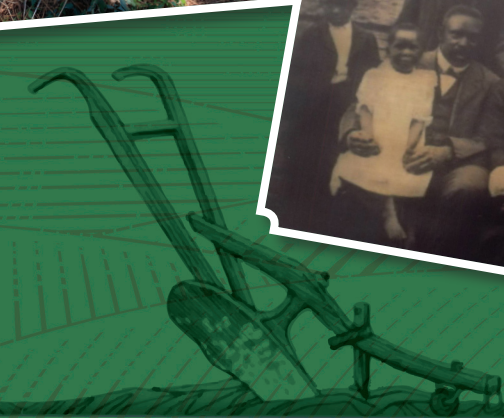


Lasting Legacies

African American
Century Farms
in Tennessee





The Civil War brought fundamental change to Tennessee, especially to its agriculture. After the fighting stopped in 1865, emancipated African Americans immediately sought ways to take care of their families, establish communities, and become productive citizens. Between 1865 and 1919, African Americans acquired 15 million acres across the South. But Black farm families still faced a hard row to hoe because during those same years, segregation laws created roadblocks to loans for machinery, seed, and fertilizer. Farming was difficult for land-owning African American farmers. But not impossible.

The stories of these 15 African American Tennessee farms show the resiliency and determination that help farm families find and sustain success. The 15 farms are all registered Tennessee Century Farms, a Tennessee Department of Agriculture program that for 50 years has recognized and celebrated families that have owned and cultivated family farmland for 100 or more years. In addition to serving as the foundation of Tennessee agriculture, Century Farm families have been foundations for rural communities, contributing land and support for schools, churches, and cemeteries. These 15 families are just a small part of the Tennessee Century Farm community, but their stories of persistence on the land are powerful reminders of how the Civil War and emancipation opened new doors for change in Tennessee, creating lasting legacies that shape our lives today.

On the cover, top to bottom: McDonald Craig Farm (Perry Co.), Butler Farm (Rutherford Co.), Moore Family Farm (Benton Co.), William and Luella Carter Farm (Lauderdale Co.), and Hatcher Family Farm (Williamson Co.).



Farms are listed in order of their founding dates.



John Henry and Inez Moore

The Moore Family Farm (1870, Benton County)

John and Harriet Moore purchased 220 acres of land, keeping most of it for a timber logging business and using the rest for crops and livestock tended by their 23-member family. They donated land for a community cemetery and church.

Their son, John Lewis Moore, and his wife, Ida Moore, inherited

Courtesy of Renee Williams.

the property and donated land for a church and school. Several of the Moore children taught at the school and passed down the importance of education. John Henry and wife Inez Moore continued to host community events and added a timber mill and sorghum mill. Today, the family combines cultivating a tree farm and leasing crop land with providing history tours and events to share their remarkable story.

The McDonald Craig Farm (1871, Perry County)

Tapp and Amy Craig used a yoke of oxen as a down payment to become the first African Americans to own land in Perry County. Over the years, the family acquired more land and diversified crops, livestock, and timber as a model 20th-century progressive

farm. Great-grandson McDonald Craig returned from World War II determined to build a better future for his family despite segregation. In addition to farming and logging, he bought a school bus to drive students to the closest high school, which was across the Tennessee River in Henderson County. Craig was also a talented, award-winning folk musician. Fellow musicians and country music fans traveled to the farm to meet him and his wife, Rosetta Smith Craig, who helped manage both the farm and her husband's career. The McDonald Craig Farm was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2006.



McDonald and Rosetta Craig, 2006.



Barn and tobacco on the Drake Farm.

The Drake Farm (1876, Sumner County)

After emancipation, George and Maria Bullock obtained 160 acres and raised cattle and horses. They also cultivated corn, wheat, fruit, and vegetables. The Bullocks

contributed to their community by donating

a portion of their land for a school and the Macedonia Baptist Church. The founders' granddaughter, Alice M. Drake, was the second owner and a schoolteacher. The farm was part of the Tennessee Maneuvers during World War II. Third owner Herman K. Drake expanded the farm by 1976 to 252 acres; cultivated tobacco, fruit, and hay; and raised livestock. Vietnam War veteran Richard Drake took the farm into the 21st century, and the property is now managed by his son Richard Jr.

