

THE GEOGRAPHY OF SOMEWHERE:  
A TREATISE ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE  
ADPATED TO THE NORTH GEORGIA PIEDMONT

by

MELISSA COLE TUFTS

(Under the Direction of Eric Macdonald)

ABSTRACT

Rural counties in Northeast Georgia are experiencing growth and development that will change the character of these rural areas. Landscape architects can assist residents and developers in coming up with ways to design homesites that will help integrate new development and allow for farming to continue. This thesis examines the history of landscape architecture's relationship with rural design and explores the social, economic, environmental and historic aspects of Madison County, Georgia in order to devise some basic principles for new design in rural areas. Four homesteads have been used as case studies.

INDEX WORDS: Landscape architecture history, *genius loci*, rural design, Georgia history, Madison County, North Georgia piedmont, Andrew Jackson Downing, Samuel Mockbee

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## DEDICATION

In memory of Bobby Clements, Madison County farmer and friend

1943-2008

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## **CHAPTER 1: Introduction**

Since 1979, I have lived on farms in the counties surrounding Athens/Clarke County, and have watched as growth and development transformed their traditional agricultural societies. Gone are the dairies and peach orchards that dominated Morgan and Oconee Counties as recently as the 1980s. Oglethorpe County, whose population had been in decline for almost a century, began to experience growth from sprawl along Highway 78. Large tracts of timber land that were owned by national corporations were sold and divided as the timber industry went north to Canada or south to Brazil. Accessible to Atlanta and its exploding suburbs via I-85 and Highway 316, Jackson, Barrow and Walton Counties were also transformed. Small, quiet Southern towns like Winder and Jefferson along the interstate corridor became bedroom communities in less than a generation in the last decades of the twentieth century. High density apartment complexes and large subdivisions became common in these towns that were once agricultural centers.

With this growth and change came some welcome transformation including improved schools, access to healthcare, and cultural opportunities. The lives of people who descended from farming families of the nineteenth century and who never fully recuperated economically from the hardships of Reconstruction, the demise of the cotton empire, and the Great Depression, were less isolated; alternatives for employment also accompanied the transformation.

But the changes brought on by the growth of nearby cities and counties also brought some deeply troubling effects to rural counties. Madison County, which is the study area of this thesis, began to experience increased populations in the 1990s that put pressure on schools and social services. Citizens and political leaders struggled to find ways to accommodate new and larger populations while still trying to serve the existing farming population. Taxes and land prices increased; farmers and farm families struggled to hang on to the land their people had

worked for generations, and along with this struggle came the realization that many of the freedoms and advantages of a lightly populated, rural county were imperiled. And not everyone was able to take advantage of some of the improvements. Illegal and dangerous methamphetamine labs replaced the family chicken house; teen pregnancy remains common and the high school drop-out rate high. There appears to be a dark side to the rapid transformation of a traditionally rural county just as there were “dark sides” to the rural past.

While the profession of landscape architecture cannot solve all of the problems of rapid societal change, it can help relieve some of its pressures. This is especially true at the level of middle income dwellings where new residential development can have beneficial effects on the county even as it adds to the transformation of the agricultural society. Much of modern landscape architecture has been in the realm of large-scale planning and urban/suburban design, leaving small holdings residents to their own devices. This paper will explore the possibilities for middle income residential design and try to identify ways designers can help counties in rural areas deal with their growing pains.

Few landscapes have been more idealized than the rural domestic environments of America. The image of the small family farm is shorthand for many American values of self-sufficiency, independent thought, and entrepreneurial spirit. Labels on food containers in retail food stores show pictures of a barn, a green field and some “happy” cows and chickens roaming an immaculate barnyard. Children’s books show pictures of Old MacDonald in his rubber boots and neat, spotless overalls carrying a single pail to water his one cow. Magazines for the “simple” rural life abound, and hobby farm pamphlets idealize the daily life of the working farm. Casual conversations with people about their dream home often conjure up “a small place in the country where I can kick back and raise a family.” Even the recent movement of locally grown



food and community supported agriculture assumes a certain kind of accessible, small-scale rural domestic environment.

Real estate marketing promotes the “freedom” of country life. Subdivisions have names like “Rolling Creek Farms”, “Old Oaks Homestead”, or “The Downs,” as if such elements could somehow exist in the controlled environment of a well-lit, paved, and gated community. On larger single-home tracts even the antebellum South and its cotton empire are conjured up in replicas of Tara-like mansions, again with no farming allowed and no reference to the historic agricultural experience (including human slavery) of the lands around them. Rural landscape imagery including open fields and woodlands also shapes modern resorts, corporate campuses and other urban fringe developments.

These idealized landscapes have been plucked out of the imaginations of Americans who crave a relationship to the country life. Important dreams for Americans, these notions are rooted in a historically agricultural society, but one that has constantly evolved in the course of the nation’s history. However, the rural landscape means something else entirely to the people who have actually experienced real farm life. What happens when urban and suburban development encounters a real working farm community?

In rural Madison County, Georgia, farm owners warn newcomers that flies, bad odors, and pesticide applications are part of their working world, and that farmers are not in a position to accomodate people who come for recreational use or residential development. These warnings are a response to awkward attempts by developers to create idyllic country homesites that do not fit the established working farm surroundings (Figure 1.1).



**Figure 1.1:** Sign at family-owned poultry operation in Madison County.

Rural communities like Madison County find themselves struggling with complex issues such as zoning and long-term land use planning, and rural residents often feel threatened by forces of development that seem beyond their control.<sup>1</sup> This population often is not in a position to become expert in the nuances of land planning. Days are long for the farming family; meetings after work are hard to attend. Although this is changing fast, there has not been much precedent for working out complex issues of land use in low-density counties in public discourse. The tradition in these cultures has been to settle disputes with an immediate neighbor or family member rather than bring needs and goals to a common table and hash out common interests.

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<sup>1</sup> For examples of long and arduous debate and self-education about rights to farm in a rural county, see articles and editorials in *The Madison County Journal*: 2001-2008.

In recent decades, however, state and local governments have begun to respond to the changing nature of rural land use. County commissioners call on professional planners and zoning commissions to make recommendations, while citizens participate in developing long-term plans. In Georgia, these long-term land use plans are mandated by state governments through regional development councils. Federal and state funding is often tied to the county's ability to develop and carry out these plans.<sup>2</sup>

Are there ways in which the profession of landscape architecture can assist communities and landowners in rural areas faced with dramatic change to alleviate some of the bad effects of growth and development? When development occurs in rural areas without regard to the existing agricultural community, often antagonistic responses end up alienating community members; public discourse dissolves into argument, frustration and anger, and finding common ground between factions gets harder and harder. This in turn leads to feelings of helplessness: people argue that politicians are not listening, or that developers and development authorities are not respecting the farming heritage that is still at work. The desire to “save our rural character” gets lost in angry debate over ideology and property rights. In the meantime, economic pressures and growth from outside the county continue to shape land use in ways that citizens feel are beyond their control. Landscape architecture can facilitate productive discourse between factions with seemingly different agenda; as facilitators, landscape architects can help people see a variety of solutions by way of some of the profession's tools. These include: site inventory and analysis, design, ecological protection, and articulation of cultural history, to name a few. The profession can help integrate non-farming residents into the dominant agricultural community in ways that

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<sup>2</sup> The Northeast Georgia Rural Development Council is an example of a state office that carries out these responsibilities. See also *Madison County Journal* for coverage of the evolving level of citizen participation in planning at the local level.

will both protect and celebrate that community. In the long run, this may help a rural county be stronger and more malleable when faced with change. Change will not be stopped—it rarely can be—but it might be better shaped and integrated to serve the greater good rather than just the interests of a few people.

### **Landscape Architecture and the Challenge of Contemporary Rural Design**

Landscape architects, land use planners, and residential developers have an interesting challenge when trying to capture the imagination of the modern American homebuyer who aspires to a country experience without having to endure some of the things that make it “country.” They also have a responsibility to the communities whose land they are developing as people move out of urban areas in search of peace, comfort, fresh air and independence. After all, it is farming that makes the countryside “country” and this is not always a pleasant, safe, predictable, or “clean” environment.<sup>3</sup>

Where can landscape architects find instruction and inspiration to design new rural homesteads that do not destroy the very experience the homeowner has sought out? Is it possible to create modern homesteads that reflect and respect the farming tradition of a particular area and allow it to continue around the newcomers? Do the rural environments themselves hold any keys to their own survival, lessons for the future that are more than just creating a museum of rural experience? What are the steps a landscape architect can take to ensure both protection of the cultural and natural resources of a farming community and still allow new development to occur?

As we shall see in this thesis, landscape architecture has a very old relationship to rural life, and many designers never lost sight of rural landscapes as the basis of the practice. The area of study, the Northeast Georgia piedmont, has not lost its own defining rural personality either,

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<sup>3</sup> Of course there are some rural areas that are not defined by farming. Madison County, however, is historically and demographically agricultural; it is this tradition of *farming* that defines its rural character.

and so it can serve as a model for contemporary rural design. By studying the area and discussing issues with local residents, landscape architects can uncover rich sources of design inspiration.

This thesis will offer a roadmap that directs a constructive path into the future, where people can relate to their agricultural pasts and their dreams of a country life, participate in the real, contemporary rural community, and become a part of the flow of rural-based human experience.

The profession of landscape architecture is in a position to make contributions in helping residents face the challenges of adaptation and integration within a rural context. Landscape architects can use the tradition of their own profession, the history of the locale, and the requirements of the natural environments of a rural area to shape development in practical and productive ways. And they can help protect valuable natural and cultural resources in the process. First there has to be an understanding of the role of the professional landscape architect. This can be articulated by studying the history of the profession. Then there has to be an understanding of what it means for a community to be rural. This is done through study of that community's past and analysis of its current demographics. Subsequently, locating good examples of beneficial development within the rural context will give direction to future good, integrative rural design. These principles, which are an outgrowth of the study of the profession and the history of the area, will allow this study to serve the profession and the rural communities in need of guidance.

### **Methodology**

To this end, I explored the writings of early practitioners like Andrew Jackson Downing, Liberty Hyde Bailey, and Frank Waugh, which included manuals on farming techniques and plant propagation as well as theoretical discussions about the role of design. Downing's Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening and Rural Essays were the most thoroughly

examined. Ian Thompson, Samuel Mockbee, Ian Firth, Mark Reinberger, and Richard Westmacott provided late twentieth century models of landscape theory and practice that redefined the role of the landscape architect and pointed to new sources and methods of instruction.<sup>4</sup> This study of the profession allowed me to define a tradition of rural design that could be built upon in contemporary landscape architecture. It also gave me insight into ways the rural tradition might be modified to apply to a local context in the twenty-first century. The emphasis on *local* contexts rose out of the profession's history of respecting the *genius loci* of a place, an aspect of the process of design that has been an over-arching theme in the profession since its inception.

Also in the tradition of landscape architecture, I set out to identify landscapes that could serve as models and found four in Madison County, Georgia. This was done by visiting homesteads around the county for over a year and talking to people who were passionate about the rural character of the county and their desire to protect it. Keeping in mind the prerogative of honoring *genius loci*, I sought out homesteads that were “new,” not historic or traditional, but which identified with the established agricultural life of the county nonetheless. If there existed homesteads that were not farms *per se* and weren't old, traditional piedmont farm sites that were kept in families or restored by newcomers, these models might suggest methods to future developers about designing homesteads that *fit* rather than *impose* themselves onto the existing farming culture.

I created a questionnaire for the four families to fill out, and followed up with numerous discussions both in person and on the phone. This questionnaire asked the homesteaders to

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<sup>4</sup> Samuel Mockbee of the Rural Studio in Alabama was not a landscape architect; however, his work as an artist and architect was especially adept at incorporating the landscape and culture into his designs, and as an academic in the design profession he has inspired many Southern students of landscape architecture.

consider why and how they chose their sites, and what ethical issues guided their decisions. It also made them think about *why* they made the decisions they did and if they have succeeded in creating the kind of place they envisioned.

I visited the four homesteads at various times of day and in different seasons. I took photographs, studied maps and plats, and walked over the sites extensively. In an effort to define their sites' interactions between themselves and the community, I created plans that placed their homesteads into the surrounding farmland.

Examining these homesteads led me to a study of the history of the county, which I have included in this thesis because it became clear that history is a crucial aspect of understanding the area's *genius loci*. I read the writings of William Bartram who explored this area of the piedmont in the eighteenth century, and I read local and state histories. Several aspects of historical agricultural practice also were discussed in conversations with farmers whose families have lived in the county for several generations. Although they are not documented formally in this thesis, these oral histories added greatly to my understanding of the fabric of the Madison County experience.

For an environmental history of the area, in addition to Bartram, I read Charles Wharton's portrait of the natural environments of Georgia. I also studied the fact books of the Madison County Extension Service and the U.S. Census to get details of the evolution of the county's farming history. Recent studies by the University of Georgia's Agricultural Economics department were also informative.

While not exactly a scholarly pursuit, I would also like to mention that canoeing the Broad River as often as possible, hiking dirt roads, logging trails and old trading paths and exploring the county on horseback over the past several years, afforded me many insights into

the nature of Madison County's rural character. By being *on the ground* and *in* the landscape, I have learned a great deal about the layers of experience of a historically agricultural community. It turns out that this kind of participatory methodology has many precedents in the profession, including Frank Waugh who used to ask his students to spend time on their study sites and get a feel for the place. Other practitioners espoused an on-site investigation as well. It is only recently, through the use of modern technology, that design has been carried out largely *in absentia*.

### **Findings: History and the Profession of Landscape Architecture**

In my study of the history of the practice of landscape architecture in North America, I found that except for a brief foray by modernists in the mid-twentieth century, landscape architecture has been guided largely by rural landscapes. It became clear that the profession has been deeply influenced by rural environments across America for over 150 years. In an attempt to find precedents, I learned that as late as the mid-nineteenth century, landscape gardeners, as they were called at the time, held fast to a rural ideal. And even though the practitioners of the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century concerned themselves more with large public spaces and parks, they continued to espouse a rural aesthetic. Many designers today, even those working on smaller scale residential plans, still look to the country for inspiration. It became clear that landscape architecture's roots and tradition were never very far from the agricultural roots of the nation, and therefore could serve as a positive force in facing the challenges of modern development in the twenty-first century countryside.

### **Findings: Local Expression**

In my study of a rural county faced with growth and development, I found that Madison County is a rich and complex community. Its history, demographics, land use, and popular




culture all reflect an agricultural legacy even today. It lies in the northeast section of Georgia's upper piedmont, which has a significant regional agricultural history as well. Farming has been and remains the predominant mode of livelihood ever since the first Anglo-American settlers came to the area in the eighteenth century. Most of the population continues to farm in some capacity and much of the land is held by families who have farmed for several generations.

The four homesteads I studied are owned by people who came to this county specifically seeking a *rural* experience. Like much of the population moving into areas like Madison County today, these people did not come to actually farm. They came seeking an independent lifestyle close to nature and in a culture that respected individuality, self-sufficiency and right livelihood. Unlike a lot of newcomers in recent decades, however, all of these people have direct familial ties to a rural Southern experience in their families' pasts.

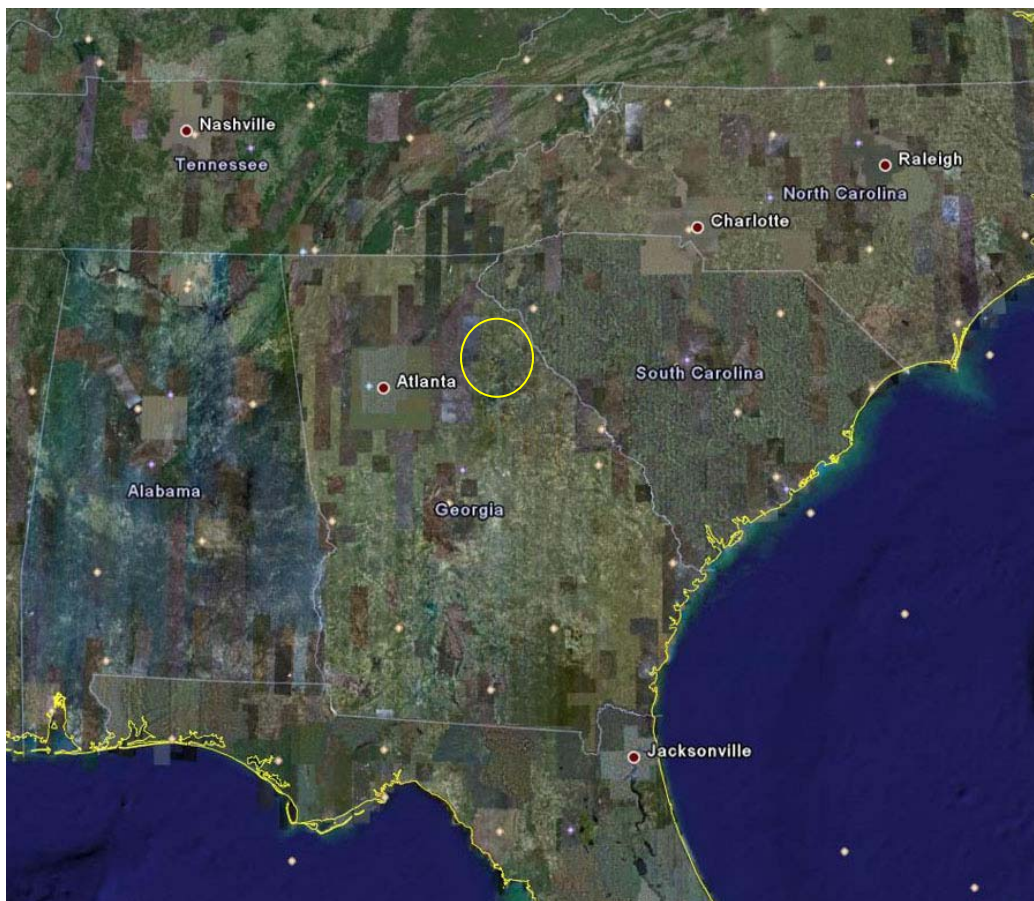
The homesteaders studied did all of the work on the sites themselves: from laying out driveways, establishing garden sites and building locations, to constructing their homes. The processes these homesteaders created and the principles they adhered to throughout establishment are instructive and fit into the tradition of a rural aesthetic from which landscape architecture can continue to learn.

Because populations increasingly are migrating out into working farm land, it was helpful to look also at nearby counties that changed from agricultural to urban in recent decades. Examples of area counties that were predominantly rural as recently as one generation ago include: Oconee, Walton, Barrow, and Jackson. They have followed the model of Gwinnett and Cobb Counties on the outskirts of the Atlanta metropolis, first breaking up farms for single family development in the 1960s and 1970s, and then caving in to a profusion of subdivisions that quickly became the dominant landscape type in the 1980s. Huge retail centers and corporate

campuses were not far behind, taking advantage of the “open land” left by farmers who could no longer compete. 

## Synthesis

The final phase of this course of study is a synthesis of these historical precedents and site analysis. Some general principles emerged that landscape architects can use when creating homesteads that are not *bona fide* farms in rural areas like Madison County. These will be discussed and illustrated with examples from the four homesteads studied and put in the context of the history of the county and its natural environments.



**Figure 1. 2:** Madison County is in the northern Georgia piedmont, approximately 100 miles from Atlanta. Soils are typically clay. Annual rainfall is approximately 50 inches. The nearest large town is Athens. Surrounding areas that have experienced large growth include: Atlanta, Athens, Gainesville, Greenville/Spartanburg, and Augusta. Map derived from Google. No scale.

By detailing four contemporary homesteads that fit into the farming community, this piedmont study can shed light on some of the challenging aspects of rural development. These models, combined with the rural design tradition of American landscape architecture, will provide contemporary practitioners with well-grounded, inspirational design principles. The main conclusion I have drawn is that the profession of landscape architecture can serve rural communities in productive ways because there is a design tradition within the profession that emphasizes *genius loci* and there remains in the rural Georgia piedmont a fertile rural character that has both historical and cultural precedents. These precedents can instruct and inspire rural design in a quickly changing American landscape and help protect the farming community while allowing for growth and change.

## CHAPTER 2: Defining the Problem: Rural Identity and the Effects of Development



**Figure 2.1:** This mansion was built on farmland scraped bare by bulldozers. The house does not in any way reflect the yeoman farmer experience in Madison County and is an inaccurate reference to plantation house design. It is an imposition on the ecological system it inhabits. The few trees that were left will die from soil compaction, wind exposure, and lack of water. The fountain in the front yard ran throughout the water restrictions of 2007. Soil run-off continues to the creek below. All vegetation planted around the house is non-native. The house has been for sale since it was completed.

It is not hard to see why sprawl fails to serve the natural ecosystem: the needs of living organisms are ignored (Figure 2.1). Impervious surfaces prevent natural hydrologic cycles and the ability of a particular area to regenerate is compromised. In short, highly complex systems are forced to simplify and this in turn prevents their ability to respond to change. Sprawl quickly becomes ugly because it stultifies dynamic, vibrant and intricately connected living things that need to be able to *move*, expand and contract, grow and die, blossom and fade. This predicament is a metaphor also for what happens when

cultural entities fail to acknowledge the *living*, moving, and ever-changing nature of their own systems. Sprawl is an imposed construct. It does not grow out of the environment (natural or cultural), but rather is a contrivance placed on a locale for economic purposes. New developments in rural areas that do not respond to *genius loci* are the first tentacles of sprawl and for some people, signal a rural community's demise (Figure 2.2).



**Figure 2.2:** This subdivision, across the road from the mansion above, imposes itself on the farm country of Madison County. All of the houses face the created cul-de-sac, turning their backs on the countryside both literally and figuratively. Sun angles and prevailing breezes have been ignored. Placed on a scraped ridge top, the development has caused severe erosion to the banks of the creek below. (See **Figure 2.11.**)

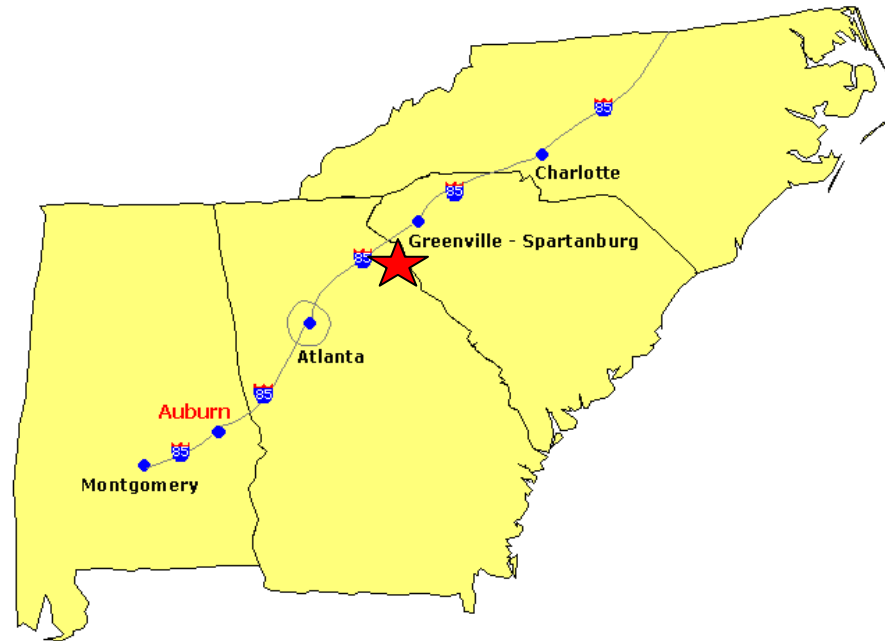


**Figure 2.3:** This photo is a close-up of the subdivision (Figure 2.2) in Madison County that is devoid of all reference to the farming community in which it is placed. The residents are completely dependent on their automobiles to access schools, churches, and retail districts. No effort has been made to create green spaces, gardens, or supports for wildlife. Non-native plants requiring irrigation were used to decorate the yards. These houses sell for between \$150,000 and \$175,000. Large hay and cattle operations surround the subdivision. Neighbors complain when chicken manure is spread on the pastures for annual fertilization.

During the twentieth century, urban and commercial growth around large cities in Northeast Georgia began to spread into lands that for generations were farmland, swallowing up their ability to support living things including plants, animals and human community. Areas that had supported farm families for over two hundred years were converted to large tracts of residential and commercial sprawl, most of which required its residents to commute to jobs and away from home. This trend is especially evident in maps of the I-85 corridor running between Atlanta and the Greenville/Spartanburg area. Where small-holdings farms once produced cotton, corn, soybeans and peaches, huge distribution centers, retail and office outlets, apartment complexes and more roads to support them paved over the streams, open lands and forests, stifling the natural processes that had allowed this piedmont area a rich and varied existence. These changes also have had their effect on the cultural elements of these areas: huge population increases which called for dramatic changes in public services, while demands on natural



resources and governmental structure increased exponentially<sup>1</sup>. This put strain on small communities who, for several decades, had served a fairly small and homogenous population.



**Figure 2.4:** The I-85 corridor is exerting pressure on rural counties like Madison County in the north Georgia piedmont. Madison County is approximately fifteen miles from I-85.

For the people who inhabited these farmlands of the Georgia piedmont, these changes brought some benefits as well as difficulties, but it would be hard to argue that the farming community has not been forced to take a back seat as commercial progress grows and expands. Madison County, Georgia, sits along the outside edge of the first wave of this sprawling growth, to the east of I-85, north and east of Athens.<sup>2</sup> In the first decade of the twenty-first century, it began to feel some of the effects of this growing

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<sup>1</sup> Jackson County, which rests directly east of Madison County, is the fastest growing county in the Athens metro area. Population increased almost 40% between 1990 and 2000. Between 2000 and 2005, the population grew from 41,589 to 52,292. Barrow County's population increased from 46,144 in 2000 to 53,702 in 2006. See U.S. Census Bureau statistics at <http://www.census.gov/popest/counties>.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Conroy et al, "Landscape Change in the Southern Piedmont: Challenges, Solutions, and Uncertainty across Scales," published by the Resilience Alliance, 2003. <http://www.consecol.org/vol8/iss2/art3>.

sprawl. Farmers, who comprise the majority of the population, began to see farmland selling at high rates. Farmland was used to create subdivisions where once row crops, hay and timber had thrived. Schools got crowded, roads were straightened and widened, and industry was courted to replace the farming economy, which appeared stagnant and lifeless to some people. In this rush to modernize the assets of the county, leaders ignored the needs of the farmer and turned instead to retail and commercial development, in search of bigger revenue to support the growing population. While it is too early to determine the full effects of this change, it is not too soon to see the frustration and concern that many farming citizens have for this new world of commerce, industry and residential sprawl.

