthday.

Wm. Cheairs 1915

Jerry clearly had other plans. He appears to have run away from his then-owner Nat Cheairs, and enlisted in the Union Army’s United States Colored Troops on January 6, 1864 in Pulaski. A private in Company F, 111th USCI, he was later taken prisoner at Sulphur Trestle, AL on September 25, 1864. After his release in June 1865, Jerry mustered out on April 30, 1866. After the war, he did not return to Spring Hill. Census records show Jerry Cheers (spelled as Cheairs only in the 1920 Census) living and working in Murfreesboro. By 1920,

Portion of the letter written by William Cheairs, courtesy of the National Archives.

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65 Jerry Cheers USCT Pension Application file, U.S. National Archives and Records Administration.
66 Fold3 website has his military records at https://www.fold3.com/image/302899647
Cheers owned his own mortgage-free farm on the Nashville Pike in Murfreesboro in District 13, despite not being able to read or write.\textsuperscript{67}

Jerry Cheairs’ story stretches from slavery to escape to service in the Union army during the Civil War to freedom and owning a farm in Murfreesboro in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. His story provides an outstanding opportunity to accurately document and interpret the life of a formerly enslaved person at Rippavilla that transformed his life, serving his country in the pursuit of freedom and successfully building a new life as a free, successful farmer and family patriarch.

**Henry and Martha Cheairs**

Henry and Martha Cheairs offer additional insight into the lives of the enslaved people who lived at Rippavilla before the Civil War. Both Henry and Martha were frequently listed by name and referenced as a married couple in the multi-year lawsuit between Nat Cheairs and his siblings following the death of his father in 1846. Their value to the family was so great that the skills of both were frequently requested by various family members. As noted previously in this report, it appears that Nathaniel Cheairs eventually inherited both Henry and Martha when the lawsuit was finalized, after hiring them in 1852 from the family in the interim while the lawsuit was pending.

By the 1870 Census, Henry Cheairs was listed in Maury County as a mulatto farmer owning property valued at $500, with Martha listed as a black female occupied with keeping house. Although additional details are scarce, it is valuable to note that Henry and Martha amassed personal property in just five short years after the war’s end. For reasons unknown, the family did not remain in Maury County for long. By the 1880 Census, Henry and Martha had moved their family to District 4 in Hickman County, still working as a farmer.\textsuperscript{68}

\textsuperscript{67} Jerry Cheairs, 1920 United States Federal Census, Ancestry.com
\textsuperscript{68} Henry Cheairs, 1870 United States Federal Census.
Sam Bond

Previous Rippavilla tours have discussed the role of Sam Bond, a formerly enslaved man that served as the foreman for the Cheairs quarters and Rippavilla’s daily farming operations. Bond has often been portrayed as the “beloved slave” that remained on the plantation after the war’s end. However, Bond was never enslaved at Rippavilla. Instead, his story is a larger one that reflects the powerful transformations that emancipation brought to African Americans – a story of new freedom and entrepreneurship that provided a foundation for success for both himself and his family.

Born into slavery just across the county line in Williamson County on the farm of Thomas Bond, Sam Bond joined Rippavilla’s workforce as a paid employee after the war ended. In an interview conducted by William Ewing Fowler for his 1937 Master of Arts thesis “Stories and Legends of Maury County,” at the George Peabody College for Teachers in Nashville, Sam Bond reflected, “I belonged to ‘Squire Tom Bond’ who lived on the place now called the Mefford Place one and one half miles north of Spring Hill.” He recounted serving as a “house boy” until age 12 when he was freed after the war.69

In a video interview (believed to be conducted by former Rippavilla Board president/U.A.W. president Mike Bennett), Sam’s granddaughter Laura Bond Dale shared her memories of the Bond family and their experiences at Rippavilla. Born in 1908 on her grandfather’s farm in the Mt. Zion community in Spring Hill, Laura stated her father Peter (Sam’s oldest child) came to Rippavilla in 1916 to take his father’s place as foreman. She stated that “most of Sam’s children were born on the Cheairs farm.” As foremen, both Sam and later Peter managed workers on what was called the Cheairs Quarters, ringing the bell every morning to

wake the approximately 50-75 workers that typically worked on the property during harvest time.\textsuperscript{70}

By the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, Sam Bond had diversified into his own entrepreneurial enterprises. The Nashville Globe newspaper noted in 1910 that he and partner William Lockridge were moving along nicely with their undertaking business.\textsuperscript{71} A later article by grandson Norman Bond, provided vivid details about the business, stating that “the only undertaker in Spring Hill was my grandfather, known as Uncle Sam or Papa Sam. He operated a black hearse with the glass sides, pulled by his two black horses with plumes on their heads.”\textsuperscript{72} As a farmer, undertaker, Sunday School superintendent, and well-respected citizen, Sam Bond transcends the “faithful slave” narrative, instead reflecting the profound transformation that freedmen and women experienced as they began the incredibly challenging but rewarding task of building free communities and institutions.