The Butler Farm (1880, Rutherford County)

After the Civil War, Josiah and Martha Lillard Butler established a 26-acre farm. Butler Cemetery is located on this acreage, which was sold to satisfy a court ruling. In 1880, son Perry Butler and his wife, Alice Butler, purchased additional acreage near the same location. Along with their children, the Butlers cultivated corn, cotton, and vegetables, founded a church and school on the land, and contributed to a variety of community organizations. The family also raised pigs, horses, cattle, chickens, and goats. The construction of Tennessee Highway 1 near the farm in the 1910s led to the creation of two rock quarries on the land. World War II veteran James Butler Sr. and his wife, Dolores Williams Butler, raised Black Angus cattle, goats, hay, and vegetables. After James Sr. passed away in 2019, the next generation took over, doubling the size of the operation.



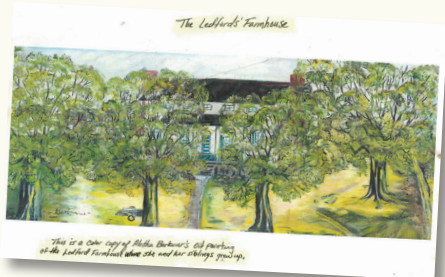
The Butler family at the Butler Farm. Courtesy of the Butler Family Facebook Page.





The Ol' Ledford Farm (1880, Montgomery County)

James "Jim" and Mary Bacon Dawson Ledford began their farm with 35 acres that included a spring. Previously enslaved in Kentucky, the Ledfords raised livestock and tobacco, and they built



Third owner Alotha Barbour's oil painting of the Ledford family farmhouse.

both a grist mill and a sorghum mill. The farm quickly became a place for the local community and travelers to gather. In 1901, the Ledfords sold 1 acre to Montgomery County for the two-room Griffey School, named after Joseph Griffey, the Ledfords' friend and fellow St. Paul AME Church member. The school served African American children for about 53 years, while several of its teachers boarded with the Ledfords over the years. Now with 80 acres, the farm produces tobacco, vegetables, and Angus cattle. It hosts the annual Ledford-Williams-Rogers Family Reunion every fourth year.

The Shaw Farm (1881, Haywood County)



View of the Shaw Farm.

Heck and Jennie Shaw purchased 77 acres on April 30, 1881, and raised six children on the land. The family cultivated sorghum, peas, okra, cantaloupes, watermelons, cotton, and garden vegetables. They also raised cattle, hogs, sheep, chickens, ducks, mules,

and horses. Son Clarence helped his father with farming while attending Fisk University; he graduated with a degree in Education. Clarence and his wife, Callie Shaw, grew the farm to roughly 300 acres and raised their family on the land. Clarence also added turkeys to the farm's wide variety of livestock and crops.

Nelson Bond's Oakview Farm

(1888, Haywood County)

After 20 years of renting or sharecropping the land of others, Nelson and Harriette Johnson Bond purchased a farm in partnership with their white neighbors. The Bonds made the final payment in 1891, and their neighbors relinquished all claim to the land. The Bonds expanded the farm and gave a parcel to establish Oakview Missionary Baptist Church. In the 1950s and 1960s, Lawrence and Nola Walker Bond leveraged their position as landowners to play an integral role in the local Civil Rights movement. Nola sat on the Haywood County-Brownsville branch of the NAACP, and there is now a scholarship for county high school students in her name. The founders' great-grandchildren continued farming, growing cotton, corn, soybeans, greens, peas, okra, and melons under the direction of Howard Bond and his wife, Margaret Bond.



*Bond descendants at Oakview
Missionary Baptist Church.*

The Robertson Farm

(1888, Hardeman County)

Born into slavery in Arkansas in 1856, Crawford Robertson moved to Tennessee with his wife, Cora Robertson, and they purchased 75 acres.

They soon expanded the farm to 200 acres and produced corn, cotton, sorghum, hay, and livestock. A community leader and skilled carpenter, Crawford both contributed to and collected funds for the Hardeman County Training School, a Rosenwald Fund-supported school that later expanded into the Allen-White School, a well-regarded Black high school that served local children and those from surrounding counties.



Robertson Farmhouse, c. 1900.