### **Farming and Design in the Rural Piedmont**

Southern American farmers often complain that people moving to the country from cities raise the price of land so much that farming becomes impossible.<sup>3</sup> Taxes and infrastructure necessary to support people who are not independent and self-sufficient make it difficult to live a “simple life” on the farm. The demand for services—emergency services, recreational centers, animal control, policing, water and sewer, etc.—starts to dominate the county’s budget and the farmer, whose demands on the local tax structure are comparatively small, is left with land that is valuable only when it is sold.<sup>4</sup> New populations often cause difficulties for existing social and political structures that are not prepared for the kinds of demands that are created with fast-paced growth.

Unfortunately, much of the residential design in rural areas has been initiated by developers or outside investors who are interested in exploiting the advantages of rural life and

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<sup>3</sup> Bobby Clements, a farmer in Madison County, noted in a discussion with the author that the typical economic model for determining the value of farmland is confused with land that is actually developable and for sale. Land appears “cheap” to someone who has not yet encountered the tax increase necessary to provide the services that will be needed for a non-farming household.

<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey H. Dorfman, “The Economics of Growth, Sprawl, and Land Use Decisions.” Publication of the Alliance for Quality Growth, The University of Georgia, 2004, <http://aqg.ecology.uga.edu>.



affordable land for financial gain, destroying or compromising much of what makes a rural experience valuable in a higher sense. Land is seen as a commodity, an investment made in pursuit of returns and profit, not as a thing that holds together a culture, nurtures a heritage, or celebrates a life lived primarily out of doors. In this development tradition, landscape architects have been outsider "experts" rather than facilitators who look to existing models and infrastructure and find ways to meld new development with established models.



**Figure 2.5:** A house built in the 1930s on the site where the new strip mall in Danielsville was placed. The house was bulldozed along with the land. The house was a reference to the rural Georgia aesthetic of the period.



**Figure 2.6:** This 1950s brick bungalow, surrounded by mature pecans, sat on a large lot next to the white frame house shown in Figure 2.5. It, too, was bulldozed. All trees on the site were destroyed.



**Figure 2.7:** In Danielsville, the county seat, it took bulldozers less than four days to obliterate three homesites that had existed for over seventy years on a gently sloping hillside on the north side of town. These residents were within walking distance (and had a sidewalk) of churches, drugstores, banks, etc. A strip mall has flattened the landscape and the culture.



**Figure 2.8:** Bulldozers remove all reference to the natural lay of the land. Here a slope and all vegetation are being removed to create parking for the new strip mall.



**Figure 2.9:** The strip mall replaces the residential homes and rural small-town setting. All reference to the farming past is obliterated and the distinctive character of the county seat is ignored. The ecosystem of the site is degraded by impervious surfaces, unnecessary lighting (the stores are not open at night), and dead zones of asphalt and concrete.



According to Susan Buggy, the role of the designer is one who *brings together* seemingly opposing interests; this is helpful when we realize the many layers of variables in any landscape.<sup>5</sup> Designers are no longer addressing single issues serving a particular population; they are looking for ways to blend, integrate and regenerate complex systems. This can be a daunting exercise but traditional small farms and farm life are some of the most integrated systems that American culture has produced, and their rich and diverse heritage has much to offer at several levels.<sup>6</sup>

It is the responsibility of landscape architects to look to what makes a place special, what gives it character and what sustains it ecologically. The very first level of understanding, before any design can take place, is what early landscape architects identified as the *genius loci*, the spirit of a place. Fortunately, the *genius loci* of rural places can readily be grasped because where there is a farm there remain obvious material elements and spiritual expression still within a designer's reach. Life moves in and out of the main house; there are outdoor rooms full of gathering areas (under the shade of a tree or by a campfire or barbeque pit); animals move in and out of the spaces also occupied by people; the garden is at hand; decorations emerge from discarded objects; nature is allowed to *flow*. And in the yards of the rural South, mythology, spirit, and history are rarely ignored.<sup>7</sup> Old tools and worn-out farm equipment are left on display; vehicles are up on blocks either being repaired or for sale; shrines to spirits or loved ones

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<sup>5</sup> Susan Buggy, "Historic Landscape Conservation in North America: Roaming the Field over the Past Thirty Years," *APT Bulletin* 29 (1998): 37-42.

<sup>6</sup> Wendell Berry, *What are People For?* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), p.74-96.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Westmacott, *African-American Gardens and Yards of the Rural South* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1992.) and Andrea Oppenheimer Dean and Timothy Hursely, eds., *Rural Studio: Samuel Mockbee and an Architecture of Decency*. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2002), p. 37.

deceased are constructed in special places in the yard; outdoor cooking and socializing continues throughout the year. On Sundays and summer evenings, the yard becomes a basketball or a volleyball court. Older people congregate on porches and stoops or sit on outdoor furniture that might be an old stump or an abandoned car seat. In the Georgia piedmont, one of the most distinctive elements that ties rural inhabitants to the past is the outdoor granite tabletop, usually from Elbert County, that serves as a place to lay out family reunion picnics or double as a work table. This artifact reaches beyond simple practical use and evokes not only the geology of the region (granite outcrops, granite mines, old quarries people grew up swimming in, etc.), it conjures up the family spirit, the church revival, and the experience going back generations of shared meals.



**Figure 2.10:** Icons of the rural Georgia experience: a granite slab and iron cook pot at the Edwards homestead in Madison County in the outdoor gathering area.

In addition to the cultural and spiritual aspects of a rural domestic environment, landscape architects now know the importance of addressing issues of sustainability and regeneration even at the smallest homestead. Advances made in the past forty years in our understanding of the ecology of a site have helped residents see the impact (good and bad) their lifestyle can have on their surroundings. Contemporary landscape architects cannot afford to leave out the understanding of a site's ecosystem and what it needs to maintain health and the ability to remain malleable as various challenges arise. Complexity is understood as a healthy, resilient and powerful characteristic of a site.<sup>8</sup> We no longer need to concern ourselves with being able to control nature all the time; rather it is our task to be able to create homesteads that can respond to change and regenerate.

Landscape architects can also serve as bridges between the farming community and non-farming residents by connecting their interests. This can be done by discouraging barriers for wildlife, protecting watersheds from pollution, engaging farmers in local beautification projects that both enhance the viewsheds and protect the values of their property. Designers can also help farmers protect their rights to farm by planning effective natural barriers or siting homes away from the least inviting aspects of farming.

Small rural towns can be shown how to celebrate their rural context and honor their public buildings and public spaces. Since the concept of public space has never been emphasized much in rural areas, the town square around an old courthouse or the scenic byways through the countryside can become places designed to encourage an understanding of the context in which the farming community exists. Country churches and their cemeteries and outdoor reunion sheds

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<sup>8</sup> Ian McHarg, *To Heal the Earth: Selected Writings of Ian L. McHarg* (Washington: The Island Press, 1998), p. 188. See also: Ian McHarg, *Design with Nature* (New York: John Wiley, 1992.).

become *de facto* parks where anyone can stop on a walk or a drive and sit a while or have a picnic. Designers can connect residents to natural resources such as lakes, rivers and streams and wildlife management areas so all citizens can enjoy them and perhaps even participate in their protection and management.

All of these examples lead us back to the early efforts of the first practitioners of landscape architecture who knew the value of the countryside in the American imagination and spirit. This emphasis within the profession is nothing new, really, just set aside for the past several decades in the effort to address what appeared to be more pressing problems of urban design, growth and development, and the need to protect large public spaces. The next discussion will trace the development of the practice of landscape architecture that remained loyal to *genius loci*. This tradition will serve contemporary design, helping non-farming populations who want to live in the country find ways to blend in and contribute to the rural character as well.



**Figure 2.11:** Degraded stream banks are a common sight in Madison County. Taxpayers have to pay for poor development practices; the ecosystem suffers, and the rural traditions, such as fishing, are compromised.





**Figure 2.12:** The view across the degraded creek to another housing project that has degraded and replaced the productive farmland. Note the continuation of erosion in the “yards” below the houses.

### CHAPTER 3: Tracing the Legacy of Rural Design in Landscape Architecture

Historically, rural landscapes have been a source of inspiration in American landscape architecture. Many of the elements of design articulated by the profession's earliest practitioners were based on principles that tried to harmonize residents with their "natural surroundings" which, in most cases in the nineteenth century, were also rural surroundings. Before the profession evolved into urban and public space planning, much of the writing focused on rural homesteads and country life. Early practitioners like Andrew Jackson Downing, Liberty Hyde Bailey, and Frank Waugh were horticulturalists and nurserymen who were as interested in the practical aspects of plant propagation, pomology, soil conditioning, etc. as they were in trying to articulate ideas about the American landscape. Downing's essays, which were collected as the book, Rural Essays, contained discussions of soil improvement, fruit orchards, and farming "technology" as well as arguments for "tasteful" garden and homestead design.<sup>1</sup> Liberty Hyde Bailey espoused a practical and "educated" form of gardening and farm production that helped shape the goals of the Cooperative Extension Service and other agencies that grew out of the Progressive era. How-to pamphlets and monographs on "manuring" and soil care were published along with treatises on the broader aspects of landscape gardening. Because farming was still the main form of living in the nineteenth century, a majority of Americans remained familiar with it. Many people were engaged at some level in producing some of their own food; there were still places to hunt wild game, and farming was what one saw when one left the city. Agricultural land was the dominant "landscape" outside urban centers, and even people who weren't farmers understood where their food came from and how it was raised.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Jackson Downing, ed. George W. Curtis, *Rural Essays*. New York: G. P. Putnam & Co., 1853.

These first American landscape architects wanted to maintain this tie to the farming experience, especially in the face of increasing industrialization and urbanization. Downing articulated the belief that farm and garden were rich with inspiration and good qualities of life that would benefit society as well as the individual participating in them.<sup>2</sup> The *values* of the early American landscape architects were for the most part values of a *rural* experience. And this appreciation of the rural landscape was closely tied to the concept of *genius loci* in that the “spirit” of the place was largely a rural one.

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The rural design tradition in the Anglo-American experience of country life in North America dates back to the mid-nineteenth century, when the profession of landscape architecture was in its infancy. British designers like Humphrey Repton and J. C. Loudon, whose aesthetic was closely tied to rural England, had a significant impact on America’s first famous landscape gardener, Andrew Jackson Downing, by emphasizing rural elements from the countryside. Meadows, woods, and water were shaped and framed to reflect a pastoral experience codified in landscape painting of the period. In America, Downing was enthusiastic about the writings of some of these English designers and eventually visited the country, where he discovered much to admire in the estates and gardens of the Old Country.<sup>3</sup> Downing in turn influenced Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. and Calvert Vaux, who took the countryside aesthetic to large urban spaces, as well as residential estates in America.

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<sup>2</sup> Andrew Jackson Downing, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (New York: George P. Putnam, 1850), p. ix.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Jackson Downing, “Letters from England” in *Rural Essays* (New York: George P. Putnam and Co., 1853), p. 475-547.

Much of Downing's writing in horticultural and popular journals was addressed to upper income people who aspired to be gentleman farmers, and who wanted country estates to enjoy for recreational and social purposes. He also served the new middle-income suburbanites who were moving to the "country" to escape the ills of the industrialized and crowded cities. Because they were not dependent on their country land for survival, the landscape pursuits of the wealthy were indulgences and more concerned with appearance and pleasure than survival. (This audience is similar to the one introduced in the first chapter: people who move to the country in the twenty-first century with no intention of participating in farming in any way other than being able to enjoy freedom from urban ills and the pastoral views the countryside provides.)

But it is a third audience that Downing addressed that provides us with some of his most applicable lessons in a rural piedmont setting in Georgia. He tried to bring issues of aesthetics to a group of people whose concerns and lifestyle had not been addressed by professionals before. This audience was the lower- and middle-income homeowner of the nineteenth century who needed inspiration and practical knowledge on how actually to live on the land, making it "beautiful" as well as *productive*.

This combination of aesthetics and agricultural improvement made Downing's "landscape gardening" the bridge to an American "landscape architecture." Not only were landscapes of the landed gentry admired for their organization and form, actual small American rural domestic environments became a focus of design concern. For the first time in professional landscape design, an "expert" began looking at small holdings farms and found that their working landscapes were also inspiring. For this readership Downing could distill some of his loftier principles of the art of landscape gardening and apply them to a *bona fide* country life experience.

While not necessarily farmers (and definitely not farmers of the emerging large-scale agricultural economy), these country dwellers, Downing believed, could live in satisfying and productive ways that would improve both their lives and the life of the land. In this sense we can see Downing as an early supporter of the “back-to-the-land” movement (or rather, “stay-on-the-land” as might have been the case during his lifetime) that would thread its way through American cultural history all the way up to the 1970s. He encouraged city dwellers to try their hand at country life and exhorted country people to stay on the farm.<sup>4</sup> Like the early farmers of small holdings of the nineteenth century, many late-twentieth-century Americans moved out to the country to escape the violence, degradation and commercialism of the cities and the numbing homogeneity of modern suburbs. Much of the information that inspired the modern movement came directly from nineteenth and early twentieth century farm life before large-scale, industrial agribusiness emerged after the Second World War. This reference to the nineteenth century is in evidence in the kinds of farming espoused by the back-to-the-land movement and even sustainable farming and gardening today.<sup>5</sup>

Yet even as he helped shape the burgeoning profession of landscape architecture by articulating principles and a philosophy, Downing promoted practical knowledge. He understood the needs of the soil, and his expertise in horticulture (and pomology, specifically) could be applied on even the smallest acreage. In fact, many of his rural essays are practical manuals of

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<sup>4</sup> Andrew Jackson Downing. *Rural Essays* George W. Curtis, ed. (New York: G. P. Putnam & Co., 1853). See introduction.

<sup>5</sup> See publications of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association such as the quarterly newsletter *Maine Organic Farmer and Gardener*. Also, *The Small Farmers Journal*, which is in its fourth decade of publication. Both of these institutions advocate using horse power and hand tools, and absolutely no petroleum-based fertilizers or pest control.

effective husbandry. Soil fertility, “manuring,” and other aspects of what we now refer to as “sustainable” gardening were discussed at length.<sup>6</sup>

But these lessons were not limited to a productive garden or small farm; they were lessons that would literally nourish American democratic society as a whole. Like Thomas Jefferson, who had faith in a society comprised of yeoman farmers (real or imagined), Downing believed American democracy would benefit from populations who found succor in the rural life, away from smoking chimney stacks and crowded city streets. He believed that the lessons learned on a small farm about nature’s processes, fruit and vegetable gardening, and other manual skills, were lessons that a person could carry through life. In 1848, Downing espoused that in America the farming class was “the great nursery of all the professions, and the industrial arts of the country.”<sup>7</sup> He thought people who grew up on farms could go out in the world as lawyers, educators and other professionals, and then return “to be rejuvenated by the primitive life.”<sup>8</sup>

With his extensive knowledge of horticulture and his ability to write for the general public, Downing became a voice for several generations of American landscape designers from the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, articulating principles of the American rural aesthetic and a rural pragmatism that was both “beautiful” and practical. As an “Apostle of Taste,” Downing identified elements of the rural life that would help Americans fit their lives back into and onto the land that had held much promise in the first decades of the new

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<sup>6</sup> Andrew Jackson Downing, “How to Enrich the Soil” pages 404-410 and “The Philosophy of Manuring Orchards” pages 452-463 in *Rural Essays*, ed. George Curtis. (New York: G.P. Putnam and Co., 1853).

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Jackson Downing, *Rural Essays*, ed. George W. Curtis (New York: G. P. Putnam & Co., 1853) p.389.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

democracy.<sup>9</sup> He agreed with his contemporary Alexis de Toqueville that Americans were a restless people who had yet to settle into their own *place* and that a profound social transformation was happening in the mid-nineteenth century. America was trying to define itself and create a society that left behind the patrician tradition of the Founding Fathers' generation, while the Gilded Age of opulence and materialism was just beginning to take shape for some members of society in the Northeast. The middle classes were faced with the challenges of life in a world that was neither frontier nor entirely cosmopolitan. In the South, his recommendations served aristocratic estates as well as small holdings residents in the countryside where modern industrial capitalism did not yet have a huge presence.<sup>10</sup>

Wary of industrialism and expanding capitalism, Downing was also skeptical of the effects of pioneer agriculture from the recent past. He was dismayed by the practice of “skinning” the land that had been so much a part of the American agriculture tradition: exhausting and using up the land, depleting its nutrients and then moving further West to do it all over again.<sup>11</sup> He saw that modern advances of his time like the railroad and factories were necessary parts of progress, but he didn't want the nation to lose sight of the way of life of the small farm. Instead, through rural landscape gardening, Downing tried to create landscapes and country “ways” that took the best from both worlds. An idealistic man with great faith in education, he sought to raise people out of drudgery, both economic and aesthetic, and find ways

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<sup>9</sup> David Schuyler, *Apostle of Taste: Andrew Jackson Downing, 1815-1852*. (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p.4-6.

<sup>10</sup> Catherine Howett, “Residential Landscape Traditions,” *The New Georgia Encyclopedia* (2005) <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org>.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Jackson Downing, *Rural Essays*, ed. George W. Curtis, (New York: G. P. Putnam & Co., 1853) p.392.

to help them take delight in the bountiful land around them. He defined landscape gardening in his Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening (1850 edition) this way:

An artistical combination of the beautiful in nature and art—an union of natural expression and harmonious cultivation—(which) is capable of affording us the highest and most intellectual enjoyment to be found in any cares or pleasures belonging to the soil.<sup>12</sup>

Downing believed landscape gardening was different from simple gardening in that it encompassed the whole scene around a homestead and was girded by ideals or principles that would lead to the betterment of the dweller's life. It was also more than just horticulture, though that was an essential element in the basic knowledge necessary to pursue these loftier ideals. He sought to educate people “to collect and combine beautiful forms in trees, surfaces of ground, buildings and walks in the landscapes surrounding us” and embody the Beautiful in a home scene.<sup>13</sup> By Beautiful, Downing meant a harmonious ideal based on natural elements of a Creator: infinity, unity, symmetry, and proportion.<sup>14</sup> He went further in the fourth edition of his treatise to emphasize the notion of the Picturesque in which an idea of beauty is irregularly expressed, displaying power, mystery and a somewhat unpredictable beauty. He believed these were distinct notions that could be combined in the same landscape, their collective powers raising humanity even further. Beautiful design incorporated flowing, gradual curves and soft surfaces: the layers of the ground melting gradually into “easy undulations.” The Picturesque had a “certain spirited irregularity, surfaces 'abrupt' and the plants would be 'wild' and somewhat

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<sup>12</sup>Andrew Jackson Downing, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*, (New York: Orange Judd Co., 1875), p.18.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.18.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.68.



mysterious.”<sup>15</sup> The lawn at a Picturesque landscape might be less frequently mown, the edges of the walks less carefully tended than in the Beautiful ideal. In a Picturesque landscape, deep shadows, irregular outlines, rustic elements and bold architectural projections replaced the clear, identifiable and more symmetrical elements in a Beautiful landscape. Downing thought that this combination of the Beautiful and the Picturesque were the things that made American landscapes unique and peculiar to the “restless” young nation. “We seek to embody our ideal of a rural home; not through plots of fruit trees...but by collecting and combining beautiful forms in trees, surfaces of ground, buildings and walks in the landscape surrounding us.”<sup>16</sup>

### **Creating an American Rural Aesthetic**

Downing used Humphrey Repton’s basic principles of good design: Unity, Variety and Harmony, and made them his own by suffusing them with the tenets of pragmatism that were uniquely American. *Unity* meant having a controlling idea based on the nature of the site. To avoid a confusion of sensations, a landscape had to have an over-arching congruity to hold onto its essential character. This did not mean uniformity, necessarily; in fact, Downing’s example of the ideal arrangement of walkways in a given landscape reflects the opposite:

Even in arranging walks, a whole will more readily be recognized, if there are one or two of large size, with which the others appear connected as branches, than if all are equal in breadth, and present the same appearance to the eye in passing.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Andrew Jackson Downing, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (New York: Orange Judd Co., 1875), p.18.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* This combination of the Beautiful and the Picturesque will have many applications in the rural landscape of the South.

<sup>17</sup> Andrew Jackson Downing, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*. (New York: Orange Judd Co., 1875), p.81.

*Variety* in the landscape created interest and curiosity by adding ornament (sculpture, pots and urns, a bench, etc.) and other man-made details. A mix of different plant species, numerous points of interest, and variety in the layout of the path added up to encourage curiosity and intrigued the viewer.

At the same time, *Harmony* would keep ornamentation subservient to the established Unity. For something to be harmonious there must, of course, be contrasting elements that were brought together. Harmony provided the elements to reveal the whole experience. For Downing, Harmony was the highest principle of the three because it was what held the landscape all together.

In his original Treatise, Downing quickly moved from the discussion of these principles to a more pragmatic orientation: chapters on wood and plantation, discussions of actual tree species—deciduous and evergreen—rural architecture, and “embellishments” followed, taking the reader deeper into the process of actual design application. His pragmatism would steer people towards the satisfying practices of creating a small orchard, raising bees or growing grapes. In short, the garden would provide sustenance as well as edify. Growing flowers, pruning fruit trees, producing and marketing vegetables, were all things anyone from any social or economic class could do, male or female, and these activities could feed the soul just as great art could open the human heart to greater understanding and feeling.<sup>18</sup>

### **Adapting Rural Elements to Urban Contexts**

In large towns and cities in the later decades of the nineteenth century, Downing’s emphasis on domestic designs were replaced with park-like designs of Frederick Law Olmsted,

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<sup>18</sup> Andrew Jackson Downing, “A Few Words on Fruit Culture,” pages 435-441, and “On Improvement of Vegetable Races,” pages 468-472 in *Rural Essays* (New York: G. P. Putnam & Co.), 1853.

Sr. and others who, though deeply indebted to Downing, took American landscape architecture into the newer realm of urban and public-space design. Olmsted's residential designs created a rural scene within an urban context: "individual properties were visually unified along curving streets by contiguous sweeps of lawn and canopies of shade trees" still referring to the country aesthetic but, again, in a uniquely "American" way.<sup>19</sup> A good example of this aesthetic in the South was expressed in the design for the Druid Hills neighborhood between the cities of Atlanta and Decatur, where Olmsted's office designed the new suburban expansion in the early twentieth century. After World War II, according to garden historian Catherine Howett, residential landscapes became more of a private "oasis" for entertainment, leisure and play."<sup>20</sup> Outdoor gathering areas moved to the back of the house; privacy walls went up and the interaction with the public went down. The working landscapes of the kinds that Downing tried to "improve" persisted in the rural areas of Georgia, however, well into the last decades of the twentieth century.

Other early proponents of the rural or small farm aesthetic included: Horace William Cleveland (1814-1900) and Robert Morris Copeland (1830-1874), his partner; Wilhelm Miller (1869-1938), who developed the prairie spirit of landscape gardening; Frank Waugh (1869-1943) and Liberty Hyde Bailey (1858-1954), all of whom were passionate about plants, farming, gardening and the rural life. Bailey was especially interested in rural improvements and was instrumental in starting the cooperative extension service and 4-H. Educated at the Michigan Agricultural College, he went to Cornell University to be the director of the College of

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<sup>19</sup>Catherine Howett, "Residential Landscape Traditions," *The New Georgia Encyclopedia*. (2005), <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org>. Even though Downing's audience was primarily privileged northeastern residents, his principles also spread to Southern "country life." See Barnsley Gardens near Rome, Ga., which he helped design.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

Agriculture. At Cornell he was instrumental in getting New York State to support the university's agricultural research, establishing the first "experiment station" at a state university. He published text books, encyclopedias, and numerous pamphlets and manuals on rural science and "gardencraft." Bailey's desire to educate people about good farming and gardening practices spilled out into the community and to the national level. In 1908, during Theodore Roosevelt's administration, he served as chairman of the Commission on Country Life.<sup>21</sup> He was one of the founders of the American Society for Horticultural Science.

Horace Cleveland trained as a civil engineer and lived on a farm in New Jersey where he aspired to be a "scientific farmer." Copeland, who wrote Country Life: A Handbook of Agriculture, Horticulture and Landscape Gardening, also lived on a farm. Wilhelm Miller was an agricultural extension specialist in addition to being a designer.

In the twentieth century, Frank Waugh picked up Downing's arguments and focused them on the needs of a changing economy and national experience. Waugh taught agricultural students at the University of Massachusetts where he tried to teach them to "love the land, beautify their environments and find an occupation that could replace farming" as demand for farming skills was shrinking.<sup>22</sup> He edited Downing's Landscape Gardening and rearranged the original materials to try to update them for the twentieth century, replacing drawings with photographs and incorporating some modern building materials and other resources that would not have been available to Downing. In his preface to the tenth edition, Waugh explained that the effort was not so much to revise (he obviously admired Downing's principles) as it was to bring together from

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<sup>21</sup> For a presentation of Bailey's career and publications, see: <http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/bailey/cornellu> (2004).