\textbf{Sam Bond with children at Rippavilla, courtesy of Rippavilla archives and University of TN.}

\textsuperscript{70} DVD interview with Laura Bond Dale and Mary Louise Cheairs Schlater Rose, Conducted at Rippavilla on 5/16/2005. Rippavilla archives.
\textsuperscript{71}\textit{Nashville Globe}, February 25, 1910.
\textsuperscript{72}\textit{Spring Hill Morning Sun}, June 12, 1986.
Peter Bond, the son of Sam and Laura Moore Bond, served as Rippavilla’s foreman once his father left the position. Ross Bond, another son of Sam and Laura Bond, served in World War I. Just one generation removed from slavery, Sam’s sons made powerful contributions to both Maury County and the nation’s safety.

Once restored, the existing laborer’s house near the cemetery could be used as a focal point of exhibitry and interpretation of the Bond family. Since Sam Bond’s story stretches from slavery to freedom, the Heritage Area will be happy to work with Rippavilla on the interpretation of the building.

Emma Burns

Emma Burns is another prominent member of Rippavilla’s African American community, She oversaw the kitchen operations and cooking for the Cheairs family during the early twentieth century, working from the same two-story brick service building directly behind the main dwelling that had housed the enslaved cooks during the 1859s. Laura Bond Dale remembered Emma Burns well, noting her influence within the home and stating that children were not allowed in the house unless Burns told them they could enter. Clearly she was more than the cook, and took on the role more commonly called housekeeper.
Born ca. 1886, the 1910 census documents Emma Burns as a 24-year-old cook living in Nashville’s Ward 16. Living at this time as a boarder on 12th Avenue, Burns was employed as a cook for a private family, noted as able to read and write. By 1920, Emma was listed as 35-year-old cook under the household of William M. Cheairs in Maury County.73

She died in 1950 in Franklin, Williamson County, where she was employed as a cook in a private home, and additional details about her life at and after Rippavilla are difficult to uncover. Emma Burns’s life reflects both the new opportunities and the challenges that African Americans faced in the years after emancipation as they strove to gain an education, gainful employment, and new opportunities.74 Her story could be very effectively interpreted in the former two-story brick service building immediately behind the mansion. This building was both work space and dwelling for the enslaved and then after emancipation for African American laborers such as Emma Burns.

Neiley Polk, blacksmith

In her interview, Laura Bond Dale identified Rippavilla’s blacksmith, Neiley Polk. Listed as a farm laborer living in District 22 near Sam Bond and Anderson Cheairs in the 1900 and 1920 censuses, Polk also served as a valuable member of Rippavilla’s workforce.75 African Americans including Polk that lived and worked at Rippavilla were instrumental in the farm’s post-war recovery. His story could be interpreted at the barn. The building dates to the twentieth century and would be an appropriate location to talk about blacksmithing and the era of agriculture where animal power drove production at the farm.

Julius (J.W.) Blair

Julius (J.W.) Blair is another significant figure associated with Rippavilla. According to Blair’s January 17, 1962 obituary in the Columbia Daily Herald: “The son of Julius Blair, a well known local carpenter who helped build the Bethel Hotel, he was born on the old Cheairs Place near Spring Hill December 29, 1871.” He first worked as a barber for his grandfather Sol Wilkins who operated a shop in the Bethel Hotel, learning the trade until he was able to open his own barbershops and other businesses on the square as well as on East 8th Street in Columbia. He became a well-respected leader in the community.76

Julius was 76 years old when the infamous 1946 Columbia race riot erupted. On February 25, 1946 a confrontation between African American World War II veteran James Stephenson and a white shopkeeper over a radio repair resulted in Stephenson’s arrest for assault. Violence rapidly escalated, fueled by law officers who raided the African American business district without search warrants and confiscated weapons. Police arrested more than 100 African American men, charging 25 with attempted murder. A high-powered African American legal defense team including attorneys Z. Alexander Looby, L.A. Ransom, and Thurgood Marshall defended them, resulting in the all-white jury acquitting 23 of the 25 men.

