The Amis Farm: 240 Years as a Tennessee Landmark

June 2020
Acknowledgements

This report came at the request of the property owners, Jake and Wendy Jacobs, and was encouraged by Liz McLaurin, the executive director of the Land Trust for Tennessee. In 2019, McLaurin talked with Dr. Carroll Van West, the director of the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation and the Tennessee State Historian, on a possible joint visit to the property. McLaurin and West visited the Jacobs, reviewed the property, and discussed next steps. Because of the property’s significance and due to its deep connections with many facets of the state’s history, Dr. West encouraged the owners to request a joint report from the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation and the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area. In the early 2010s the Heritage Area had developed a Civil War Trail marker about an important battle, known as Big Creek, that happened in and around the property. The Jacobs had consequently supported the marker by taking one of the farm’s historic dwellings in 2016 and converting it into a small visitor center with exhibits about the Amis family, the Revolutionary period, the Cherokee Indians, and Civil War in Hawkins County.

All of the participants discussed the tremendous potential of the property as a place of public interpretation and education for the forthcoming 250th commemoration of the Revolutionary War and the Declaration of Independence. They agreed on the need to highlight why the property mattered and what were the preservation needs of the house and its outbuildings. The owners also requested a separate report on potential business opportunities of the property.

Savannah Grandey, Center Fieldwork Coordinator, led the project on a daily basis. Ethan Holden, PhD Research Assistant, drafted the property’s history. Mandy Hamilton and Robert Kurtz, PhD Research Assistants, carried out the assessment of the property’s buildings. Steph McDougal, PhD Research Assistant, authored the “Potential Business Opportunities in Support of Sustainability” section. Carroll Van West, Center Director, edited and prepared the final report.
Why Amis Farm Matters

Amis Farm is a remarkable natural and historic 60-acre landmark located along Big Creek in Hawkins County, three and half miles east of Rogersville, Tennessee. The farm once counted hundreds of acres within its boundaries; today its 60 acres include many of the most important historic features from the farm’s 240-year history. In 1780 Thomas Amis acquired the property through North Carolina land grants for his service in the Revolutionary War. Over the next two years, Amis, his wife Mary Alice Amis, children, and an unknown number of enslaved people established the farm and built the original dwellings between 1781-1782. The property touches upon so many key themes in early Tennessee history:

- the impact of Revolutionary War veterans from North Carolina, Virginia, and other former colonies;
- the impact of slavery and the labor of the enslaved in the Revolutionary era and in early statehood;
- the impact of Native Americans, here largely Cherokees, in both the Revolutionary war and settlement process;
- the nature of building with available materials in settlements so isolated from primary trade routes;
- the creation of what was a self-contained trade center with its own mill to produce grains and gunpowder, blacksmith, and a store full of goods on the edge between the settlers and Native American lands;
- the expansion of new economic opportunities through international trade, with Native Americans and the Spanish; and,
- the emergence of a new state from the intersections of all of these people and events.

Thomas Amis lived here for about sixteen years, from c. 1781—when this land was westernmost North Carolina—to his death in 1797, a year after Tennessee became the 16th state of the nation. Those sixteen years witnessed the transformation of a land dominated by Cherokee alliances to one where the roots of the American experiment in democracy took firm root.

The story doesn’t stop at statehood. Thomas Amis’ grandson, Thomas Jefferson Amis, took the property in new directions by the mid-nineteenth century. He no longer relied on slave labor to operate his mill and farm lands. He owned no slaves in 1850 and owned only an elderly woman on the eve of the Civil War. He enlarged the stone house into a dwelling more in keeping with the vernacular classicism of his time and he expanded production at the mill, and built a new residence for his mill operator in 1860. Then came the Civil War. Thomas Jefferson Amis was an avowed Unionist—and faced threats for his beliefs. Both armies plundered the farm, although since he supported the United States, the federal government compensated him for his losses to Union troops, some ten years after the fact. He lived to see his place become a post office in 1880, a role maintained to 1901, and enter the progressive era of Tennessee agriculture. His son William H. Amis and especially his granddaughter Anne Amis nurtured and protected the property for most of the twentieth century. Specialization was set aside for “general farming,” and the mill wheel grew quiet. Anne Amis lived here from her birth in 1883 until her death in 1974, and for her last 50 years, she ran the place, ensuring that it became a recognized landmark of history first in her county, then her region, and by 1973 the nation when the house and eight
acres were listed in the National Register of Historic Places. She opened the house to tourists and created the foundation for the heritage tourism industry embraced by today’s property owners.

In its mix of commerce, farming, industry, and modern-day tourism, in the wide diversity of peoples who made history here, and in its very persistence from the Revolutionary to the second decade of the twenty-first century, Amis Farm testifies powerfully to the main currents of Tennessee history. Here is a landmark of few equals among the properties that remain from our Revolutionary roots.

Amis Farm through the decades

The Amis Family in Colonial North Carolina

The Amis family shaped the settlement narratives of North Carolina and Tennessee. The story begins with Thomas’ father, John Amis, who was born in Middlesex, Virginia, on August 20, 1724.¹ John married Mary Dillard and together they had two boys, William Amis, who was born in 1743, and Thomas Amis, who was born in 1744 in Northhampton County, North Carolina and was baptized on January 19, 1744.² John Amis and family resided on a slaveholder plantation in northwestern Northampton County, located in the colony’s northeastern section.³ John and Mary’s family continued to grow with the addition of six daughters named Rebecca, Nancy Anne, Frances, Margaret, Mary, and Rachel Amis.

On January 27, 1763, at the age of nineteen, Thomas Amis married Alice Gale, the daughter of Thomas and Mary (Marshall) Gale.⁴ Just over a year later, on February 18, 1764, his father John Amis died—at the age of 43. John Amis’ will reveals that at his death he owned nine enslaved workers—listed by name in the will as Nan, Joseph, Phebe, Sue, Bet, Rachel, Jane, Esther, and John. Though exact ages are not provided, a close reading of the language reveals Nan and Joseph may have the only adults enslaved by John Amis, who willed both to Thomas. The will stated: “I give and bequeath to my son Thomas Amis two negroes—Nan and Joseph—which is all the estate I intend for him.” In contrast, the will describes the remaining enslaved as girls or boys. While there is no evidence indicating the relationships between the enslaved people Amis mentions in his will, it is possible family members were split up as a result of John’s death, with the adults going to Thomas while those considered boys and girls were bequeathed to other members of the Amis family.⁵ John’s will stipulated that his land and plantation were to be given, “at the death of my wife or marriage,” to his eldest son William Amis.

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² Norfolk, England, Church of England Baptism, Marriages, and Burials, 1535-1812, Ancestry.com, pg. 11.
⁴ Owings, The Amis Family, p. 5.
Thomas Amis and the Revolutionary War

Thomas Amis might not have had the family land in North Carolina but the two adult slaves made him a slaveowner at the age of 20 in 1764. His first daughter, Tabitha, was born in October 1764, followed two years later by daughter Frances “Fannie.” Thomas and Alice Amis watched their family grow at a time of uncertainty for the American colonies. The Seven Years War had concluded in 1763, the year they married. The war had ravaged across Europe and North America since 1754, and the British victory meant that almost all French territory in North America was now under British jurisdiction. But with victory in hand, it came time to balance the accounts and pay for the war. Beginning with 1764’s Sugar Act and Currency Act, the British government launched a series of royal decrees and acts that served to create a rift between the American colonies and Great Britain over the next ten years. These winds of change eventually developed into the storm of the American Revolution in 1775.6

When war began in 1775 settlers had already moved over the Appalachians into the greater Tennessee Valley. Long hunters were as far west as the confluence of the Cumberland and Stone’s Rivers in the 1760s; the first Watauga settlers leased lands from the Cherokees in 1772.7 The process of change that historians have called settler colonialism was underway. Historians use the term settler colonialism to differentiate between white traders, who had been among the Cherokees and other inland Native American nations for decades, with the settlers who wanted to permanently own the land, and to displace the original occupants. Dragging Canoe, an important Cherokee leader, expressed his concerns to British agent Henry Stuart as early as 1776: “encroachments of the Virginians and inhabitants of North Carolina” meant the Cherokees “were almost surrounded by the White People, that they had but a small spot of ground left of them to stand upon, and that it seemed to be the intention of the White People to destroy them from being a people.”8 Historian Jeffrey Ostler agrees: “as Indians experienced colonial invasions of their lands and episodes of disease and violence that accompanied these incursions, allegations that first the British and then the Americans intended the physical destruction of indigenous people became more widespread.”9

Thomas Amis was not yet part of this transformation of peoples and lands in the southeast. He probably never considered venturing that far west in the late 1760s—very few did—because his family had always been in the eastern part of North Carolina. Just before their third daughter Mary was born in August 1768, Thomas and Alice Amis moved to Duplin County, North Carolina, north of Wilmington, where they purchased a farm of 180 acres. Another daughter, Elizabeth, was born at the Duplin County farm in 1770 but two years later, Thomas moved to Bladen County, the next county to the west, where he purchased 200 acres along Drowning Creek. There he established a grist mill—and took his first steps toward the industrial/commercial focus of his later businesses in Tennessee. Two more children came to Thomas and Alice Amis before the Revolution--John, born 1773 and Rachel, born 1774.

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Thomas Amis was thirty-one years-old, a farmer, slaveowner and grist mill operator when the American Revolutionary War began in 1775. By September, two regiments of 500 soldiers each from North Carolina had joined the Continental Army. The North Carolina assembly in January 1776 approved a third regiment, and Thomas Amis went to war and was appointed a captain under the command of Col. Richard Caswell. The Third Regiment fought in the decisive Battle of Moore’s Creek on February 27, 1776, where they helped to win a smashing victory for the patriot cause, leading to an end of royal government in North Carolina and within weeks a call for elections to the first Provincial Congress in April. Thomas Amis was elected to the Provincial Congress and Amis was one of the 83 delegates to unanimously approve the Halifax Resolves, which called for independence from England. Later, after North Carolina declared for independence on April 22, 1776, his colleagues elected Amis to the committee to draft the new state’s constitution.\footnote{Minutes of the Provincial Congress of North Carolina, Colonial and State Records of North Carolina, Volume 10, pg. 500, \url{https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.php/document/csr10-0250} and Minutes of the Provincial Congress of North Carolina, Colonial and State Records of North Carolina, Volume 12, pg. 655, \url{https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.php/document/csr10-0250}.}

By the summer, Amis had returned to the Third Regiment and took part of the defense of Charleston, South Carolina, in June. At end of the year, his military career took a different course. His older brother William had served the new state of North Carolina as a commissary—a purchasing agent—for the army. William wanted to resign his commission to take care of his own business. In December 1776 Thomas was selected to replace his brother as Commissary for the 3rd Regiment, North Carolina Continental Troops, where he held the rank of Captain.\footnote{Minutes of the Provincial Congress of North Carolina, Colonial and State Records of North Carolina, Volume 10, pg. 990, \url{https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.php/document/csr10-0442}.}

As a Commissary, Thomas Amis solved the critical issues of logistics and resupply during an era when infrastructure and supply lines were tenuous and inadequate at best. Thomas Amis struggled, like commissaries before him, to solve these issues and dealt with the “custom” to pay for costs both expected and unexpected. Matters became even more complicated in the winter of 1777 when the Third Regiment transferred to the command of Gen. George Washington, where they participated in the Battles of Brandywine and Germantown. On August 22, 1777 William Amis wrote on behalf of Thomas Amis to North Carolina Governor Richard Caswell:

> The most pressing necessity obliges me to dispatch this message to your Excellency for money. The Troops I’m informed are to march to the Northward in a few days, & it will be absolutely impossible for me to supply them, unless I can draw about £2000. I’ve already mortgaged my own property for the loan of a few hundred pounds, which is now exhausted. I’ve been the only acting Commissary and supplied all the Troops here since the departure of our army for the Northward. Your Excellency, seeing my distress, will, I hope, order that one of the Treasurers pay into the hands of the Bearer, John Webb, £2000, and I will be answerable for the same. I could not wait on your Excellency myself, having no person here that I can intrust my business with. I act for, & on behalf of my
brother, Thomas Amis of Bladen, who was appointed Commissary to the third Reg't.\textsuperscript{12}

Though the Continental Congress supplied some equipment and uniforms, it was often left to individual regimental commanders to raise, pay, and equip their militia units.\textsuperscript{13} Amis was not alone in using his own fortune to equip his soldiers for battle. By the end of the year, Amis joined two other North Carolina commissaries to petition the legislature to accept their resignations; the legislature agreed and Amis returned to his Bladen County farm.

Thomas Amis’ contributions to the American Revolution were not over. In April 1778 voters elected him to a term in the House of Assembly, and among his first actions in the legislature was to sponsor a bill to construct a Bladen County Courthouse in Elizabethtown. By the next month, however, his legislative career again went on hold as he resigned his seat to accept an appointment as a militia contractor. His reputation as a man who could navigate the many demands of feeding and supplying revolutionary soldiers was well known. Gen. Allen Jones wrote Gov. Richard Caswell on October 28, 1778: “The men who are to march from Halifax will soon be ready, but I know not what we shall do for a person to victual them, unless Mr. Amis undertakes it. There is no other person who is able at so short a warning, to supply them.” The general reminded the Governor, however, that if Amis took the task, “he will want a considerable sum of money.”\textsuperscript{14} By the first of December, Amis told the governor that he had the matter well in hand.

\begin{quote}
We have about 300 men here. I have about 100 head of beef cattle engaged, the most of which is now gathered & must be killed shortly or will decline. I have some Pork bought, for which I have given market price, some of which I must receive this week which I expect to pay 20 dollars for or most of the Pork I expect is on the waters of the Peedee [River] near about where I live, where I think with your advice will be the best place near this to put it up.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

Amis continued to provision the army into 1779, the same year he received his first land grant of 320 acres, with a second grant of 320 acres coming in 1780. During these two years Amis’ property near the South Carolina border also served as a hiding place for General Francis Marion, a dashing Revolutionary raider best known as the Swamp Fox. Marion camped out frequently near Amis’ mill on Drowning Creek in Bladen County. Marion used the site as an area to pitch camp, regroup, and rest in the relative safety of an owner and community friendly to the cause of the Revolution.\textsuperscript{16}

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\textsuperscript{15} Thomas Amis to Richard Caswell, December 2, 1778, ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} For more information on Francis Marion and his activities, see Robert D. Bass’ \textit{Swamp Fox: The Life and Campaigns of General Francis Marion} (Orangeburg: Sandlapper Publishing Company, 1974), particularly pages 55 and 67.
\end{flushright}
The Battle of King’s Mountain in October 1780 largely ended the major fighting in the two Carolinas and Georgia, but Amis continued his work as a commissary agent and came to believe that his family and fortune were threatened with retaliation if he stayed in Braden County. Later in October, officials appointed him as the Superintendent Commissary for the Wilmington district, empowering him to enlist a company of 25 men to gather the necessary pork and beef for the forthcoming winter. This roundup was one of his last acts of service in eastern North Carolina before he moved his family and slaves to safety, and to claim his land gained as a Revolutionary veteran. Once at his new property west of the Appalachians he continued as a Superintendent Commissary for Washington and Sullivan counties, serving the North Carolina Revolutionary cause, until peace came with the Treaty of Paris in 1783.