<sup>22</sup> Jan Whitaker, "The Landscape Beautiful," UMASSMAG [http://umassmag.com/Winter\\_2003](http://umassmag.com/Winter_2003).

all of Mr. Downing's writings the best portions of his work bearing directly on the subject of Landscape Gardening." <sup>23</sup>

Waugh included many of the rural essays Downing had written for the *Horticulturalist* magazine which had been previously collected by George William Curtis. What Waugh left out of the tenth edition published in 1921 is an interesting comment on the material, and tells us something about his audience. Many of Downing's essays on general agriculture and his travels in Europe were left out, perhaps in an effort to appeal to an audience that was a few more generations removed from Europe and less defined by an agricultural experience. While farming remained a predominant lifestyle in America in the 1920s, the societal changes wrought by WWI and increased urbanization and industrialization in the North added to the changing rural fabric of American society in general. Waugh was aware that people were not experiencing the landscape in the same way earlier generations had, in any case. He encouraged his students at the University of Massachusetts to lie down and look at the sky in all kinds of weather and in different seasons (as a farmer would) and get new perspectives by looking at landscapes upside-down. He took them on field trips into forests and encouraged them to sketch in the open air. In short, he advocated an experiential form of study and analysis that would inform their design.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Andrew Jackson Downing, *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*, (New York: Orange Judd Co., 1875), p. ix.

<sup>24</sup> Jan Whitaker, "The Landscape Beautiful," UMASSMAG [http://umassmag.com/Winter\\_2003](http://umassmag.com/Winter_2003).

Other twentieth century landscape architects who were passionate about the rural (or “natural”) experience were Jens Jensen and O.C. Simonds, both of whom looked to the native landscape for inspiration and direction.<sup>25</sup>

### **Tracing Rural Tradition Values in Contemporary Landscape Architecture**

In his book, Ecology, Community and Delight: Values in Landscape Architecture, written in 2000, Ian Thompson searched for core defining values of landscape architecture by interviewing twenty-six practicing landscape architects.<sup>26</sup> Having practiced himself for many years, and taking the advice of these contemporary practitioners, he concluded that if landscape architects are to be more than just "planting technicians," they have to take a high moral ground and retain the profession's loyalty to principled aesthetics.<sup>27</sup> Using *genius loci* as the driving force of a site or locale, Thompson asserted that a fundamental respect for the ecological system, *combined with* its cultural and aesthetic dynamics, will most effectively serve the inhabitants and the land that sustains them. However, consulting the *genius loci* should not confine landscape architecture to “backward-looking strategies which can degenerate into pastiche,” said Thompson.<sup>28</sup> It must inspire, not dictate.

While the profession may go in many directions (urban parks, city street design, suburban residences, etc.), it must always be grounded in promoting and protecting ecosystems, supporting the human community as part of the natural community, and being "artistical" as Andrew Jackson Downing liked to call it in the nineteenth century. Delight and inspiration go hand in

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<sup>25</sup> For examples of their works see: Jens Jensen, *Siftings* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990) and O.C. Simonds, *Landscape Gardening* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1920).

<sup>26</sup> Ian Thompson, *Ecology, Community and Delight: Values in Landscape Architecture* (London: E and Fn Spon, 2000).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* p.190.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* p. 25.

hand with the "sciences" of design and the mandate to serve humanity. Design that is solely profit-driven, as was some of the design of the last decades of the twentieth century, not only fails the users and their ecosystem, it fails the profession.

Contemporary rural American designers in the South can heed Thompson's call to respect the *genius loci* precisely because that spirit remains readily identifiable. The American farm has many permutations, but its basic identity is still closely tied to the land it inhabits.<sup>29</sup> And in the South, this relationship is still directly tied to the area's past. History lives in the ways people use their porches, slaughter hogs, or attend church. These folk ways can teach modern rural designers about agricultural character and provide references for new designs. This is good news also for preservationists because what it means is that instead of always bemoaning *loss* we can celebrate the past through new forms driven by traditional methods. The new design emerges from the old; not bound but definitely inspired by and tied to what came before.

In the American South, several designers emerged in the late twentieth century who carried appreciation of *genius loci* to a new level. These designers (and scholars) sought out the elements of local vernacular buildings and grounds that expressed the human experience of non-privileged residents. Small working farms long the Blue Ridge Parkway, African-American swept yards, and sharecropper houses emerged as significant signposts of culture, worthy of study and incorporation into design decisions at both local and regional levels.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Large industrial farm operations have radically changed both the experience of the farm family and the design of the farm. When large operation poultry farmers in Madison County were interviewed for this study, however, they did not hesitate to call themselves *farmers*. Family continues to play a primary role and homesteads are not far from the chicken houses. We might say that traditional small-holdings farm elements persist but in different scale.

<sup>30</sup> Ian Firth's work on the Blue ridge Parkway with the National Park Service documents regional and national design that came to respect the vernacular, while Samuel Mockbee's work exemplifies "local" design at a very personal level. Mark Reinberger and Richard Westmacott's analyses of working rural yardscapes also emphasize non-professional, *local* design.

## Twentieth Century Rural Design and the Southern Vernacular

*Not only is the knowledge of what is local about any place starting to disappear, but also the sensibility that makes us see the value in that local specialness.*

Jim Baird, Comer

*The architect's primary connection is always with place; and not just the superficial qualities of place but the deeper energizing focus of the entire cultural structure where the making of the architecture occurs.*

Samuel Mockbee<sup>31</sup>

Where Andrew Jackson Downing and his intellectual descendents strove to establish principles of rural design that could be applied anywhere, modern late twentieth century designers moved to embrace *genius loci* in a more radical, local way. (By radical here I mean *rooted*.) While many developers of American residential design in the mid-twentieth-century embraced suburbanization wholeheartedly, which led to homogenization and sprawl, these suburban forms created their own aesthetic which was not tied to the traditional farm experience.

The concern for the demise of the uniqueness of distinctive communities in the U.S. was first articulated during the nineteenth century in the Northeast and the Midwest, when people began to see urbanization and industrialization swallowing up rural and natural environments. In the South it wasn't until the twentieth century that effects of commercialization and industrialization had equally dramatic impacts on rural areas. In Georgia, this expansion was fueled by many factors, among them white flight from the cities during the Civil Rights era, the lack of natural boundaries to growth, and a booming new economy that was no longer based on farming. Urban centers became commercial districts full of skyscrapers that ignored the human

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<sup>31</sup>Andrea Oppenheimer Dean and Timothy Hursely, eds., *Rural Studio: Samuel Mockbee and an Architecture of Decency* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2002), p.101.



community at street level; residential housing and small retailers were pushed out of the heart of the cities and people left for an affordable land in outlying neighborhoods.<sup>32</sup>

Henry Grady's vision of a New South that was to rise out of poverty through economic development became a reality of strip malls on town edges and urban downtowns that were increasingly full of high-rise office buildings and fewer and fewer residents.<sup>33</sup> Development in the New South in the twentieth century seemed especially devoid of a historical and environmental context. While industrial growth brought prosperity to many people, it also signaled the demise of the rural culture that had defined the region for its entire existence. Farmland, worn out from bad farming practices, began to be seen as a commodity, a place for urban centers to expand, rather than a place that provided society with food and a repository of the nation's rural character. This new economy was limited to Georgia's urban centers for the most part, however. Also, farmers in South Georgia with large holdings could compete on a national level, but the small-holdings farmers of areas like the Georgia piedmont saw their opportunities shrink.

Rural communities that experienced growth after the recession of the early 1970s had less and less "culturally specific" businesses, like blacksmiths or feed mills that were integrated in the local society's economy. The agriculture-based economy was changing dramatically and traditional economies like the textile industry, which once had at least some ties to the cotton empire, began closing down. Locally owned clothing manufacturers, many of which employed rural people in small towns, sent their factories to Mexico and other Central American countries,

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<sup>32</sup> Robert Bullard, Glenn Johnson and Angel Torres, eds., *Sprawl City: Race, Politics and Planning in Atlanta* (Washington: Island Press, 2000).

<sup>33</sup> Henry Grady was the editor of the *Atlanta Constitution* and a vocal booster for a new Georgia economy that would embrace industrial development from the North in an effort to rise out of the poverty and degradation that had dogged the South since Reconstruction. See Numan Bartley, *The Creation of Modern Georgia*, (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1990), p. 83-87.

thus removing yet another layer of the agrarian past that had evolved into a Southern rural industrial economy.

### **Economic and Social Changes Give Birth to a New Sensibility**

As suburban sprawl out of the South's urban centers increased, some designers looked for inspiration to the rural vernacular architecture and the culture in which it was embedded. In part this was intended to identify and articulate character that seemed to be disappearing into homogenization. Economic growth trends were beginning to have their effects in many cities and towns across the U.S., while in the rural South, small town life and rural experience were left "behind." Ironically, the small towns' inability to mobilize themselves in the wake of new economic trends meant that they also would retain much of their local character and personality. Small farms, too, which were not in the direct line of development, held onto agriculture-based character.<sup>34</sup> Over time, the rural South and small town life became a kind of cultural repository where people could still see the artifacts of the past even as town squares emptied and the number of small family farms shrank. Some farms were consolidated and others abandoned outright, lowering the actual number of farms.<sup>35</sup> A rural way of life persisted but in many ways it was encased in poverty and degradation rather than productivity and independence.

In the 1970s and 1980s, landscape architects like Ian Firth and Richard Westmacott began to articulate a new sensibility to rural domestic environments. In his study on the Blue Ridge Parkway, Firth realized that much of what was framed as rural farmsteads along the scenic

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<sup>34</sup> Numan Bartley, *The Creation of Modern Georgia* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1990.) See Bartley's discussion of the effects of industrialization in the early twentieth century on the agriculturally based society in Georgia: "Myth, Reality, and Social Stability in Plain Black and White," p.126-146.

<sup>35</sup> Gilbert Fite, *Cotton Fields No More: 1865-1980*. (Lexington.: The University of Kentucky Press, 1984).

highway, were idealized by the road's designers.<sup>36</sup> Richard Westmacott chose to study and map the gardens and yards of slave descendents in the rural south in his book, African American Gardens and Yards in the Rural South. He found these vernacular landscapes were rich with history and had definite principles that shaped the owners' outdoor lives. This study was unique because it was the first time in the South that a professional landscape architect had chronicled a genre of yardscapes that was not from the dominant class. In both of these studies the authors pointed to the significance of "real" working rural landscapes.

Another designer who resisted this homogenization of Southern culture and even looked into what was "broken" for inspiration and sustenance was Samuel Mockbee. Mockbee, an artist and architect who taught at Auburn University, was a fifth generation Southerner who practiced in both rural and urban communities, where he fully embraced *genius loci* and expressed it in unique and modern ways. He was also a social activist in rural Alabama. While he was deeply concerned about the poverty left behind in the rural South by the new economic trends mentioned above (and old prejudices and paradoxical social structures as well), his designs for houses and public buildings went beyond renewal or simple upgrading. His perspective on the challenges of creating buildings that would provide more than just shelter was tied to much more than economic necessity. "Everybody wants the same thing, rich or poor: not only a warm, dry room, but a shelter for the soul." <sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ian Firth, "The Blue Ridge Parkway: Road to the Modern Preservation Movement" in Charles A Birbaum and M.V. Hughes, eds. *Design with Culture: Claiming America's Landscape Heritage*. (Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 2005).

<sup>37</sup> Andrea Oppenheimer Dean and Timothy Hursely, eds. *Rural Studio: Samuel Mockbee and an Architecture of Decency* (New York.: Princeton architectural Press, 2002), p.4.



**Figure 3.1:** The butterfly house in Hale County, Alabama, re-created out of a tenant house by Samuel Mockbee's Rural Studio.<sup>38</sup>

In Mockbee's opinion, the soul of a place could be accessed *through its inhabitants* and how they expressed their culture through art, lifestyle, faith, and varied aspects of life other than just economic necessity. His process, unlike Downing's which adapted specific models from other cultures and held them up for example, actually embraced the paradoxical and ambiguous aspects of Southern rural life and created a whole new entity. By mythologizing or at least being willing to express elements of the non-material experience of his poorer clients, Mockbee forced a transmogrification of the shacks and shanties of rural Alabama. An example of this is the "Butterfly House" (Fig.1) which turned a traditional tenant shack into a livable work of art.<sup>39</sup> While the circumstances of the client's life did not change, the everyday experience of life in the house was reinvented.

As a designer and professor Mockbee presented the discipline of architecture as one rooted in community, responding to its environmental, social, political and local aesthetic. His

<sup>38</sup> Butterfly House by the Rural Studio, Auburn, Al. Picture downloaded from <http://www.cadc.auburn.edu/soa/rural-studio>.

<sup>39</sup> I'm not sure exactly why this house is referred to as the Butterfly House. Its new rooflines resemble a butterfly's wings; also, its transformation exemplifies the butterfly's chrysalis as the "new" house emerges from the old.

process included engaging the residents/users of his buildings, as well as his students who had actually to live on site and participate in every aspect of a project, from design to installation. He recognized inherent value in the existing homesites and let those values emerge with the help of their owners. The new versions of the homesteads were not re-makes or gentrified versions of themselves; they were entirely *new* expressions. Mockbee showed how vernacular art and architecture provide original sources for local design in the way that primary resources such as letters and diaries might provide a historian with information that is directly derived *from its source*. This is a different kind of truth than the kind that can be weighed or measured and supported with “facts.” It is an *expressive* truth. Southern folk culture and the vernacular become expressive resources for architects and landscape architects in this late-twentieth-century design model.

This interactive participation made the designs respond successfully to their sites and to the needs of the people who would be using them. Mockbee’s insistence on context-based learning was a reflection of his context-based designs, and it is what made them such powerful responses to the *genius loci* of each site. Though not a landscape architect, Mockbee did engage the landscape and local vernacular in ways that would fit American landscape architecture's traditional principles of responding to the particulars of the existing site. As a native Southerner, Mockbee also knew well the everyday requirements for living in the hot, humid climate, where buildings were closely tied to their surroundings. He also knew that the physical landscape was imbued with a mythos that must be actively engaged if the design was to generate solutions that would go beyond just creating livable structures.

But the design solutions would not be limited to quotidian practicality; they would grow out of a deeper, more complex understanding of the soul of the places of the South. Mockbee

was not afraid to address questions of “mystery” and “spirit” when exploring the complex cultural fabric of the South. In the South in the 1970s, this meant literally embracing the remaining mystique that was still very much alive, especially in rural areas. Weathered and crumbling structures were artifacts for a society that was also weathered (experienced) and crumbling (caving in to passage of time).

Lori Ryker, the editor of the monograph, Mockbee Coker: Thought and Process, explained that Mockbee and his partner, Coleman Coker

...developed an architectural language that combined their impressions of local forms, the landscape, and mythologies with those ideas and forms holding universal meaning. Their architecture embodied new interpretations of Southern traditions simultaneously developed with the influences of the expanding global culture and a local community's particularities.<sup>40</sup>

The design process included the *genius loci*, which was shaped by mythological and historical components, as well as the physical elements of a particular place.<sup>41</sup> Bottle trees, shrines to the dead, outdoor food preparation and areas to “just sit” (meditate on life?) were part of his multi-faceted designs. By exploring the less tangible aspects of the Southern vernacular, Mockbee became an architect whose actions were based "on the relationship between what exists in the landscape and what is added, what is remembered and what is invented."<sup>42</sup> Analogy and metaphor shaped the buildings along with sun angle and stormwater management. Mockbee explained:

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<sup>40</sup> Lori Ryker, *Mockbee Coker: Thought and Process*. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1995), p.18.

<sup>41</sup> By “mythological” here I mean the design related to stories that explain experiences of rural Southerners. Writers like Jean Toomer, Flannery O’Connor and Harry Crews are especially adept at portraying the complexity and paradoxes of rural “mythology” in Georgia. See *Cane* (Toomer), *The Violent Bare it Away* (O’Connor) and *Feast of Snakes* (Crews).

<sup>42</sup> Lori Ryker, *Mockbee Coker: Thought and Process*. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1995), p. 35.

The architect's primary connection is always with place; and not just the superficial qualities of place but the deeper energizing focus of the entire cultural structure where the making of the architecture occurs.<sup>43</sup>

Mockbee did most of his best known work in Hale County, an impoverished county in Alabama near Auburn. His use of local materials and the local architectural traditions of Deep South agricultural society created buildings—both living quarters and community structures—that were derivations of the vernacular. The tin roof and the screen porch were two of his favorite elements of houses in rural Alabama. His domestic environments also engaged the yards in ways inspired by the swept yards of rural Southerners. Stairs onto the porch served as benches and social gathering areas; the yard around the houses was a collection of outdoor rooms, and residents were expected to *participate* in the landscape by way of gardens, smoke houses, and barnyard activities.

In addition, like the early traditional landscape architects of England and America, Mockbee was deeply influenced by visual artists. In his case, modern artists like Picasso, Klee, Pollack and Matisse were the inspiration rather than traditional landscape painters. Their art was not strictly representational, just as Mockbee's architecture was not a replica of an old construct. These modern painters looked at the human form and the world in ways that were not limited by surface appearances. By deconstructing them, the painter engaged the viewer in new ways of perceiving. Mockbee in turn looked at the *expressive* forms of the rural African-American life, reconfigured them, and incorporated them into design.

Mockbee's appreciation of the local life, which included whimsical, spiritual and mystical elements, also inspired him artistically. His designs contain elements of the folk art tradition that also express the *local* human experience. Many of his clients were descendents of

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101

slaves who lived in very limited economic circumstances and whose creative outflow was always shaped by what was at hand. Murals were put on outdoor walls, furniture dragged into the yard, and animals, both wild and domesticated, moved freely through the spaces. Bottle trees, gourd trees, whirligigs and lawn ornaments (aedicula/shrines/niches) made from pieces of concrete and other leftovers, were encouraged. Like Jens Jensen, Mockbee celebrated outdoor hearths and campfire rings, aspects of life that melded practicality with spirit and history.

Mockbee created designs that people of modest means could enjoy and use and that would serve to inspire them and speak to their most noble instincts. Like Downing before him, Mockbee espoused an aesthetic that captured the nobility of its residents. "It seems to me that there is a certain presence that a person can have, that a thought can have, that, if it elevates our spirits, is noble."<sup>44</sup> But unlike Downing, Mockbee allowed the instinctive, intuitive nobility of his clients to shine through. Also, he didn't gloss over the hardships and suffering that he found. Mockbee wasn't "lifting" people up as much as he was encouraging them to express their culture in a new way that also happened to include improved shelter. For him the conditions of the rural poor did not dictate the aesthetic in exclusively negative ways: creativity and inventiveness were appropriated in positive, inspiring ways. A shanty or shack was reinvented to be a safe, warm, and dry shelter that grew out of the poverty and into a new and bolder structure to nurture the souls of its residents. Where Downing tried to help Americans settle in to the existing agricultural experience, Mockbee chose to redefine the settlement so that it responded better to the needs of the residents. Mockbee differed dramatically from Downing as well by his refusal to try to establish some sort of over-arching sensibility or "taste." The modernist Mockbee, while very aware of the power of the South's past and heritage, thrilled at the chance to let each

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.



landscape be an ecstatic celebration of its individuality. His process asked that designers find ways to *unleash* a landscape or building design from expectations, rather than prescribe specific doctrines or definitions of what constituted a "rural home."

These modern practitioners and scholars represent a shift in design approach. Where early designers like Downing, Bailey and Waugh had more top-down approaches to design, Westmacott, Firth and Mockbee redirected the process to include the existing vernacular, giving design more of a bottom-up path.

This redefinition of the methods and role of the designer has lessons for contemporary Southern landscape architects as well. It focuses on the land and the local culture, and lets them speak to help create something new. The rural domestic environments that will be presented in the next chapter are extensions of this new design imperative. By examining rural homesteads that were not professionally designed, but which express a rural aesthetic and fit well into the culture around them, we will see good examples of this "bottom-up" (or inside-out) approach.

### **Summarizing Rural Influences in Landscape Design**

The story of the relationship between rural design and the profession of landscape architecture is one that reaches back all the way to the first practitioners in America. Rural landscapes and rural aesthetics have played defining roles in the evolution of American landscape design even as the basis for rural influence has changed. There are fewer numbers of farms in America producing more food and other products than ever before, and still the concept of the small family farm and its built environments persist in the American imagination.

Landscape architects in the twenty-first century will be able to help newcomers to rural areas in more sustainable ways if they hold on to more truthful elements of rural life and let design emerge out of *genius loci* as the modern designers discussed here have done. Gone is the

static model of the “perfect” rural household of Andrew Jackson Downing, and in its place a more organic and lively example that embraces vernacular and “found” constructs. *Genius loci* remains as crucial in modern rural design as it was in nineteenth century rural design, but it is defined with broader and deeper sensibilities. For this discussion the spirit of the place incorporates human history, natural environments, and the cultural elements of small-holdings farm life, as well as some non-material aspects of human experience in a Southern rural environment. Using Madison County, Georgia, as the study focus, we will explore this version of a particular rural community’s *genius loci* in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 4: Identifying Rural Character and *Genius Loci* of Madison County

If embracing *genius loci* is to be the guiding force in rural design, just what is the process for uncovering Madison County's *genius loci*? By examining the social, ecological and aesthetic qualities of the county the character of the region will emerge: a rural Georgia piedmont community that is inhabited, for the most part, by Anglo-American and African American families that have been involved in agriculture in various forms for several generations. First we will discuss the county's natural elements; then we will explore its agricultural and social history. There will also be a discussion of contemporary cultural traditions in the summary of this chapter.

### Character Grounding: Madison County's Rural History

Since the late 1700s, Madison County has been dominated by families making a living from the land. The experience of the farming life has been shaped by the soils, climate and temperament of the people working the land, which engendered a lifestyle that has evolved over time but maintained a strong sense of identity across several generations.

From its earliest European-based history in the eighteenth century, the region in and around Madison County has been an enticement for people interested in economic opportunities based on the rich and varied land. Unlike neighboring counties that sat on veins of granite, marble and, in a limited amount, gold, Madison County's natural benefits were largely derived from natural resources such as the soil, especially the fertile valley lands along its rivers and streams, and the availability of water and navigable streams.<sup>1</sup> While Georgia's first settlements in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were Spanish and French, it was the British colony established by James Oglethorpe at Savannah that provided the early white population and the

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<sup>1</sup> For a historical presentation of the area see E. Merton Coulter, *Old Petersburg and the Broad River Valley of Georgia: Their Rise and Decline* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1965).

opportunity for growth and expansion later into the Georgia piedmont and specifically, Madison County.

### **The Natural Physical Elements of Madison County**

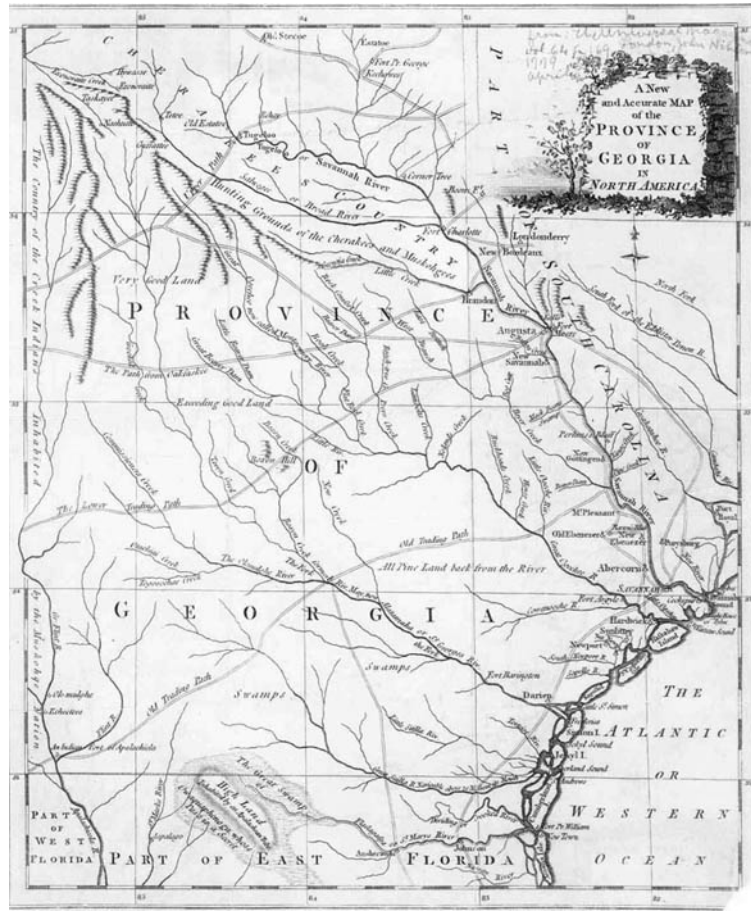
Madison County's geography is typical of the Georgia Piedmont: rolling hills in its northernmost sections, with occasional views of the North Georgia mountains; red clay soils and shallow streams interrupted by expansive shoals. Upland hardwood forests contain mostly white and red oak, maples, sweet gums, sycamores and poplars.<sup>2</sup> Because most of these woods were harvested in past centuries, the deciduous trees are just now reaching a mature age, with trunks eighteen to twenty-four inches in diameter. The native understory includes dogwoods, serviceberry and silver bells that bloom white, and Piedmont azaleas that bloom pink in early spring. River cane and upland oats grow in swaths along the creeks, sending up delicate light green shoots as summer approaches. Running cedar blankets the forest floor along with ferns, bloodroot and honeysuckle, while muscadine and other creeping plants like cross vine, smilax, wild hydrangea and jessamine climb the towering trees above. In open lands that have been farmed for two centuries, pastures are surrounded by early successional forests edged with smaller native plum trees and emerging pines, sumacs and cedars.

The natural characteristics of the landscape combine with cultural characteristics and human history to create what we call the "rural character." And, as with any landscape, it is always helpful to explore the human story of the place in order to capture some of its spirit. Where the ancient Greeks and Romans might have thought of *genius loci* as a spirit at a place of (Delphi, for example), modern American designers might consider the natural and cultural

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<sup>2</sup> Charles Wharton, *Natural Environments of Georgia*, (Georgia Department of Natural Resources: Atlanta: 1978), p.146-161.

history, combined with the religious experience of the inhabitants, as vessels that hold the spirit of the place.