76 Julius Blair obituary, Columbia Daily Herald, January 17, 1962, copy provided by Jo Ann McClellan
The riot gained national media attention, and resulted in increased efforts toward civil rights in the 1950s and 60s.77

During this time, Julius Blair played a vital role in defending James Stephenson. He first posted bail for Stephenson after his arrest for assault. Later, two patrolmen alleged that Julius Blair had instigated violence during the riot by having shotguns, a claim that was refuted by state witnesses. The claim against Julius was also adamantly refuted by attorney L.A. Ransom, who was quoted as saying “It is inconceivable that these two respected Negro citizens of Columbia went out and asked other Negroes to kill. They would not be leaders in their communities, nor would they be as respected as they are by white and colored alike if they harbored, or had ever harbored, such thoughts in their minds.”78 Blair’s story links Rippavilla to the county’s 20th century civil rights struggle.

Rippavilla is sold out of the Cheairs family

In 1920, sweeping changes came to Rippavilla. On January 17, Alabama native and industrialist/entrepreneur John G. Whitfield purchased the home from William Cheairs, and for the first time in its history Rippavilla was no longer in the Cheairs family. A native of Georgia, Whitfield began his business career in Alabama as a wholesale grocer. He became wealthy

78 Nashville Tennessean, October 3, 1946.
from running the Jefferson Fertilizer Company and a cottonseed products venture in
Birmingham. Whitfield retired in 1920 as a wealthy man and spent the next five years investing
into real estate. Rippavilla was his first significant purchase in Tennessee. The Columbia
Herald raved about Whitfield’s purchase, noting that the whopping $200,000 transaction
resulted in the largest farm deal made in the history of Maury County.

The Whitfields at Rippavilla, courtesy of Rippavilla archives.

The paper’s in-depth article documented both the massive property sale as well as a
glimpse into Whitfield’s plans for spending at least $75,000 in home and farm improvements:

Probably the largest [deal] ever in Maury county farming lands ever made was
consummated Monday when Col. William M. Cheairs sold “Rippovilla,” his magnificent
estate of 887 acres near Spring Hill to J.G. Whitfield, millionaire oil man of Birmingham,
Ala.

The farm, the farming implements and tools were all sold together, the
consideration being $200,000. But the transaction involved even more than this because
in addition Mr. Whitfield also purchased all of the livestock on the place from Mr. Cheairs.
It was a cash transaction, and acreage considered sets a new record price on Maury
county farming lands. The consideration for the farm was above $200 an acre.

Mr. Cheairs will retire from the farm and expects to spend the major portion of his
time in the future in Columbia.

Although Rippavilla is already one of the showplaces of the Dimple, a farm for its
acreage without a superior, with a magnificent colonial residence set in a great forest of
native trees, with the negro “quarters” not far distant, the new owner plans to spend not
less than $75,000 in making improvements. Changes, additions, and modern equipments
for the great and commodious old residence, will, it is said, involve an expenditure of not
less than $35,000.

Roads and boulevards will be constructed all through the farm at a cost of several
thousand dollars. A great fishing and boating lake will be constructed and the entire front
lawn will be handsomely fenced. New and modern additions will be made to the barns.
New “quarters” for the hands and help on the place will be built. An immense greenhouse
steam heated, will be constructed where flowers and vegetation will be grown all year. Mr. Whitfield will make this the showplace of Tennessee.\textsuperscript{79}

John and wife Pearl lived on and off at Rippavilla for the next five years (they also had a home it seems in Florida where J.G. served on the Sarasota City Commission in 1920), making significant improvements that are still impressively reflected in its present appearance. “A sum nearly equal to the amount of the purchase price, $225,000, was said to have been spent for modern conveniences and interior decorations,” according to the Columbia \textit{Herald}.