Throughout the Revolutionary War, Mary Alice Gayle Amis shouldered an immense amount of responsibility not the least of which was losing and bearing children and managing the family. Thomas and Mary lost their daughter, Elizabeth, in 1776. However, they also had three children during the Revolutionary War. These births included Willis Amis, born in 1777; Lincoln Amis, born in 1779; and Alice Gayle Amis, in 1780.17 The number of enslaved workers at the Bladen County farm also increased, but a primary document that tells us just how many enslaved Amis brought with him to Hawkins County has not been found.

Thomas Amis, His Family, and Enslaved Come to Cherokee Territory

Built in 1781-1782 by Pennsylvania builder Thomas Harlan for North Carolina Revolutionary War veteran Thomas Amis, the Amis House sits on a rise overlooking the raw, natural beauty of valleys, rugged hills, and forested land that is characteristic of Hawkins County, Tennessee. Over time, the Amis family and its workers, at first enslaved African Americans and later white wage laborers, added a historic cemetery, historic dam, and several historic agricultural buildings.

At first, however, the house was literally an intrusive fort located above Big Creek in the land of the Cherokees. The builder Thomas Harlan was born in Chester County, Pennsylvania in 1750. He grew up in a county crossed by the Great Wagon Road and a county known still today for its eighteenth century stone masonry buildings, especially those preserved within the Valley Forge National Historical Park.18 When he was thirty-three, he took his skills as a mason and moved father south on the Great Wagon Road to Frederick County, Maryland, another place known for its stone buildings, before traveling again on the Great Wagon Road, taking the Holston River fork and stopping in what became Hawkins County. Harlan married a local, Elizabeth Carmack, in 1793 and they had five children. He was buried on the Carmack farm in 1811.19 Not much else is known about Harlan’s life, though his skill as a stone mason is evident in the construction of the Amis House. The architecture of the Amis House reflects a Chester County vernacular tradition in both its interior plan and in its stone masonry. It was a landmark house, on the southern tip of the Great Wagon Road in Tennessee. Its hillside location commanded the

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18 An interesting comparable would be the dwelling known as the Stirling Quarters within the park. See John A. Milner Associates, *Stirling’s Quarters at Valley Forge* (Chadd’s Ford, PA, private, 2006).
19 Alpheus H. Harlan, *History and genealogy of the Harlan family, and particularly of the descendants of George and Michael Harlan, who settled in Chester County, Pa., 1687* (Baltimore: The Lord Baltimore Press, 1914), pg. 132. Also see the extensive listing of material on Thomas W. Harlan of Hawkins County at ancestry.com.
surrounding countryside for miles, and soon other travelers and settlers came this way and passed by the stone gateway to the west.

How Amis and Harlan connected is unknown. Harlan brought building skills but in constructing this imposing house, he probably relied on Amis’ enslaved workers to cut the river bluff stone, transport it to the building site on top of a hill, and do the heavy lifting of construction. Harlan, Amis, or both directed the construction of a log palisade (what it looked like is unknown) to help protect the house and family.

The Cherokees knew what the house/fort on Big Creek meant—permanent change was coming. In 1776, at a meeting of several Indian nations at the Cherokee village of Chota on the Little Tennessee River, a Shawnee warrior explained that they had already observed the pattern “wherever a Fort appeared in their neighbourhood, they might depend there would soon be Towns and Settlements; that it is plain, there was an intention to extirpate [eliminate] them.” The Amis property fit that pattern. As the Goodspeed history of Tennessee notes in its chapter on Hawkins County, “the next year [1783] he opened a store, and erected a blacksmith shop and a distillery. Very soon after he also put into operation a saw and grist-mill, and from the first he kept a house of entertainment [a tavern].” By the end of the decade, Rogersville, just three miles away, would be the seat of Hawkins County.

Amis faced many challenges at his new farm, none moreso than the deaths that stalked his family. Mary and Thomas lost an infant son, Thomas Amis Jr., in 1782, Mary herself died in 1784, and her last child, Penelope Amis, who was born in 1784, died a year later in 1785. Thomas married again to Lucy Anne Haynes on March 26, 1787. Over the next ten years she had four children: Haynes Amis on February 22, 1788, William Amis on July 3, 1789, James Amis on November 6, 1790, and a Nancy Amis on October 29, 1797. They all grew up on the farm.

Collectively, Amis’ experiences and activities during the Revolutionary War paint a picture of a man thoroughly involved with, and engaged in, the struggle for independence, before in the last years of the war, from 1781 to 1783, he built new opportunity in the west. Thomas’ time as a military commissary, a legislative statesman and frontier leader would also translate into peacetime, when he continued to serve as a representative to North Carolina’s Congress and then as a leader in the Rogersville area. An understanding of supply and logistics gained during the Revolutionary War served Amis in his shift from wartime to the owner of a commercial outpost on a major transportation route. The preponderance of Revolutionary War soldiers who visited his store or tavern also suggests that his status as a veteran, and the networks he undoubtedly constructed during his service, brought those veterans heading West to his tavern and store to claim their land grants, for which he was also a surveyor.

The Amis Farm in the late eighteenth century

From 1782 to Thomas Amis’ death in 1797, the Amis Farm served as a prominent place as a regional transportation and commercial crossroads. Historian Kevin Barksdale has pointed out

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that “Capitalism drove the first frontier settlers into the wilds of East Tennessee, and their successful businesses became the fiscal engines driving the economic development of the Tennessee Valley.”

The Amis Farm is the best extant example of this fundamental process linking economic development and the settlement of Tennessee. It was its own world, divided three ways, between Amis, his wife, and children; the men, women, and children of the enslaved; and the regional, national, and international backgrounds of the visitors and traders who passed this way.

On his property Thomas Amis directed his enslaved workers to operate a tavern, a store, water-powered mill, blacksmith, tannery, and a distillery along with tilling the fields and keeping the livestock. It was a settlement all its own, designed to facilitate trade and to create a place where information of all sorts could be exchanged. The blacksmith shop would provide products ranging from nails to horseshoes; the tannery would take animal hides and pelts and turn into valuable leather; the dam and mill harnessed the power of water to grind flour for sale both in the store and for the Amis family; and the distillery produced quantities of whiskey, a valuable and lucrative enterprise, for sale wholesale at the store or by the drink at the tavern. Here at one place was a mini-rural village, and a rural trade center for the Holston Valley, and beyond. The enslaved were always nearby and in plain sight—housing was believed to be located near the main house and to the south along the farm road that connected to larger public road headed to Rogersville or to the Holston River.

The family hosted a constant stream of visitors in the years immediately after the 1783 Treaty of Paris. Travelers mentioned the place in their memoirs or journals. From these accounts, it is clear that Amis operated a “tavern,” a place for food and lodging. The tavern at first could have been what is now the dining room of the 1782 house. The foundations of the store are a hundred yards or so from the house; the store may also have been the tavern. The first account of the tavern came from the Moravian minister and trader, Brother Martin Schneider, of Salem, North Carolina. In his “Report of His Journey to the Upper Cherokee Towns,” written from 1783-84, Schneider’s account underscores how the Amis Farm became an early trading center, both in the goods that Amis made available to other traders but also in the information about trade possibilities that people could find when lodging with Amis. Schneider’s visit to “Capt. Emy” house came in late 1783, when he stopped there on the way to the Cherokee villages on the Little Tennessee River and on his return trip to North Carolina. On the first stop, he met a young white trader named Richard Grantham who later married one of the Amis daughters in 1785. Grantham provided invaluable information about the names of the villages and their locations. On his return trip in early 1784, Schneider stopped by again and was relieved that Amis “rejoiced to see me again safely.” Indeed, his mission to the Cherokee had not gone well. The Indians were willing to trade but had no interest in a Moravian mission. Schneider picked up a half loaf of wheat bread—it “now served as Biscuit for my coffee” he wrote in his diary--that

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24 Based on artifacts found by the owners over the last ten years. The location of the housing was adjacent to the original kitchen wing of the house. There are no extant census records for Hawkins County from 1790 to 1810 making it difficult to determine how many slaves Thomas Amis had working on the property.

Amis had held for his return trip to North Carolina. The Moravians would not return to discuss Cherokee missions until the end of the century.

In June 1784 John Lipscomb noted at a stop at the Amis House in his journal as he and his compatriots headed to land grants in Middle Tennessee. His party included Col. James Robertson, one of the founders of Nashville, William Walton, the creator of the Walton Road, and Col. Hardy Murfree, for whom the town Murfreesboro would be named in 1811. They stayed for a couple of days, and Lipscomb noted they had plenty of “whiskey to drink.” He also noted that Amis sold rum, and they bought oats for the horses, along with cooking a beef for food then and for the road. As he surveyed the territory in the fall of 1784, Daniel Smith, noted surveyor and later official in the Southwest Territory government, and Middle Tennessee plantation owner, stayed with the Amis family. In November, however, life changed at the farm forever—Alice Gale Amis died on November 22, 1784. Thomas Amis would not remarry for two and a half years when he wed Lucy Haynes on March 26, 1787. Thomas and Lucy would have three children, Nancy, James, and Haynes over the next ten years.

Trade with travelers such as Lipscomb, Robertson, Murfree, and Smith was fundamental to Amis’ vision for his farm. A quick look at his extant ledgers for his store at the Amis Farm from 1782 to 1785 tells us that fur trade was alive and well. Most transactions were barter exchanges—corn and furs for iron tools, iron bars, and iron cookware, whiskey, salt, salt peter, and grains, both for humans and for animals. From March through May 1783, Colonel John Smith acquired iron bar, corn, potato plantings, hoes, a hat, repaired wagon wheels by “Danl,” possibly an enslaved worker, salt, and lots of whiskey. In the first half of 1784 Phil Martin acquired whiskey from the store on four different trips.26

Local historian Lucy Gump transcribed the Amis ledger books, and looked carefully at the early years of 1782 to the mid-1790s because these records not only recorded transactions at the store but also contained records about the tavern, mill, and blacksmith operations. Whiskey was the most popular product but his store sold a wide array of goods. The enslaved workers operated both a grist mill and a powder mill and the blacksmith operation was extensive. Amis and his enslaved workers also bred horses for sale. Amis rented out two of his slaves—names not identified—to saw planks for construction.27 Many of Amis’s customers were Revolutionary War veterans or soldiers that stopped by as they headed west to claim their North Carolina land grants. Also included in the ledger are enslaved African Americans who purchased items from Amis either for themselves or for their enslavers, thus exhibiting the role of the enslaved as actors instead of property in the local economy. The Amis Farm was a place of meeting and exchange for diverse people. The enslaved rubbed shoulders with land grant surveyors, holy men shared their faith and engaged in spirited debate with rugged frontiersmen, and traders debated regional news and the impacts that it might have on business. Amis kept his business in the black, even after the founding of Rogersville and the establishment of new commercial competitors in the seat of Hawkins County by the end of the decade.28

28 Ibid., 231-237.
Amis came west to avoid possible repercussions due to his war service in North Carolina but also in search of a greater future. The vision for his businesses extended far beyond the Cherokee villages to the southwest or the settlements in what became Tennessee and Kentucky to the west and the Mississippi River and the Spanish empire. In 1784, the Spaniards had closed the Mississippi to shipping from the American states. Americans were informed that they could not use the river or transfer goods to oceangoing vessels at Natchez or New Orleans unless they were Spanish subjects. Anyone caught on the Mississippi breaking these rules without express Spanish permission was to be arrested.29

Some settlers accepted the Spanish terms; Amis refused. In the summer of 1786, Amis, his son John Amis, and two of his African American male slaves—the primary sources do not list their names—put together a large shipment of goods destined for markets in Natchez and New Orleans. The enslaved built a flatboat, and together and white and black party began the long river journey down the Holston to the Tennessee River, through the Muscle Shoals, and onto the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. The Spanish Garrison at Natchez on June 7, 1786 detained Thomas and John Amis, William Fletcher, and two unnamed male enslaved workers. They confiscated the boat and goods, which included 142 dutch ovens, 53 pots and kettles, 34 skillets, 33 cast iron boxes, 3 pair of dog irons, 1 pair of flat irons, 1 spice mortar, 1 plough mould and 50 barrels of flour.30 The Spaniards detained the Amis party for nearly two months. Finally, on August 29, 1786, Dr. Charles de Grand, the commander of Fort Natchez, gave Amis permission to leave: “Permit Mr. Thomas Amis, his Son John Amis and two Negroes Belonging to them, and the named William Fletcher to pass into North Carolina to their familys [sic]. I desire and charge they may be permitted to pass Unmolested as the said Mr. Amis, has while his Stay here, Behaved himself as a Gentleman and man of the stricktest [sic] honor.”31

As soon as he reached Davidson County, North Carolina (now Tennessee) in November, Amis filed a disposition at the county seat of Nashville detailing his loss. Amis explored every possible avenue to be compensated for his losses. In December, he turned to state government, writing the North Carolina General Assembly about the lost goods, including in his documentation the aforementioned passport, a full deposition, and a list of goods confiscated by the Spanish. State leaders were concerned at the Spanish behavior and what that might mean for future western trade. Like all westerners they wanted their government to secure free navigation of the Mississippi River as almost a birthright.32 Public outrage over the Spanish shutting down the Mississippi River prompted public outcry and sabre rattling. Some argued that if the United States could not go down the river, the Spanish were not allowed to come up. By 1787 John Jay, the secretary for foreign affairs of the national government, was involved. By the end of that year the heated rhetoric had somewhat cooled because American leaders recognized that they could not win a war with Spain.33 While some Americans may have accepted the standstill the negotiations between the United States and Spain, Thomas Amis did not, and never did change

30 Ibid.
31 Thomas Amis Passport, August 29th, 1786.
his mind. In his will, more than ten years later, he deeded to his son John “what may be recovered from the cargo seized from me by the Spanish Commandant in June 1786.”

His trip to Natchez proved to be a financial disaster, but overall his businesses at the farm made Amis a prosperous and respected citizen of western North Carolina. His political career is significant. He was a Hawkins County representative to the end of the decade (1788 and 1789), and participated in the North Carolina ratification of the United States Constitution. During the political controversies surrounding the short-lived State of Franklin, Amis defended Gen. John Sevier and played an important role in the decision of North Carolina to restore Sevier’s citizenship. Near the end of his term in the North Carolina legislature, he introduced the bill on November 2, 1789 to legally establish Rogersville as the seat of Hawkins County.