**Figure 4.1:** Map made in 1779 of Province of Georgia showing Savannah River and Broad River valley.

### **William Bartram in the Broad River Valley: A Voice in the Wilderness**

One of the clearest voices that described the natural setting of the Broad River valley region in the early years of European settlement was William Bartram, who traveled throughout the South from 1773 to 1777. Bartram had an understanding of the area's environmental qualities before the white settlers dominated the landscape, and his voice is relatively free of the

hyperbole of land speculators who also came to the area during the middle to late 1700s.<sup>3</sup> He first came to the Georgia piedmont employed by a group of British naturalists who wanted to know more about the flora and fauna of the New World. Bartram explored and recorded data and impressions of life and culture on the frontier, and because he was interested in scientific discovery and not just looking for marketable land *per se*, we can trust his descriptions to be accurate. His travels were some of the first attempts to get a broader and deeper understanding of the piedmont landscape—its soils, river and stream networks and topography-- in addition to plants and wildlife. His descriptions paint a picture of the “natural” state of the county, and these writings and drawings can serve as a foundation for understanding the landscape before frontiersmen, pioneers, settlers and yeoman farmers made their marks.

Bartram, a watercolorist, naturalist and son of John Bartram of Philadelphia, first came to Savannah, Georgia, by way of Charleston, South Carolina. Twice he traveled to the back country and explored the regions in and around what is today Madison County. First, in 1773, he ventured out from Augusta (at the time a growing city that would become Georgia’s capital in 1785) and a second time, in 1775. During the summer of 1773 he joined an entourage in a trek across the land that lay between the Oconee River to the west, the Little River to the south, and the Broad River to the north. This trek was part of an effort by land speculators, Native Americans, and other curious adventurers to better understand the lands that were being ceded to the Anglo-American population in 1773 in what was referred to as the "New Purchase."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> William Bartram, *The Travels of William Bartram: The Naturalist’s Edition*, ed. Francis Harper (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998): p. 37.

<sup>4</sup> Brad Sanders, *Guide to William Bartram’s Travels: Following the Trail of America’s first Great Naturalist*, (Athens, Ga.: Fevertree Press , 2002), p.92.

## **The Land before there was a Madison County**

Throughout the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century, Northeast Georgia was a thinly populated area of untouched forests and grazing lands inhabited by the Native American population, mostly Creek and Cherokee. While Creek and Cherokee Indians hunted and camped throughout the region, there are no known permanent Native American settlements of significant size.<sup>5</sup> During the 1730s and 1740s as the British colony established itself in and around Savannah, Anglo-American populations began scouting out lands to the north and west. The lower Broad River Valley, for which Madison County provides the northern boundary, was one of the earliest and most populated areas of the new colony of Georgia. Using the Savannah River as their access route, first a small number of pioneers, then settlers, pushed inland in search of land. The town of Augusta on the Savannah River, established by James Oglethorpe in 1735 to control relations with the Creek Indians, served as an important base for people seeking new hunting grounds and lands to settle. While the majority of the population came via this route, there were also settlers who came south across the river from the Carolinas and into what is now Elbert County, east of Madison. The Broad River, which flows into the Savannah, shaped much of the culture that migrated up from the low country along its banks and in its waters. Numerous ferries and mills thrived later in the nineteenth century, but because of the Broad River's shallowness, large industry was limited mostly to the river's lower reaches.<sup>6</sup>

Some of Georgia's early settlements were created as pious efforts to form utopias and fresh starts for disenfranchised immigrants; however, the main impetus behind settlement in this

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<sup>5</sup>For detailed discussion of Native American populations in the Georgia piedmont see Charles Hudson, *Southeastern Indians* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1976).

<sup>6</sup>E. Merton Coulter, *Old Petersburg and the Broad River Valley of Georgia: Their Rise and Decline*. (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1965).

area of Georgia appears to have been financial gain and basic survival.<sup>7</sup> Until the 1780s, parts of what became Madison County were basically the western frontier of white settlement in eastern North America. These pioneers created trading posts, forts and river crossings before they created farms. First clearing forests near streams, rivers and springs, their impact on the land was quickly expressed. Mills and forges came next. Forts of various sizes were constructed for protection, sometimes from the Native American population, sometimes from the British military. Remnants of all of these endeavors still can be found across the county and region.

As more people began settling in the late 1700s and early 1800s, small-holdings farms and larger plantations were established across the Piedmont. By the time Madison County was formed as a political entity in 1811, farming was the predominant way of life, and since that time, has remained so.<sup>8</sup>

### **Early Agricultural Practices that Shaped the Land for a Century**

The New Purchase of land from the native population in 1773 was a major turning point in the history of settlement of the area. Approximately two million acres were ceded, covering the area that would include Madison, Elbert, Wilkes, Lincoln and Oglethorpe Counties. Georgia's Royal Governor, James Wright, oversaw the distribution of land in this territory during the 1770s. No one person was allowed to buy over 1,000 acres, although this rule was broken from time to time for high-ranking officers and individuals who established furnaces and forges, operations that were essential to the settler population's ability to survive. Surveyors often were sent by Wright to lay out the boundaries of farms of 100 to 1,000 acres, and numerous "farms" were established before the Revolutionary War. Typically, a settler was allowed 200 acres plus 50 additional acres per family member or slave. This size farm appears to have been

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<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p.22-30.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Tabor, *The History of Madison County Georgia*, (Privately published in Danielsville, Ga., 1974), p.43-54.



typical of the kinds of holdings that were first established in Madison County. Larger plantations were the norm in nearby counties to the south and east, especially Oglethorpe County. While a few families created huge cotton plantations in later decades, Madison County was typically and historically a county of smaller holdings.<sup>9</sup> (Some contemporary farmers attribute this to the soil types and what they could produce as much as to the wealth and social class of the early farmers.<sup>10</sup>)

Because the area was so heavily forested, land clearing was the main preoccupation of the first settlers. “Pioneer Farming,” as it was called, was largely a process of slash and burn, although girdling and leaving trees to die standing was also practiced. Cane grew thickly in the low-lying, wet areas, while deciduous forests and their understory of shrubs and brambles also challenged white settlers who were intent on creating fields.<sup>11</sup>

Fields created in flatter areas near the river were usually planted in corn, tobacco, pumpkins and beans. Tobacco and corn were the main cash crops of the early settlers. Corn was used for animal feed or traded and sold along with the tobacco to neighboring communities. Corn was also used for making whiskey, a significant commodity for the backwoods dwellers. Both of these crops required open land and plenty of sunlight, so land clearing was a common practice in the early establishment of the yeoman culture.

Early homes were log and frame, often two rooms with a dogtrot. Sawmills came into existence about 1800, thus beginning the tradition of sawed lumber dwellings. Chimneys were usually mud and flat rocks. In the earliest days, brush and tree limbs were used for fencing to

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Preston Brooks, *The Agrarian Revolution in Georgia, 1865-1912* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Bulletin, 1914), p. 69-80.

<sup>10</sup> From author’s discussions with David Morgan and various other farmers whose families have lived in the area for several generations.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Tabor, *The History of Madison County Georgia* (Privately published in Danielsville, Ga., 1974), p.44.

keep livestock—horses, hogs, cattle and sheep—out of cropland. Split rail fencing restrained livestock as farms became larger and more established.

Farm animals were allowed to roam the woods foraging for food, a practice which also had a large impact on the native landscape, particularly in riparian areas. Cane and native grasses were abundant along creek sides and river lowlands before farming practices of the nineteenth century virtually wiped them off the map of the American Southeast. Early settlers and Native Americans realized these grasses were an important source of food for roaming livestock. The smaller types of cane, switch cane, grows five to eight feet high, can still be seen along river banks and creeks and in swampy areas in Madison County.<sup>12</sup> The destruction of the millions of acres of cane across the Southeast in the nineteenth century was one of the most dramatic environmental and cultural changes these early residents caused. Converting forests and the abundant cane breaks to row crops and cotton fields meant opening up the old growth forests which in turn reshaped the shrub and ground level plant and animal life. What cane that wasn't destroyed by hand removal (African slave labor, Native Americans and free laborers) was eliminated by fire, another common clearing practice.<sup>13</sup> These practices profoundly affected the region's ability to regenerate, both physically and culturally, and today there are almost no pockets of "virgin" forest land except in the most extreme slopes along the Broad River.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to pines, the forests of Madison County grew chestnuts, oaks and hickories, which provided a host of nuts for livestock. Fowl, especially turkey and chickens, found plenty to eat on the forest floor in the leaf litter. Many native flowering trees and shrubs provided food

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<sup>12</sup> See Bartram's writings as well as the history of Madison County by Paul Tabor. Also, Mart A. Stewart's article on the destruction of native cane habitats in the Southeast: "From King Cane to King Cotton: Razing Cane in the Old South" *Environmental History* (2007).

<sup>13</sup> Mart A. Stewart, "From King Cane to King Cotton: Razing Cane in the Old South" *Environmental History* (2007).

<sup>14</sup> Charles Wharton, *Natural Environments of Georgia* (Atlanta, Ga.: Georgia Department of Natural Resources, 1978). See chapter titled "Piedmont Province," p.146.

for bees, in addition to the fruit trees planted by the settlers. County historian, Paul Tabor claimed there were at least three kinds of wild “beans” that grew at the edges of cane breaks, which also provided sustenance.<sup>15</sup>

### **Setting the Stage for Modern Farm Life: The Early Pioneer Farmers of Madison County**

Land grants in what is now Madison County started as early as the 1780s and there is record of an active mill in 1790 at Watson Mill on the river's south fork. The family histories of the settlers who put down roots in the eastern part of the county are fairly well documented. They came from Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina. Many family descendants still reside in modern day Madison County.

In general, the earliest settlers who entered the Georgia Piedmont by way of Charleston, South Carolina, and Savannah were English and Scotch-Irish who moved north and west towards Appalachia. Their first domestic landscapes were efforts to tame the wilderness and they tried to impose a little “civilization” with fences to enclose their houses and gardens. According to garden historian Catherine Howett, “the earliest domestic yards of vernacular landscapes functioned to accommodate essential activities and structures of rural living: gardening, slaughtering, cooking and other kinds of food processing; laundering; storage sheds and cellars; and pens, coops or stables.”<sup>16</sup> These gardens reflected the “imposition of a European idea about order and civilization on the threatening disorder of wild nature.”<sup>17</sup> The gardens were “working

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<sup>15</sup> Paul Tabor, *A History of Madison County* (Privately published in Danielsville, Ga., 1974), p. 43. Author has not been able to determine what kinds of “beans” these were.

<sup>16</sup> Catherine Howett, “Residential Landscape Traditions,” *New Georgia Encyclopedia* (2005).  
<http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org>.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

yards” and in later decades would include “swept yards” where inhabitants cleared the sand and clay earth with a broom on a regular basis.<sup>18</sup>

The general pattern of population emigrations shows that, from 1790 to 1860, about half of the population was a mix of Scotch-Irish and Welsh and about one fourth of the white population in the South was “English.”<sup>19</sup> Other English settlers in the Georgia Piedmont migrated from the Northeast, beginning in the Philadelphia area and migrating to Virginia and the Carolinas. The Scotch-Irish, who predominated were largely of Presbyterian stock and some of the oldest churches built in Madison County were Presbyterian. In 1739 a terrific famine in Northern Ireland had sent a wave of emigration from Ulster. These Scotch-Irish settlers flooded the western part of Pennsylvania, Virginia and North Carolina. Many of Madison County’s earliest white settlers came to Georgia as this migration continued south and west. Also, later in the 1770s, over 50,000 Presbyterians emigrated from Ulster to North America and settled mostly in North and South Carolina, where they formed a majority of the backcountry population.<sup>20</sup> Again, many of these Scotch-Irish emigrants found their ways south to Northeast Georgia.

By the time of the New Purchase, in 1773, there was also a large population of frontiersmen who had been crowded on the South Carolina side of the Savannah River and were anxious to start their lives over in new territory. Some of these “squatters” were considered “villainous” and uncultured by the church-going Protestants. They often lived in small huts rather than real houses and survived mostly by hunting and plundering. Horse thievery was common, supposedly, and these people were a threat to the more “civilized” Protestant family

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<sup>18</sup> Richard Westmacott, *African American Gardens and Yards of the Rural South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992).

<sup>19</sup> John B. Rehder, “The Scotch-Irish and English in Appalachia,” in *To Build a New Land*, ed. Allen G. Noble, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1992), pp. 95-118.

<sup>20</sup> Brad Sanders, *A Guide to William Bartram’s Travels: Following the Trail of America’s First Great Naturalist*. (Athens: Fevertree Press, 2002), p. 175.

groups who were coming by way of legal and documented land purchases. While these descriptions of these people may be somewhat dubious—after all, exactly who was making the distinction and what were their motivations?—it is still significant to note that accurate or not, there were a lot of independent-minded, hard living, poor people who joined the more established Protestant populations that provided the ancestry for the Broad River region in its earliest days. They tended to live outside of the newly established society, were suspicious of government, and often settled their differences with a fight rather than by committee or vote. They moved around a lot and made their livings by hunting and fishing and/or trading. Whiskey was an important part of their culture, which was, in general, “rough-and-tumble,” to say the least. They tended to have clannish loyalties and because they moved around so much, lacked education and had little loyalty to the larger community outside their own kin. Many of these traits persist in modern day Madison County culture, by way of social and perhaps even genetic, heritage.<sup>21</sup>

### **Establishing Farms after the American Revolution**

After 1802 all land secured from Native Americans was surveyed and the divisions numbered and distributed to citizens of Georgia by lottery. These divisions were square parcels of 40 acres. There were eight land lotteries in Georgia between 1805 and 1835. According to the U.S. Census, there were 3,735 people living in Madison County in 1820.<sup>22</sup> All of the African-American population at that time was in slavery except for two people; the rest, besides the

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<sup>21</sup> What I mean by “genetic” here is that certain cultural lessons and behavior traits are handed down to each new generation and we can see many of these still at work in Madison County society today. Often rural residents will explain their understanding of a particular issue as “just being in my bones.” This doesn’t really qualify as *genetic* in the biological sense of the word.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Tabor, *History of Madison County* (appendix) for U.S. census figures.

unknown number of Native Americans, were white, primarily of English and Scotch-Irish descent.<sup>23</sup>

Madison County, which is 283 square miles, was formed out of pieces of Clarke, Elbert, Franklin, Jackson and Oglethorpe Counties in 1811. This was during a period of expansion and growth when Georgians pushed their frontier westward. In the beginning these Northeast Georgia counties surrounded Wilkes County, which had been created in 1773 as one of Georgia's original counties. Wilkes had been the border of Georgia and South Carolina, but after the cession of the Cherokee Indian lands, the state stretched up to and across the Broad River to the north. Georgia's population was growing dramatically during the four decades between the 1770s and 1810s, from 162,000 to 691,000 people.



**Figure 2.2:** A map of the piedmont counties of Georgia made in the early twentieth century. Counties to the north of the dotted line, including Madison County tended to have small-holdings farms with few or no slaves.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Census figures located at <http://www.census-online.com/links/GA/Madison>.

<sup>24</sup> Robert P. Brooks, "A Local Study of the Race Problem: Race Relations in the Eastern Piedmont Region of Georgia," *Political Science Quarterly* 26 (1911): p.194.

### **Madison County Agriculture in the Antebellum Period: 1785-1860**

As mentioned above, most of the Anglo-American yeoman farmers had small farms which they worked with less than twenty slaves or no slaves at all. These people were comprised of very poor to fairly stable, middle-income, self-sustaining farmers. In 1911, economic historian Robert P. Brooks described the area's population this way:

Settlers in the upper piedmont were people noted for their thrift, plainness and independence...they comprised a small farmer class that did not develop into wholesale cotton planters...and were accustomed to work with their hands. These immigrants settled down to careful, relatively intensive cultivation of the soil.<sup>25</sup>

Antebellum farmers in Madison County, specifically, fit this description well. These farmers personally performed their farming tasks, raised their own foodstuffs and managed their small places with care and foresight.

The railroad, which arrived during the mid-nineteenth century, had a profound impact on the development of the area's economy and culture. The railroads served the growing agricultural industry, including timber economies, connecting producers and growers to their markets. The first rails in the Madison County tied Athens to Augusta.

Before cotton dominated farming in the county, corn was the main crop. Small grains, sweet potatoes and tobacco were also important. Oxen rather than mules were used to plow new grounds after deforestation.<sup>26</sup> Green beans and Southern field peas, originally from Africa, were co-planted with the corn. Pumpkins often were planted between corn rows. The rich organic topsoil left after cutting down the forests and ash from burning leftover trees and stumps grew vegetables well but was quickly exhausted and depleted by erosion after hard rains. Farmers

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 204-219.

<sup>26</sup> Paul Tabor, *History of Madison County*, (Privately published in Danielsville, Ga., 1974), pp. 43-54.

would often “wear out” the land and then move on. Tabor wrote that this method was common for the majority of farmers in Madison County until after the Civil War. In the meantime, the dwindling supply of forage caused livestock to roam farther and farther from home. The practice of open range roaming ended by popular vote a generation later in the 1880s.

Historically, corn was vital to the agricultural economy in Madison County. However, once the cotton gin was invented in 1793, upland cotton became the main crop grown for export and would be the main force for economic advancement for even the yeoman farmers. Until the invention of the gin, which could extract the seed from the boll effectively, cotton was too laborious and expensive for small-holding farmers to process. But the gin made it possible for small-holdings farmers without a large slave labor force to have their cotton de-seeded. The cotton was taken by wagon to local gins instead of being cleaned by hand on the farm. Cotton dominated the landscape in Madison County for a century. Most cotton cultivation and harvesting, however, was done by hand until the second half of the twentieth century when tractors and other technological advancements replaced horse and mule-drawn plows.

Growing cotton in Madison County had a profound effect on the organization of the landscape. Huge quantities of trees were removed, further opening up the landscape and exposing the soil to erosion and depletion. Farmers in the county today recall being able to see for several miles across the county as “every tree” had been removed and cotton was the only thing growing between the towns.<sup>27</sup>

The main market for Madison County cotton and for buying supplies was Augusta, approximately one hundred miles to the east. Primitive roads traversed on horseback took about two weeks to travel there and back. Tobacco was rolled in hogsheads; cotton hauled in wagons

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<sup>27</sup> Danny Martin, fourth generation farmer in Madison County.



was pulled by horse and oxen; and animals for sale were driven there on foot. Camping grounds existed along the route.

Commercial fertilizer radically changed farming practices in the nineteenth century. Mixtures made of imported guano, bone meal and salt were used, as were super phosphates from Germany and France and soda nitrates from Chile. These fertilizers became especially widespread in Madison County after the Civil War, according to Tabor. Cotton production in Madison County, while modest compared to other, more coastal Georgia counties, increased steadily from about 600 bales per year in 1812 to just over 1100 in the 1830s and 1840s. After the Civil War, however, cotton production increased dramatically over the next few decades, with 28,922 bales produced in 1920.<sup>28</sup>

In general, while the antebellum period in Georgia might be considered a fairly productive and successful time for farmers, the years of the Civil War and its immediate aftermath were grueling. Resources—human, animal, manufactured goods and food—were needed for the war effort. In fact, because so many Georgians were involved in agriculture (as opposed to manufacturing), the war's effect on farmers was profound. Prosperity that had flourished up to the war, especially with regards to cotton, dissolved. The need for food was so high that cotton farmers were asked to convert to more diversified production. Corn, small grains, livestock, fruits and vegetables took precedence over cotton during the war years. Unfortunately, the cost of production went up, even for the yeoman farmer. Fertilizer costs increased and markets were unpredictable.

After the Civil War, the most dramatic effect on farming in the state was the abolition of slavery. While large plantations with tremendous numbers of slaves were not the norm in Madison County, the end of slave labor still had an impact on how land was managed. Even

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<sup>28</sup>Kenneth Coleman, *Outline of Georgia History* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1978), p.43.

small farms that had only a few slaves were profoundly affected, and the freed slaves, too, had to create a new way to survive. In general, productivity per acre went down and it took a few years for agriculture to reinvent itself as a slave-free institution. The state's railroads also were destroyed during the war, and state and local governments, like most businesses, went bankrupt. These factors had a large impact on Madison County's farm economy as it evolved during the 1870s.



**Figure 3.3:** The “Saw Dust” school in Danielsville, Ga. circa 1900. Children were an important part of the workforce on small farms. School calendars usually revolved around planting and harvesting schedules. Photographer unknown.<sup>29</sup>

During Reconstruction, sharecropping became a common practice, which had social as well as political and economic implications for decades to come. The poorer, small holdings farmers joined former slaves in the struggle to eke out a living and grow food for their families on land that belonged to someone else. The harsh conditions and perpetual debt drove a lot of rural Georgians from the farm to big cities and the growing textile industry. Madison County,

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<sup>29</sup> Old photograph from Madison County Public library collection: “Vanishing Madison County.”

like so many other rural Georgia counties during this period, lost people to the cities. The poverty and isolation of the rural Georgia population is well-documented in the essays and novels of Erskine Caldwell (Tobacco Road and God's Little Acre for example) and the photographs of Margaret Bourke-White, who spent time in Madison County.<sup>30</sup>

During the last decades of the nineteenth century and the years before the boll weevil in the twentieth century, however, cotton production made a comeback in Madison County. The end of slavery did not have quite as great an impact on the area because most farms had been owned and run by small holdings farmers; the overall economy was not as dependent on slave labor and therefore not as affected by its demise as the economies of the cotton producing counties further south.<sup>31</sup> Cotton's cultivation and its economy would dramatically shape the landscape of the county in the early twentieth century. Farmers of every land-holding size cleared land, installed bench terraces and planted cotton on every possible acre. The short-term prosperity was at the price of the land's viability, however, and the county still suffers from the soil's depletion during those years. Its waterways, specifically the Broad River, also suffered from sedimentation, clouding the waters in times of heavy rains and reducing the amount of oxygen available to flora and fauna.<sup>32</sup>

### **Twentieth Century Farming Practices in Madison County**

With the turmoil brought on by WWII, changing international markets, and the introduction of synthetic chemical inputs and the evolution of farm equipment, the systems of farming in the mid-twentieth century changed in even more dramatic ways. In the South these

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<sup>30</sup> Mark Reinberger's "The Architecture of Sharecropping: Extended Farms of the Georgia Piedmont," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, vol. 9, Constructing Image, Identity, and Place, (2003), pp.116-134.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Preston Brooks, *The Agrarian Revolution in Georgia*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Bulletin, 1914). pp. 69-81.

<sup>32</sup> Bruce Ferguson, "The Alluvial History and Environmental Legacy of the Abandoned Scull Shoals Mill." *Landscape Journal* 18 (1999): pp.147-156.

"advances" took a little longer to infiltrate the experience of the small holdings farmer. Southern farmers, black and white, struggled to find a way in the modern world in the mid-twentieth century while still reeling from the effects of war, economic depression and natural disaster. They were faced with problems of poverty, isolation and depleted farmland, and there was not much to romanticize or take inspiration from in sharecropping or tenancy, where many piedmont farmers struggled profoundly just to survive.

After cotton's failure, Madison County farmers planted corn, wheat, and soybeans, in addition to other vegetables and silage crops. Timber became one of the county's biggest crops in the latter part of the twentieth century, replacing traditional row cropping, while large poultry production houses came to dominate the farm gate value at the end of the century. Timber farming, especially, redefined the forests in the county, creating monocultures of short-leaf pine controlled by fire and herbicides, thus limiting the diversity of the land's understory.<sup>33</sup>

In the 1950s and 1960s poultry became a growing livelihood for Madison County farm families. Too, the economic fabric of this area of Georgia began to open up and diversify. Military bases grew in Augusta and outside of Atlanta; people found employment in nearby hospitals, the university and local schools, and state government. But farming remained the dominant lifestyle. Farming during this period included row crops such as corn and soybeans and hay crops like wheat and Bermuda grass, as well as cattle production.<sup>34</sup>

### **Rural Social Fabric in a Farming County**

Throughout this agricultural history the human population in the county remained fairly homogenous, with white, lower- and middle-income families predominating as they had throughout the county's two centuries. The few small towns began to suffer economically in the

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<sup>33</sup> Madison County Agricultural Extension fact sheets located at <http://caes.uga.edu/extension/county>.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

1950s and 1960s, with growth and economic opportunity only returning during the last decade of the twentieth century. Small New South farmsteads of traditional white frame farmhouses and unpainted barns gave way to ranch-style brick houses in the 1960s and 1970s, and mobile homes became ubiquitous in the 1990s. By this time, the typical farm family in the county usually had at least one member who worked off the farm, providing a steady income and insurance benefits to the rest of its members.<sup>35</sup>

The overall population peaked in the first half of the twentieth century when cotton was farmed in most of the county. Between 1960 and 1980 the population decreased but has since bounced back and has begun to grow again. More people have been able to find jobs in Athens, Gainesville and Royston which are all within driving distance of their family land. Currently, there are approximately 27,000 people living in Madison County. There is no cotton being grown and row cropping has all but ceased. Farming families that plant anything, plant wheat, millet and Bermuda grass for silage and mulch, and sorghum for cattle feed. Timber and poultry farms now dominate the agricultural base.

On timber farms loblolly pines are grown for pulp and wood products, and Bermuda grass and fescue are typical of the pastures. (In the 1990s large tracts of thousands of acres of timber land were sold off by paper companies as competition from Canada and increasing local land values made it less profitable to grow timber for an American market.) Several thousand chicken houses, including broilers and laying operations, function throughout the county. While only one family-owned dairy exists as of 2008, cattle operations remain common. There is an active Cattleman's Association with approximately 200 members, reflecting a continued interest in the beef market. Farming citizens broke ground on a new agriculture center at the county high

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<sup>35</sup> Information gleaned from interviews with several farm families in the county, especially Bobby and Carlene Clements.

school in January of 2008, which is designed to encourage young farmers to continue the agriculture tradition.

What are missing from the farming landscape are diverse family farms that grow several different things, including most of their own food. During the 1950s and 1960s, independent farmers in Madison County produced large quantities of vegetables, including sweet corn and sweet potatoes that were marketed in Atlanta and Athens. Soy beans and feed corn were also once common. But markets have changed dramatically and with them, rural domestic landscapes have become somewhat spare in appearance. The county has no feed mills of its own; growers who don't have their own milling equipment have to drive to Gainesville to get their products ground. Beef, poultry and timber markets remain subject to global trends and regulations.