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{Solarium-addition.jpg}
\caption{Solarium addition added to Rippavilla.}
\end{figure}

From 1920, John and Pearl implemented the significant Colonial Revival changes that transformed much of the home’s interior, including the imposing double-return staircase, the sun porch (solarium) addition, and enlarged openings between lower level rooms. According to the 1996 National Register nomination prepared by the Center for Historic Preservation, the extensive remodel “included a new raised roof, raised floor levels, and the addition of both north and west porticos (as evidenced by the change in brick patterns) and the south elevation solarium. Interior changes include the center hall and staircase, interior plasterwork, the creation of the rear courtyard, and rear balconies.”\textsuperscript{80}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{Solarium-addition.jpg}
\caption{Solarium addition added to Rippavilla.}
\end{figure}


\textsuperscript{80} Rippavilla, Maury County, TN. National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form.
During the Whitfields’ tenure, another brief yet fascinating event in the home’s history occurred in the fall of 1923, when a bit of Hollywood glamour came to Middle Tennessee. Director Allen Holubar came to Franklin to scout locations and film an epic Battle of Franklin scene as part of his adaptation of John Trotwood Moore’s book “The Bishop of Cottontown,” complete with explosives and thousands of local extras to film the extensive battle scenes. He chose Rippavilla as the perfect set for a portion of the film’s early scenes.81

The Tennessean agreed, writing eloquently of Rippavilla, “So typical of the old South and its pre-war splendor and pleasant country life is the Cheairs estate that it was recently used by a picture corporation in making the cinema “The Human Mill,” which is taken from the book by John Trotwood Moore entitled “The Bishop of Cottontown.”82 Although the movie was never completed or released (the director died two months later due to complications from surgery), the filming process brought great excitement and a touch of Hollywood glamour to Rippavilla.

After Whitfield sold Rippavilla in 1925, he and Pearl moved to Sarasota, Florida, and became full-time residents, building a Mediterranean Revival-style estate, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Whitfield initiated development of the 1926 Bay Haven Hotel and the luxurious Whitfield Estates (both also now listed on the National Register of

82 The Tennessean, November 25, 1925.
Historic Places), which boasted an 18-hole golf course, a high-end business district, a yacht club and basin and a 200-room hotel overlooking the bay that attracted celebrities including Babe Ruth, Esther Williams, and Bob Hope. Although Whitfield originally planned to retire in Florida, his ongoing work and involvement in architecture, real estate development, and civic affairs kept him busy and made an indelible and lasting mark on Sarasota’s architectural history and identity, much as he had during his brief but influential tenure at Rippavilla.83

**P. D. Houston Acquires Rippavilla, 1925**

John G. Whitfield sold Rippavilla to prominent Nashville banker P.D. Houston in 1925. Houston, born March 30, 1874 in Lewisburg, rose to prominence in the Nashville banking industry, serving as the first Nashvillian elected president of the American National Bank. A descendant of General Sam Houston, P.D. Houston also accepted several public service positions, including the Nashville Advisory Committee of Low Cost Housing and the Tennessee State Planning Commission among others, and trustee for Meharry Medical College, Fisk University, and Vanderbilt University.

Rippavilla was Houston’s weekend estate until his retirement. His Nashville residence, a Tudor Revival mansion designed by the important Nashville firm Warfield and Keeble, is listed

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in the National Register of Historic Places. Houston renamed Rippavilla “Houston Hall”. Houston added the six foot brick wall and courtyard enclosure at the mansion in 1932. His obituary noted that “his outside interests centered around the 884-acre Houston Hall farm in Maury County. During his latter years Mr. Houston spent many hours on the farm, considered to be one of Tennessee’s model farms. He owned one of the nation’s finest herds of Black Angus cattle.”

**John H. Sharritt Acquires Rippavilla, 1958**

Two years after Houston’s death in 1956, Columbia native John H. Sharritt purchased the home from the Houston estate in 1958 for $177,500. Although originally from Maury County, Sharritt had moved away from Middle Tennessee years earlier, settling in Phoenix, AZ and working as a rancher and cotton farmer. With no plans to move back to Rippavilla, Sharritt decided to transform the property into a dairy farm, hiring Charles Luttrell of Columbia to manage the daily operations.

Sharritt quickly made a sizeable profit on his investment, selling the entire 887-acre property to local real estate developers/auctioneers L.D. Hill and Fred A. Greer for $221,750. Hill and Greer quickly flipped the property, dividing it into five tracts that generated almost $235,000. The University of Tennessee bought 275 acres to expand the nearby Middle

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Tennessee Experiment Station (now known as the UT Institute of Agriculture Middle Tennessee Research and Education Center) that had been established in adjacent to Rippavilla in 1917.

