Built in the 1920s for schoolteachers Delta and Sadie Ford by relative and local farmer Byron Quarles, this house is an excellent surviving example of a middle-class farm home in what was once a rural part of Middle Tennessee. Though the home is the centerpiece of the property, the farm retains original farm buildings located behind the house, including the livestock barn and storeroom. The Fords (and later the Reed family) kept livestock and grew crops such as corn, wheat, tobacco, and sorghum. Like many farm homes, the house evolved to meet the needs of a 20th century family. After purchasing the house at auction in 1949, the Reed family modernized the kitchen at the rear, added a bedroom on the side, and added the garage. Despite these changes, the home retains many historic features that speak to the era in which it was originally built. These features include the intact chimneys, stone foundation, and original wood windows.

The Ford Family

The Fords were educators and farmers. On the 1920 census for Statesville village in Wilson County, Delta and Sadie were listed as public school teachers living on a rented farm. Soon afterward, the couple purchased this farmland and had the house constructed. The Fords witnessed many changes around the property, including the establishment of the park during the Great Depression and the Tennessee troop maneuvers that occurred during World War II. Sadie died in 1934, followed by Delta in 1945. The children, Delta Jr. and Mary Ellen, were cared for by Sadie’s great uncle, Byron Quarles, for several years before the home was sold to the Reed family in 1949. The Reed family lived in the house until 2018, when owner Ella Owen Major Reed died. Cedars of Lebanon State Park and the state of Tennessee acquired the 73-acre Ford House and Farm property in 2019.
Between 1942 and 1944, Middle Tennessee served as a training ground for young soldiers preparing to fight in WWII, due to the region’s resemblance to the terrain in Germany, France, and Belgium. The War Department chose Cumberland University in Lebanon, Tennessee, to be the headquarters for the Army ground forces, bringing about 850,000 troops to the area. Maneuvers ran down U.S. Route 231 (Murfreesboro Road) in front of the Ford House and Farm. The newly established Cedars of Lebanon Park served as a respite site for these soldiers, providing a location for recreation during their time in the area.

As the only remaining “pre-park” farm in the area, the Ford House witnessed incredible change that reshaped the landscape of southern Wilson County. The first major transformation occurred during the Great Depression with the creation of the Lebanon Cedar Forest Project (now Cedars of Lebanon State Park) across the road by the Works Progress Administration. This New Deal agency created work opportunities for unemployed Americans through the improvement and construction of public projects throughout the United States.

The Lebanon Cedar Forest Project began in 1933 when the government purchased the properties of 94 Wilson County families, moving them to better quality land for farming. As part of its reclamation of the land, the federal government sought to reforest it, establish a wildlife refuge, and provide a recreational center for the region’s people. The WPA hired some of the farmers from whom the land had been purchased to survey the land, build the park’s roads, install power lines, and construct park buildings. Facilities at the park included tennis and croquet courts, picnic grounds, athletic fields, a swimming pool, and a lodge for community events. The park opened to white patrons in 1937. The Tennessee Department of Conservation began managing the park in 1939.

Tennessee Maneuvers

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"Tennessee Army maneuvers, characterized as ‘a springboard to the battlefront’ for many of the units to be involved in the huge training program and soon thereafter to be engaged in actual combat against Axis forces. . . . The maneuver area will be a rough rectangle, immediately east of Nashville, approximately 75 miles wide and 125 miles long, with Lebanon as the center."

– Daily News Journal, Murfreesboro, TN
Jul 30, 1942

This exhibit is sponsored by the Center for Historic Preservation at Middle Tennessee State University in cooperation with Tennessee State Parks. The exhibit team included Savannah Knies and Meggan McCarthy. Special thanks to Sarah Geeslin.