### **Current Agricultural Statistics in Madison County**

Today, Madison County has a population of approximately 27,000 or 90 people per square mile. Its population continues to be predominantly Caucasian (90%), with a small African-American population (8%) and a fairly recent Hispanic population of approximately 2.4%. The median household income is \$37,244.00 and almost 13% of the population lives below the federal poverty level. In short, the county continues in its lower- and middle-income tradition statistically. Approximately 76,000 acres are in farmland, not including timber production. There are approximately 11,300 housing units.<sup>36</sup>

Even as farming continues to be the defining livelihood of Madison County in this first decade of the twenty-first century, increasing populations of different ethnic and economic groups are making contributions to the evolution of the environmental and cultural landscapes. More people are coming to the county who are not tied to the land in the same way the past generations of farm families were, bringing with them new ways of being "in the country."

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<sup>36</sup> Madison County fact sheets (2007) at <http://www.madisoncounty.gov>.

Subdivisions that are marketed as safe, comfortable “country” lifestyle investments are on the increase as are single homes whose residents live in them in the country but experience most of their lives in nearby towns and cities.

### **Defining Madison County’s *Genius Loci***

*Genius loci*, as we have seen in this portrait of Madison County, is a combination of the natural environment, historical and cultural precedents, and ideology. It contains a certain amount of emotional and “spiritual” identity as well. While there are aspects of the county that have not changed over time, there are many that have; *genius loci* itself is complex and evolving too, which is why it is such an important source of instruction for designers.

Even the physical aspects of the Georgia piedmont have changed as this evolution occurs. Where once were deep deciduous forests, the practices of pioneer and settlement farming opened the land up into fields and pastures. Cotton farming, especially, changed the farmland into a more open, expansive physical landscape. Over the past forty years, that landscape has been shaped yet again by farming practices: pine timber tracts take up large portions of the countryside; deciduous trees of early succession forests have regenerated. It’s not possible to “see all the way to Comer” anymore.

Along with these physical changes there have been social and cultural changes as well. New populations have introduced new ways of living in the country; technology and the internet have connected rural residents to the outside world in ways never before experienced. Young people have access to popular culture, education and travel.

But there are cultural institutions that carry on the rural traditions of the past: Protestant churches remain very active throughout the county; 4-H and the Cattlemen’s Association thrive; and the popular traditions of rural Georgia such as hunting and fishing continue. Other social and

cultural traditions reflect habits of the agricultural past. For example, many stores and banks close on Wednesday afternoons; beer and wine is only sold Monday through Saturday in town stores. Liquor is not sold anywhere. (This reflects two traditions: the Baptist and Methodist tradition against alcohol consumption of any kind and the Anglo-American tradition of making one's own liquor with recipes passed down through generations.) Churches maintain leadership roles in people's lives, often dictating political and moral stands on state and national issues. People are still baptized in the river and the debate on the separation of church and state rages on in the local paper.<sup>37</sup>

In general, the lives of Madison County residents continue to be shaped by a relationship with the natural environment. Children are expected to help out on the farm and families look for ways to hold on to property as generations come and go. Some farms have expanded but most remain in the category of medium and small holdings, between 10 and 200 acres. Culturally, the yeoman farm of the nineteenth century is not very different from its descendants in Madison County.

There also are less tangible aspects of *genius loci* that are at work in the Madison County landscape. The independently minded farmer and his/her strong feelings about home do not have much of an outlet in public discourse. People rise up in anger over specific problems (for instance, the role of zoning) but they rarely have a way to articulate their concerns or find common ground solutions. The "personality" of the yeoman farmer culture is one of self-reliance and independence, which is sometimes hard to translate into shared responsibility and commonality.

The characteristics that help define Madison County's *genius loci*, then, are found in its natural, cultural and social attributes: an Anglo-American rural society that has emerged over the

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<sup>37</sup> See the four issues of the *Madison County Journal* during April, 2008.



past two hundred years, closely tied to the natural attributes of an area that lends itself to small-holdings farming. This small-farm tradition carries with it certain personality traits that can express non-material as well as material culture. Even as the “facts” of this rural character change, the combination of the North Georgia piedmont’s physical and cultural elements remains an underlying “spirit.”

### **Concluding Thoughts about the Use of *Genius Loci* in a Rural County**

Madison County’s *genius loci* resides in an agricultural piedmont landscape, expressing itself in various ways the small farm experience. The existing character or “spirit” can be used to create new homesteads that will serve their owners and at the same time respect the traditional culture around them. However, as the discussion of landscape architecture’s relationship to *genius loci* showed in the previous chapter, the way we think about the spirit of a place has changed to include ecological systems and developing respect for the vernacular as well. By examining homesteads that have incorporated history, culture, ecology and spirit—in short, this modern, broader definition of *genius loci*—landscape architecture will be able to respond to the problems of development in a more complex and malleable way. In the following chapter we will explore four homesteads that do just that.

## **CHAPTER 5: Four Madison County Homesteads that Instruct and Inspire Modern Rural Design**

In the American Southeast, the Native American burial mounds and icons such as Rock Eagle in Putnam County, Georgia, are some of American society's most powerful reminders of the complexity of its past. Similarly, in many rural counties the courthouse and its setting serve as the most significant landmark for Anglo-American political and cultural history. Plantations and their gardens, remnants of the planter/slave society of the nineteenth century, also speak of the human experience in the region.

In the face of homogenization and the globalization of cultures, grand landscapes will remain iconic and should be cared for and studied to help us keep track of who we are and where we've been. But it is equally important to examine less dramatic landscapes that express a culture's character and values, and show how populations have built lives out of daily routine and responsibilities. More humble landscapes of the swept yard and kitchen garden tell stories of the farming past in rural Georgia as well, even as they dissolve quietly back into the earth after their residents have passed away or left for a new life elsewhere.

Cultural historians refer to these functional and domestic environments as *vernacular*, built everyday environments that are unique to their places because they are directly tied to the locale and its resources. The human made landscapes and buildings grow out of the cultural experience of day-to-day life in a particular place. Vernacular designs are not professionally created; rather, they emerge out of necessity, practical use and intuitive creative efforts.

## **A New Population Aspires to the “Good Life” in Rural Georgia**

During the 1970s and 1980s, when land prices were under a thousand dollars per acre and the county's population was on the decline, a handful of people desiring a country life experience looked to Madison County for a place to settle. These were young people who usually came to the area to attend the University of Georgia in Athens, and responded to the social and economic upheaval of the 1960s by turning to homesteading. Not exactly a part of the back-to-the-land movement of the sixties, these people did tend to be iconoclasts of sorts and were in search of a less materialistic, independent lifestyle close to the land where they could raise families, live simply, and grow much of their own food. They were also interested in being able to make their livings with their own hands, and living in the country was conducive to this kind of independent and self-sufficient lifestyle.

Some of these people created homesteads that have become significant rural domestic environments in Madison County. They can serve as models for small-holdings development in an agricultural piedmont setting. They were not professionally designed and the owners used local materials and their own intuition and skills to create them. In this regard they are a “new” vernacular. We will examine these four Madison County homesteads to see what makes them effective living spaces, subtle and unobtrusive designs that also inspire the people who interact with them, while protecting the natural environment.

Each of the homeowners used similar processes in deciding how and where to build their homesteads, and all started with a basic acceptance of their individual sites, a somewhat radical notion in twenty-first century America. By basic acceptance I mean

that the homeowners did not approach their sites with the idea that they could buy it because it was affordable and then change it to fit their own desires, through extensive grading and re-shaping. Each homestead was built with the owners' own hands and with the intention of changing the land as little as possible. Three of the four were built on land that as recently as the 1950s, grew cotton or soybeans and corn. The homesteaders' expressed goal was to have a negligible impact on the land, leaving the sites to speak for themselves, allowing the landscape to exist in the state it was found as much as possible. By blending in rather than establishing a household that imposed itself onto the natural and cultural landscape, as sprawl does, these families created an excellent model for middle-income development in Madison County's.

The four homesteads in the study include the homes of Chip and Dena Chandler in Carlton; Scotty and Ginni Edwards, who live on the Broad River; Jim Baird and Julie Buffalo, who reside on the edge of Comer; and David and Kathi Morgan, who live near the Broad River off of an old road to Royston.

### **Some General Observations**

Sitting at any one of these four homesteads on a late summer afternoon, the visitor is lulled into a sense of comfort; the high-pitched whirl of insects, crows calling from the tops of trees, small breezes rustling the drying seed heads and the occasional drone of a tractor or truck on an unseen road, all combine in a subtle seasonal tonality that makes it possible to literally *hear* the landscape. Most of the sounds one hears are Nature at work, humming and sighing as the day unfolds. One can experience the lay of the land without having to use too much imagination. Here is the high ridge, the bluff; there is the granite

outcrop; out front, the dissolving bench terraces of the cotton days, while down below runs a creek on its way to the Broad River.

The sights, too, are things of the earth: views into the front pasture, or shade-filled pools of green in piney woods, a narrow deer or beaver path to the river. And a patch of blue sky, where the water has carved a way through the world, will hold the night's stars, also a source of solace and wonder, and viewable from a back door stoop, a campfire ring, or a familiar boulder at the water's edge. Some of the aspects of this experience are the result of conscious human decision and some of them are the result of the owners' willingness to let nature "take its course," which is also a somewhat radical notion in contemporary America. (Modern homeowners short on time and knowledge often want residential designers to create utterly controlled environments for low maintenance.)

Plants, as well, are significant elements of these homesteads. Traditional Southern rural garden shrubbery (sasanqua, forsythia, and quince, etc.), bulbs (daffodils, ginger, daylilies, and lycoris) and other perennials (phlox, rudbeckia, echinacea, etc.) join forces with native beautyberry, sweet shrub, and vaccinium. In the pastures, asters, sumacs and goldenrod blossom in autumn, rising above the elegant reddish seed heads of the native grasses. Butterfly weed and Queen Anne's Lace emerge from ditches along the drive in summer, while blackberry and scuppernongs grace the fence rows and pastures edges. Trumpet vine, cross vine and Jessamine also run rampant. In the summer vegetable garden drying stalks of tomato plants hold on to one last bit of fruit, and tall columns of okra gone to seed, their pods rattling in the wind, give way to the autumn garden of mustard, collard and kale. The *planted* landscape is married to the existing *native* landscape.

Even local history, which seldom shapes the design of new homes and living spaces, is contained in these homesteads in a subtle way. While all of these residents are native Southerners—in the case of one, a ninth generation Georgia farm family descendent—their aesthetic is not one of imitation or replication. They have respect for the local past but they do not feel beholden to it. Their homesteads reflect their appreciation of the rural heritage while simultaneously creating a new definition of that lifestyle. Interestingly, none of these homesteads has mimicked the traditional white frame house of the small holdings farmstead in Piedmont Georgia. While one of the homesteads examined, the Chandler home in Carlton, harkens back to the log houses of the eighteenth century in the Broad River Valley, it is not a replication of an historic building type. All three of the other homesteads also have a unique character and seem to derive their own aesthetic out of the materials available locally (if not actually from their own land) and from the settings themselves.

With the exception of the Chandler household, these people are not farmers even though they all have farming ancestry and even though they all made a conscious decision to settle in a farming/agricultural county. They live here respectful of the dominant economic system, which is agricultural, and except for concern over agricultural environmental damage, each household is glad to be a part of a rural community. They are not trying to make the county a bedroom community or a suburban version of a rural place; they are not interested in seeing convenient shopping malls or services establish themselves in the countryside, but rather, are willing to shape their lives to fit the setting they have chosen. Letting the landscape speak, each of these homesteads takes a backseat to the subtle beauty of the countryside it inhabits, once again

quietly insisting that we look at what is here naturally rather than what has been contrived even as farming goes on around them. It is possible that this basic attribute is the thing that makes these homesteads fundamentally sustainable; each exists *with* the land rather than merely *on* the land and each carefully acknowledges the naturally occurring system in which it exists.

All four landscapes are remarkable for their ability *not* to draw attention to themselves. They are characteristically non-public and their occupants have avoided being seen directly from the road. This speaks of the personalities of the individual owners (wanting privacy, solitude and peacefulness) but it also speaks of a tradition of self-reliance and independence that does not rely on cultural approval. Nor do these homesteads aspire to “marketability.” Fitting gently into the Georgia Piedmont, these four homesteads become a part of the woods and fields that surround them and, over time, take on even subtler qualities of co-existence. In the case of one house, the owner and builder did not place a foundation under his logs with the assumption that the earth would one day reclaim the house. He wanted it to go as gracefully as possible back to from where it came.

Another commonality among these four sites is the owners’ expressed economic ethic. None of the homesteads were created with the intention of being for sale one day in the future. The houses and their land are part of their lives in a way that many contemporary Americans do not embrace. These modern homesteaders perceive their role as landowners as protectors and conservators. This notion is something unique to these rural homeowners who hope to find a way through land trusts or by staying small and affordable, tax-wise, to be able to leave their homesteads to the next generation. Local

farmers, on the other hand, often consider their land a form of investment for later retirement, and while they would like to be able to leave their land to their children, they know that this may not be viable. (The costs of farming might be too high; the income gained from sale of the land might be what sustains them in their retirement, etc.)

Thus in addition to trying to make a controlled, beneficial impact on the land *for its own sake*, these landowners also are defining their presence here in different economic terms. Not a single one of the four is native to Madison County, and yet they all put down roots planning to stay their entire lifetimes. The homestead is not real estate in the sense that it is solely a monetary investment; it is a moral, spiritual and emotional long-term commitment to a way of life as well. The homeowners also see themselves as part of the larger community and believe that their lifestyles contribute to rather than drain the county's economic, environmental and political structures.

### **The Chandler Homestead in Carlton**



**Figure 5.1:** The dirt drive to the Chandler homestead.



To reach the Chandler homestead, one leaves the asphalt of a residential street in Carlton and travels along a sandy dirt road approximately one half mile. On the left are planted loblolly pines, a significant source of the family's income, and on the right are naturally occurring red cedars that live along the neighbor's fence row. *Adropogon* and numerous other grasses grow in the shallow ditches along the roadway. Utility poles follow the fence line and the neighbor's livestock can be seen from the road. This is an emblematic Piedmont Georgia dirt road and tells both an ecological story and a cultural story. It serves as an entrance to the isolated and private life of its inhabitants and provides a throughway that only minimally affects the wildlife that abounds in the area. Wild turkeys, deer, rabbits, 'possums and raccoons and numerous songbirds and woodpeckers are common and relatively free from danger here except during hunting season. That is, the road does not create a significant barrier to several species of the local wildlife. There is no artificial light along this road leading to the house.



**Figure 5.2:** Tree thinning at the Chandler property not far from the house. Clear-cutting method is not used. Timber is sold to local brokers.

Management of the forest surrounding the homestead is very much in evidence. In Figure 2, twenty- year-old pines are being thinned for sale and to allow certain other trees to grow even bigger. The Chandlers have used traditional methods to manage their forest, including controlled burns, but have recently had to resort to chemical spraying because of nearby residents. (Smoke disturbs them.) Tree management is part of the homeowner's daily life. This isn't happening in a distant forest but right at the homestead where the residents *experience* the process of being timber farmers. While this actual harvesting doesn't happen very often, it is necessary to constantly check on the health and size of the tree crop; the livelihood from timber is enmeshed in the homestead experience.

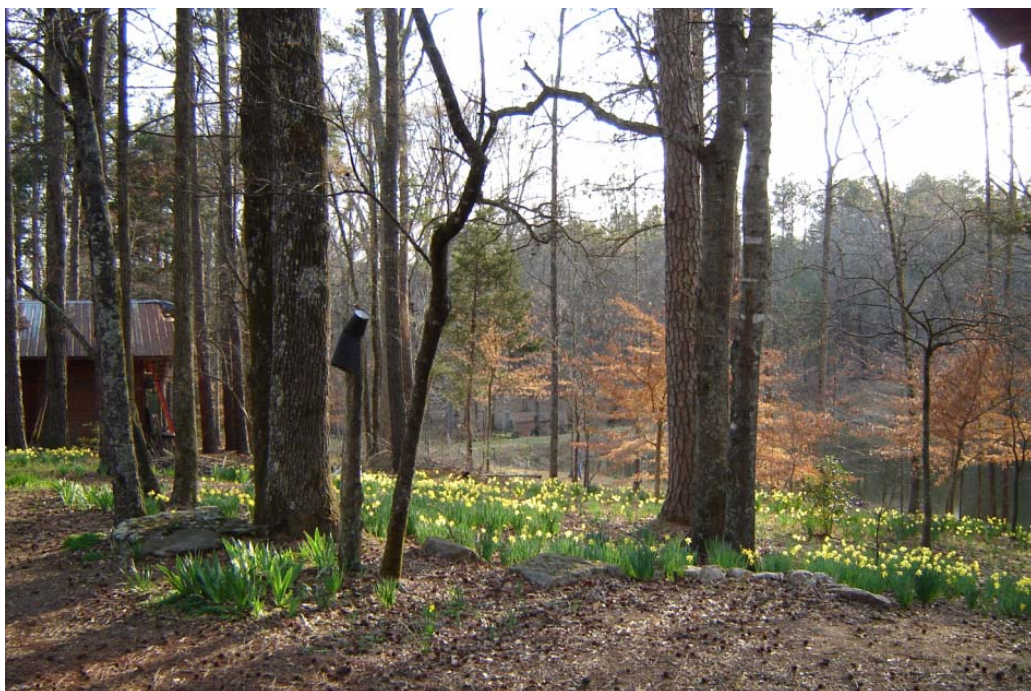
The initial approach to the house, once one has turned off of the dirt road, leads into a working yard, which is typical of all four of these homesteads. There is evidence of farm life: tractors, tools, sheds to house equipment, etc. Everything is in sight and in *process*, ready to be used at any moment. Wheel barrows, garden tools, chain saws, gasoline cans, firewood tools, etc. are all conspicuous, telling the visitor a lot about what these people are doing with their lives. There are three outbuildings used for storing farm equipment and tools.



**Figure 5.3:** View of the Chandler homestead from the drive.

The homestead sits on just the other side of the driveway from where the timber harvesting takes place. Large pines frame the house sitting in a clearing surrounded by red buds, dogwoods, maples, oaks and other native trees. The daffodils planted by the owner have naturalized. The house faces southwest and looks over a small lake created by damming up a creek on the property twenty years ago. In addition to being pleasant to look at and fun to swim in, the small lake keeps them informed about the water level on the land. When they experience a drought, they can literally see and feel its effects. While damming the creek has had an impact on the natural flow of the creek and the definition of its flood plain, the residents have been careful not to inhibit other natural cycles surrounding the water. No fences, walls or impervious surfaces exist at the water's edge; animals, insects and plant life have free access to the water.





**Figure 5.4:** Beeches are protected and allowed to grow in the homestead's managed forest.



**Figure 5.5:** Chip Chandler moved a 1790 log cabin to his house site. These rocks are from the original structure and will be used to reconstruct the chimney.

The wood shed stays well stocked providing the homeowners with wood for heating in the winter. Again, this is also a managed resource the land provides. The forest

also provided cedar shakes for the roof and cedar columns for the house entrance. The house was built by hand from logs taken from the property.

Helleborus graces the front stoop. Chip Chandler, who created this homestead, explains that he chose the site for his house by sitting, literally, on the land and spending nights out under the stars, trying to get a feel for its best location. He took the appearance of two deer while he contemplated the site as a positive sign that his instincts were right. The house sits on an east-west axis facing the small lake, its back to the road through the woods. The house is built into the hillside, but Chandler did not do any grading of the site. He built the house into the existing contours, parallel to the stream that would become his lake. The out buildings are also parallel to the water in an effort to make a formal relationship among the buildings since the setting is so natural and unaffected.

Below the dam, the homeowners have cultivated a landscape that references the tradition of Humphrey Repton and J.C. Loudon, harkening back to an English “park.” A sloping parkway winds away from the house; mature native tree species are allowed to thrive and granite outcrops serve as sitting areas. Native trees are clustered in small groups of understory or overhead canopy (figure 6). In the area immediately surrounding the house, the *genius loci* of the land before cotton farming and a timber monoculture—in short, the makings of what Bartram might have seen—is valued.





**Figure 5.6:** Woods are kept clear of honeysuckle, privet and smilax below the Chandler's dam. Native dogwoods, maples, cedar and beeches emerge in the maturing forest.

### **The Morgan Homestead on Old Wildcat Bridge Road, Danielsville**

David Morgan earns his living as a potter and his wife, Kathi, works as a designer at the University of Georgia Press in Athens. There are currently four buildings that serve as dwelling, studio, gallery and kiln shed. These buildings were built nearby for convenience to the house and easy access for pottery sales and shipping. Once a year the public is invited to come to the homestead to purchase pottery, so while this is a very private and somewhat isolated homestead, it needs to open up to the general public from time to time. A pasture serves as a makeshift parking area when visitors come to the pottery studio each fall. As business has grown, buildings have been added in a line along the drive, away from the house.



**Figure 5.7:** The curving drive to the Morgan homestead reflects the old terraced pasture.

The Morgan homestead is located in the woods on the edge of an old pasture. This fifteen-acre parcel was a wheat and soybean farm in the middle of the twentieth century; before that, cotton was its main product. As possibly part of the original Madison Springs plantation (a spa and inn in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), the Morgan homestead land was probably worked by slaves before the Civil War. Old bench terraces built in the 1930s are in evidence both in the front pasture and into the woods down towards the creek behind the house. Like the Chandlers, the Morgans spent a lot of time trying to get a feel for where their main house should be sited. The first several months they owned the land they slept in a tent while trying decide where and how to build the first structure. They realized the woods provided much-needed shade in the summer on this somewhat dry ridge, so they laid a concrete slab at grade on an east-west axis tucked into the oak forest.





**Figure 5.8:** The Morgan home sits at the edge of the forest on grade.



**Figure 5.9:** The studios and gallery were placed along the drive, allowing easy access for the family business.



Cedars, persimmons, dogwoods, water oaks and red oaks were the predominant species when they first established the homestead. In the front pasture are now mature pecan trees that volunteered from pecans discarded by the Morgans, whose extended family lived and farmed in South Georgia and who gave them pecans every year. Plum trees have come and gone; a few old apple trees are dying out from old age and drought. A hedge row and a wooden fence were established to try to control the terrific winds that can bear down on the homestead from the west. The house is hand made of wood and is considered “unfinished” by the owners. They plan to stay there until they pass away and will leave it to their daughter, Naomi. David considers the homestead a “work in progress,” and he and Kathi are constantly working on some aspect of the dwelling.

The yard serves as a driveway and parking area, its lack of turf and impervious surfaces is reminiscent of swept yards. Local gravel is used for maintaining the drives and walks. The lived-in space and the native woods create a “yard” that quickly melts into the native plant environs, and wildlife are not deterred if the dogs are in the pen or the house.



**Figure 5.10:** Yard life is rich at the Morgan homestead.

The family participates in the landscape a great deal. They walk, ride bikes, float on the nearby river and garden extensively. In figure 10, a playhouse doubles as a small chicken coop; a yard swing faces the house and a hammock provides a place for an afternoon nap.



**Figure 5.11:** The vegetable garden is part of the entrance into the Morgan homestead.

The vegetable garden has a prominent location at the Morgan homestead: near enough to the house for convenience but also in the full sun to accommodate the plants. David Morgan explains that the garden has evolved over time, moving around the homestead as soil conditions dictated and deer populations became more bold. Traditional crops are grown, among them: collards, sweet potatoes, butterbeans, green beans, okra, tomatoes, corn, mustard, lettuces, and peppers. David Morgan comes from eight generations of South Georgia farmers and uses many of the cultivation methods passed on to him from his parents and grandparents and extended family.





**Figure 5.12:** Mustard and collards are part of the traditional piedmont garden.

This homestead has the feel of a compound or an artists' colony: shards or "seconds" of Morgan's pots are put to use throughout the yard; projects abound, and there is always a bonfire being compiled from leftover wood for the kiln. There isn't any definitive structure that separates the studio area from the living quarters, just the gravel driveway that opens up into a yardscape.



**Figure 5.13:** Volunteer pecans in the pasture provide a backdrop to the Morgan's vegetable garden surrounded by a fence comprised of black locust posts.

### **The Edwards Homestead on the Broad River**

*We were trying to make our place in the world, and we wanted to have the least impact possible on the fragile parts of our property.—Ginni Edwards*

When the Edwards family first moved to their land in the 1980s they lived in a tent and then a converted school bus for several months before deciding where to build their living quarters. The homestead sits on a bend in the Broad River, approximately eight miles from Comer. The approach to the driveway is made along a dirt road that parallels the river on the south side of the Broad at the Highway 172 bridge. There are several small homes along the dirt road, but there is a distinctive sense of privacy and individuation once one turns down the road to the homestead. Scott Edwards is a woodworker and building contractor. Ginni is a librarian at the local public high school and makes handcrafts for sale with their daughter, Isabel.





**Figure 5.14:** A welcoming entrance to the Edwards house in the piedmont woods. Myrtles, upland river oats, blueberries, dog hobble, service berry and oaks are among the plants that surround the house.

Of the four households studied, the Edwards live in the closest contact to the Broad river. Much of their life is spent in and around the water. Their wooden house and outbuildings are located deep in the woods just a few hundred yards from the river. The house and sheds sit unobtrusively in the landscape, and people coming down the Broad would probably not even know they were there. This sense of belonging to the landscape is a dominant theme for the family and they want to have as little impact as possible on the land with their structures and activities.

The house is sometimes hard to find in summer foliage (figure 14.) The yard surrounding the house has a fantastical quality; split rail fences and local boulders define



the space while native shrubs engulf the house. Hand-made creatures and sculpture are embedded in niches created by sparkleberry and other *Vaccinium* species.



**Figure 5.15:** The Edwards house uses tin roofing and cedar posts, creating a new southern vernacular out of traditional materials.





**Figure 5.16:** The flower garden celebrates found objects of the rural life.

A small flower garden is on the left as one enters the homestead site on the long, narrow dirt road. This entrance is made all the more intriguing by the long sandy road that parallels the river once one has left the main highway. The family also owns land a little farther down the road. This has been reclaimed after serving as an illegal dump for many years. The Edwards plant a large garden on this parcel, which they refer to as “the farm.”