Ruby Mae Davis Loftin purchases Rippavilla, 1959

Maury County native Ruby Loftin purchased another section of the subdivided property, along with daughters Bobbie Jean Gray and Ollie Ruth Davis. In 1959, Loftin bought the tract that included Rippavilla along with 48 acres and a small barn for $50,000.86

Ruby Mae Davis Loftin remains a well-known and colorful figure in the history of Maury County. Born on October 7, 1908, she married Oscar Davis in 1922. Born into a working class family, the 1940 Census listed her occupation as a single needle operator. Upon her death in 2009 at age 100, her obituary listed a long list of accomplishments, including her graduation from Columbia Business College, work as a seamstress, secretary, entrepreneur, antiques dealer, and a long membership at Highland Park Baptist Church.87

Nashville newspapers painted a different picture. In the Nashville Tennessean of December 20, 1959, writers described Ruby Davis of 601 Armstrong Street as one of the most prolific bootleggers in the county. Blasting the local citizens that want to “vote dry but drink wet,” the paper reported that Ms. Davis and a handful of others that were arrested in the bootlegging raid were considered “the ‘top brass’ of the bootleggers in Maury County, said Capt. Louis Hamilton, district patrol commander who led the simultaneous raids . . . One of the alleged bootleggers, Miss Davis, recently bought an expensive home near Columbia, it was said.”88

87 Ruby Loftin Davis obituary, Tributes.com
88 The Tennessean, December 20, 1959,
Secondary sources also reference Davis’s role as one of the county’s premier bootleggers. In his 1986 unpublished article, “Spring Hill, Tennessee,” author James Reston, Jr., described Davis:

At the time, the leading bootlegger in Maury County was a woman with flaming auburn hair named Ruby Davis. To the utter horror of the decent people in the county, particularly the women, she bought Rippavilla in 1960 and proceeded to furnish its 32 rooms in provincial gold. By day, she could be found at her two-room joint on Armstrong Street in Columbia. No whiskey was kept at Houston Hall, for there were children there, as well as poodles, and Ms. Davis, a teetotaler, felt as a matter of principle that the stuff was 'made to be sold, not drunk.'

Despite anecdotes from family members and persistent rumors, there is little evidence that Ruby Davis used Rippavilla for anything as an investment and residence, as she and her daughters only owned it for one year before selling it to Mr. and Mrs. Robert K. Witherspoon of Nashville in December 1960.

**Robert and Hesta Witherspoon Acquire Rippavilla, 1960**

In 1960, Rippavilla again changed hands. Nashvillians Robert and Hesta Witherspoon purchased the property with plans to restore the mansion. However, trouble soon erupted in paradise. By 1963, Hesta Petty Witherspoon and Robert K. Witherspoon had entered into divorce proceedings, which were finalized in 1965.

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Hesta Munns, as she was also known, appeared to be a colorful character in her own right. As remembered by niece Trish Rasbury in Joe Sherman’s book *In the Rings of Saturn*, “Aunt Hesta, a stylish woman who had grown tired of Nashville society after a third divorce, had just bought the ‘historic white elephant,’ as she called it, from Ruby Davis, the best bootlegger in Maury County.”91 In a side note, Trish also noted the peculiar style of the previous owner. “And I also remember some of the prior owner’s decorating – how appalled we were with the purple and yellow tile in one of the bathrooms, which we later undid.”92

After Hesta died in February 1984, Rippavilla stood empty for several months. Hesta had willed the property to her sister Joy Rasbury, but sweeping changes were on the horizon for Spring Hill. By the mid-1980s, Rippavilla and the remaining acreage surrounding it faced a new threat – the approach of rapid development following the arrival of General Motor’s new Saturn Plant. Feeling pressure from GM to negotiate the sale of Rippavilla and the 2,000 surrounding acres, Joy’s daughter Trish reflected on her family’s next steps. “In June, the Rasburys hired a lawyer and began negotiating for what Trish called ‘corporate responsibility for the structure.’ They didn’t want it razed, or historically bastardized. Because of its uniqueness, the price for the structure was negotiated separately from the land.”93 That same year, Joy and Victor Rasbury sold Rippavilla to the Maury County Industrial Board,94 which in turn leased it to Saturn Corporation with a 25-year lease to purchase agreement.