While Thomas Amis was faraway serving in the North Carolina legislature in 1786, Joseph Rogers and Mary Amis eloped and married against her father’s wishes. According to family and local history accounts, Joseph Rogers initially worked as a clerk in Thomas Amis’s store at the farm. Rogers, who was born in Ireland in 1765, fell in love with Mary Amis, Thomas’ daughter. Thomas Amis did not consider Rogers to be a suitable husband and would not entertain the idea that Joseph and Mary were to be married. When Thomas Amis returned, he was furious and demanded to see Joseph Rogers. When Rogers refused, Thomas Amis saddled up, went and found Rogers, and caned him. Though their relationship is not well documented following this incident, it can only be assumed that they reached a type of understanding, as Amis gave Rogers land that would eventually make up the town of Rogersville. In fact, Thomas was one of the two surveyors for the creation of the town’s first lots.

Bishop Francis Asbury was a Methodist circuit rider across the frontier. He traveled thousands of miles, and perhaps most importantly, kept a journal for those forty-five years, which included accounts of harrowing mountain travel and to having to travel in groups of preachers “who are well armed and mounted” in response to threats, or anticipations of, violence. In 1790, Bishop Asbury arrived at Amis’ property after crossing the Holston River at Smith’s ferry. He complained that Amis did not offer lodging and food for free but then admitted that “they were well entertained for their money.” On the return trip, he wrote

> We came back to A---‘s, a poor sinner. He was highly offended that we prayed so loud in his house. He is a distiller of whiskey, and boasts of gaining 300pd per annum by the brewing of his poison. We talked very plainly; and I told him that it was of necessity, and not choice, we were there—that I feared the face of no man. He said, he did not desire me to trouble myself about his soul. Perhaps the greatest offense was given by my speaking against distilling and slave-holding.

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39 Ibid., 257.
40 Ibid., 256.
One wonders if Amis’ sense of being offended reflected his understanding that his most valuable property was the distillery and his enslaved workers. The famed French botanist Francois Andre Michaux also stopped at the Amis Farm on November 16, 1793, noting that he followed the banks of the Holston river and “slept at the house of Amis Esquire.”

The Death of Thomas Amis

In 1796, Thomas Amis witnessed the founding of Tennessee as a state and found, for the first time in his life, that he was no longer a North Carolinian, but a Tennessean. A year later, Thomas Amis died on December 4th, 1797 and was buried in the Amis Farm cemetery. His will reveals that he had become a man of means. He “lended” his wife Lucy 550 acres, the house that he resided in, his black smith tools, and all other tools and utensils to her until death or marriage, at which point it would go to their son Haynes Amis. He gave his oldest son John the lawsuit against the Spanish government and the tract of land that he lived on in Rogersville and “the lower part of my six hundred forty acre tract of land.” To his son Willis, he left the upper part of that tract. To Lincoln Amis he left five lots in town of Rogersville, and all the land lying on the west side of the main road and adjoining Rogersville. To Thomas Gale Amis, he left all the certificates funded by the Continental Loan Office in North Carolina. He is very specific in this, including the date they were funded which was August 22nd, 1791, and numbered 106, in the amount of $2,162.40. He stipulated that the library of all his books be kept together for the use of his school, which was also located on the property.

Amis also deducted money from the inheritance of four of his older children, Tabitha, Mary, Fanny, and John because “of negros already given them.” A year later, on March 3, 1798, the settlement of Thomas Amis’ 34 slaves was recorded at the Hawkins County Courthouse, and finally the historical record documented the names of those who toiled the land, developed the businesses, and made the Amis family their fortune.

Lucy, his second wife, received: Frank (identified as a “Negro Man”), Cooper and Nancy, “Cooper’s wife” and “Polly, Nancy Cooper’s daughter”

Rachel Amis received: “Muck, a Negro Man, Little Lucky, Joe (white swelling)”

Willis Amis received: “Joe (Parson), a Negro Man, Sylvia, a Negro Girl, Boston”

Alice Amis received: “Bob, a Negro Man, Sal, a Negro Woman, Ferryby, a Negro Child”

Lincoln Amis received: “Ben (yellow), Lucy, his wife, Charles, York”

William Amis received: “Joe (Miller), Frank (Little), Milly, Daph, Tom”

James Amis received: “Ben (black), Nancy, Polly, Venus”

Nancy Amis received: “Lydia, Sam, Gloucester, Beck”

Fanny Amis Grantham received: “Simon, a Negro Man”

John Amis received: “Tabitha, Suck, Ned”

The list indicates that certain enslaved families were allowed to stay together, at least at the time of the estate settlement of March 1798. Nonetheless, the settlement also tells what had been a large slave community at the Amis Farm (over 30 enslaved workers) were now dispersed among multiple families. The designation of “Joe (Miller)” may indicate who operated the grist mill while “Joe (Parson)” may indicate that Joe was the identified minister for the Amis enslaved workers.

The history of the Amis Farm and its earliest inhabitants provides a nuanced glimpse into the experience of the Revolutionary War and early federal periods on the North Carolina western border, the migration of people over the Appalachians, and the beginnings of a slave-based society in what would become East Tennessee. Thomas Amis’ experiences during the Revolutionary War laid the groundwork for his subsequent life in Hawkins County, Tennessee. The connections that he forged, both in the military and politically, ensured that he remained a man of stature and was connected to a network of Revolutionary War veterans. Thomas Amis also represented the many contradictions that came with the Revolutionary generation. Though the Revolutionary War utilized the rhetoric of freedom to motivate soldiers like Amis, this freedom did not apply to everyone, and Thomas Amis did not free any slaves in his life or his death. Rather the settlement of his estate meant that what had been a large number of enslaved working together at the farm were now scattered among multiple white families. Thomas Amis’ death literally destroyed this very early and large community of enslaved workers who built the farm and its related businesses from 1781-82 to 1798.

From Village to Farm: Haynes Amis (1806-1848)

Haynes Amis likely inherited the farm when he married Mary Howell on December 6th, 1806, per Thomas’ desire that the farm pass to Haynes upon his marriage. Regardless, it is certain that Haynes inherited the farm, and any remaining parts of Thomas and Lucy’s estate, when Lucy died in 1819. Haynes Amis does not appear as frequently, or prominently, in the historical record as his father. Haynes and Mary had six children. All six children lived on the farm with their parents in 1830, though by 1840 only two continued to live on the farm. The 1840 census also lists that six white laborers on the Amis Farm were involved in agricultural work, with one being involved in manufacture and trade. Haynes Amis saw to the continued operation of the farm’s substantial milling business. Indeed, Haynes’ will seems to suggest that he expanded

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44 Lucy Amis’ Will, Hawkins County Will Book—Volume 1, Page 6, December 17th, 1818. Ancestry.com
45 1830; Census Place: Hawkins, Tennessee; Series: M19; Roll: 178; Page: 39; Family History Library Film: 0024536, Ancestry.com and 1840; Census Place: Hawkins, Tennessee; Roll: 526; Page: 207; Family History Library Film: 0024546, Ancestry.com.
46 1840; Census Place: Hawkins, Tennessee; Roll: 526; Page: 207; Family History Library Film: 0024546, Ancestry.com.
these manufacturing and trading operations, as he lists “other improvements” in addition to the farm, house, mill, and tannery to be inherited by his son Thomas Jefferson Amis. His will also reveals that sometime between his father’s death in 1797 and his own death in 1848, the original blacksmith shop burned down.

Enslaved labor played a major role in the farm’s continued prosperity. The 1798 settlement list tells that at least 16 slaves remained on the property, as Lucy and the three children inherited four slaves apiece. When Lucy Amis died in 1819, her will mentions four enslaved African Americans by name, three of which are confirmed to be part of the same family. The mother’s name was Polly, and her children were named Milly and Joe, which according to Lucy’s will, were Polly’s two oldest children. Lucy stipulated that Haynes should pay her other son, James, the value of Milly and Joe, rather than leaving them as an inheritance to James. She determined that they were worth $300 each, for a total of $600 that should be paid within two years of her death. Later in her will, Lucy mentions a young enslaved boy, Charles, whom she deeds to the youngest daughter of Lincoln Amis.

The 1830 census indicates that as the children grew up and left, the number of enslaved workers dropped to 12, owned by Haynes Amis. These slaves included three males under the age of ten, two males aged ten to twenty-three, one male aged thirty-six to fifty-four, one male aged fifty-five to ninety-nine, two females under the age of ten, two females aged ten to twenty-three, and one female aged thirty-six to fifty-four. Interestingly, the 1830 census lists three free African Americans—all women—on the Amis farm, which included one female under the age of ten, one female aged ten through twenty-three, and one female aged thirty-six to fifty-four. No names are given.

The number of slaves at the Amis Farm increased only by one in the 1840 census to thirteen enslaved African Americans. They included one male under the age of ten, three males aged twenty-four through thirty-five, one male aged thirty-six through fifty-four, four females under the age of ten, two females aged twenty-four through thirty-five, and one female aged thirty-six through fifty-four. There was no listing of free African Americans living on the property—where the three women went is unknown. Haynes Amis was wealthy—most white Tennesseans did not own slaves and of those who did most owned less than five. But, unlike his father Thomas who had squarely fit into the planter category of slave owners [more than twenty enslaved workers] by having more than 30 slaves, Haynes Amis belonged to the next lower tier of slaveowners, that of a well-to-do farmer and manufacturer.

Similar to his father, we can learn some of the names of these enslaved workers in Haynes Amis’ will filed after his death in 1848.

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49 Lucy Amis’ Will, Hawkins County Will Book—Volume 1, Page 6, December 17th, 1818. Ancestry.com
50 1830; Census Place: Hawkins, Tennessee; Series: M19; Roll: 178; Page: 39; Family History Library Film: 0024536, Ancestry.com.
51 1830; Census Place: Hawkins, Tennessee; Series: M19; Roll: 178; Page: 39; Family History Library Film: 0024536, Ancestry.com.
52 1840; Census Place: Hawkins, Tennessee; Roll: 526; Page: 207; Family History Library Film: 0024546, Ancestry.com.
• Lucy H. Amis received an enslaved man named Joe “about 30 years of age” and “a negro woman now and for several years in their possession named Mary, about 20 years of age;”
• Daughter Martha received a “negro girl for many years in her possession;”
• Daughter Mary received “a negro woman named Nancy and her three (now four) children. I also give her a negro man named Jack about 25 years of age”
• Lucy Ann Armstrong (the daughter of his deceased daughter Sarah Amis Armstrong) received “two negro girls named Francis and Harriet.”

Once again the division of the estate also led to the division of the enslaved families who resided at the Amis Farm.

Besides his wealth in enslaved people, Haynes accumulated a sizeable estate, including over 1,100 acres, $900 in cash, considerable livestock, and various household and farm items. His son and executor, Thomas Jefferson Amis received 400 of those acres, the Amis House, the Amis mill, and unnamed “other improvements.” His brother, James H. Amis, received the other 400 acres on the southern portion of the land, which included the tan yard, the stock therein, and “other improvements.”

An Antebellum Farm in War and Reconstruction, 1848-1890

Thomas Jefferson Amis, born on December 1, 1807, was just over 40 years old when we assumed operation of the Amis Farm. He and his wife Matilda lived in the Amis house. Together they had three sons and two daughters. Thomas J. Amis transformed the family’s stone house into a building more in keeping with the antebellum domestic landscape of a successful farmer in East Tennessee. According to his granddaughter Anne McClain Amis, Thomas Jefferson Amis added a wooden second story to the house in c. 1850 in addition to what she referred to as “rambling rooms.” Not only were there more rooms for his wife and children, the exterior façade added wood post columns supporting the second floor that gave the house a vernacular classical revival look. Then directly behind the main house Amis had his craftspeople to build a two-story wing that housed the kitchen and laundry room on the first floor and provided lodging for his African American house slave on the upper floor. This building was separate from the main house and not connected to the dwelling until the mid 1970s when a small hyphened addition was constructed, which also allowed for indoor bathrooms to the house for the first time.

The 1850 census records that Thomas J. Amis, age 46, had a household of five: his wife Matilda, age 26, and four children eight years old or younger. This farmer owned real estate valued at $800. The slave schedule for 1850 stated that he owned no slaves. Ten years later his property had skyrocketed in value to $8000 in real estate and $1000 in personal property. The

54 Ibid.
55 Owings, The Amis Family, p. 87.
household had reached 7—Thomas, Matilda, and five children. Also, according to the 1860 slave census, Thomas J. Amis had enslaved one woman, age 60. His lack of reliance on a large community of enslaved workers is a striking contrast with the holdings of his father and grandfather.

Perhaps that is why when the American Civil War erupted in 1861, Thomas Jefferson Amis retained his loyalty to the United States of America and never threw in his lot with the Confederacy. The Civil War story of the Amis Farm is important. While it never became a battlefield the land and its buildings are strongly associated with the themes of occupation and homefront during the war.

Thomas Jefferson Amis, in his sixties, would have been too old to serve in an active duty role. Yet his faith in the union never wavered. Thomas J. Amis was a Unionist throughout the war and into Reconstruction. He served as a delegate to the 1866 Unionist convention in Knoxville where the delegates asserted that a new state called “East Tennessee” should be formed so that Unionists could be protected and could rejoin the United States. In 1874, Thomas J. Amis filed a claim to the U.S. Southern Claims Commission, and that primary source is an excellent record of his support for the United States during the war. He swore to the commission: “I sympathized with the Union Cause, my language and feelings were for the Union. I voted for the Union. I voted against Ratification [of Tennessee’s secession in 1861]. I adhered to the Union cause all time.” He testified that both armies impacted the farm. Confederate forces “pressed my mill and forced me to Grind [grain] for them.” According to his count, the Confederates took 5 to 6 horses, camped at the farm, burned 50 to 60 acres of timber, and “took a good deal of flour” for which they paid him Confederacy money. Throughout the early years of the war, Amis testified, local Confederates “threatened to take me and whip me several times” and told him to take his family and leave the county.

Then came Union occupation, late in the war. On December 12, 1864, a Union brigade from Stoneman’s command camped temporarily at the farm. During their stay, the Union troops took 1300 pounds of hay, 700 bushels of fodder, 90 bushels of oats, 10 bushels of rye, 1 bay mare, and 1300 fence rails, which they used as firewood. Amis’ claim centered on those losses, a total claim of $415. In 1875 Congress appropriated $357 for his losses during the war.