While the Edwards have many neighbors, their presence is hardly felt due to the diligent effort to conserve trees and allow the native flora to thrive.





**Figure 5.17:** The driveway to the Edwards homestead where local rocks are piled along the bank and plants are allowed to grow freely.

Like the Morgan homestead, this landscape is full of life and activity, reflecting the family's enthusiasm and creativity. A nearby chicken coop houses the family flock; old canoes, kayaks and fishing equipment are readily available and the child's playhouse is built in a small clearing at the edge of the woods.





**Figure 5.18:** The chicken coop in the pines at the Edwards homestead.



**Figure 5.19:** Frugality is an essential goal of each of these homesteaders. Here, the Edwards have used recycled barn tin to create their wood sheds and a split rail fence is made from trees off of their land.



### The Baird/Buffalo Homestead in Comer



**Figure 5.21:** The drive to the Buffalo/Baird residence follows existing field contours.

The Baird/Buffalo homestead is situated on the southwest side of Comer, Georgia, down another dirt road. This 11.5-acre site was purchased by the homeowners in 1986, and like the other families, the owners took great care in deciding where to place the living quarters. This family also slept in tents on their property before deciding where to place their home. Principles of *feng shui* were incorporated in the placement of the house on an east-west axis with the back of the house placed just inside the woods. The house takes advantage of prevailing breezes, using transoms to circulate air.

The front of the house faces west and looks out onto a meadow, which is cut once or twice a year, but otherwise left to grow naturally. They kept the meadow to be able to

enjoy the view of the woods and the night sky, and have an “open feeling” to the land. It also serves as a reference back to the days of row cropping.

The couples' decision to move to Madison County was a very purposeful one: "I guess you could say we were part of some kind of back to something, but as movement members we were a little late and didn't manage to make the land support us, except by way of its nurturing beauty. Some have said that impressions of the senses are a kind of food, and it is that kind of nourishment I think we have enjoyed from the beauty of our homesite. I think that natural beauty is the main crop we have here. Some of it is native and some of it was enhanced by our efforts. You can't buy it and install it, but if you can see it lurking under the privet and the greenbrier, you can reveal it and improve on it." <sup>1</sup>



**Figure 5.21:** The Buffalo/Baird house is long and low, fitting gracefully into the terraced land.

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<sup>1</sup> Jim Baird, Appendix, p. 8.



Siting the main living quarters, the Buffalo/Baird family used what they call “common sense” aspects of *feng shui*, such as an open view to the front, slight protection to the left side and out towards the front, a high, solid back drop (here, dense woodlot and ascending slope), and open expanse to the right and forward of the building. These aspects fit well with the climate, contours, and native plantings on the site.



**Figure 5.22:** The Baird/Buffalo house sits in among the native trees that were there when they built the house. (Dogwoods, service berry, oaks, and pines, etc.)

Jim Baird is a building inspector in the county and Julie Buffalo is a nurse in Athens. They have two teenage daughters. The house and outbuildings at the homestead are an integral part of the landscape, which the Baird/Buffalos plan and care for themselves. The couple are tireless gardeners and are always exploring new plant materials and adding artistic elements to their outdoor living spaces.



**Figure 5.22:** The woodpile dissolves into the native beautyberry in summer.

"I think making/keeping something of the natural/local/native plant community has value, though I am not sure that that is what will be seen by those who follow. Not only is the knowledge of what is local about any place starting to disappear, but also the sensibility that makes us see the value in that local specialness. I used to try to expand the number of native plant species a lot more than I do now, but have met with a high rate of attrition. Now I have begun to focus more on trying to plant things that will live here at all..."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Jim Baird, Appendix, p. 8.

## Summary

By examining these four homesteads we find that certain principles emerge that can support new rural design that will in turn support the community at large. It is also possible to see the influence of *genius loci* in these contemporary homesteads. The natural and old agricultural surroundings provide the context for the buildings; the independent spirit of the homeowners shines through; and natural systems are accommodated. They become models for rural design because they are *of their place*. In this light, certain general principles emerge to help shape other new rural homestead design.



## CHAPTER 6: Deriving Principles for Rural Design



**Figure 6.1:** Garden chairs at the Edwards homestead sink into the actual garden and the past.

In his book The Country Life Movement in the United States, Liberty Hyde Bailey laid out four tenets of being a “good farmer.” These included being able to make a living from the land; raising a family carefully and well; being of service to the community; and leaving the farm more productive than when it was begun.<sup>1</sup> While the American farm family has changed dramatically from Bailey’s era and market forces have revolutionized how we get our food, these ideals persist in new and varied forms. And Bailey’s rules for the good life on the farm are really

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<sup>1</sup>Liberty Hyde Bailey, *The Country Life Movement in the United States* New York: MacMillan and Co., 1967.



not that far from the aspirations of many newcomers to the country, people who moved there with the goal of participating in a rural experience even in the midst of great cultural shifts.

As part of this study, four homesteads in Madison County were chosen for the purpose of examining how contemporary middle-income people who were not raised on the land or dependent on it for survival could make a productive, satisfying *place* for themselves and embrace the agricultural life around them. Because the intention behind these designs is so well grounded, these examples become more than just prescriptions for a pleasant or “attractive” residential experience in a rural area. Their owners’ willingness to be of the county’s cultural heritage lets the homesteads literally become a part of the agricultural fabric while also respecting the native ecological systems. In short, these modern homesteaders created a new agricultural model.

By studying these examples and putting them in the historical context of American rural design, principles emerge that can serve as guides for newcomers to the area. This kind of prescriptive model has its roots in some of the earliest North American landscape practitioners, among them Andrew Jackson Downing, Robert Morris Copeland, Frank Albert Waugh, Liberty Hyde Bailey and Frederick Law Olmsted. All of these men had one foot in the practical aspects of residential country life and one foot in the loftier questions of aesthetics and large-scale planning. The thread that ties them all together is the rural aesthetic that wove through their philosophies, designs and personal experiences. In many ways, the rural ideal was what shaped the basic aesthetic of all these men. Downing lived and wrote from his home in the country where his plant nursery sustained the family for several years. Copeland, Waugh and Bailey also were rooted in plant propagation and horticultural research, and spent much of their professional careers trying to educate the public on the country ways of raising food and plants for sustenance

and pleasure. Olmsted referred to himself as a farmer and spent time touring the South and writing about the effects of slavery and agricultural practices before he established his landscape firm.

The historic themes articulated by Downing and Waugh still remain in force today but they need to be reinterpreted and reinvigorated to accommodate what we now know about sustainability, ecology, and resource conservation. And where these early practitioners felt justified in defining a single acceptable aesthetic, contemporary designers now use a more fluid or multicultural aesthetic, which is created by the user to a great extent. By serving as “facilitators” rather than “experts,” the contemporary designer leaves behind the top-down process, turning instead to the actual site and its users for inspiration. (This is what Samuel Mockbee did in Alabama.)

For modern designs to function well in the contemporary South, they need to incorporate culturally inspired methods like those studied by Westmacott and Firth and designed by Mockbee. Downing’s Unity, Variety and Harmony can be invoked, while a unique Southern ethos also becomes a driving force, especially in the face of globalization and the loss of local character. We also need to understand that the definition of “small family farm” is constantly in flux, and that these rural homesteads do not constitute farming entities *per se*. They hold many of the material and spiritual aspects of a small family farm, but they exist primarily as rural residences within the larger farming community.

### **Some General Principles Emerge for Contemporary Rural Design in the Georgia Piedmont**

As we address the needs of new populations wanting to live in traditionally rural communities in the American South, it is helpful to establish some over-arching principles in much the same way that Downing tried to do, but with a different ultimate goal in mind. Where

Downing thought he could impose a canon of rural "taste" on people living in the country, modern designers have recommended that we should look from *within* the community (its past, its uniqueness, and its own environmental needs). Here we can find existing attributes of a rural experience that do not rely on expert or top-down advice and definition. In this way, it might be that models are created that are more sustainable because they evolve from within the very culture that created them. The rural vernacular becomes a source rather than urban academic theories.

Just as modern ecological thinking teaches mutualism and cooperation rather than pure competition, modern landscape architectural thinking can benefit from seeing the design process as one of give and take that not only acknowledges the existing culture and environment but looks to it for direction and inspiration.

The following is a list of principles that became apparent after examining the four contemporary homesteads in Madison County, Georgia, and speaking with their owners about their values and methods. These principles are meant to help support the *process* of engendering rural character in the twenty-first century.

### **Nine Principles Articulated**

**Principle One:** *Homesteads respect the natural ecosystems they inhabit and allow for regeneration.*

There can be no human community if there is no living environment to sustain it. Advances in understanding the complexity and significance of ecological systems at a given site lead landscape architects to make preserving the natural environment a primary goal in design. The Edwards homestead on the Broad River is especially significant in that it has had very little impact on the natural system in which it exists. Native trees and shrubs abound; the river and its

floodplain are protected by allowing the natural system to perform. The structures are made with local materials that do not poison the environment and their siting was done without any grading of the soil. Wildlife is encouraged; night lighting is kept to a minimum so that migrating birds can use natural reference points. The homestead literally merges with the natural environment.

**Principle Two: *Homesteads respect and embrace the cultural heritage around them.***

In all four cases, the access to the homestead is unobtrusive and subtle; no obvious gates or identifying structures exist that proclaim ownership. The homesteads are part of the agricultural community flow. Sandy or clay dirt roads, a farm fence and piles of native rock pushed to the side are the main indicators that identify their entrances. They blend into the established farming landscape rather than create separate neighborhoods. Their designs do not interrupt the farming community around them as a poorly placed imitation mansion with large gates and a plastic fence might.

These homesteads are set in a rural tradition of hand-made wooden buildings. Their roof lines, outdoor living spaces, the interface between the natural woods, the cultivated farmland and the household yard are all inspired by the rural piedmont heritage.

**Principle Three: *Homesteads become a part of the history of the county by embracing their own familial experiences, sharing knowledge gained over generations.***

This is expressed in the pastimes of gardening, artisanal skills (carpentry, pottery, etc.), timber management, handcrafts, etc. There is *expression* of activities of rural life at each homestead. Evidence includes vegetable gardens, clotheslines, small flock chicken coops, bee hives and wood piles. In some cases the residents make artwork and manufacture items for sale from the homestead. These include soaps, beeswax candles, painted hubcaps, wreathes, baskets,

woodwork and, in the case of David Morgan, a living is made making pottery. Many of these handcrafts continue the tradition of rural Georgia lives common in the past. Each household produces a significant amount of their own vegetables and some of the residents eat venison and rabbit hunted on their property.

**Principle Four: *Homesteads don't require constant support from the local government to exist and in the process they don't deplete the county's financial resources.***

The residents of these homesteads see themselves as part of the community and invest in the land in deeper ways than just material gain, and with long-term commitments. Using frugal methods, they strive to be self-sufficient so that their impact on the local government and community services is not a drain.

**Principle Five: *Homesteads allow for creative self-expression, which enriches both the residents and their community's experience.***

In the tradition of Samuel Mockbee and Lucy Lippard, these homesteads celebrate vernacular influences. Free to decorate their homesteads in any way they choose (unlike at a controlled subdivision where strict rules apply), these residents are part of a long tradition of an idiosyncratic and highly individualistic form of expression in Southern yardscapes. Yard art, found and homemade objects startle and surprise the viewer. The homesteaders themselves take delight in using discarded materials, old hub caps, concrete statuary, etc.

**Principle Six: *Homesteads are real responses to their genius loci, not imitations or imports from elsewhere.***

The houses and outbuildings at these four homesteads all reflect influences from traditional Anglo-American farm houses. This included log cabins, board and batten, and buildings that took advantage of local breezes with dogtrots and transoms. They used local stone

for foundations, local wood for structure and in three cases, tin roofs in the tradition of barns of the piedmont. The buildings are enfolded into the landscape, not stuck on high ridges or in the middle of rural views. This kind of sensitive building siting and design contributes to Georgia's cultural history and identifies the homesteaders as part of its flow. The houses and outbuildings are not historic replicas; they are new versions of the old traditions.

**Principle Seven: *Design for rural homesteads is based on an intimate knowledge of the site.***

In the tradition of Frank Waugh, as well as these homesteaders, the design process at rural homesteads must include getting to know the site in detailed ways. This can be done by exploring the site in person, spending time on it at different times of day and night and in different seasons and various weather conditions.

There is much evidence of lives lived out of doors at these four Madison County homesteads. The residents are closely connected the environments they inhabit. Each family slept on their land for several months before deciding where to site their homesteads. At each one there are numerous indications that the inhabitants appreciate and use the natural world around them. There is an elemental quality to their lives that connects the residents to the natural world. Each household enjoys campfires, seasonal bonfires, canoeing and kayaking on the Broad River, camping, hiking, fishing, bird watching and viewing the night sky. There are numerous paths in and out of the woods surrounding the homesteads and connecting to neighbors and dirt roads that run deeper into the county. Visitors could show up on horseback just as easily as in a car, and outdoor entertaining areas are discreet. No swimming pools, giant decks, or plastic playgrounds for the children. Every source of rest and relaxation is, again, embedded in the landscape. Not surprisingly, the residents of these places are in tune with the natural rhythms of

their environments. Water gauges, thermometers and wind vanes help them read the weather. Celebrations based on traditional rural life take place at significant times of the year. There is also a great store of knowledge about plants and animal life among these residents.

**Principle Eight:** *A homestead's purpose answers to a variety of economic, political, ecological, social, ethical, and spiritual issues, and remains flexible in the face of unexpected change.*

There is no one solution path; homesteads contain ambiguity and nuance. This is why responding to *genius loci* remains a fundamental part of the designer's approach. The concept of *genius loci* itself is complex, multi-layered and subject to change. But it also provides continuity across time by grounding the spirit of the place, holding wisdom and instruction.

**Principle Nine:** *Homestead design acknowledges that human beings have a spiritual need of identifying Home.*

This is especially true in the face of globalization and the fast-paced, cross-cultural life that is emerging in the twenty-first century. Identity and *place* remain anchors when societies and cultures collide, integrate, and transform in single generations.

Human interaction with the natural world creates a landscape; a human finds his or her place in the world and interacts with it on many levels. The art critic and author, Lucy Lippard, explains in her book, The Lure of the Local, that there is a historical narrative that is written in the landscape by the people who live there:

The intersections of nature, culture, history, and ideology form the ground on which we stand—our land, our place, the local. The lure of the local is the pull of place that operates on each of us, exposing our politics and our spiritual legacies.<sup>2</sup>

This sense of what is *local* is one of the defining aspects of life in a rural area. People's families have been in a particular locale for generations; there is a sense of belonging and identity that comes from having worked a particular piece of land for a long time. Habit, tradition, and family narrative all anchor a person in his/her locale. As one Madison County farmer put it: "I wouldn't know who I was if I didn't live where I live. This is what I know: the county, my pastures, my family. Without them I would be lost."<sup>3</sup>

Samuel Mockbee practiced design with this sense of the local and the four homesteads studied in Madison County also express this sense of *belonging in* a place. See questionnaires in the appendix for specific discussion of the relationship to Home.

### **Finding a Common Thread in Planned and Unplanned Rural Design**

The inspirations expressed in Mockbee's work and Lucy Lippard's writings<sup>4</sup> emphasize the *local* environment. These four Madison County homesteaders also looked at their own surroundings and chose elements of Southern vernacular (screened porches, metal roofs, whimsical found and hand-made decorations, etc.) and made them part of their design. The rural experience, including the native plant community and the agricultural heritage, served as a foundation for a rich and multi-layered life. In each case they consulted, almost literally, the

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<sup>2</sup> Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multi-centered Society* (New York: The New Press, 1997), p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Bobby Clements, Madison County farmer in a discussion about his farm near Comer, Ga.

<sup>4</sup> Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local* (New York: The New Press, 1997).



spirit of the place by spending weeks on their land before deciding where to place their main buildings.

The landscapes were rooted in the Southern rural tradition, but like Mockbee's designs, they were not nostalgic backward-looking replicas. They created their own new style of Southern rural aesthetic. At the Edwards homestead the outdoor rooms are literally out of doors, separated from the house but clearly part of the homestead. At the Morgan residence the screen porch is under the same roof of the house. It is an inside/outside room. Fresh air and a view of the land can be enjoyed in the comfort of a room with a roof and screens. The Baird/Buffalo home has three levels of outdoor rooms starting with a screen porch, moving to a deck with wide stairs that also serve as a sitting place from which one may move onto a patio that spills out into the woods. All three levels have a different view of the same meadow. At the Chandler homestead, the deck on the back of the house serves as an outdoor gathering place as well as a viewing platform looking out over the pond and into the forest. In each case, the outdoor life is embraced and recognized as an essential element of the experience of the homestead. Books, art, natural and cultural history of the locale also inspired each of these Madison County homesteaders.

To designers like Mockbee and Coker, constructing a home or building that is rooted in the ethos of its place is essential; this *rootedness* makes the design a true response to the needs of its inhabitants. The design "marks a spot" a "gathering together the things of the earth" in order to grant a person a place. The structure (and landscape) holds the inhabitants, the inhabitants hold the place. The created elements don't just represent their experiences there.<sup>5</sup>

These four modern rural homesteads also rooted their inhabitants in a place that they *came to* and wanted to become a *part of*. There are mysterious elements, practical elements and

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<sup>5</sup> Lori Ryker, *Mockbee Coker: Thought and Process* (New York, N.Y.: Princeton Architectural Press, 1995), p. 69.

creative activity in these sites that drag the Southern vernacular out of its past and into a whole new mode of living with the land.

### **Threading Landscape Architecture's Rural Design Connection through Madison County**

The four Madison County homesteads examined in this study follow in the Downing/Waugh tradition in that, without exception, the homeowners started with defining the character of their respective sites. *Genius loci* was embraced from the very moment these homesteaders began to site their buildings. All of them lived or at least slept out in the open on the land before they made a decision about where to lay their foundations. The homesteads—the houses and their surrounding outbuildings and the land immediately around them-- all fit gracefully onto the land and within the agriculture around them. While none of these homesteaders actually used Downing's books for reference, there was an initial union between the house and the grounds that he would have greatly appreciated. Each homestead also found a balance between the modern world, the traditional farming society in which it exists, and the natural environment. Each maintained a pleasant view framed by natural woods and kept the more manicured and organized portions of its yard close to the house. Where possible, natural water systems were protected and celebrated.

These homesteads, in short, can teach us many of the same lessons that Downing's rural essays and treatises articulate. They can also shine a light on the prospect of sustainable design for new non-farming populations that might come to Madison County.

In what ways do these homesteads fit the Downing tradition while exercising the Mockbee spirit of a "Bold New Design"? At the Chandler homestead, the pond, though man-made, is allowed to exist in a natural state: no extravagant stone walls or decking at the water's edge. Native wildflowers grow up to the pond's edge and mature beeches, maples, oaks and

dogwoods are left to grace the banks. The grounds around the house have a park-like feel, especially below the dam. This reminds one of the English countryside aesthetic that Downing admired. The Chandler's residence evokes Mockbee, however, by redefining the traditional log cabin. It is not a replica; it is a unique, new form. Their house has a steeply pitched roofline; recycled windows and doors are used to create an engaging wall of light.



**Figure 6.2:** Wood from the property as well as recycled windows and art create a new vernacular at the Chandler homestead.

At the Edwards homestead, the house and outbuildings were designed to become a part of the woods, literally, and the river glides by untouched and unencumbered with structures or ornament. A visitor can hear water as it moves over the shoals but has to make an effort to explore the small foot path to actually locate this huge body of water that runs just a few hundred yards from the house. In this sense, the homestead has literally taken the sites' natural elements and made them part of the human experience. Water provides a unifying element. (At the Buffalo/Baird and the Morgan homesites, it is the existing woods and a view of a meadow that define this experience rather than water.)

Variety at all of these homesteads is much in evidence. Whimsical folk art, hand-made swings, bird baths made from found objects and laying hens wandering around in the wood lot all make for delightful experiences in the yards. What recreational structures they have are part of the natural scope of the landscapes: a bench made from an old log or a piece of local granite; an old canoe turned upside down becomes a shady spot for a dog to sleep in summer; a tool shed doubles as an outdoor porch. Gorgeous fragments of cracked pottery become birdbaths or water bowls for the family's pets, and handmade kudzu vine wreaths and baskets adorn a stoop or shed door. Painted hubcaps are mounted on the wooden walls of a feed shed while drying laundry blowing in the breeze forms a colorful, dancing canvas in the winter sunlight.

Harmony is expressed at each site with the obvious appreciation the residents have for the natural environment. This is done by leaving as many native trees as possible and nurturing native shrubs both around the house and in the nearby woods. Exotic invasive plants are kept under control and flower plantings around the houses are subtle, blending in quietly with the paths and borders of native stone or wooden fence, or drifting into the wilder portions of the yard.

The unifying element of all of these homesteads and the thing that reflects Downing's ideas is the residents' devotion to *rural* activity and the *rural* aesthetic: humble dwellings that sit unobtrusively on their land, participating in the rural experience. However, while Downing espoused European-influenced rural architecture, these people created their own unique dwellings that implied that heritage: board-and-batten or log homes but not in the shape of any specific tradition. These dwellings create a new vernacular. And like the working yards of colonial America and modern rural America, these homesteads incorporate the essential activities of rural living. At hand are vegetable gardens, nut and fruit trees, chicken coops and other animal dwellings. Laundry hangs in the open air; sheds and small cabins/studios house artistic and creative endeavors. Managed forests supply firewood as well as shade, habitat, and visual stimulation throughout the seasons. Paths from the houses lead directly into the experience of the land, winding through native shrubbery, under story and woods and through to open fields and back again into the piedmont forest. Views to the out-of-doors are cherished, and windows, doors, porches, simple patios and decks all encourage the dwellers to engage in the natural landscape surrounding the house. All of these elements speak of Downing's American pragmatism where the beauty of landscapes is married to the activities of the humans who inhabit them. These are not wilderness camps or trophy suburban estates. They are all living entities that reflect a rural heritage and an agricultural presence. Scuppernong arbors, a collard patch, an animal skin drying in the shed, all reflect lives actively engaged in the traditional small-holdings farm life of the Georgia piedmont.

### **A Renewed Tradition in Landscape Architecture**

It is tempting to dismiss the idea of having any single "arbiter of taste" in the times in which we now live, especially in isolated and remote rural areas of the American South where

people tend to live very independent and self-sufficient lives which are not obviously shaped by popular culture. In fact, some of these homesteaders might argue that they live where and how they live precisely because they don't *want* their lives predicated on what is fashionable or acceptable by the status quo or by an "expert." Instead, the highly individualistic nature of each of these homesteads is what makes them so appealing. None was created with a resale value in mind or the intention of being some kind of showcase. In fact, like Mockbee's rural houses, they were created by looking at what was at hand, what local resources they could use and, at the same time, do as little damage as possible to those resources.

In the new southern vernacular that also embraces ecological sustainability, these homesteads responded to and protected their natural resources. No one built in the floodplain or did any major damage to the site with unnecessary grading; the night sky was left unpolluted with electric "security" lights; wildlife and native plants were encouraged, etc. The homeowners' ethic included a dedication to the protection of the land itself; it was not there for them, they were there for the land.

"Taste" in Downing's day and region spoke to a fairly homogeneous population (white, Anglo-American) and, by definition, reflected the aesthetic of the English/American New England. One hundred and fifty years later and deeper into a uniquely Southern culture, the "taste" has been modified and expanded to include a folk art or local vernacular as well as ecological principles. Stewardship of the land combined with celebrating the curious and iconoclastic Southern rural folk tradition rather than what is defined by experts as "tasteful" or "attractive" was an overriding goal of the four Madison County home owners. This new rural aesthetic also includes a very different history and economy. In addition to the elements that jive with Downing's ideals of rural atmosphere, affordability, "natural" Beauty, and practical

gardening experience, etc., these homesteads create new prerogatives of both a piedmont aesthetic and an ecological imperative.

Aesthetically, all four of these homesteads reflect a local vernacular. Wooden fence posts sometimes decorated with found objects or outbuildings that serve a practical purpose but have whimsical, folk-art-like decor are just two examples. The houses themselves do not "fit" into any traditional architectural school. Rather, they exist in the spirit of appreciation of rural architecture of the past. While Downing might have found some of these elements "strange" or too eclectic, he would have noted their peculiarity to the Southern rural experience.

The main area where Downing's principles must be updated, however, is with regard to ecological realities and sustainable design. All four of these homesteaders were influenced by the environmental movement of the 1970s and have a grasp on some of the most fundamental aspects of living carefully on the land. With the exception of Chip Chandler, who makes his living as a timber farmer and who has to struggle with the paradoxical imperative of having to grow timber for a livelihood while destroying a lot of what is "natural", these people try to embrace the principles of ecology. This includes doing as little damage as possible to the natural systems (especially plant life, soil and water and avoiding night pollution with artificial lighting) and minimizing the impact of their activities over decades so that the land can "heal" and rejuvenate on its own. Little or no grading was done in positioning the houses, no high maintenance lawns, and no gardens or landscapes that need constant inputs (fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides, etc.) are examples of a more respectful, ecologically, rural domestic environment.

Another aspect of updated Downing principles rests in the larger community and the individual homeowner's role. As development marches across American farmland, often the very

things that draw people to the countryside are the things they destroy in the process of development. These four homesteads acknowledge the necessity of *farming* if there is to be a rural landscape. Not everyone who comes to the country has to be a farmer, but everyone who wants to live in a rural community must understand what it is that makes it "rural." In Downing's day, farming was the predominant source of income for the largest number of Americans; it would have been difficult to see a day when there wasn't any further to go for more farmland in the West.<sup>6</sup> Today, farms, especially small family farms, are part of a vanishing culture; preserving them in some form is seen as part of the prerogative of these homesteads. (See responses to questionnaire.)

These contemporary Madison County homesteads embrace the farming community in which they exist. They haven't created suburban gated communities that are falsely "country." Rather, they have settled themselves into the existing history and activities of farm life around them, embracing its *genius loci*. They have also embraced the ethos of the community as Mockbee would have, taking inspiration from folk and vernacular artistic expressions. This combination creates a unique and "new" vernacular that can inspire the profession of landscape architecture.