The political and economic climate in Spring Hill experienced rapid and radical changes with the arrival of GM and the Saturn plant, another fascinating story worth pursuing in greater detail. Even *People Magazine* picked up on the story, with the tongue in cheek headline “News

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92 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
94 The Maury County Industrial Development Board (IDB) serves as a non-resource conduit lender for taxable or tax-free financing for industrial projects. It was created for the purpose of attracting and promoting industry and to acquire, own, lease and dispose of properties to induce manufacturing, industrial and commercial enterprises to locate in Maury County.
that GM’s Giant Saturn Plant is Landing in Town Sends Spring Hill, Tenn. Into Orbit.” The article reflects both the astonishing scope of GM’s plant (a $5 billion project, reportedly the largest single industrial development in American history), as well as the serious concerns and apprehensions of local residents.95

1985 – General Motors purchases Rippavilla.

As General Motors began building the new Saturn plant not far from Rippavilla, new discoveries about the area’s past came to light. While excavating the site for the Saturn facility, workers discovered the remains of several persons buried in unmarked graves located on the nearby Haynes Haven property. GM later reinterred the remains to the Historic Cheairs Cemetery located roughly a mile east of Rippavilla, marking the area with a monument with the following inscription: “Here lies persons unknown removed from Haynes Haven land, reinterred with reverence at this site this 10th day of Nov. 1986.” This cemetery also has a section of land near the Cheairs family burial plots that is believed to be a slave cemetery. Although this section does not contain any grave markers and no known documentation of any slave burials has been located, impressions in the ground seem to reflect a significant number of burials there.

Acquisition of the Freedmen’s School, c. 1994

By the 1990s, local stakeholders including representatives from GM, elected officials,

preservationists, and heritage tourism professionals increasingly recognized Rippavilla’s value to Spring Hill’s identity, sense of place, and economic development. Recognizing the need to expand Rippavilla’s interpretation to include all who built it and worked its lands, in the early 1990’s a historic freedmen’s school was moved to the grounds of Rippavilla. Originally located on the John B. Bunch farm approximately three miles south of Rippavilla, this ca. 1870s school is a rare survival of the one-room schools built across the state in the Reconstruction period to provide public education for formerly enslaved children. When the property off Greens Mill Road sold in the early 1990s, Ron Shuff (the owner of the E.A. Green mansion where the school originally stood) agreed to donate the school. Leadership Maury 1993-94 chose the school’s restoration as its class project, and Alton Kelley spearheaded the effort to move the school to Rippavilla. The logs were dismantled and labeled on June 3 under the direction of Kim Willis, president of Columbia Construction. Log building expert Michael Gavin supervised the restoration of the building at Rippavilla. The school is an under-utilized interpretive resource. It has potential to tell important stories about the post-emancipation laborers at Rippavilla plus open up discussions of how Reconstruction transformed Rippavilla’s families.

The reconstructed Freedman’s School behind Rippavilla.

96 Columbia Daily Herald, February 23, 2013,
Entering the 21st Century as a Historic Site Museum

For several years, Rippavilla remained in operation as a historic house museum, focusing on the Cheairs family, the Battle of Spring Hill, and the home’s interior and furnishings. At the same time, Spring Hill continued to grow rapidly along the Highway 31 and Saturn Parkway corridors.

After undergoing a number of significant changes, in 2007 General Motors entered into a 10-year agreement with Rippavilla and the City of Spring Hill, with the goal for the site to become financially sustainable. However, an economic recession caused GM to shut down the Saturn division in 2009. The plant later reopened in 2012. GM chose to transfer ownership of Rippavilla during this time, while still continue a level of financial support. The City of Spring Hill’s 2016 planning document noted that:

General Motors donated Rippavilla and 98.44 acres to Rippavilla Inc., with the approval of Maury County government and the Industrial Development Board. Rippavilla Inc. agreed to professionally pursue historic preservation, education and fiscal solvency in return for a 10-year, $100,000 annual stipend from GM. October 2016 marked the 10th and final year of the GM agreement. Under its current structure, Rippavilla Inc. operates with about $95,000 in annual expenses over its total income without GM’s donation. Initially, the City will temporarily subsidize any remaining funding shortfall, but City officials have said they envision the subsidy being quickly dissolved through additional fundraising events and marketing visibility. One of the identified ways of addressing funding is through the local tourism tax the City of Spring Hill recently adopted after the ability to do so was enacted by the state legislature in 2016. The hotel/motel tax is projected to produce about $100,000 a year in new revenue that qualifies to spend on expenses such as the operations, maintenance and promotions of Rippavilla.97