The war certainly impacted the Amis family and farm. Whereas ten years earlier Thomas Jefferson Amis’ real estate was worth $8000, it had dropped to $6000 in 1870. Though Thomas continued to be a farmer, the 1870 census reveals that he increasingly came to rely on his family to ensure that the farm was maintained. All five of his children as listed as living in the Amis household, three of which, including his oldest son William, had “helping on farm” written under their profession in the census. Thomas Jefferson Amis’ daughter Sarah’s husband lived on the Amis property as well, and also held the profession of farmer. His wife Matilda is listed as

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59 Brownlow’s Knoxville Whig, May 9, 1866.
60 Thomas J. Amis, Claim No. 12848, Settled Case Files Approved by the Southern Claims Commission, 1871-1880, National Archives.
“keeping house” for her profession, though like most women on farms in the south, Matilda would be responsible for chores and work that took place both inside, and outside, the house.\(^6\)

In addition to family members, the 1870 census also reveals the presence of an African American mother, Fanny Miller, and her child, Amanda Miller, as residents of the Amis Farm. Fanny, who was thirty-four years old, was listed as a “cook” under her profession. Her daughter lived with her. Following the end of the Civil War, newly freed African Americans faced a radically altered landscape in the South. Though many African Americans moved to cities and population centers, particularly in the North, many also continued to live and work in their communities or for their former masters. Newly freed African Americans toiled as sharecroppers, day laborers, and domestic workers in the employment of whites. While Thomas Jefferson Amis owned only one elderly enslaved woman in the 1860 Slave Schedule, that woman is clearly not Fanny Miller. She and her daughter found employment from Amis as domestic workers and, according to family memory, they lived in the room above the kitchen in the two-story outbuilding.\(^6\)

The 1870 census also reveals that a twenty-five-year-old white male schoolteacher named E.S. Mooney lived on the Amis property. The family had in the past supported educators for their children but one wonders if Mooney was not one that initial group of teachers hired for the short-lived program of public education in Tennessee. The census also reveals the racial lines of education—the Amis children knew how to read and write, but Fanny Miller and her daughter are both listed as not being able to read or write. For many years following Emancipation, African Americans had sparse access to education.\(^6\)

The final census that Thomas Amis appears in is the 1880 census. He is still listed as a farmer, and three children, including one daughter-in-law, lived on the Amis property. Though both Fanny Miller and Mooney are not listed in this census, a seventeen-year-old African American female named Bettie Connack is listed as a resident on the farm. The census records state that her profession is that of a domestic worker. Additionally, everyone living on the farm, including Bettie Connack, is listed as being able to read and write.\(^6\) Thomas J. Amis, then well over 70 years old, was named postmaster for the community of Amis in 1880. A post office was kept at Amis until 1901.\(^6\)

Matilda Ann Amis died in 1886 and Thomas J. Amis died in 1890 and was buried at the nearby Ebbing and Flowing Methodist Church Cemetery. By the time of their death, local newspapers had already recognized the place as historic. In 1878 the Morristown Gazette featured a story on “The Amis Settlement,” reporting that the house was in good repair, and that the family operated a grist mill, saw mill, tannery, wheelwright shop, blacksmith shop, and shoe shop. The reporter noted that a new post office was to be established there, called “Amis Mills,” an indication of how the mill operations dominated life and business at the farm.\(^6\) The Goodspeed History of Tennessee (1887), which contained histories of all of the Tennessee counties, also identified the


\(^{63}\) Ibid.

\(^{64}\) Ibid.


Amis House as a landmark. In the century to come, the Amis Farm would continue to be recognized and lauded as an important Tennessee landmark.

The Twentieth Century

William H. Amis, who was born in 1845, inherited the farm in 1890 following his father’s death. He spent his entire life on the land. He married Matilda A. Carmack on March 31, 1875. Together they had two children, John Carl Amis in 1880 and Annie (she later spelled her name as Anne) McClain Amis in 1883. For the next ten years the family worked the farm until John left for the University of Tennessee. He graduated in 1902 with an engineering degree, which led to an outstanding civil engineering career. He held a membership in the American Society of Civil Engineer and specialized in railroad construction and operation. John built railroads in South America in addition to building an extension of the Atlantic Coastline from Fort Myers to Marco Island, Florida. John also worked as chief engineer of the Detroit and Mackinaw Railroad, in addition to serving as superintendent of the Virginia Iron, Coal and Coke Company. He stayed away from the farm until medical conditions, and the downturn of the Great Depression, forced his retirement at the age of 52. In 1932 he returned and lived there until his death in 1942.

Anne took only a high school degree and never left the farm. When her mother died in 1911, Anne and her father, then 66, took over all of the farm’s operations. Listings of the property in 1900, 1910, and 1920 censuses came with the designation of “general farm,” which meant that the Amis Farm did not engage in a specific or specialized type of agricultural production, such as dairying farms or tobacco farms.

In 1925, William H. Amis died and Anne Amis assumed ownership and operation of the farm. William Amis’s will said: “I will and devise to my daughter Annie McClain Amis, the real estate belonging to me and upon which now live, known as the old Amis home place, bounded on the East by Albert Lyons, on the West Wright Collins and others on the North by C.W. Rogers and the Beal place on the south by the Thurman place, containing about 125 acres.” He also willed that Anne receive all his personal estate. John was the recipient of an unspecified “other place” in this will.

Anne spent her life trying to preserve, and protect, the Amis Farm and property. She relished that the house became a landmark of Tennessee history. The first serious treatment of the house as a landmark came in the Homes and Gardens of Tennessee, a major book project undertaken by the Garden Study Club of Nashville and published in 1936. The club writer noted:

68 Goodspeed, Goodspeed History of Tennessee, 873.
70 “Funeral Services Held for J.C. Amis,” Rogersville Review, November 27, 1942.
71 Ibid.
72 “Mrs. Matilda C. Amis,” Knoxville Sentinel, March 25, 1911.
The dangers of life in that day dictated a sturdy stone house with walls eighteen inches thick and portholes instead of windows in the upper half-story. The heavy doors were made of double thickness, with outside panels running vertically and inside horizontally. The hinges and bolts, made for strength and protection, as well as for beauty, were wrought in the owner’s blacksmith shop. The window sills measure five and one-half inches on the exterior and eighteen inches on the interior with double sashes of small panes of glass. Each room had its own inclosed [sic] stairway leading to the upper floor.  

In the WPA Guide to Tennessee (1939), the writer noted the “little Amis Stone House” and related that “The 18-inch walls of field stone formerly had rifleports instead of windows in the upper half-story. In later years Amis’ daughter Mary said that she frequently wakened to hear Indians grinding their knives and tomahawks on her father’s grindstone. The log kitchen was formerly some distance from the house.” This latter comment is of considerable interest. The log building is not the kitchen—that was encased in the 1850 two-story wing. Was it perhaps the old Amis store/tavern at “some distance from the house”?  

John Amis died in 1942 and Anne became the sole occupant of the house, and made few if any changes to the farm, depending on hired labor to do the work. She opened the house to visitors regularly. An article titled “Ancient Amie House Has Lively, Picturesque History” in the September 12, 1948 issue of the Kingsport Times-News features Anne quite prominently as she guided the journalist, Anna Quillen, through the house. The article mentions many of fine family furnishings in the house at that time: “fine, delicately carved chairs,” a bookcase, a desk and secretary, the original ledgers, letters, and a mammoth tall case clock, with the works imported from France. In the years that followed, the local newspapers reported periodically about the house as a recognized historic landmark. In 1949, the Rogersville Review reported that Anne Amis brought the ledger books to town so a librarian from the Lawson McGhee Library in Knoxville could make microfilm copies. Amis commented that it was the first time ever the ledgers had left the house. In January 1950, the Kingsport Times featured the Amis House in a story penned by Mrs. Charles Schmacher of Rogersville, part of a history of early homes in Hawkins County that won Schumacher first prize in the United Daughters of the Confederacy’s old homes essay contest in 1949. Clearly by this date, the fact that Thomas Jefferson Amis was an avowed Unionist in the Civil War had been forgotten. Later in 1950, Vick Weals wrote in the Knoxville Journal that “Hundreds of antiquarians and amateur and professional historians have been attracted by the Amis home. Its durability and its architectural beauty, after almost 170 years, give additional clues to the character of the builder.” By the end of 1950, the state highway department had announced its plan to install a historical marker about the Amis House at the intersection of Burem Road and U.S. Highway 11W. The marker was one of four in Hawkins

75 Roberta Brandeau, ed., Homes and Gardens of Tennessee (Nashville: Garden Study Club of Nashville, 1936), 61.
County and among the first historical markers erected in the state following the Tennessee General Assembly’s decision in 1950 to have a historical markers program. Campbell Brown of the Tennessee Historical Commission explained in early 1951: “The plan was originated because too few persons, including Tennesseans, know enough about the interesting history of our state. It is often difficult for tourists to see all of Tennessee that they want to, simply because historical sites are not properly marked.” Brown added “We believe our endeavor will boost Tennessee’s fast-growing tourist industry to even greater heights.”\(^81\) The following year the Amis House was one of the Tennessee landmarks included in the state’s initial Tennessee Pilgrimage Week to historic homes and gardens, set for May 3-10, organized by the recently established Association for the Preservation of Tennessee Antiquities and endorsed as a statewide event by Governor Gordon Browning.\(^82\) The house remained part of the Pilgrimage for the rest of the decade and into the 1960s. Anne Amis hosted groups and visitors form that point forward on a regular basis. The Amis Farm was consistently included in regional accounts of important historic sites in Upper East Tennessee.\(^83\) In 1970, a group of 20 women teachers from the area came to tour historic landmarks, one of which was the Amis House. Anne Amis helped guide them through the house.\(^84\)

In June 1973, the National Park Service approved the nomination of the Amis Farm to the recently established National Register of Historic Places. Ellen Beasley of the Tennessee Historical Commission prepared the nomination, which was among the first properties in Tennessee to be listed in the National Register. Beasley nominated eight acres of the property, noting a period smokehouse, a log corn crib, and two barns “of a later date.” On the house, she commented: “It is an interesting stone and clapboard house exhibiting numerous additions and alterations on the surface. To properly document its history would require an extensive architectural study for this structure which has been adapted to the lives of six generations of the Amis family since its construction in the early 1780’s.” The house, she observed, is “one of the earliest examples of Tennessee architecture extant.”\(^85\)

Anne Amis, who had carefully taken care of the Amis Farm for decades, died at the house in 1974. Wendy and Jake Jacobs, the current owners, have reopened the house to visitors, established a highly regarded restaurant on the farm, and keep the grounds near the historic grist mill open to the public.

\(^{81}\) “County Markers With Data Are Being Erected,” Rogersville Review, February 1, 1951.
\(^{84}\) “Teachers Tour Landmarks,” Kingsport News, November 6, 1970.
Assessment of Amis Farm Landscape

The Amis Farm includes approximately 60 acres, which contains open fields, woods, historic road systems, a portion of Big Creek, two historic dwellings, a historic mill dam and associated structures partially in ruins, two large historic barns, a historic log corn crib, a historic smokehouse, and late twentieth century equipment shed, log residence, shop, and restaurant.
The Amis House is the farm’s centerpiece, centered on a hill, overlooking the landscape. The house has three phases of construction, the first construction in 1781-1782 consisted of a two-room first floor, which ran above a large stone basement, and had a half-story loft.

The 1781 original house is an example of Pennsylvania Dutch stonework built by stone mason Thomas Harlan. The original stone house was approximately 18 feet x 46 feet in size with a half story incorporated under the roof. The basement was a large workspace for the enslaved; it is full height and following the measurements of room 101 above. The walls of the stone portion of the house are 18 inches thick. The stone wall is categorized as uncoursed, meaning that the stones are laid in a random pattern without horizontal rows.

A 1933 depiction of what 1781 house may have looked like, from Homes and Gardens of Tennessee (1936)

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86 Information taken from article titled “Amis House: A Treasured Hawkins County Landmark” by Rodney Ferrell.
The dwelling took on its present appearance after a major expansion to two full stories c. 1850 along with the construction of a two-story kitchen/quarters building directly behind the dwelling.

Rooms 107-108 and the covered porch were part of the c. 1850 kitchen/quarters building.

The construction of a “hyphen” infill addition c.1975 placed interior toilets, a modern kitchen and connected the c. 1781/ c. 1850 main section with the c. 1850 two-story kitchen and quarters. That final building phase gives the dwelling its current interior plan.
The second phase of construction was an addition to the stone house c. 1850 and is consistent with the present-day dwelling. The second phase is wood frame construction with 4-inch walls. In this phase the half-story of the initial dwelling was extended to a full second story (rooms 201-203) along with a covered porch. The two-story kitchen/quarters wing (rooms 208, 209) was also constructed c. 1850. In c. 1975 rooms 204-207 were constructed as part of the “hyphen” connecting the two buildings.
The front (east) façade shows the blending of wood and frame elements in the dwelling’s construction. The wood posts have minimal carving and are painted white. Part of the first story porch is in-filled to create a small space that the family now uses as a tack/utility room.

It may be a space that Thomas J. Amis created to serve as the post office once he was named as a local postmaster c. 1880.

The first-floor porch is covered by the second-floor porch which is covered by the main roof. The stone wall of the first floor has two doors, both historic and probably from the nineteenth century. There is a single window with a replacement six-over-six grille pattern.
The second floor is wood frame covered by wood plank siding painted white. The second floor is wood framed finished with wood plank siding painted white. There is one window with six over six grilles and one louvred roof vent in the gabled end.

There are two wooden doors and two windows with six over six grille patterns in the front second floor wall. The second-floor porch has no railing but wood frame knee wall approximately 36 inches high finished with wood plank siding painted white. The porch deck and steps are painted gray.

There are 7 wood posts on the second-floor porch, painted white. The ends of the porch are enclosed with wood frame walls finished with wood plank siding painted white. The roof is covered in silver metal roofing and the stone chimney is off-centered.
The south elevation displays three phases of construction as the end and basement of the 1781 stone house has been wrapped around by the c. 1850 frame addition. The six-over-six windows are historic, probably c. 1850. The ventilation grille is c. 1975. The covered entrance over the basement is c. 1920; the basement doors are c. 1920. French double doors, installed c. 1975, are part of the hyphen addition that connected the kitchen/quarters wing to the house. The porch of the kitchen wing has six wood posts with minimal decoration and 36 inch railing all painted white. The porch deck is painted gray. The wall of the porch is finished with wood plank siding painted white. The roof is covered with silver metal roofing and the brick chimney of the kitchen is visible.
The west (rear) elevation shows the two different construction periods of c. 1781 and c. 1850, and changes made when the c. 1975 hyphen was constructed, linking the buildings. The rear of the c. 1781 house has a door installed c. 1975 to allow for access to the modern kitchen while the kitchen/quarters wing has a paired modern window on the second floor of the hyphen.