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<sup>6</sup>Andrew Jackson Downing, *Rural Essays* (New York, N.Y.: G. P. Putnam & Co., 1853), p. 385.





**Figure 6.3:** A playhouse made of recycled materials at the Buffalo/Baird residence sits in the native beautyberry; hand-painted decorations and an old swing conjure up the Southern vernacular yard scape.

## CHAPTER 7: Summary and Discussion of How Landscape Architecture Can Reclaim Domestic Rural Environments as a Focus

Landscape architecture should inspire and edify people and protect and encourage the natural environment. This means looking at creative ways we can live on and with the land within both the natural state and the existing cultural context. The experience of rural life has much to offer the profession in the way of inspiration, design elements and a relationship to the natural world. While much of “nature” has been controlled, augmented and/or degraded by farming practices, there still exists access to the native environment on many levels. Designers need to seek out what remains of rural life. The Georgia piedmont’s historically rich agriculture community persists even into the twenty-first century, providing designers with these vibrant resources.

The Northeast Georgia piedmont, and Madison County in particular, embody many of the natural and cultural elements of a traditionally rural character, and it is that character redefined that will give modern landscape design models for inspiration. Also, in a community such as Madison County, where the role of government is under constant scrutiny and authority in general is suspect, landscape architects might have a more positive impact by looking at what is there and locating models that fit principles of resource conservation, environmental protection, cultural celebration and local history. If the goal is to protect the “rural character” of place, and especially one as characteristically individualistic as Madison County, it is helpful to *start with that place's character*; not enter the scene with an idealized notion of what is rural or as an “expert.” An outsider's vision, no matter how beneficial or well-intended, will often be regarded with suspicion. As Susan Buggy argued in an overview of historic landscape conservation in North America, in the modern world it may be better to as professionals to serve as “facilitators

more than experts."<sup>1</sup> Landscape designers might be able to look at what exists at a certain site, put it in a historical and cultural context, and from there reach into the future for what will be needed by the new residents. In any case, the richest source of information will be the site itself.

As Madison County's population increases and economic changes occur in the region, there will be pressures of development on the traditional rural way of life, as well as on the natural ecosystems that sustain that heritage. Designers can offer models that show homeowners how to participate in the traditional culture without destroying the very thing that brings these new populations to the area. The four homesteads in this study do just that: no massive earth moving took place when these homesteads were established; native trees and shrubs are respected and nurtured; the hydrologic cycle is cared for, and the cultural experience of these households fits gracefully into the established historical agriculture of the county, allowing farming to continue around them.

The households are designed for simple, efficient living by virtue of their careful placement on the land with regard to air currents and sunlight. The gardens and yards exist both for work and leisure; they are not showcases that professional designers and gardeners planned or managed. They use renewable energy resources for heating and minimize their use of air conditioning. None of these homesteads create insurmountable barriers for wildlife migration and browsing, and all natural resources are managed with care and not exploited beyond their ability to regenerate. In short, these remarkable homesteads let the natural and cultural environments continue to evolve around them.

In all four cases, the *genius loci* was an integral part of decision-making. They succeed as homesteads because they pay tribute to the spirit of the locale and they join the flow of history,

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Buggy, "Historic Landscape Conservation in North America: Roaming the Field over the Past Thirty Years." *APT Bulletin* 23 (1998).

farming life and the ethos of the Southern rural experience. They will last, not just because they were well built or have homeowners who were careful to design and live within the means of the site; they will last because they have connected to larger notions of dwelling through metaphor and analogy, creating works of art. Each serves as a model for contemporary landscape architecture by following the wisdom of Downing's historical foundations and Mockbee's cathartic, modern interpretation. Moreover, the homeowners started with the premise that his/her effect on the land should be kept to a minimum; that the land was not there to serve them as much as they were there to serve the land. Exploitation or ruin for financial gain was never an impetus for the development of the site. How this ethic will be considered in the future is a huge challenge for Madison County but with these kinds of models, all of which have thrived for over two decades, there is an affordable, life-affirming way of living in an ever-changing environment.

These homesteads also have a role to play in the maintenance of the rural character of Madison County. While the practice of farming and the existence of farm families will be the main engine that drives the character of the rural landscape, these four homesteads inspire other small acreage home sites to fit *into* the land. This context-based homestead design can serve as an alternative to the suburban model that consistently ignores the agricultural world into which it imposes itself.

The U.S. has a history of people living off the land in both real terms and in the imaginary life of the would-be rural resident. As recently as 2006, the *Mother Earth News*, a popular magazine that has been a voice for the back-to-the-land movement since 1972, laid out recommendations for how to plan the perfect homestead: "Thousands of Americans still dream of going 'back to the land' to learn to grow their own food, build their own homes, generate

electricity from renewable resources and live a self-reliant lifestyle.”<sup>2</sup> Magazines for hobby farms, “simple living” and “country life” abound. There seems to be a societal need for farmland that goes beyond industrial agriculture: we want to be able to see trees growing, cattle grazing on long and sloping pastures, old barns rising up out of the landscape, and streams flowing freely. It does our collective hearts good to see a flock of wild turkey meandering into the woods or a family of raccoons trundling into the road-side creek.

These four homesteads in Madison County clearly embrace this need to be a part of the landscape and at the same time acknowledge the heritage of the farming community around them. Instead of obliterating their natural and cultural environments, they take delight in finding a way truly to be a part of the *genius loci*. Landscape architects in the twenty-first century can use the principles laid out by the early practitioners of the nineteenth century and continue the tradition in modern ways by referring to the homesteads of these four Madison County families and being inspired by the creative philosophy of Samuel Mockbee in rural Alabama. As designers we need to be able to idealize and romanticize, but not at the expense of the ecosystem or the established culture. These Madison County models are effective in that they allow us new forms while drinking from the deep well of the rural Southern piedmont.

### **Creating a New Paradigm for Rural Landscape Architecture**

While this paper has emphasized the influence/tradition of rural landscape design in the profession in America, I do not mean to argue that this tradition is static. Like a theme or creed, rural design has provided continuity of reference over time, even as new generations interpret “rural” in different ways. Also, farming has evolved, which means the source of rural design’s inspiration has changed. I cannot say that modern industrial farming practices are worthy of

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<sup>2</sup> *Mother Earth News*, April/May 2006 p.42.

emulation but I can say that the small-holdings farmer has managed to retain many of the elements of rural life that Americans have nurtured and needed over time.

Early practitioners such as Downing had a particular sensibility that they wanted to promote. Downing's sensibility grew out of his love and appreciation of the Hudson River Valley where he resided. His focus on "good taste" implied that there was a particular way to do things in the American landscape that would engender particular outcomes; he saw himself professionally as an arbiter of a universal set of rules that would create beneficial domestic environments. Even with good intentions, his prescriptive method comes across as somewhat paternalistic today: I know what's best for your landscape and your life. Follow me and you will be "correct."

During the Progressive Era, practitioners like Liberty Hyde Bailey had something of this same paternalistic streak. Like many educators and social reformers of the early twentieth century, Bailey saw education as a tool to help bring people "up" and out of poverty and isolation, assuming that the ways they survived and expressed themselves somehow lacked worth. He also edited encyclopedias of agriculture and horticulture, as well as manuals on farming, pruning and managing plant nurseries, with the intention of helping people relate more productively to their natural environments. Like Downing, Bailey believed this would improve society as well as the individual.

Late twentieth-century practitioners like Mockbee, Firth and Westmacott stopped preaching a specific set of guidelines and principles and instead allowed designers to explore and integrate landscapes of non-dominant cultures within the American experience.<sup>3</sup> New inspiration was found in less obvious places (some might say more *honest* landscapes because they are less

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<sup>3</sup> Randy Hester should also be included as an important modern designer who espouses these new aspects of the profession. A native of North Carolina, Hester teaches at the University of California at Berkeley.

self-conscious?) because they were not designed by professionals with a particular aesthetic in mind. Because local design had value in and of itself, these modern practitioners championed the vernacular, unplanned landscape.

While landscape architecture should keep its affiliation with America's rural character, contemporary designers cannot afford to proclaim and prescribe one particular aesthetic over another. Our culture is too rich and diversified and our ecosystems too much in need of complexity to be able to afford a single-minded, top-down design methodology. Just as there is not one working rural domestic environment, there should not be one particular rural aesthetic. Also, design principles that we do adhere to should be flexible and general enough to be able to sustain change. Landscape architects are no longer addressing single issues serving a particular population; they are looking for ways to blend, integrate and regenerate complex systems so they can remain malleable over time.

The American rural South remains one of the more colorful and historically rich landscapes in the country. If the profession can turn to this diversity for inspiration, perhaps it can find solutions to problems of overdevelopment and generic design (creating the geography of "Nowhere," as James Kuntsler put it in his book, *The Geography of Nowhere: The Rise and Decline of America's Man-Made Landscapes*) that will serve rural populations as they grow and change in the future.



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## Appendices

### A. A list of elements that qualify as rural the four homesteads studied.

The four case studies include the homes of Burton and Dena Chandler, Carlton; David and Kathi Morgan, Danielsville; Ginni and Scotty Edwards, Comer; and Jim Baird and Julie Buffalo, Comer.

*Elements of these homesteads that reflect their rural character:*

- Atmospheres of privacy and isolation in countryside settings.
- Houses and outbuildings blend into landscape by not destroying it or dramatically altering it first.
- Houses and outbuildings are built with local wood and stone.
- There is evidence of an independent, self-sufficient lifestyle including wood lots, wood piles, handmade fences, walls and structures. (No pre-fabricated structures.)
- There is little night lighting in evidence.
- Vegetable garden that supplies residents with food.
- Outdoor clotheslines and other daily life activities.
- No impermeable pavement.
- Animals are part of the yard experience: pets run free; some farm animals roam.
- Each homestead has its own source of water and a septic system.
- Lack of popular culture elements such as swimming pools, formal patios, manufactured outdoor grills, car garages, etc.

- Homesteads contain a lot of variety; that is, each has a lot going on in the yard such as household and farm projects; parked farm equipment; chicken coops; dog pens; small boats, kayaks and canoes in the yard, etc.
- The landscapes at each homestead are “active” in that they portray the owners’ interests including: art studios; potting sheds; outbuildings that are social gathering places; campfire sites within view of the houses; tree houses and play areas; and paths that wind off into the woods or over to neighboring homesteads, etc.
- The native landscape weaves in and out of the yard experience.

**B. Descriptions and locations of each homestead:**

*Edwards*

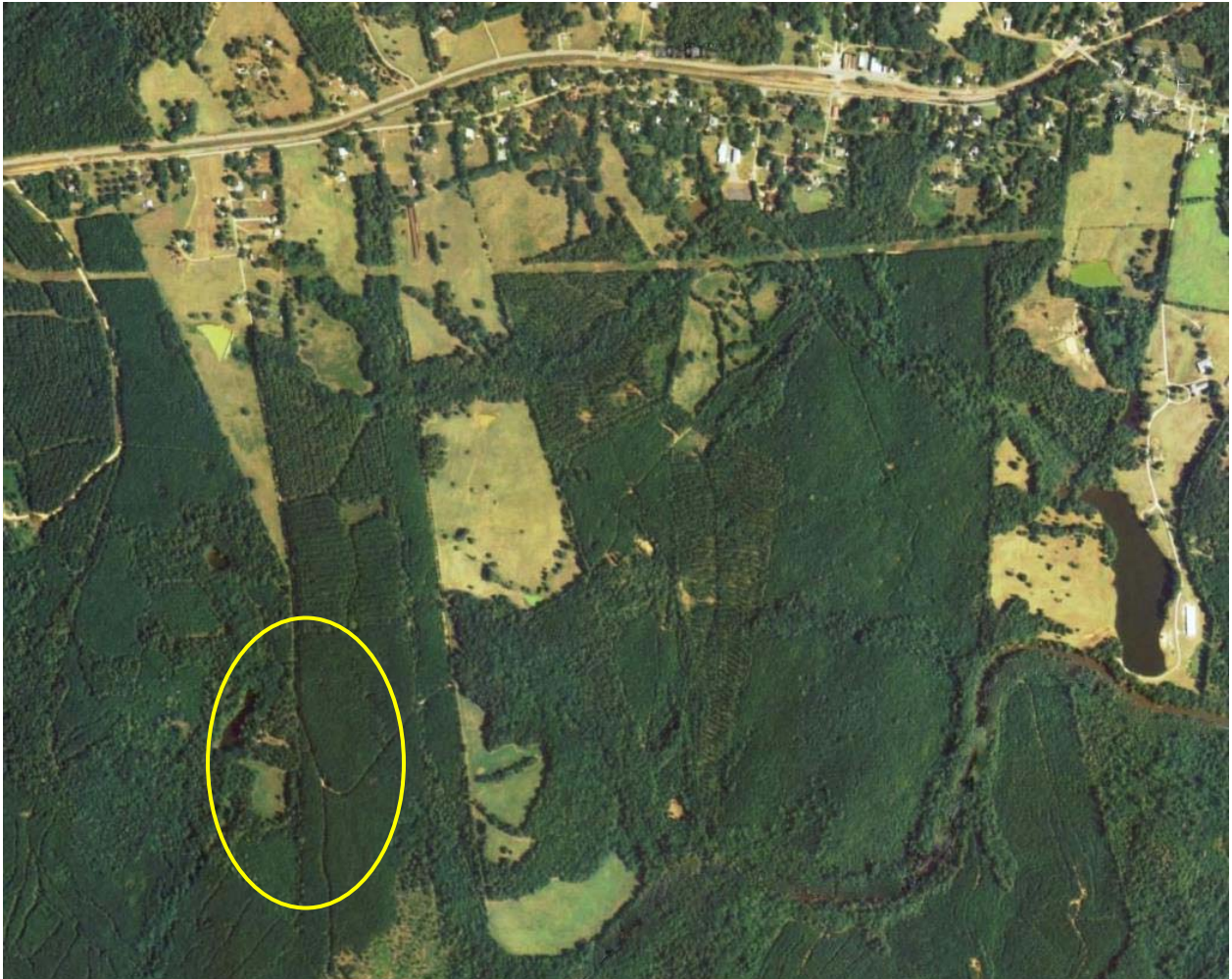


North ↑

**Figure Appendix.1:** The Edwards homestead is on the Broad River at the northeastern edge of Madison County. Numerous ferry crossings can be mapped along this stretch of the river. The Edwards have avoided affecting the floodplain as much as possible. This homestead is 15 acres and utilizes the Georgia conservation use program. They are surrounded by timber lands and one hay farm. *Map derived from Google. No scale.*



## Chandler



North ↑

**Figure Appendix.2:** The Chandler homestead is approximately 50 acres within a much larger tract of timber. It is approximately .5 miles from Carlton. The owners have maintained the dirt road entrance and left the access open to the woods surrounding the house. The Chandlers are surrounded by working farms on all sides, with a fork of the Broad River as their southern boundary. River access remains unchanged. *Map derived from Google. No scale.*

## *Morgan*

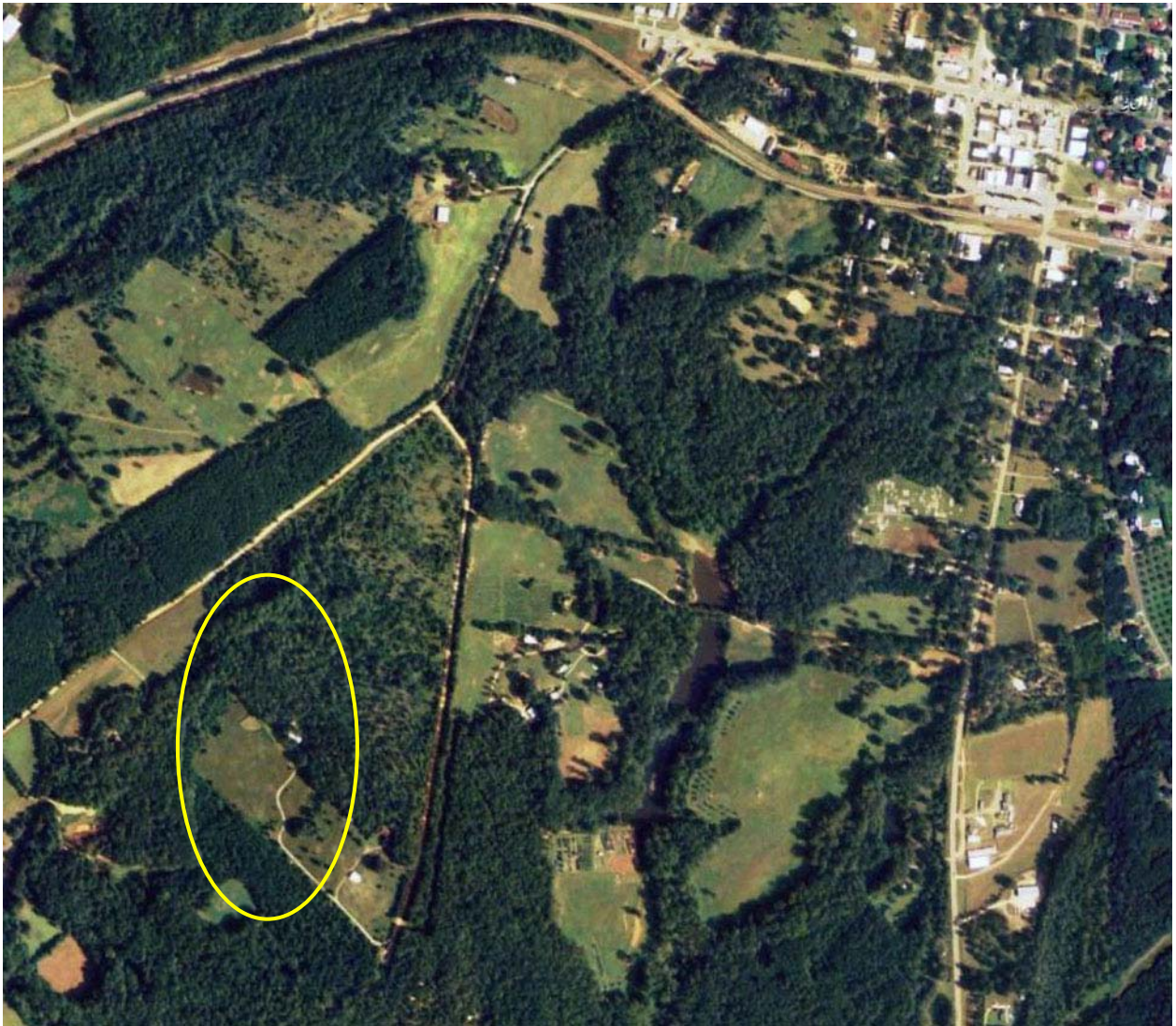


North ↑

**Figure Appendix.3:** The Morgan homestead rests within an agricultural community of hay, cattle, and poultry operations. The family maintains the meadow to the front of the house (an old hay pasture) and protects the native woods around the home and studio. A dirt drive follows old farming contours to the homestead. The homestead is 14 acres. The family needed access to paved roads as they make their living selling hand-made pottery. A few pasture trees, including pecans, apples and cedars, are allowed to grow in the field. *Map derived from Google. No scale.*



## *Buffalo/Baird*



North ↑

**Figure Appendix.4:** The Buffalo/Baird homestead sits .5 miles from Comer, surrounded by small farms and timber tracts. The meadow is preserved as are the native woods to the north and east of the house. The homestead preserves the small-holdings tradition by not dramatically altering the contours of the farmland. The driveway is an extension of an old farm road, and early succession trees at the forest edge are allowed to grow. The homestead is 11.5 acres and is the Georgia conservation use program. *Map derived from Google. No scale.*

### C. Responses to surveys:



**Figure Appendix.5:** The piedmont environment at the Buffalo/Baird residence.

#### **Morgan**

*Why did you choose your land?* We were looking for reasonable priced rural acreage, with paved road frontage, to build on and be able to pursue the pottery profession, as well as garden, grow small crops, cut our own firewood and pursue a rural lifestyle.

*When? How long did you intend to stay?* 1979: We intended to stay until death or consignment to assisted living or some other elderly ghetto.

*How did you site your house? Your outbuildings?* We sited the house to be in the woods--for shade in summer and to take advantage of the edge environment. (Pottery studio was sited to be able to use kiln and have access to the road.)

*What was your intention in establishing this homestead?* (See above.) I think we wanted to take the place and improve it in a way that made a statement about who we are.

*What percentage of your acreage is the homestead?* (House, outbuildings, and vegetable garden.) We have about fifteen acres and the house and outbuildings comprise about two acres, although I consider the fields and woodlots extensions of the homestead.

*What are your plans for your homestead once you have died?* Pass it on to our child.

*Do you see any immediate threats to your homestead lifestyle?* Financial? Political? Environmental? Will our well run dry? Will our neighbors continue to elect Republicans that sell us all down the river? Will the dollar collapse? Will development cause us to sell and leave?

*Do you have any regrets? What would you have done differently?* Hindsight is a tough window to look through. I wish I had paid a little more attention to infrastructure early on.

*Do you see your homestead lifestyle as contributing to the larger community/society or is it just a model that suited your personal needs?* The answer is both. I feel that we are making a positive contribution as productive community members while satisfying our personal lifestyles.

*In what way does your homestead contribute to the greater good if you think it does?* We create products which enrich the community. We endeavor to improve our own land and its ties to the community.

*What are some of your historical relationships to farming in the American South?* Eight generations of farmers to my father's generation. I grew up on and about a cotton and peanut farm (in South Georgia). I was aware of and intrigued by the back-to-the-land movement, but was always also aware of the "bigger is better" crushing reality of modern farming.

## **Chandler**

*Why did you choose your land?* I had had an unsuccessful search for a community to live in that had some ag. connection and was pondering the situation, sitting in the early Oct. snowfall in Switzerland and it became very clear to me that I was not going to find what I wanted in an exotic locale. (Chandler had been staying in a Protestant monastery when he had this epiphany.) I was tired of traveling and looking. I left for home that week and called a realtor the day after I got home. I looked at three properties but I bought the first one I saw. On the trip to Europe I found a book called I Bought a Mountain, about a sheep farmer in Scotland, I think. I had that in mind all summer and when things didn't work out at the monastery. The life of a farmer seemed a good one. I wanted decisions to have tangible results; I wanted actions to have unambiguous consequences.

*When? How long did you intend to stay?* 1974: I bought with the motivation to be buried here (we are working on having a "green" burial cemetery here).

*How did you site your house? Your outbuildings?* I couldn't quite decide on the location and was sitting on the site and three deer walked up behind me and that seemed to be the spot. I wanted the front door to the east and the house to be built into the hillside. I built it



with logs because I didn't have any money for the house. I didn't use a concrete foundation because I thought the whole house might recycle one day. The house is lined up with the stream, now a lake, and the outbuildings are not in line but are in parallel. I wanted a slightly formal relationship of the buildings since the setting was so informal. Siting the house, I thought of Thoreau building his little cabin, and a visitor who said why didn't he build it on the hill instead? He responded--what a great place not to build a house. At the Chandler homestead...Since the outside was truly outside, the house was to feel snug--no picture windows, only small mullions on the windows.

*What was your intention in establishing this homestead?* I was seeking people whose lives were shaped by growing things. I knew more what I *didn't* want: I didn't want people who were afraid of the outdoors; who didn't know how to do anything with their hands. I wanted a little more sanity that I had grown up with in the suburbs. I thought I might be part of something new based on old traditions.

*What percentage of your acreage is the homestead?* One half per cent.

*What are your plans for your homestead once you have died?* The land is in a trust held by the Georgia Land Trust. The timber is our only retirement fund. We don't see the land itself as a 401k. We didn't plan on selling pieces of it in order to retire.

*Do you see any immediate threats to your homestead lifestyle? Financial? Political? Environmental?* Our lifestyle is controlled in large part by the economics of our area. Returns on timber are not worth the heavy capital required to own the land. The commercial timber companies have all sold out. A high average return is \$100 per acre before any expenses. That is 2% of the \$5000 per acre land. Suburban homeowners who have never lived in the country complain when we cut timber or do controlled burns. We are shifting to chemical control of competing weed species, as a higher cost to us and overall a higher environmental cost. One of the biggest threats to our farm is our county commissioners.

*Do you have any regrets? What would you have done differently?* Regarding the land, none. I would have worked harder at an earlier age to make more money to buy more land when it was cheap. A year after I bought my land a nearby tract came up, 340 acres at \$275 per acre. I rounded up five couples to buy it and subdivide the center (5-10 acres) and own the other land in common. (I was going to sell my land.) I couldn't convince anyone to commit to that kind of ownership. They said if they bought in the country they wanted to own their own tract, not a part of one. I regret not being part of a community that is physically more immediate and local. I don't know anyone in the county that is doing what I am doing and it is rewarding but very lonely.

*Do you see your homestead lifestyle as contributing to the larger community/society or is it just a model that suited your personal needs and desires? Both?* I thought when I moved here that I would be able to teach my rural neighbors about the larger world they were missing and I found they taught me instead. Both.

*In what way does your homestead contribute to the greater good if you think it does?*  
Aside from timber production, wildlife benefits, carbon sequestration, and oxygen production it keeps me sane. Also, water purification, topsoil production, reduction of nature deficit disorder, etc.

*What are some of your historical relationships to farming in the American South?* My great grandfather Ben Burton in Colbert was a farmer. My mother's grandfather farmed the land from Whitehall (in Athens) to Five Points. My dad always wanted land but he passed before his stepfather could give him 100 acres. (Mr. Jackson had 6,000 acres in Wilkes County. He started out as a poor mule trader.) My great grandfather farmed sugar cane in Barbados. He didn't like it and moved back to Abbeville (S.C.).

### **Buffalo/Baird**

Julie Buffalo Responds:

*Why did you choose your land?* Beauty, affordability...meadow and woods which are diverse and unique in species types. Jubilee Partners was next door and friendly. I liked the motto "Make our town your town!" (Jubilee Partners is an intentional Christian community farm that cares for refugees from around the world.)

*When? How long did you intend to stay?*

1987: For our lifetimes.