Facing economic challenges of its own, the Friends of Rippavilla, which had been managing the site, donated the property to the City of Spring Hill in 2016. The city’s Board of Mayor and Aldermen accepted the donation of Rippavilla, the remaining 98.4 acres and buildings surrounding it, and the related operational responsibilities to help ensure the property’s long-term preservation. The City’s planning document also states:

the acquisition of Rippavilla fits neatly into the City’s ‘Spring Hill Rising: 2040 Comprehensive Plan,’ which calls for the preservation of natural areas, creating the highest and best use of significant historic properties, preserving the area’s rural

character, and preservation of cultural history ensuring future generations can enjoy our area’s natural and cultural legacies. The Friends of Rippavilla LLC, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, will continue to manage donations, grants and fundraising events for the historic site, while the City will manage the ongoing maintenance and preservation of the property.\textsuperscript{98}

Despite the changes and challenges that Rippavilla has faced during its long history, the property remains a testament to the history and identity of Spring Hill. If properly maintained and accurately interpreted, this site will be a premier place to learn how the South and Spring Hill have changed over the last 160 years.

\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.
Recommendations

The City of Spring Hill’s vision statement—advocating for “the highest and best use of significant historic properties, preserving the area’s rural character, and preservation of cultural history”—clearly creates significant expectations for Rippavilla. To best meet those expectations in the interpretation and preservation of the property, this report has emphasized key historical periods in the property’s development since the 1850s. This history also points the way for future interpretative and education programming that meets the city’s vision of “the highest and best use of significant historic properties.”

Rippavilla is a very significant property with many different historic elements. At this time, the standard “tour” focuses on the house and includes too many unsubstantiated stories masquerading as historical “facts.” History is the ultimate “it is what it is”—with so many fascinating people and events tied to the property there is absolutely no reason to embellish the past. In fact, by doing so you devalue the property—because its greatest value is how these different people over the decades charted new futures for themselves, their community, and state at the same place.

The next step is an interpretation plan for the property that would cover all of the different historic elements. The best interpretation plan comes out of discussions with all of the stakeholders invested in Rippavilla’s future. To start those discussions, we offer the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Use the periods of 1850 to 1958 as the chronological focus of your interpretation and programming. After John Sharrit purchased the property from P.D. Houston and stripped the farm of most of its agricultural lands in 1958, its era of significance in agricultural history comes to an end. Of that 100-year era, the history divides into 5 periods of emphasis:

1850-1860: Building the Plantation. The story of the Cheairs family and its slaves (the attached
appends allows you to personalize the story of the enslaved.)


1875-1920: Agricultural Innovation and a Return to Prosperity. The William Cheairs story is highlighted but the stories of African American laborers who worked the land give depth and meaning. The stories of Sam Bond, J.W. Blair, Neiley Polk and Emma Burns are highlights.

1920-1958. Rippavilla enters the modern era. The many changes introduced into the building fabric by the Whitfields. Houston continues the pattern of agricultural innovation and renames the place.

Recommendation 2: Enhance the interpretation of key spaces within the plantation. Such improvements, for example, could include:

- Using the “sun room” on the first floor of the mansion to center the story of the Whitfields and the changes they made to the house and plantation

- Using the second floor bedrooms as both period rooms and as exhibit space. Devote one bedroom to the 1850-1860 era (using mats or temporary bedding to indicate the presence of slaves); one for 1860-1870 era, showing the use as a Civil War hospital (thus tying the house to the adjacent Spring Hill battlefield); one for the 1880-1920 era. For exhibit spaces, permanent installations could focus on the Spring Hill battle; photographs of the different families and their history; documents detailing the slaves at the plantation, using information from the appendices below; and the architectural changes made by the Whitfields. The Heritage Area would be very interested in supporting the development of these new permanent exhibits. You should leave one exhibit space for temporary and traveling exhibits that are directly associated with the history and themes of the house.

- Restore and interpret the two-story kitchen/work space/dwelling to tell the story of the
enslaved (again the appendix has names) and later domestic labor who lived and worked in the space. The Heritage Area will be very interested in supporting exhibits for this building. You can look at the existing exhibit in the Loom House at Travelers Rest in Nashville as an example.