The foundation is stone to match the 1781 house. The brick chimneys are visible and the roof is covered with metal. The stone veneer at the rear corner was installed c. 1990.
The north elevation clearly shows the cantilever effect of the c. 1850 expansion, where the new frame section rests on top of the historic thick-wall stone dwelling. The insert stone veneer c. 1990 is also clearly visible as the small rectangular 6-light fixed window installed at that time.

**Interior features: Room 101 (c. 1781-1782, c. 1990)**

When Thomas Amis and his family lived here in the 1780s, it is quite likely that this large room, with a boxed staircase that allowed direct interior access to the half-story loft and the full basement, the family’s residence. The boxed staircase and the original fireplace remains, as do c. 1890 floors and mantel.
Room 101

Room 101, with plaster removed from wall

Room 101: Boxed staircase with doors to loft (now second floor) and basement

Original entrance doors with historic hardware
Room 102 is likely the c. 1781 tavern/store. It is literally a “step down” from Room 101 with the original interior access coming through three steps down or by the two exterior doors.

The image on the left shows the flight of steps leading from Room 102 into the dwelling (Room 101). It also shows the alignment with the boxed staircase.
Mantel (probably c. 1890) in Room 102

Liz McLaurin of the Land Trust for Tennessee gives perspective to this overview of Room 102

Steep narrow stairs leading to loft above Room 102
When Amis family decided to update and expand the dwelling c. 1850 they added above the stone house two large bedrooms and a much smaller room, really no more than a stoop, where the boxed staircase allowed access to the second floor and then a second staircase in that same area allowed staircase to an attic created by the gable roof of the second floor.

These two images show Room 201 from the vantage point of Room 202. The photo on the left also shows one of the original doors that led onto the covered porch.
Rooms 208-209 were initially low ceiling rooms probably used as quarters for the single Amis female slave known to have resided with the family in the 1860 census. After emancipation the rooms were used, according to family tradition by African American domestic workers Fanny Miller and her child. In the 20th century, family members used the rooms. In the 1990s the owners restored them as guest rooms.

Of particular note is Fanny Miller’s room (#209) which has an extremely steep staircase that allows access to the space that would have included the kitchen during the years she worked for the family in the late 19th century.

This flight of steps connects the hyphen to the second-floor stoop of the c. 1791 house and thus provides access to Rooms 208-209 (taken from the entrance to Room 208).
Jake and Wendy Jacobs discuss Native American history with Liz McLaurin in Room 208.

Room 209
Room 209. There is no fireplace and you can see the steepness of the steps leading to the first floor.

**Basement**

The basement is a large space that would have been integral to the operation of the dwelling in its first two generations. We have reserved further study of the space. An archaeological investigation of the ground floor may have considerable potential to tell us more about the room’s function for those who occupied the space throughout the day.
Preservation Considerations

The main house is in very good condition considering that the first level of the home is almost 240 years old and the addition is just over 171 years old (figures 1-4). The owners have kept it well maintained over the years and much of the home has been left in its original state. An initial examination of the home revealed weathered paint with minor damage around the gable end vents. A gutter has been added to drain the water away from the foundation. Other than normal wear and tear from being exposed to the elements, the posts and woodwork on the upper and lower porch are in good condition. The stonework has been kept up, however there are spots where the mortar needs to be repaired. An HVAC system has been installed which will aid in maintaining an even temperature within the home.

The interior of the home is in excellent condition. Most of the floors are original and well maintained. The front, rear, and side exterior doors have been updated but the rest of the original doors are in place and are still operable. There are shallow sags in some of the upstairs floors, walls, and ceilings, but nothing to be concerned about. Sags, cups, and minor twists are common when using planking.

There are a few immediate concerns regarding the main house. We recommend the removal of foliage away from the building. Since our visit in November the vines on the south side have already been removed.

What was left behind is a good example of how devastating vines can be to mortar. An immediate step would be to add mortar where it is missing from the damage caused by the vine and remove remaining vines. Keep all foliage away from building. Trees or bushes touching or rubbing against siding or masonry can cause significant damage over time if left untrimmed.

The bushes on the north side of the ell should be removed and replanted away from the building. The roots can cause severe damage to the foundation (figure 8). The flower garden by the front porch should be moved out away from the posts for the same reason. The gutter system is keeping the water away from the foundation. Retouch caulking on siding, scrape, and paint exterior. Caulking must be completely removed prior to caulking seam. Caulking a joint over dried/damaged caulking will cause more leaks and can create even more damage. Replace or repair what looks like a broken piece of siding on the north gable end vent.
The Family Cemetery, Historic Barns and Cribs

The Amis Cemetery: Brief Description, History, and Assessment

The family cemetery is a very significant component of the Amis Farm landscape, as it dates at least 1784, with the burial of Amis’s first wife, Alice Mary Gale Amis who died on November 24, 1784. Generations of family members are buried here plus it has several small fieldstone markers that probably denote the burial of enslaved workers from the farm.

The cemetery is rectangular in shape, measuring roughly one hundred feet long and fifty-five feet wide and divided generally into two sections. The southern section are the burials of Thomas Amis and later generations of the family. His second wife, Lucy Haynes Amis (died 1818), and the farm’s next male owner, Hayes Amis (died 1848) are also buried here.
The northern section is where numerous burial depressions and fieldstones are found, indicating that this area may have been the burial site of some of the family’s enslaved persons or, perhaps, later white laborers at the Amis Mill. It slopes downhill, another indication that this section was on the “margins” of the family burials. A wooden, split-rail fence, c. 1990, surrounds the perimeter of the cemetery. There are a few mature trees located towards the middle of the cemetery, which contributes to the sense that the cemetery has two distinct sections.

Within the cemetery are several different types of headstones and tombstones: small, triangular markers with no inscriptions, late nineteenth and twentieth century tablet markers, and modern, slot-in-base, marble headstones of varying shapes. The cemetery as a site is in good condition, but several markers require repair. Several stones are replacement, memorial grave markers erected in the twentieth century; the gravesites of Thomas Amis, Alice Mary Gale Amis, Lucy Haynes Amis have these markers. The location of their original markers is unknown. Recent burials include John Carl Amis, Jr. (died 1987) and Gemae McCormick Amis (died 2009).
Preservation Assessment
The site visits for the Amis Cemetery took place during the winter and early spring. As such, determining the current state of vegetation in the cemetery was not possible. However, upkeep indicates that the Amis Cemetery is well kept and receives consistent, and careful, landscaping attention.

To keep the cemetery and its valuable markers in good condition, we offer the following recommendations:

- Be cautious of the damage to cemetery markers from mowers and weed trimmers. Keep these machines roughly one foot/two feet away from a historic marker. The remaining distance should be cut using a hand powered tool, such as large scissors or shears.
- Continue to treat broken tombstones as you have, matching the broken pieces of the tombstone together and laying them flat on the ground. This ensures that, whenever the owner is ready to repair the cemetery, the pieces are all together. When, and if, the owners are ready to begin the next stage of repairs to broken or damaged markers, they should contact the historic cemetery specialist at the Tennessee Historical Commission.
- Grave depressions are a valuable part of a cemetery’s landscape. In many cases, grave depressions are all that remains to mark a burial plot. Grave depressions present a difficult preservation dilemma. One the one hand, grave depressions can create unstable terrain and lead to possible injuries. However, by filling in grave depressions, all records of a burial plot are erased. It is recommended that grave depressions are not filled with dirt. If the depressions get too steep or severe, the owner could rope the grave depression off. Alternatively, the owner could cover the grave depression with a thin layer of mulch. This marks the depression as different from the surrounding landscape, thus giving it visibility and reducing the upkeep associated with trimming or mowing the grass within the depression.
- When cleaning biological growth from markers, use approved cleaning methods—warm water and soap—rather than the harsh treatments of pressure washers and commercial cleaning solutions. Both methods can strip the protective layers off a headstone, which further contributes to its deterioration.

The owners could consider first hosting a cemetery cleaning workshop, which the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation could supervise and provide expertise. Amis Farm could advertise the workshop through the restaurant on property and through local advertisement/community.
channels. Community service groups, like the Scouts BSA, or community institutions, like local youth groups or high school clubs, are ideal candidates for cemetery cleaning workshops. Because of the small size of the Amis Cemetery, it should not take a large group long to completely clean the cemetery. Hosting an event like this not only allows the Amis Farm access to motivated volunteer labor, but also encourages community bonding and interaction with the site.

Historic agricultural outbuildings and barns behind and to the north of the dwelling not only document the evolving built environment of the farm, they also add significantly to the sense of time and place conveyed by the property today.

In the foreground of the image above are two early twentieth century buildings, a board and batten shed metal roof chicken coop (c. 1920) and a metal gable roof board and batten shed (c. 1920). To the south of the dwelling is a c. 1950 board and batten wood shed that has been adapted to multiple uses.

To the north of these buildings is the oldest farm building, a c. 1800 log crib. The corn crib is a rectangular half-dovetailed notched log building, used for corn storage initially, that later was adapted into a general storage building. It needs permanent stabilization as the following images show. We do not recommend the removal of the gable roof and posts since they date c. 1900, and help to document the evolution of agricultural practices at the farm.
Serving as a transition area between the domestic setting of the house and various outbuildings, and located along the Amis Road opposite of the family cemetery, is a series of mid to late twentieth century buildings. The owners built the log residence as a guest house c. 2000 from logs of older historic buildings in the area. This building’s future could remain as a guest house but it could also serve as a visitor center/museum for the dwelling or as a permanent residence for a park ranger or historic site manager.
Adjacent to the log cabin is a mid to late twentieth century machine shed/ garage and shop/storage building. There is a livestock lot directly behind these buildings.

The historic barns of the property date late nineteenth century, with various changes made during the twentieth century as agricultural production at the farm changed. They serve as good representative examples of multi-purpose barns found on East Tennessee farms in the early twentieth century. The three-bay barn is mostly being used for storage and the current owners have their horses in the horse barn. The exterior of both barns shows significant weather damage which is not uncommon due to their age and for barns that have not been painted. There are certain places where the wood has become so dried out that it splits and it is falling away from the nail, but the few spots that were found were on the ends of longer pieces and unlikely to fall off any time soon. There is no significant insect damage that could cause structural issues and the exterior of both barns have well kept. The building will remain in good condition as long as basic rules of good farm building management are followed. Keep a good roof on the barns to avoid water damage. Keep the tall grass off the building to alleviate rotting of the lower walls and posts. Storage of hay in either building should be kept to a minimum to reduce both the weight and the presence of rodents and other varmints which can cause significant structural damage.
The three-bay barn features an intricate ventilation grill for the hay loft. This interesting building has some hand-hewn logs used in its construction and the center section rests on a stone pier foundation. The two flanking bays were probably installed c. 1910-1920 to provide more storage space for animals and equipment.

The horse barn has a laid continuous stone foundation and dates to a single building period. Adjacent to the property’s primary livestock barns is a small livestock barn and another small storage barn. The small livestock barn is mid-twentieth century. The small storage barn has log walls, suggesting a nineteenth century date but clearly the building has been altered over time with a board and batten gable end from the twentieth century.
This cluster of farm buildings from c. 1890 to 1920 are an integral part of the story of the Amis Farm. We do not recommend their removal in the future in order to focus on a pre-Civil War story line. One of the most significant facts of the farm is that one extended family has operated the property since 1781-1782—almost 240 years. These different buildings constructed after 1890 help to tell the story of change and continuity on this historic family farm.

Allegedly the raised rectangle now used for wedding or other ceremonies is the site of the Amis store. If that association can be verified, this property would have significant potential for archaeological investigation. The site is located adjacent to a late eighteenth century historic road that passes along the edge of the farm complex. The site and road together help to convey the image of Thomas Amis as a frontier trader. The location makes sense since the building stands at the junction of the public road and the private access road to the Amis House.

High swales help to define the historic public road that began at the Mill on Big Creek, passed by the Amis Farm buildings and continued to Rogersville.
The mill is the farm’s best-known feature. The mill house ruins, grounds, and the dam are the setting for family events, such as wedding photographs to picnics on the riverbank between the Bear Hollow Road and Big Creek. From the spring to the fall the privately-owned area becomes informal public space. The dam, first built in the 1780s, but expanded and rebuilt since that time, is a marvel of stone craftsmanship. Erecting the dam counted on the hands and expertise of enslaved and white laborers and the mill served as the farm’s most important economic engine.

The owners contracted for a structural engineering report of the Big Creek Dam, which estimated the costs of repairs at $200,000. The dam is on private property but has served as a water source for the City of Rogersville for decades.
The Miller House (Big Creek Visitor Center)

The Miller’s House, built c. 1860, was a two-story log building based on a hall-parlor plan on the first floor and a single open loft on the second floor. This image from the Rogersville Review in 2016 shows the house as it was being renovated into the Big Creek Visitor Center.

The Miller House was built c. 1860 for the mill manager and was remodeled in 2016. The 2016 renovation replaced damaged sub facia, a new roof, new windows, replaced the siding, and repaired the front porch. Key exterior features such as the brick chimney and a full basement entrance were retained. Interior changes were minor with original floors, wood paneling, mantels, and boxed staircase extant. The addition on the rear of the house was added to incorporate male and female restrooms available to visitors. A large, covered, screened deck with countertop space was also added to the rear of the home.

Description and Analysis

88 “Grand Opening of Big Creek Visitor’s Center Set for April,” Rogersville Review, March 2, 2016.
The one and a half story house with a gabled roof covered with metal roofing. The house is wood framed finished with wood plank siding, painted white. There is a masonry fireplace located on the right side of the house. The front of the house has a one story covered porch four wood posts painted white with no railing. Decorative filigree wood pieces flank the posts. The porch has a low pitched shed roof covered with metal roofing.

The three-bay façade has a central entry flanked by two six over six double-hung windows. Modern black shutters flank the first floor windows. The second floor contains one central six-over-six, double-hung window flanked by modern black shutters.

The south elevation side has a gable end with one window with six over six grilles and black shutters on the first floor and two small modern four-light fixed windows inserted in the second floor. The centered original brick chimney dominates the north elevation.

The forementioned large screened porch and modern restrooms additions covers the original first floor appearance of the rear of the house. The original rear wall contains a door and a window with six over six grills. The right side of the house possesses a masonry chimney which is flanked by two small windows on the second floor. An accessible ramp has been installed on the south elevation, allowing for access to the rear deck and then the interior of the visitor center.