*How did you site your house? Your outbuildings?* South orientation, facing the meadow. Old ditch to the north, back side of our house. In Chinese philosophy of feng shui\* this is an auspicious desirable location. Outbuildings are same design as house...and are not long enough!

*What was your intention in establishing this homestead?* To build a house we designed, build it with thought, sweat and muscle in the countryside; to garden, plant ornamentals and vegetables, keep bees, chickens, a donkey and children.

*What percentage of your acreage is in the homestead?* 30%

*What are your plans for your homestead once you have died?* If our children don't want it, I want to give it to Jubilee Partners as part of their holdings to use as a refugee house or other type of building (administrative, family, visitor center, retreat center, etc.) Not a 401k but certainly my heart of not my financial retirement.

Jim Baird responds:

*Why did you choose your land?* It looked better than any of several tracts of land we looked at. I wish we could take credit for having exercised more diligence in the search, but it just wasn't there. An agent was asked to look for approx. size parcels that were fairly secluded.



*When? And how long did you intend to stay?* We closed the land purchase in June of 1986, after having “personal surveyor” flag and measure our selection from a larger parcel. The idea was to get half open land and half wooded. Intended to stay “for the duration,” whatever that means.

*How did you site your house? Your outbuildings?* Existing forms/topography helped a lot. Parcel selection aimed at southern exposure with tree line along which to locate dwelling. Centrality of dwelling site was to ensure seclusion within property lines. (Do you sense any hints of a reclusive attitude yet?) certain common sense aspects of *feng shui* played a role I’m sure, finding expression in what felt like a personal preference, but may have been unconscious application of *feng shui*. Such as, open view to the front, slight protection to the left side and out towards the front, high solid back (dense woodlot and ascending slope), open expanse to the right and forward.

Outbuilding: just one so far and beside it to come, located out of the way of above mentioned views, and also to span a wide existing swale that helps slow the runoff.

*What was your intention in establishing this homestead?* Beyond the basic act of staking out a homesite, there was not a lot of plan, except for the desire to control and keep green a number of acres and the chance to enjoy the visual treat. To grow trees, ornamentals, vegetables, etc.

*What percentage of your acreage is the homestead?* The house, garden, “yard,” drive, and wood yard all equal 25 to 30 per cent of the total.

*What are your plans for the homestead after you die?* Beyond a legacy for children I have not thought up anything. I don’t right now feel comfortable issuing limitations on what they might decide to do with what they inherit.

*Do you see any immediate threats to your lifestyle and homestead?* Not at the present time. I have often thought of the possibility of being taxed off the land. I have heard of that happening to people in the Atlanta metro area.

*Do you have any regrets?* The biggest one I have is the choice of a southern exposure and the choice of so dry a site. This little hillside is way hotter and dryer than I imagined it would be. The well is just enough, especially in drought times, to serve a household. When it gets really dry I have curtailed watering vegetables and landscape. Have lost lots of trees and shrubs. What works here I’m learning are Mediterranean type, Zone 8 plants.

*Do you see you homestead lifestyle contributing to the larger community/society or is it just a model that suited your personal needs and desires?* I don’t take credit for having done anything particularly unusual. I feel more like a recipient of good luck just in the diversity of the woodlot. I do think that having and keeping a green place is contributing to a generally greener and more hospitable local environment. If you listen to Jim Warren (a local architect and farmer) it makes sense that each green place helps keep the

topography generally cooler and a more likely recipient of rainfall.

*In what way does your homestead contribute to a greater good if you think it does?*

I think that making/keeping something of the natural-local-native plant community has value, though I am not sure that that is what it will be seen as by those who follow. Not only is the knowledge of what is local about any place starting to disappear, but also the sensibility that makes us see the value in that local specialness. I used to try to expand the number of “native” plant species a lot more than I do now, but have met with a high rate of attrition. Now I have begun to focus more on trying to plant things that will live at all here, focusing on the distinctive and unusual. Everything is native somewhere. My main influence in this thinking is Woodlanders Nursery, which began specializing in Southeast native woody plants and perennials, but branched out over the years into a “global” effort to keep alive plants that are being trampled and that have aesthetic value.

*What are some of your historical relationships to farming in the American South?* My historic roots are probably much like those of many others of my generation. My father’s parents were from rural ag-based families. They were born in 1896 and left their farm roots to come to the city of Macon, in search of jobs, etc. etc. just like in the modern exodus occurring all over today’s third world. My mother’s parents strove also for a white collar kind of gentility. Though they didn’t attain any particular high level of that (her father worked in a hardware store), so earnest was his striving in that direction that she told me the only reason he ever rose from his tubercular deathbed during her adolescence was to spank her after he heard that she had been to play with children from the cotton mill village nearby. He thought those people were beneath him.

I guess you could say we were part of some kind of back to something, but as movement members we were a little late and didn’t manage to make the land support us, except by way of its nurturing beauty. Some have said that impressions of the senses are a kind of food, and it is that kind of nourishment I think we have enjoyed from the beauty of our home site. I think that natural beauty is the main crop we have here. Some of it is native, and some of it was enhanced by our efforts. You can’t buy it and install it, but if you can see it lurking under the privet and the greenbriar, you can reveal it and improve on it. While it is not a cash crop it does have considerable value, but only if you keep that kind of account in which you can make that kind of deposit.

## **Edwards**

*How did you choose your land?* We knew we wanted to be on or near water...a river, a creek, a natural body of water. (We wanted to be in ) natural beauty and features like hardwood forest (mature) and water. We wanted to live in a rural atmosphere and work towards a self-sufficient lifestyle.

*When? How long did you intend to stay?* 1986. (Purchased land Jan. 1987) We really never actually voiced it but I think our thinking at the time was “This is our homestead and we’re going to work for it to be our PLACE in the world.” In some ways we were too young to comprehend the ramifications of this thinking.

*How did you site your house? Your outbuildings?* We considered the river floodplain and certainly did not want to be visible from the river. We wanted to have the least impact possible on the fragile parts of our property.

*What was your intention in establishing this homestead?* To create Home; to blend in with the surrounding natural landscape.

*What percentage of your acreage is homestead?* One acre of twenty.

*What are your plans for your homestead once you have died?* We will leave our land to Isabel.

*Do you see any immediate threats to your homestead lifestyle?* Taxes, development encroachment, no strong river buffer protection ordinances in place. No soil sedimentation rules enforced in our county.

*Do you have any regrets? What would you have done differently?* NO! Except we should have bought the whole 60-acre parcel when it was cheaper and available!

*Do you see your homestead lifestyle as contributing to the larger community/society or is it just a model that suited your personal needs and desires?* Both. But we didn't realize the larger community/society part until we were older and were able to look back and contemplate on *how* we became a piece of the community *because of our land*. (Emphasis made by homeowner.)

*In what way does your homestead contribute to the greater good, if you think it does?* It sustains wildlife habitat. It is a small footprint and therefore has less impact on the natural processes. It is a simple lifestyle that doesn't rely on constant upgrading or accumulation of material goods.

*What are some of your historical relationships to farming in the American South?* Our grandparents were gardeners and were a part of our early formative years of influence. (Both Scott and Ginni grew up in Macon, Ga.)

#### **D. Ways that Four Homesteads in Madison County, Georgia Express the Principles of Rural Design**

1. Starting with a long-term commitment to the land, these homesteads were designed to cause as little damage as possible to their sites, and meant to blend into the environment rather than impose themselves on the land.

2. The homeowners were committed from the very beginning to create a home for themselves and their families, not create a marketable entity for profit.

3. By living with the land in this way, these homeowners believed they were adding to the quality of life of the larger community, which is and has always been predominantly agricultural.

4. The design of these homesteads and the lives these people created maintains an elemental quality of life close to Nature and in concert with natural processes.

5. These homesteads were designed to contribute to the society around them and be as self-sufficient as possible by not being reliant on support and input from off site. (No county water or sewer required, etc.)

6. Affordability, frugality, and practicality underlie the financial ethic utilized.

7. The fact that these homesteads are actually built by the owners themselves gives them another level of emotional investment.

### **E. Some Aspects of Landscape Design in a Piedmont Environment Defined:**

1. Site house and outbuildings on the existing contours.
2. Using an east-west axis, design the buildings to take advantage of sun angles, prevailing breezes and seasonal climate changes.
3. Entranceways to homesteads are subtle, unobtrusive and yet welcoming. The access is part of the established traffic flow. No gateways, dramatic thresholds or signifiers identify their locations.
4. Native stones and wood are used for construction.
5. Native plants are protected and used where possible.
6. Views of natural landscapes are protected; the houses are not the view.
7. The architecture and garden designs reflect a tie to the American Southern vernacular but more as an inspiration rather than a dictum.
8. Wildlife is allowed and encouraged; no impervious barriers or asphalt pavements are used.



9. Vegetable and flower gardens are much in evidence, even serving as part of the entranceway to the houses.

10. Elements of the small-holdings agricultural lifestyle are in evidence: clotheslines, campfire rings, woodpiles, small chicken coops, bee hives, orchards, recycling bins, etc.

11. Evidence of lives lived in the out of doors: canoes, swings, wheelbarrows, outdoor “rooms”, garden tools, outdoor showers, etc.

12. While there is an effort to keep the landscapes watered and neat, there is not a manicured, controlled “suburban” ethic in evidence. (A suburban ethic might have specific characteristics and rules applied to fit a consensus to protect the homogeneity of the development, whereas the rural aesthetic celebrates individuality and iconoclastic design.)

13. Homesteads are a work-in-progress and show the liveliness of the life experience of the residents. There are also some ways these homesteads could be changed to further support the principles laid out.

**F. Some general landscape recommendations for rural homesteads not addressed in these models:**

1. Homesteads can establish a substantial rainwater collection system to sustain the landscapes and provide water for use in flushing toilets, etc. Gray water should be utilized in the landscape where possible.
2. Increase square footage of screened outdoor spaces, either attached to the houses or separately as outbuildings.
3. Parking for visitors can be delineated at each homestead to protect the trees and shrubs in the yards. (Instead of just parking under existing trees, which compacts the soil and damages roots.)
4. Numerous footpaths and pathways into the forests surrounding these homesteads will make the experience of the land more immediate.
5. Elements of curiosity in the landscape including labyrinths, horse trails, small shelters in the woods, wildlife watering troughs incorporated into the water collection system, etc., will add to the variety and allure of the homesteads.
6. Pastures/meadows rather than lawns can be maintained with plantings of winter wheat,

clover, and rye, and/ or millet in summer. Sorghum can be used for migrating birds and native animal populations.

7. As time goes by, rural homesteads can disappear even further into their respective landscapes. This form of planned obsolescence is part of their appeal.

**G. Homesteads can plan for the future even further, adding the following native species to their established mix:**

**Canopy trees**

<i>Betula nigra</i>	River Birch
<i>Dispyros virginiana</i>	Persimmon
<i>Fagus grandifolia</i>	American Beech
<i>Nyssa sylvatica</i>	Black Gum
<i>Platanus occidentalis</i>	Sycamore
<i>Quercus falcata</i>	Southern Red Oak
<i>Quercus alba</i>	White oak
<i>Quercus borealis</i>	Northern Red Oak

**Small trees**

<i>Acer leucoderme</i>	Chalk maple
<i>Carpinus caroliniana</i>	Musclewood
<i>Cercis canadensis</i>	Eastern Redbud
<i>Oxydendrum arboretum</i>	Sourwood

**Shrubs**

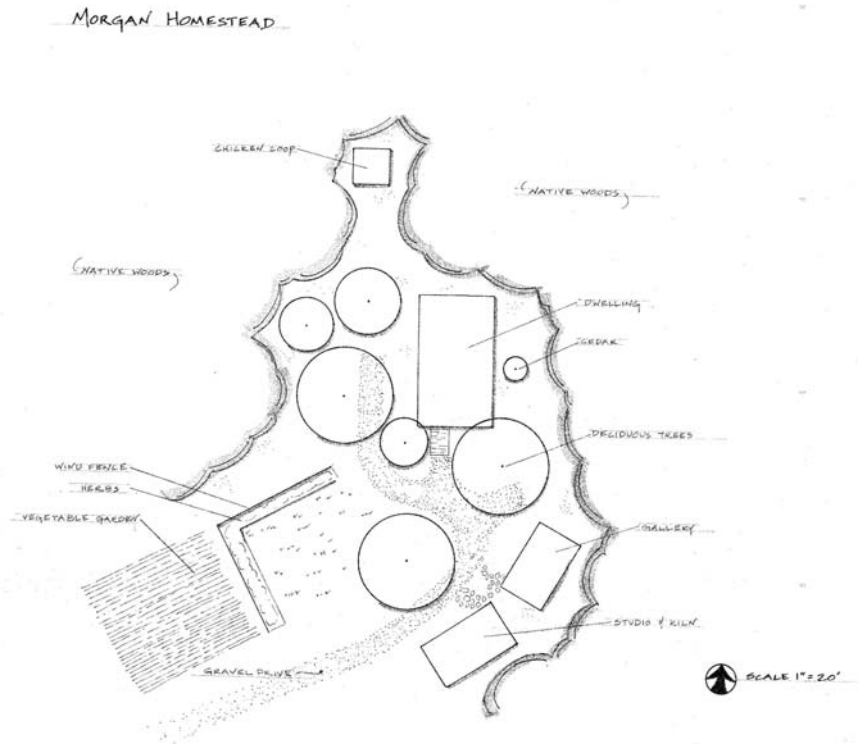
<i>Aesculus pavia</i>	Red buckeye
<i>Aesculus sylvatica</i>	Georgia buckeye
<i>Calycanthus floridus</i>	Sweetshrub
<i>Callicarpa Americana</i>	Beauty Berry
<i>Chionanthus virginicus</i>	Fringetree
<i>Fothergilla major</i>	Fothergilla
<i>Itea virginica</i>	Itea
<i>Opuntia</i>	Prickly pear cactus
<i>Rhus typhina</i>	Staghorn sumac
<i>Rhododendron canescens</i>	Piedmont azalea
<i>Yucca filamentosa</i>	Yucca

Fruit and nut production can be increased by adding the following:

Pecans  
Blueberries  
Pear trees  
Apple trees  
Figs  
Pomegranates

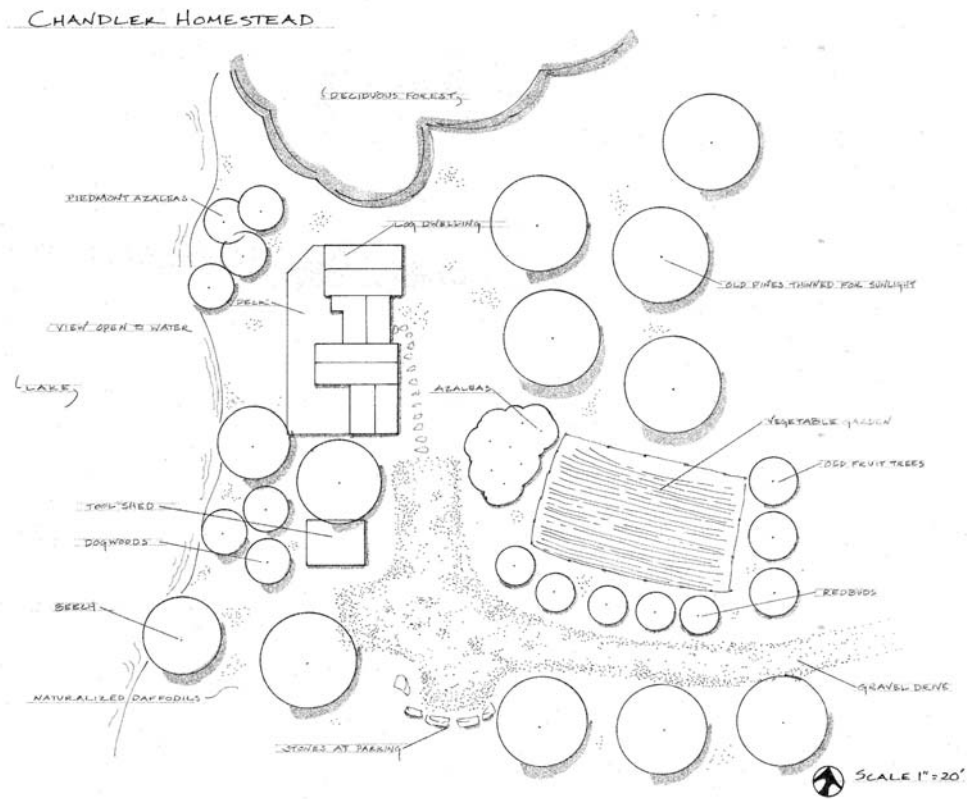
## H. Plans of Each Homestead Studied

### *Morgan*



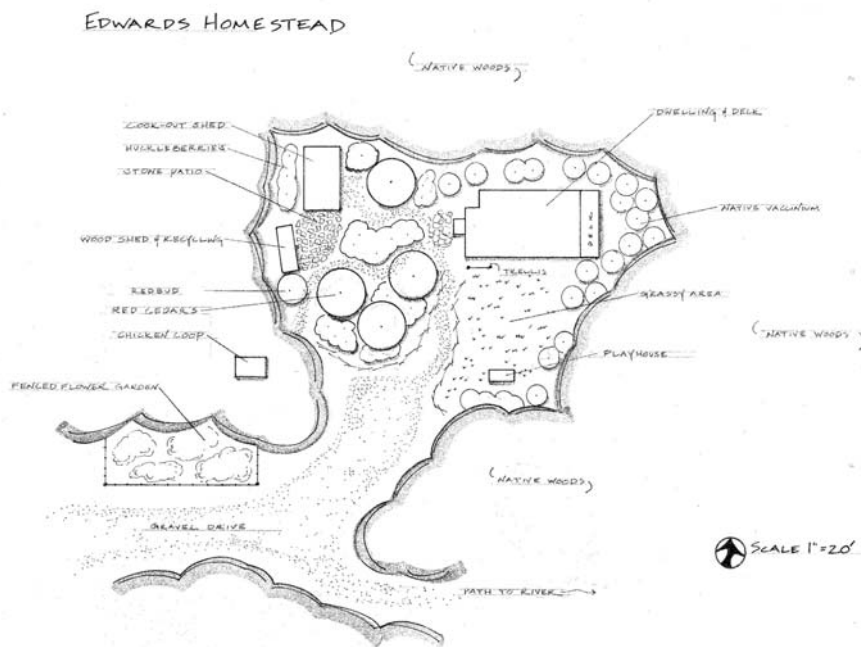
**Figure Appendix.6:** Plan of Morgan Homestead. (Not to scale.)

## Chandler



**Figure Appendix.7:** Plan of Chandler Homestead. Not to scale.

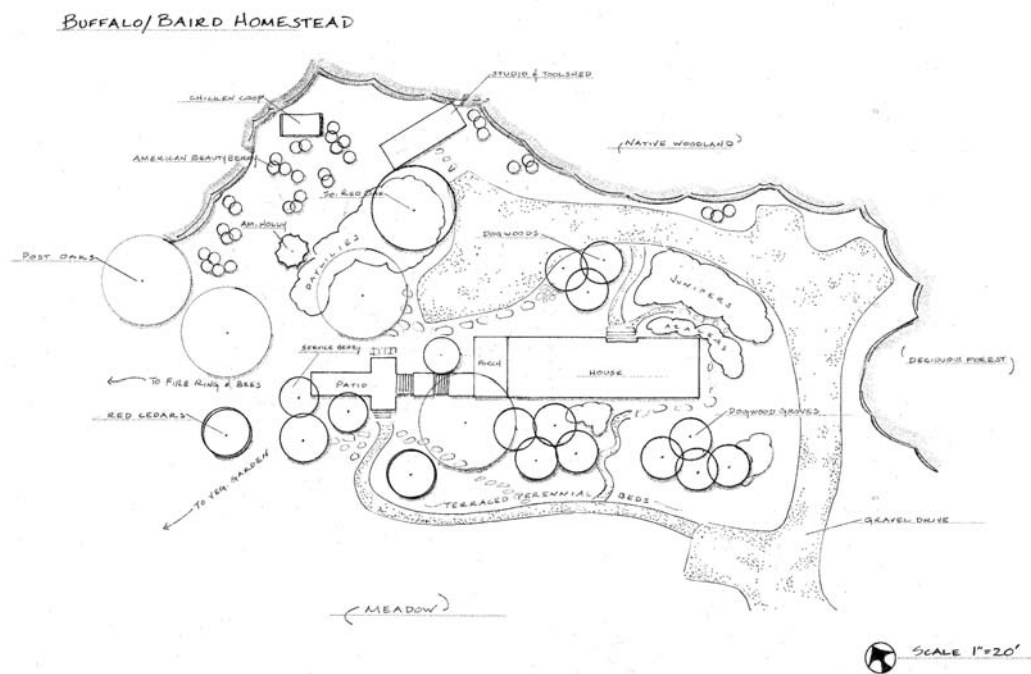
*Edwards*



**Figure Appendix.8:** Plan of Edwards Homestead. Not to scale.

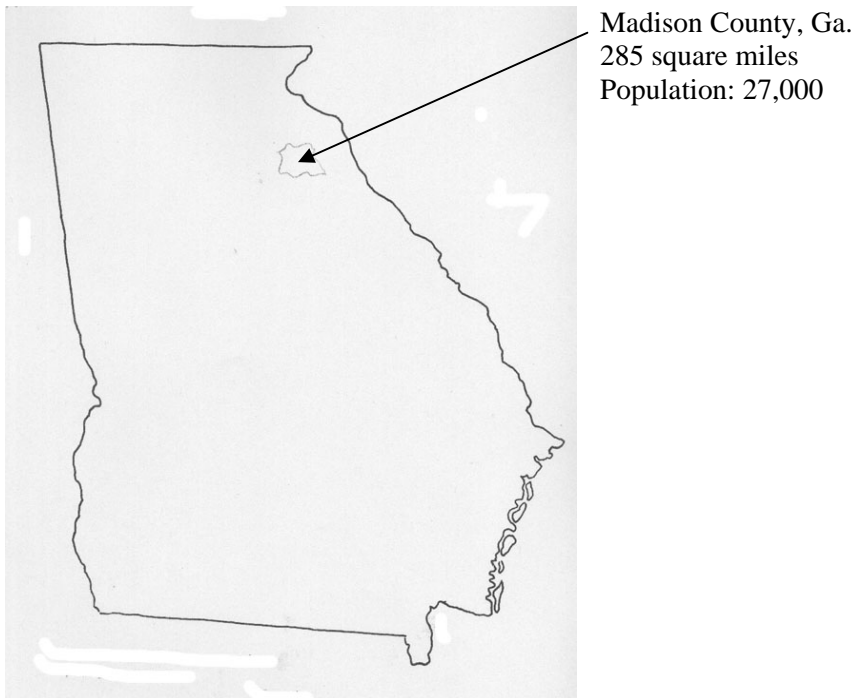


## Buffalo/Baird

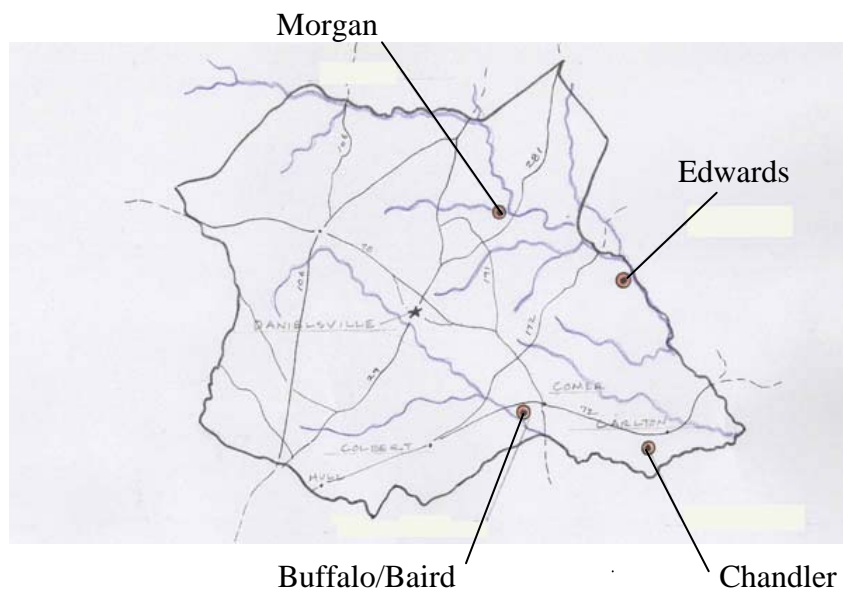


**Figure Appendix.9:** Plan of Buffalo/Baird Homestead. Not to scale.

## I. Locater Maps

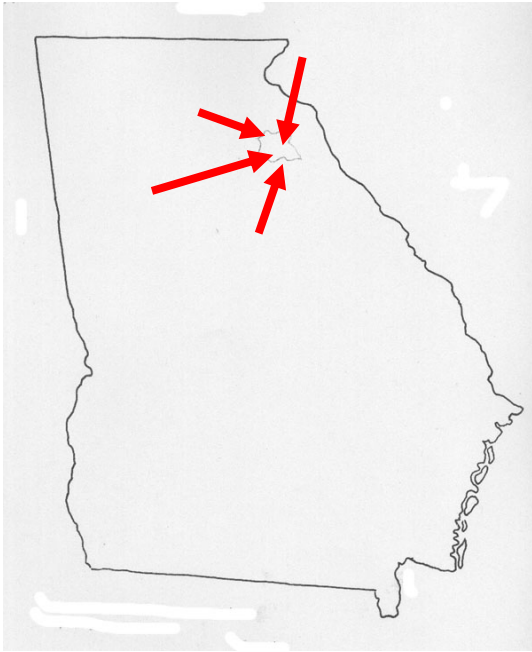


**Figure Appendix.10:** Madison County is in the northeastern piedmont of Georgia.



**Figure Appendix.11:** Homesteads used in study.

J. Development Pressure Map of Madison County, Ga.



**Figure Appendix.12:** Development pressures from Atlanta, I-85 corridor, Athens, and the Greenville /Spartanburg metro area have an impact on rural character in Madison County, Ga.