- Restoring the Laborer’s Cottage to discuss Peter Bond and the important of African American labor. The Heritage Area will be very interested in supporting exhibits for this building.
- Using the cemetery to discuss how Rippavilla was “a world they built together” and how the family and African American laborers are both represented.
- Using the Freedman’s School to discuss the post-Civil War African American families, such as the Bond family and J.W. Blair. The Heritage Area will be very interested in supporting exhibits for this building.
- Using the barn to speak to 20th century agricultural innovations from William Cheairs and P.D. Houston. Discuss the work of Neiley Polk as blacksmith.

By centering the hour tour narrative on how different spaces tell the story of the families, both white and black, who lived and worked there, you can take a huge step forward in meeting the city’s vision of Rippavilla representing “the highest and best use of significant historic properties, preserving the area’s rural character, and preservation of cultural history.”
Appendix A: Enslaved people inherited by Susan McKissack Cheairs
Source: Cheairs McKissack, Susan P. vs Cheairs, Nathaniel F. et al, 1876, Chancery Court, 117 pps. Maury County Archives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names of Negroes</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Value of Hire</th>
<th>Overall Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Billy</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>$480 per annum</td>
<td>$1,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 William</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Brick Mason</td>
<td>$480</td>
<td>$2,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Theodore</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Barber</td>
<td>$275</td>
<td>$1,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Paul</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Apprentice</td>
<td>$150</td>
<td>$900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Dick</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>$150</td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Anderson</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Farm hand</td>
<td>$200</td>
<td>$1,150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Washington</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
<td>$150</td>
<td>$800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 John</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td>$200</td>
<td>$1,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Davie/Davy</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td>$200</td>
<td>$1,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Lucy</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td>$120</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Emeline</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td>$125</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Annie/Ann</td>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
<td>$75</td>
<td>$300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Margaret</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td>$125</td>
<td>$1,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Cordelia</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Sarah</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Emily Ann/Emily Jane</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Isaac*</td>
<td>61</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Mariah*</td>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$450</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Susan states that Nat Cheairs “sold two of said slaves for $750.” This information comes from two separate documents in the court case, and Isaac and Mariah’s names are missing from the second document which suggests they are the two people he sold. Furthermore, their collective values according to the records is $650 which is close to the amount that he sold the aforementioned people for.
Appendix B: Enslaved People in the Will of Nathaniel F. Cheairs III

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names (85)</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ted</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>$0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudby</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abraham</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>608</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davy</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Granite? Granville?</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfred</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buck</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delia</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greene</td>
<td>1 /2</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Milly</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angeline</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josh</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philip</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mintia Ann</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>1 ½</td>
<td>1.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sancho</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letty</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burrell</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaac</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hal</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matilda</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tabitha</td>
<td>3 ½</td>
<td>1.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child of Matilda</td>
<td>¼</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martha</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phoebe</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willis</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polly</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charl es</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Milly</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen</td>
<td>82 or 80</td>
<td>000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Alley            | 60  | Pay the person taking her $100/1.00?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Pay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jerry</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Pay the person taking him $1.00? 100?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellen</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polly</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silvia</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>Pay the person taking her $1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harriett</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elija</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5.50 or 5.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clone</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handy? Hardy?</td>
<td>2 ½</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>1 ½</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burrell</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilbert</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rushhannah</td>
<td>½</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nashville Billy</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahala</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellen</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limber Bob</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow Bob</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peyton</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>708</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam Burb?</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long Sally</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasant</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priscilla</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snoring Bill?</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregory Bob?</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elija</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easter</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5.25</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Appendix C: Enslaved people inherited by Nat Cheairs IV

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nashville Billy</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>$6.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maholu/Moholu (Nashville Billy’s wife)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>$5.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellen (their child?)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limber Bob</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow Bob</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martha</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phoebe</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willis</td>
<td>½</td>
<td>1.25</td>
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</table>

LOT TWO

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Little Milly</td>
<td>38</td>
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<tr>
<td>Priscilla</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Philip</td>
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<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>½</td>
<td>1.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clone</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Value</td>
<td>Cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasant</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handy</td>
<td>2 ½?</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>½</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angeline?</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.58</td>
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<tr>
<td>Josh</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Although there are decimal points listed with most of these “values,” it is possible that true cost is the value x 100. E.g. Austin, Age 30, Value $550 (or 5.50 x 100).
Additional Reading:


Coker, Paul E., ""Is This the Fruit of Freedom?" Black Civil War Veterans in Tennessee." PhD diss., University of Tennessee, 2011.