The interior features an intact hall and parlor plan, with the parlor defined by the mantel and fireplace while a thin partition wall separates the first floor into the small hall space. A boxed staircase leads to the second floor loft. There is no elevator in the building.
Due to its recent restoration, the Miller’s House has few preservation concerns. Foliage against the house causing unnecessary moisture build-up and drainage issues should be addressed. Decorative bushes should come away from the home or be trimmed down, so they are not touching the siding. It is better to remove and replant the bushes at least a few feet from the home to avoid the roots causing problems with the stone foundation. The historic access to the basement or crawlspace should be kept clear and free of any weeds, leaves, or obstacles to allow for proper drainage. Because the home does not have an HVAC system make sure to vent the windows during the hot summer months to allow fresh air into the home to help avoid interior mold. If windows are opened, some type of screen should be installed on the windows to prevent insects from entering and nesting in the walls.

Big Creek Visitor Center Exhibit Assessment and Recommendations

The informative exhibits at the Amis Visitor Center currently tell the story of Thomas Amis, the Revolutionary era, and the Amis property in the first floor parlor. The first floor hall interprets Cherokee history, and the second floor focuses more on the Civil War in Hawkins County and the Battle of Big Creek continues to interpret Thomas Amis and the property.
Interpretive themes need to focus more on the story of the Amis Farm, from the Revolutionary era to its transformation after the Civil War. To fully utilize the history of the property and improve the visitor experience, we make the following recommendations.

- Signage about the building and its exhibits need to be consistent and uniform. As the image above shows, there are three different designs confronting visitors as they approach the entrance.

- Emphasize the interpretive theme of how the Amis Farm is an extant Revolutionary-era frontier landscape and how this first settlement place transformed over the nineteenth century just as the state did itself. Few places in Tennessee equal the deep chronological significance of the Amis Farm

- Emphasize Thomas Amis as a Revolutionary leader in both North Carolina and Tennessee. Place his career in context with better known Tennesseans such as John Sevier.

- Emphasize the peoples of the Amis Farm, not only his wives and children but the over 30 enslaved people who built the plantation. Having the names of the enslaved from the dispersal of the Thomas Amis estate is invaluable and should be used to its maximum.

- Emphasize the Cherokee history of the area, especially how it related to Amis’ store and its trade

- Emphasize Amis Farm as a frontier crossroads, with the many visitors and traders who passed this way. So many famous Tennesseans touched this property—used that fact to highlight the farm’s importance

- Emphasize the “failed” Natchez trading venture of 1786 since it shows Amis’ vision for his trade, the international nature of the frontier, and had long-term diplomatic impact for the new American nation. Extensive federal records from the State Department will be invaluable

- Emphasize the farm’s significant Civil War story. Much like his grandfather, Thomas Jefferson Amis was a died-hard patriot, loyal to the United States even those pressured to join the Confederate cause. The Southern Claims Commission records are invaluable resources. Plus there is the fact that T.J. Amis lessened significantly, if not eliminated, the farm’s dependency on slavery but kept a hired domestic worker, Fanny Miller, employed and living on the farm after the Civil War. This big story of the Civil War and Reconstruction should be the focus of the second floor exhibit.

- Emphasize the long story of the mill, from the beginning to the end of the century. The mill ruins and dam are just outside of the visitor center and will be the historic site most visited by patrons of the visitor center
To better convey these themes, we recommend that the counters on the wall on the first floor be removed or reconfigured to hold objects while the key interpretive messages be incorporated into wall-mounted exhibit panels.

The envisioned ten panels of the parlor room would allow for interpretation of the primary themes outlined above as well as other pertinent, interesting information taken from the history of the property. The already installed track lighting should be kept in place, but the small television for video programming could be relocated above the fireplace or removed from the interpretive space. The bench should remain as it provides visitors a place to rest or read any interpretive material before continuing on throughout the property.
The Hall room is small, and thus presents several challenges to the visitor experience. The current focus on Cherokee history is important, since the Cherokees occupied the area long before Thomas Amis and Cherokees maintained trading relationships. The exhibit would continue into the side room. But that story line does not need five panels. We suggest that the story of the Natchez venture or the trade items sold through the store could be additional points of emphasis. The piano serves no purpose to the exhibits and could be removed. This space may be the best place to tell the story of the Miller’s House and the importance of the mill in the mid-nineteenth century. The historic artifacts should be incorporated into the exhibits or removed. Additionally, the removal of the door connecting the main room with the secondary room is recommended. Removing the door will allow the visitor to access the secondary room easier and assists in the flow of preservation.

The second floor loft space should be reserved for the property’s Civil War story, with a focus on the Unionist activities of Thomas Jefferson Amis. We recommend that the owners work with the interpretive staff at the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area (www.tncivilwar.org) for funding and assistance in developing the exhibits about the Civil War and Reconstruction era. The Heritage Area can also assist in the development of a video overview of the second floor exhibits, which needs to be made since this space is not accessible to all visitors.

On the covered rear porch, we recommend one to two exhibit panels that would provide an overview history of the farm. Many visitors may only see these two panels as they use restrooms or attend events on the “back porch.” The panels would be a crucial tool in allowing the property to always tell its story.
The modern Amis Mill restaurant fits the landscape and setting of the Amis Farm. The restaurant is well regarded in the community. The owners use this space for interpretive information about the farm and the many people who passed through the property over the last 240 years.

Adjacent historic sites
At the entrance of the Amis Farm, at the intersection of Burem Road and Bear Hollow Road, the Tennessee Civil War Sesquicentennial Commission installed an interpretive marker about the Battle of Big Creek. This marker system is very popular for Civil War tourists, and attracts people to the property.
Site Map by Robert Kurtz, Mandy Hamilton, Ethan Holde
### Preservation Timetable: Non-Historic Buildings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building Type</th>
<th>0-1 Year (Annually)</th>
<th>1-5 Years</th>
<th>5-10 Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cabin</td>
<td>(Clear foliage)</td>
<td>Check roof and windows for leaks; check for water damage below eaves (if damage is noticeable add gutters)</td>
<td>Inspect foundation; check for dried out screw gaskets; check windows for moisture issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garage</td>
<td>(Clear foliage)</td>
<td>Check for rodents and rotten or loose boards; check for leaks</td>
<td>Check for stability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shed 1</td>
<td>(Clear foliage)</td>
<td>Check for rodents and rotten or loose boards; check for leaks</td>
<td>Check for stability of posts and structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shed 2</td>
<td>(Clear foliage)</td>
<td>Check for rodents and rotten or loose boards; check for leaks</td>
<td>Check for stability of posts and structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shed 3</td>
<td>Clear foliage from fence</td>
<td>Check for rodents and rotten or loose boards</td>
<td>Check for stability of posts and structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>(Clear foliage and debris). Check roof for leaks</td>
<td>Check for moisture damage around exhaust vents</td>
<td>Check foundation, porch, and steps for rot, rodents, and debris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deck</td>
<td>Clear foliage and check for rodents under deck</td>
<td></td>
<td>Check posts for rot and stability</td>
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</table>

### Preservation Timetable: Historic Buildings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building Type</th>
<th>0-1 Year (Annually)</th>
<th>1-5 Years</th>
<th>5-10 Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Three-Bay barn</td>
<td>Clear clutter and debris from inside; cut down weeds along east wall</td>
<td>Check for leaks on roof; check for loose boards</td>
<td>Check for damaged or rotted posts and structural damage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horse Barn</td>
<td>Keep interior clean of manure and old straw;</td>
<td>Check for leaks on roof; check for loose boards</td>
<td>Check for damaged or rotted posts and structural damage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Barn</td>
<td>Pull old vines off of gable end; keep weeds cut away from building</td>
<td></td>
<td>Check for rotted posts and structural damage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stable</td>
<td>Cut away all foliage from building; check for structural damage;</td>
<td></td>
<td>Check roof for leaks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Maintenance Tasks</td>
<td>Additional Details</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corn Crib</td>
<td>Raise structure and repair damaged posts; keep foliage clear of building</td>
<td>Repair any rotten or broken boards; check roof for leaks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coop</td>
<td>Remove small tree; (keep foliage clear from around building)</td>
<td>Check roof and building for stability and signs of rot</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miller (White) House</td>
<td>(Check for leaks in roof; check for dried out tar; make sure gutters are free of debris; keep crawlspace access free of debris); relocate foliage around building; vent building in summer</td>
<td>Check for moisture damage around windows; check for other signs of moisture damage like twisted planking and loose nails</td>
<td>Check foundation for signs of settling or damage paying special attention to the east wall where the addition was added.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amis House</td>
<td>Repair gaps in ridge cap and (check for leaking or gaps in roof; replace dried out tar around chimney; keep gutters free of debris); relocate foliage that is too close to house;</td>
<td>Check for moisture damage around windows and chimney; check for cracks in walls and loose nails.</td>
<td>Check foundation for cracks and missing mortar; Check all stonework for signs of shifting or settling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cemetery</td>
<td>(Clear grounds of leaves and debris; make sure placement of small headstones are in proper locations; raise small headstones above ground); repair damaged headstones</td>
<td>Check trees for damage; ensure rodents are not living in cemetery</td>
<td>Check repaired headstones for settling; check to make sure small headstones are not sinking.</td>
</tr>
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THOMAS AMIS HISTORIC SITE
POTENTIAL BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES
IN SUPPORT OF SUSTAINABILITY

Steph McDougal, Graduate Research Assistant

The Thomas Amis Historic Site is located several miles outside the town of Rogersville in Hawkins County, Tennessee. The Site is owned by Wendy and Dennis “Jake” Jacobs; Mrs. Jacobs is a descendant of Thomas Amis, a captain in the American Revolutionary War who established a settlement in Eastern Tennessee on 1,000 acres of land granted to him in recognition of his military service. Amis’ own stone house, which served as an inn for travelers, is still in use as a residence. The settlement included a trading post and a gristmill along the banks of Big Creek, which later would be the site of a Civil War battle.

This analysis of potential business opportunities for the Thomas Amis Historic Site was conducted in order to determine how the Thomas Amis Historic Site might be utilized to its best advantage, to serve both the public and the property owners, now and into the future. It was prepared under the supervision of Dr. Carroll Van West, director of the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation, by Steph McDougal, a PhD student and graduate research assistant in the Public History program at Middle Tennessee State University.

For brevity, the Thomas Amis Historic Site will be referred to as “the Site” or “TAHS” throughout this report.

Methodology
The Site, with a variety of historic buildings and open spaces, lends itself to a number of possible opportunities for income, recreation, and heritage tourism. In order to present a comprehensive analysis of these opportunities, we completed the following activities.

1. **Identify the features of the Site.** For each of the buildings, structures, and areas on the site, we have briefly discussed how these are currently being used. We have also identified any known challenges or issues.

2. **Describe the business as it exists today, along with recommendations for expanding the existing business.** Jake and Wendy Jacobs, both in their 70s, currently manage the Amis Mill Eatery restaurant and the Thomas Amis Historic Site. We have considered how the business can be expanded without increasing the Jacobses’ personal time commitment.

3. **Describe the target market area.** The Site is located in Hawkins County and is adjacent to Hancock County in Upper Appalachia. This area was previously part of North Carolina and the Site is, as the crow flies, approximately 60 miles from Asheville (NC) and about 10 miles from Tennessee’s northern border with Virginia.

4. **Identify existing heritage tourism organizations and activities in the area.** In addition to local residents, heritage tourists are potential customers for TAHS. We have
investigated ongoing programs with which TAHS might coordinate its own activities, as well as potential partners with whom the Site might become involved.

5. **Identify the competition.** For each of the potential uses, we have investigated other sites or venues that currently offer the same products/services. We used this information to identify gaps in the market that TAHS might fill.

6. **Define the value proposition.** A value proposition is the promise that the product or service will deliver. In this case, we have considered possible value propositions for the Site as a whole, as well as for individual components of the site.

7. **Provide recommendations for next steps.** This analysis of potential business opportunities provides a starting point for discussion. If any of the ideas presented here are of interest, we strongly recommend that the property owners conduct market research to investigate the extent to which potential customers would support a product or service offer and the price they would be willing to pay. Information about market research, inexpensive approaches to conducting market research, and its use in decision-making can be found at the end of this document.

**Features of the Thomas Amis historic site**

The Thomas Amis Historic Site encompasses approximately 60 acres of land, with a cluster of buildings and structures near the intersection of local roadways.

The picturesque Thomas Amis Historic Site is located just outside of Rogersville, Tennessee, a small town in the northeastern corner of the state. It is convenient to U.S. Highway 11W, which connects Knoxville, Tennessee, and Bristol, Virginia. Bristol and Kingsport, Tennessee, are also located along its route.

![Approximate location of Thomas Amis Historic Site in Tennessee (Wikipedia)](image_url)
The 61-acre property is approximately 3.5 miles from the center of Rogersville and can be accessed from Burem Road, Bear Hollow Road, and Amis Road. Addresses associated with this property include 677 Burem Road (the residence) and 127 W. Bear Hollow Road (the restaurant). Steph McDougal made a site visit in August 2019 and had the opportunity to explore the walking trail between the eatery and the home, as well as the flat and clear, but unimproved, bank of the creek between the mill and the visitor center.

The Site includes the ruins of the mill, as well as several buildings: the ca. 1781 Thomas Amis House (listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973); a log building currently used as a restaurant; a small wood-frame house that contains the visitor’s center; and a log cabin that is offered for overnight rentals. Additional structures include a pavilion and a rustic arbor, which can be used for small weddings; several farm-related outbuildings, including a barn and corncrib; and a Blacksmith’s Cabin. The property also contains a cemetery and, as shown in Figure 3, open pasture/greenspace.
1781 THOMAS AMIS HOUSE

The original stone house is the residence of the property owners. It has been expanded incrementally over the approximately 240 years since it was built and now contains four bedrooms and three bathrooms within 2,534 square feet of living area. The front façade features an open second-story gallery over the front entryway, with an enclosed stairway providing access to the upper floor.

After “a year off,” owners Wendy and Jake Jacobs have made the home once again available for guided tours (by appointment) but note that it is not ADA accessible. Occasional open-house events feature house tours.

While this building functioned as an inn in the past, and the Thomas Amis Inn was established as a bed-and-breakfast accommodation in 2008, it does not function in that capacity today.

THE AMIS MILL EATERY RESTAURANT

The restaurant on the property is housed in a one-story, side-gabled log building with metal roof. The front porch offers seating for those waiting for a table. Inside, the visitor immediately enters a small interior dining area, behind which are located two single-user restrooms off a narrow hall, and a large open kitchen. A large deck provides at least half of the seating capacity, estimated at about 50–75 people. The building does not appear to be ADA accessible. Parking for approximately 20 cars is immediately outside. The restaurant was closed for several months in Fall 2019 but now is open again for lunch and dinner Wednesday–Saturday from 11:00 a.m.–9:00 p.m. and for lunch on Sunday from 11:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m. (per Facebook page; the Eatery website and menu give the closing time as 3:00 p.m.). A new menu features fewer Cajun-inspired dishes, according to posts by a restaurant employee on the Eatery’s Facebook page. They take reservations by phone and offer carry-out as well as table service.

BIG CREEK VISITOR CENTER

The Big Creek Visitor Center is located in a wood-framed house identified as previously having been the residence of tenant farmers. It was restored for this purpose in 2016. The original two-story house appears to be a center-hall plan, two rooms wide and one-room deep on each floor; a one-story rear addition (also two rooms) is extended with a large covered deck that overlooks the creek. The visitor center is supposed to be open from 9:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. every day except Sunday but was closed during those hours when we visited.

90 “Grand Opening of Amis Big Creek Visitors Center Set for April,” The Rogersville Review, March 2, 2016 (http://www.therogersvillereview.com/news/article_6c8dbcc8-e0a4-11e5-8bdc-1b9de8b1749c.html).
Inside, the Visitor Center provides interpretive displays that “tell the story of many of the famous figures who stopped at the Amis property, which was at the end of the Old Stage Road for a time.” A small parking area is located next to the building, with two portable toilets for people who are visiting the dam or fishing in the creek.

**PAVILION**

The Pavilion is a rustic, open-sided, partially screened structure which sits on the hill overlooking the dam. It has a concrete floor and a metal roof. We estimate that it might hold 50–75 people, depending on how it is set up. The Pavilion is used for weddings, receptions, and other events, with catering provided from the adjacent Eatery restaurant. Because access to the Pavilion is provided by a smooth paved driveway, with an open entry and (we believe) no steps, it seems to be accessible.

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GROUNDS

Between the eatery and the house/inn, the grounds include both a wooded area and a cleared and mowed grassy space. Several picnic tables are located in the woods, although the “Woodland Trail” does not seem to lead to them and we saw only faint paths.

(Left) The woodland trail is covered in several inches of shredded wood mulch; (right) a picnic table in the wooded area behind the eatery

A brush arbor on a wooden deck is located on relatively flat ground. This is used for wedding ceremonies. The arbor is flanked by flowering and colorful plants. A traditional cast-iron farmhouse dinner bell is mounted atop a wooden post, with a rope hanging down so that the bell can be rung.

MILL RUINS AND DAM

Stone and concrete steps lead from the restaurant down to the road. Across the road, the ruins of the old stone gristmill are located next to a low stone masonry dam, both constructed circa 1780, adjacent to the Visitor Center. The dam is in need of repairs, estimated at $150,000 by Kleinschmidt, the engineering firm that performed the condition assessment. The firm provided three recommended options, according to Jake Jacobs: “patch the cracks” that have formed in the
heel of the dam; “pour another small concrete dam behind it”; or “blow shotcrete on the upstream face to seal all the cracks and give protection” to the historic masonry.\footnote{Blake Lipton, “Repairs Needed at Amis Dam in Rogersville,” News Channel 11/WJHL, May 24, 2019 (https://www.wjhl.com/uncategorized/repairs-needed-for-amis-mill-dam-in-rogersville/).}

We are concerned about the potential adverse effects of all three alternatives on the historic stone masonry structure and recommend that a qualified preservation stonemason should be engaged to provide a second condition assessment and recommended approaches.

When historic dams begin to deteriorate, the cost to repair them is often very costly. Rather than being allowed to continue to deteriorate, which creates a public safety hazard, some dams are instead being removed. This restores natural river functions and has many positive effects on river ecosystems. Dam removal is an option that may be worth considering, especially since the property is privately owned and therefore not eligible for grant funding.

Before any of the above options are pursued, the dam should be preceded by thorough documentation for the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER). If a cofferdam is temporarily installed to redirect water during repairs or removal, newly visible portions of the structure should be adequately photographed, laser-scanned, measured, etc. before work begins. HAER is one of the National Park Service’s \textit{Heritage Documentation Programs}, along with the Historic American Building Survey (HABS) and the Historic American Landscape Survey (HALS). Documentation is permanently archived in the Library of Congress.

\section*{Cemetery}

A small burial ground is located on the grounds near the house. Several modern grave markers have been added to mark the believed resting places of Thomas Amis and several of his family members. Small, uninscribed stones appear to mark graves (possibly of enslaved people). This cemetery has not been fully surveyed or documented.

\section*{The Business}

The Thomas Amis Historic Site is owned by Wendy and Dennis “Jake” Jacobs; Wendy is a descendant of Thomas Amis. They purchased the property in 2008. Their business was incorporated with the State of Tennessee as “Thomas Amis Inn, Inc.” in 2008 and the name changed to “Thomas Amis, Inc.” in 2011, although Hawkins County still shows the property being owned by “Thomas Amis Inn Inc.”

Other active business entities at this address include “Mi Amis Hospitality” (a single-member LLC), established in 2018 at 127 W. Bear Hollow Road. The Creekside Cabin rental agreement references “Big Creek Cabins,” but that name does not appear to be used officially by the Jacobses or registered by them with the State of Tennessee; it was previously registered by someone in Knoxville and is no longer active.

Other business entities associated with the property, now inactive, included “Amis Mill’s Sweet Tooth Catering,” established in 2013, which became “Sweet Amis Catering, Inc.” in 2014 and

The “Thomas Amis Foundation” was established with the State in 2011 but has not been registered with the Internal Revenue Service or determined to be tax-exempt under the regulation of that agency.

The Jacobses’ various properties show county property taxes paid interchangeably by Thomas Amis Inn Inc., Amis Mill Eatery Inc., and Mi Amis Hospitality LLC, as well as Mr. Jacobs. As a result, for the purposes of this report, we will consider all of these various entities as a single for-profit business operation.

### SOURCES OF INCOME

TAHS currently receives income from the following activities:

1. The Eatery Restaurant
2. House tours
3. Grounds tours
4. Festivals
5. Wedding/event rentals

We concur that these can and should continue. Additional income could be generated by expanding upon some of these product/service offers and creating a more structured approach to build awareness and attract potential customers, while reducing the personal workload for the property owners.

### ONLINE VISITOR INFORMATION

TAHS is currently represented online by two websites, “Thomas Amis 1744–1797” ([http://www.thomasamis.com/](http://www.thomasamis.com/)) and “Amis Mill Eatery” ([https://www.amismill.com](https://www.amismill.com)), with overlapping and duplicative coverage. These may be the visitor’s first impression of TAHS, and they should be updated with a more up-to-date design and streamlined content. While the property owners should still be prominently featured, we recommend shifting the focus to the potential visitor’s experience, so that they are not depending on or expecting the owners to be there and personally involved. This will allow the owners to reduce their time commitment as they grow older.

The “Thomas Amis 1744–1797” website home page invites visitors to “share this ancient house on the National Historic Register. Walk the Old Stage Road, view Amis Mill ruins on Big Creek, tour the grounds and experience the history.” The street address, but no phone number or email address, are provided on this page.

- **Events**: The current Christmas tour is promoted on the front page; no phone, email address, or ticket information is provided. The Events link on the home page top menu lists 2019 Events (a beekeeping workshop in March, a car show in August, and a
Colonial Christmas tour of the Amis Home in December) and Archived Events (the “1st Annual American Indian Festival” in 2016 and Sons of the American Revolution grave-marking ceremony in 2009, which included an Amis descendants reunion.

- **Tours:** This page directs potential visitors to call or visit the Amis Mill Eatery for tickets to the Amis House and the Ebbing and Flowing United Methodist Church. While the grounds are open to visitors without appointment, building tours require a previous arrangement and $10 admission per person.

- **News:** As for Events, the home page top menu provides a choice between 2019 News and Archived News. The current year’s page has no press releases, just a “Newspaper” link to a photo of *The Rogersville Review* newspaper with a photograph of a full-page article about the house. (The article is not readable.) Archived news coverage includes the same “Newspaper” link, as well as hyperlinks to articles from 1950 through 2012. The earlier articles are accessed as scanned PDF; more recent links to the *Johnson City Press* newspaper website are broken.

- **History** and “A Man of Substance”: Both of these pages provide biographical information about Thomas Amis; the text appears to be from different (unnamed) sources.

- **Media:** Photographs are prevented in a selection of albums that present the interior and exterior of the house and grounds in all four seasons. Construction at the Blacksmith’s Cabin, the dam and ruined mill, and the property owner’s family pets, livestock, and wildlife are also included. Several professionally produced videos present the history of the Amis House. Informal videos include an interview with Wendy and Jake Jacobs about the Amis cemetery and Mrs. Jacobs singing a song at the grave-marking ceremony.

The “Amis Mill Eatery” website home page includes a top menu as well as a “Contact” button and an “Information” drop-down for the menu and a PDF map of the grounds. A call to action at the bottom of the home page quotes Jake Jacobs: “Join us at the Historic Amis Grounds for Events, Great Food, Weddings, Tours and Our Visitor Center, all with wonderful views of our TN Mt’s.” In between, a promotion for the 2019 Christmas home tour appears above the Eatery’s hours and photos of The Eatery, Historic Dam, Pavilion, Arbor, Visitors Center, and Accommodations (Creekside Cabin). Text encouraging visitors to “Join us on Facebook” is not hyperlinked, and no other links to the Facebook page are present.

- **The Eatery:** This page includes the restaurant’s hours, another link to the menu (a slightly out-of-focus photograph, provided as a PDF; a new menu as of December 7, 2019, is provided on the Amis Mill Eatery Facebook page), a Google map, and more photos of The Eatery (front porch), The Eatery Pavilion, The Eatery Views (from the deck, looking down over the creek and dam), The Eatery—Clubs (showing the Thunderbird vintage car club with a note that “Clubs love to gather at the Amis Mill Estate”), and The Amis Mill Eatery (another view of the front porch).

- **Events:** This page includes a Google map, the 2019 Colonial Christmas Home Tour, as well as an October 2019 “American Indian Gathering at Big Creek.” This is the only place where this event appears.

- **History:** This third completely separate biography of Thomas Amis, written by Wendy Jacobs, includes a lithograph of Amis and a photo of the Amis Home, as well as a link to ThomasAmis.com, “Visit the Thomas Amis Website.”
• **Photos:** This menu item redirects to the ThomasAmis.com photo gallery.

• **Tours:** Detailed information about the Guided House Tour, Guided Estate Tour (grounds), along with admission fees and both a phone number and email address for reservations. This page also includes two top-level buttons: Contact and Grounds Map. Under the subheading “Nearby Attractions,” text encourages visitors to “Enjoy true Farm to Table fare at The Amis Mill Eatery!” even though this is the Eatery’s website. Photos of the Amis Home dining room and living room are accompanied by typical tour rules (no food or drink in the house, etc.)

• **Weddings:** Other than the Jake Jacobs quote at the bottom of every page on the Amis Mill Eatery website, this is the first mention of the use of this site as a wedding venue. This page includes photos depicting different wedding options with a contact phone number, but no other information (capacity, whether in-house catering is required, etc.) is provided.

These two websites for the house and restaurant should be reorganized and streamlined to eliminate duplicate information within each website, as well as between the two websites, and focus clearly on either the historic home/grounds tours and events OR the Eatery as restaurant and a wedding/party venue. A link to the other website could be provided in the top menus.

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**MORE CLOSELY ALIGN THE RESTAURANT WITH THE HISTORIC SITE**

Additional information and amenities at the Amis Mill Eatery restaurant could help guests develop a personal connection to the site and encourage them to visit on their own as well as bring friends and family members with them. (Everyone appreciates ideas for things to do with their out-of-town guests.) A few suggestions for extending the Historic Site experience into the restaurant include:

- Expand the paper copy of the menu to include historical information about the site, as well as promotional information about the House tour, self-guided walking tour, and upcoming festivals and other planned events.

- Create specials that are tied into seasonal themes, festivals, or events ongoing at the Site. For example, during a spring plant sale, the restaurant could feature a dish made with early plants, edible flowers, etc., all sourced from the local nurseries.

- Create a signature cookie that incorporates traditional ingredients or a historic recipe that is somehow linked to the Amis site, the local area, or historic events. (See [https://recipes.history.org/](https://recipes.history.org/) for ideas and recipes.) Make a small, fresh baked cookie a gift to each restaurant guest at the end of their meal (for example, using a quarter- or half-sized countertop convection oven). Sell larger versions of the same cookie (pre-made) by the dozen, and make sure that is listed on the menu. Include the signature cookie in boxed lunches for tour groups.

- In the future, develop a small gift shop inside the restaurant where visitors can buy cookies by the dozen, books about TAHS and related topics, Colonial cookbooks, postcards, etc. The gift shop can also serve as a hostess stand and cashier for the restaurant, so that someone is on hand to greet visitors when they arrive.

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**ATTRACT MORE TOURISTS**
Heritage tourism is an economic development generator for Hawkins County, bringing in $37.2 million annually, according to the previously cited 2017 report in the Kingsport Times News, and most of those tourists are visiting to see historic sites. The most recent edition of *A Future for the Past: A Comprehensive Plan for Historic Preservation in Tennessee, 2013–2018*, published by the Tennessee Historical Commission, noted that “heritage tourists spend almost twice as much as other travelers when on vacation” and encourages historic sites to work more closely with the State’s Department of Tourism.\(^3\) The museum field has also closely studied heritage tourism and offers a wealth of information and resources to help TAHS evaluate its programming and interpretation, if desired.

In lieu of a focused study of that nature, we have identified several opportunities that can be implemented right away. The goal for most of these recommendations is to automate as much of the business operation as possible and make it less dependent on the personal presence of the property owners.

**Establish Regular Annual Events**

The Site already has held several festivals. Committing to doing those annually, at about the same time each year, helps everyone plan for them: the Site managers, vendors and presenters, and guests. The Thomas Amis Foundation could be activated for these festivals, since they are serving a public charitable or educational purpose.

- **Heirloom seed savers, vegetable, and flower show/plant sale (Spring).** Local nurseries and growers, including Martin’s Greenhouses and Nursery and Lafollette & Sons Nursery, could have booths or tents with plants for sales; this helps the Site connect with the local community. The Northeast Tennessee Master Gardener Association also could sell plants and, with the University of Tennessee’s Hawkins County and Washington County extension offices could do demonstrations or present educational workshops. This could also tie into themes of local agriculture and the crops that were grown during the Colonial era. Northeastern Tennessee is in USDA Hardiness Zone 7, with mid-March being the start of the planting season and the best time for this event.

- **Ye Olde Colonial Gristmill Festival (Summer).** Revenue from this event would support the historically appropriate restoration of the dam and preservation of the mill ruins. Demonstrations by historic stonemasons, blacksmiths, timber framers, sawyers, millers, and others could celebrate the kinds of trades that were practiced at the Thomas Amis property during his lifetime. Projects executed by tradespeople during the festival could help to support the implementation of a master plan for the Site, while providing attendees with a stronger connection to TAHS when they return and view the finished project. Entertainment during the festival could include live music in the Appalachian tradition, falconry demonstrations (see here and scroll to the bottom of the page for a list of master falconers in East Tennessee), and reenactments. The festival should actively recognize and interpret the presence of enslaved people at the Amis site during the historical period; for example, Michael Twitty is a culinary historian and interpreter who

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presents the food traditions of enslaved Africans and African Americans during the 18th and 19th centuries. This festival could take place in June, after the school year ends.

- **Tennessee Family Archery Day (Fall).** Perhaps presented in cooperation with the Texas Wildlife Resources Agency’s [National Archery in the Schools](https://www.archeryintheschools.org) program, this festival could take place in mid-September, prior to the opening of deer season for bowhunters, and focus on archery as an individual and team sport for young people of all abilities. Archery is a fast-growing activity in many public schools, including Cherokee High School in Rogersville and in other nearby communities, due to the low cost to establish a program (currently about $3,200) and the potential for all students to participate, regardless of mental or physical ability. A family archery festival would showcase local high school archers, as well as give archery families a chance to compete in games and fun competitions, explore new products on display by vendors, and learn about the history of bowhunting during the Colonial era.

### Implement Three “Seasons” for Marketing Purposes

By dividing the Historic Site’s operations year into distinctive seasons, TAHS can focus its marketing on the announcement of those seasonal activities three times a year, in preparation for Spring (January–April), Summer (May–August), and Fall (September–December). This will streamline and minimize the Site’s marketing effort each year.

The three seasons each year can be linked by annual themes, if desired, and annual events could also share the same theme, for continuity’s sake. For example, TAHS might consider a theme like “Black Walnuts on the Farm.” Black walnut trees prefer to grow near creeks and rivers in Eastern Tennessee. Since Colonial times, black walnut has been prized for woodworking; it also can be used to make bows for hunting. The nut is edible and delicious, and the hulls were traditionally used to make a dark-brown dye. The Goschenhoppen Pennsylvania Dutch Folk Festival several years ago featured black walnuts as their annual theme, and black walnuts could easily be worked into all three of the annual festival ideas suggested above. A stand of young trees could also be planted somewhere on the farm, perhaps along the self-guided walking trail; they are safe for all livestock except horses and could eventually provide some nuts for use in the restaurant.

By identifying a theme and tying it to a seasonal slate of events and activities with expert speakers and presenters, TAHS gives previous visitors a reason to return and experience something new multiple times a year, every year. By promoting these events seasonally, the Site is able to offer a slate of events without making too many commitments more than a few months in advance, although preparation and planning would have to be ongoing year-round.

### Implement an Online Ticketing/Reservation System

This is absolutely the most important thing that needs to happen as soon as possible. At a time when information is readily accessible online, many people (especially younger people) do not want to have to make a phone call to learn if a particular day and time is available. Technology makes it easy to offer previously scheduled tours online for groups and/or individuals; allow attendees to buy tickets/make reservations; and add on food or merchandise options. People
without computer access or connectivity could still call the Eatery to make reservations, which staff could do for them using the same online system.

The online system could be used for tours, festivals, and other produced events, as well as for weddings and party rentals, to ensure that these activities do not overlap and to help potential guests make plans. TAHS cannot currently estimate how many people are interested in visiting or holding events at the Site but are unwilling to book anything if they cannot do it themselves.

**Create a Standard, Structured Tour for Groups**

Although the property owners can continue to make tours of the Amis House available by appointment, we highly recommend establishing a structured tour that can be offered on a regular schedule. This is much more likely to attract groups who are trying to plan an outing, because they will know what time the tour starts, how long it lasts, and what to expect. A regular, but not necessarily frequent, schedule would be best. Dates could be opened up on a monthly basis, six months in advance and reservations required within 30 days of the date, to ensure that the tour business is manageable for the property owners and can be tweaked until they find the schedule that best meets their needs.

Specifically, we recommend that TAHS:

- *Follow up with previous customers.* Use ticket-buyers’ contact information to send an automated thank-you email a few days after the tour is completed; ask for feedback and use that to improve the tour experience for guests. Provide an opportunity to sign up for emails to learn about future events.
- *Enable the House tour to be offered without the property owners’ presence.* Develop a standard tour/script so that a trained docent could lead the tours, without the owners being required to be there. This would also create additional jobs (albeit part-time). Limit the tour to downstairs “public” spaces, to protect the owners’ privacy. Develop movable interpretive signage that can be placed throughout the tour space prior to the tour and put away afterward. Use wireless security cameras that can be placed and turned on for the tour.
- *Make a business plan that includes tour groups.* Actively identify and promote to groups that are likely to be interested. Inexpensive email or USPS mail solicitations could begin by making them aware of the newly available dates (“Sign up now for Summer!”), perhaps on a semi-annual basis, as well as explaining the reservation/ticketing system and how the tours work, what they contain, etc.
- *Utilize the owners primarily for open houses and special tour events.* The owners will always be the best ambassadors to be present at open houses. Special tour events, led personally by Wendy and/or Jake Jacobs, could command a higher ticket price to justify their involvement. Those opportunities also should be somewhat limited, in order to keep them “exclusive.”

**Add a Boxed Lunch Option for Tour Groups**

The Amis Mill Eatery restaurant is currently open for lunch and dinner, and also offers catering services. A pre-ordered boxed-lunch option would appeal to tour groups and could increase restaurant revenue. Menu choices already on offer, such as chicken salad and pulled-pork
sandwiches paired with easy existing sides like cole slaw and pasta salad, or a Mill Wedge Salad (with a no-bacon option for vegetarians), plus a bottle of water could add an additional $8.00–10.00 per adult to the tour price. A more kid-friendly option could be offered for school groups.

The Pavilion could be used for this lunch option, with the boxed lunches set out on a table and drinks provided in a tub with ice. No table service would be necessary, and the setup and cleanup would be minimal.

Develop a Clearly Marked and Interpreted Walking Path for Self-Guided Tours

Although the TAHS website states that self-guided tours of the grounds are available, when we arrived at the site during our August 2019 visit, the Visitor Center was closed, and we could find no reference to a self-guided tour. We went to the Eatery for help and had to wait for the restaurant’s only server to return to the dining room from the deck so that we could ask about the self-guided tour. (Staff visible in the open kitchen did not acknowledge our presence and appeared to be having a heated exchange about automotive transmissions.) Once the server returned, we were simply given the illustrated map and told not to go to the House.

The map does not appear to be drawn to scale, and it was difficult to become and remain oriented while wandering. In addition, no wayfinding signage is available to point out the features marked on the map, and the only clear route is along the unpaved driveway, which leads to the House (that we were directed not to approach). No interpretive information is presented along the way to help the visitor understand what they are looking at.

![Figure 15. Grounds map (TAHS website)](image)

We have had a similar experience at small local historic sites and museums that lack interpretation and rely entirely on docents to verbally convey information to visitors. Many visitors, however, appreciate the opportunity to tour historic sites on their own and at their own pace. In addition, self-guided tours reduce the workload for historic site managers and eliminate the need for volunteer or paid docents.

Printed brochures, interpretive panels, and digital technology makes it possible for visitors to experience the rich history of a site on their own. Developing an accessible walking path, with periodic interpretive panels along the way to tell the story of the site and its occupants and
visitors, would appeal to both local residents who need to find activities for their visiting friends and family members, as well as visitors from other places.

**ATTRACT MORE LOCALS**

The purchase of an annual pass could encourage local residents to visit the Site by including free admission to tours and discounted admission to festivals. It is easier for local people to bring their friends and family to a site if they do not have to pay for their own admission every time. Offering a small but special gift, such as an enameled lapel pin that identifies them as a Thomas Amis Foundation member, and increasingly nicer gifts when they have renewed their membership for the fifth year and the tenth year, could serve to incentivize participation. Members could also receive exclusive invitations to closed special events, meet-and-greets with featured performers, and other benefits or amenities. Generally, making local people feel not just welcome, but also valued and special, will help to encourage their commitment to and sense of ownership and pride in the historic site.

**Target Market**

The Thomas Amis historic Site is located near Rogersville, Tennessee, in the “Tri-Cities” region of northeastern Tennessee near the state’s borders with Virginia and North Carolina.

Nearby cities in the Tri-Cities region include Rogersville, Kingsport, Johnson City, and Bristol (Tennessee), and Bristol, Virginia. The region includes Hawkins County, Sullivan County, Washington County, and Carter County in Tennessee. Bristol, Virginia, is included in Washington County, Tennessee, for statistical purposes by the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

**TARGET MARKET AREA**

Rogersville (2010 population: 4,420) is the primary market for this site. Beyond Rogersville, the secondary target market includes the rest of Hawkins County, Tennessee (total pop. 56,833), Hancock County, Tennessee (pop. 6,819). For this historic site, we estimate that most visitors will drive no more than an hour to TAHS; adjusting for the local terrain, that is likely to mean that they will be located within a 30-mile radius of TAHS, as shown below. Although Lee County, Virginia, is within this area, because Virginia has so much Colonial-era and Civil War history of its own, we believe that those residents are less likely to make the drive to TAHS for a tour, festival, or event.
We do not anticipate that TAHS will be in great demand as a destination wedding. However, because Rogersville offers two hotels (Comfort Inn and Suites, Quality Inn), out-of-town wedding guests have convenient lodging options. See the “Competition” section for more information about other wedding locations in the area.

**TARGET AUDIENCES**

Based on the offers identified above, we believe that the most likely audiences depend on the activity or event being offered.

**Local Residents**

People currently living in Hawkins and Hancock Counties are most likely to attend tours, festivals, weddings, and other events at TAHS. They are also most likely to visit the Amis Mill Eatery restaurant for a meal or to engage the Eatery to provide catering for an off-site event.

**Adult Clubs and Affinity Groups**

Historical societies, genealogy groups, and clubs looking for a place to visit are all potential visitors. Expanding some of the Site’s programming would make it more attractive to people other than history buffs; for example, if the grounds were to include butterfly gardens or a section of all native plants, that could draw more gardeners and families with young children (during the fall Monarch butterfly migration season). If the Site were to install a series of traveling exhibits in the Visitor Center, that might draw other people with varied interests; for example, an exhibit about colonial lacemaking could be very popular with craft guilds.

**K–12 Student Groups**

Student groups are most likely to visit TAHS as part of a field trip. Prospective customers in this category primarily include the Hawkins County public schools, as well as private and church schools and home-school parent support groups or co-operatives (“co-ops”). Home-schooling parents often turn to support groups or co-ops to organize group activities for their children.

In order to maximize the benefit to teachers and administrators, TAHS should make the field trip as easy and painless as possible, ensuring that program content meets applicable academic
standards. This can be accomplished by meeting in advance with teachers and tailoring tour content to their needs.

To contact scout troops and other local chapters of national organizations:

- Girl Scouts of Southern Appalachians Council, Johnson City Service Center
- Sequoya Council, Nolachuckey District, Boy Scouts of America
- Hawkins County Extension/4-H Office

Other heritage tourism organizations and activities

Currently, TAHS has the opportunity to partner with the following existing heritage tourism organizations and events in Hawkins and Hancock Counties.

- Hawkins County Archives
- Hawkins County Genealogical and Historical Society (website, Facebook page)
- Rogersville Heritage Association
- Hancock County Genealogical and Historical Society

Competition

For the purposes of this report, the “competition” includes other historic sites that offer tours, host events, and are available for party rentals and weddings.

### HISTORIC TOURS AND EVENTS

The Rogersville Heritage Association offers tours of the Tennessee Newspaper and Printing Museum and hosts the annual downtown Rogersville Heritage Days (October).

### WEDDINGS

Other wedding venues in the target market area include historic farms. Each of these offer a barn that can be used for both the ceremony and reception, or an outdoor ceremony can be combined with an indoor reception.

- Thomas Farm (Church Hill) offers wedding packages for 50, 100, or 150 guests. Initial contacts can be made via phone or the website.
- Stinnett Farm (1523 Burem Rd., Rogersville) does not have a website. It appears to be a relatively small venue, maybe for 50 guests according to a Google review.

In addition, the Allandale Mansion in Kingsport offers multiple venues for weddings and parties, including the Mansion, courtyard, Heron Dome gazebo, a barn, a covered pavilion with picnic tables, and the front lawn, all in a beautifully landscaped setting.

If comparing TAHS to these venues, we would be concerned about the appearance of the Pavilion as a reception space.
Value Proposition
Visitors to the Thomas Amis Historic Site will be able to learn something about Tennessee history, explore a unique Revolutionary era landscape, and enjoy a tasty meal.

Recommendations for next steps

VISITOR SERVICES
Update the Thomas Amis Historic Site website and the Amis Mill Eatery restaurant website to clearly delineate the different products and services on offer from each one.

Ensure that facilities, including the Visitor Center, are open during published hours of operation.

Do more to connect the restaurant to the historic site.

- Add historic information, tour information, event information, and the self-guided tour map to the printed menu.
- Add a gift shop to the restaurant so that visitors have a chance to purchase merchandise before they leave.
- Add a hostess/cashier station to the restaurant to serve restaurant guests and visitors to the gift shop.
- Consider developing restaurant specials and a signature cookie that reference historic ingredients, recipes, or events.

SITE FACILITIES/HISTORIC RESOURCES
Consider the development of disaster preparedness and recovery plans and heritage tourism/marketing plans.

Consider all options regarding the dam.

- Engage a qualified preservation stonemason with experience restoring historic dams to provide a second condition assessment of the Big Creek dam and recommendations for its repair using appropriate materials and techniques.
- Consult with experts to determine how a dam removal/river restoration initiative would work, potential risks and benefits, and costs of removal vs. doing nothing and allowing the dam to continue to deteriorate.
- Regardless of which option for the dam is selected, engage a qualified historic preservation professional to document it for the Historic American Engineering Record prior to any work being done.

Document the historic cemetery.

- Work with Dr. Carroll Van West to develop a plan for conducting historical/archival research to determine persons likely to have been buried there, as well as remote sensing
and archeological investigations of the known cemetery site and immediate surrounding area.

**EXPAND PROGRAMMING**

Make it easier for visitors to choose TAHS as a day trip for individuals or groups.

- Offer an annual pass
- Establish regular annual events in Spring, Summer, and Fall
- Implement three “seasons” (for marketing purposes) and annual themes
- Implement an online ticketing/reservation system
- Create a standard, structured tour for groups
- Add a boxed lunch option for tour groups
- Develop a clearly marked and interpreted walking path for self-guided tours