Grandson Evelyn C. Robertson Jr. farmed the property for more than 50 years until his death in 2024. He married Hugholene Ellison, and they had two children. Like his ancestors, Evelyn was a pillar of the community, becoming commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation and director of the Southwest Tennessee Development District. The farm is listed in the National Register

of Historic Places.

The Gardner Farm **(1889, Giles County)**

Born enslaved, Mat Gardner saved the money he earned post-emancipation to pay for a bond to marry Henrietta Jenkins in 1877.

Twelve years later, Mat and longtime local resident John Dixon started paying for 106

acres of land. By 1896, Mat became the sole owner of the farm but named the community Dixon Town after John. Mat and Henrietta had 11 children and became leaders in the community, providing land for the first local school, operating a general store, playing an active role in the Elkton Negro Army Comfort League during World War I, and participating in the Tennessee Home Food Supply Program during World War II. Mat, a minister who traveled in Tennessee and Alabama, also purchased a gravel island in the Elk River for baptisms. Mat and Henrietta grew the farm to 300 acres. Their children inherited parts of the farm, and many still farm portions of the land today. The Mat Gardner Homestead was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1995.



***View of the farmhouse and outbuildings of the
Mat Gardner Homestead.***

The Tony Angus Farm (1891, Rutherford County)

When Jesse Landrum purchased 40 acres of land near the boundary between Rutherford and Bedford counties, he was the only recognized African American blacksmith who worked in these counties. He and Cora McClain Landrum raised their family on the farm's 40 acres, growing most of their own food and keeping a milk cow. The Landrums' daughter, Beulah Landrum Lanier, became the farm's second owner in 1939. She and her husband, Charles Lanier, added a community baseball field and picnic ground to the farm (Charles had played for the Nashville Elite Giants of the Negro Leagues in the 1920s and '30s.). Anthony "Tony" Scales and his wife, Maxine Scales, became the fourth-generation owners and raised Black Angus cattle.



*Aerial photograph of the
Tony Angus Farm, c. 2001.*

The Hatcher Family Farm (1903, Williamson County)



Historic farmhouse at the Hatcher Family Farm.

Meredith Hatcher purchased 96 acres in 1903 and by 1920 had expanded the family farm to 317 acres,

despite the boll weevil and a post-World

War I recession. The land yielded livestock, tobacco, sorghum, corn, and cotton. Son Marvin Hatcher Sr., a veteran of World War I, inherited 208 acres. He and his wife, Era Emma "Sadie" Odell Kinnard Hatcher, added wheat, hay, fruit, and different varieties of livestock, including ducks, to the farm's products. Third owner Jasper G. Hatcher Sr. acquired 61 acres of



family land in 1959 and added 147 acres in 1978. Married to Thelma Thressa Hatcher, he was both a “devoted farmer and a widely respected minister” whose final pastorate was at Locust Ridge Primitive Baptist Church. The Jasper G. Hatcher

Memorial Highway in Arrington was named after him posthumously in 2022.

The William and Luella Carter Farm (1903, Lauderdale County)

Anderson Charles Carter, who had been born enslaved in Virginia, left home at age 18 in 1880 and settled in Tennessee. His “childhood dream was to live on and work his own land,” a goal he fulfilled when he and his wife, Janie Claybrooks Carter, purchased 129 acres. They grew cotton, corn, and vegetables; raised hogs and cattle; and had an orchard that produced pecans, plums, pears, peaches, and apples. The Carter family hosted annual hog-killing days for the community. Second owner William Carter and his wife, Luella Hudson Carter, hosted hayrides, baseball games, and ice cream socials. Youth knew the farm was “a place to socialize and stay safe.” In 2018, the town of Halls honored William posthumously by renaming the road in front of the farm William Carter Road.



Janie Claybrooks Carter, Anderson Charles Carter Sr., and Mitzi Carter in about 1914.



The Luster Farm (1906, Williamson County)

Grant Luster Sr. purchased 80 acres of land in Williamson County in 1906. His first wife was named Anna, and he later married Sallie Jones. The family, which included three children, did general farming for themselves and for market. Grant Luster Jr. inherited the farm in 1931 and started his family on the farm with his wife, Nellie Luster. Grant Jr. later married Mattie Jane Smithson, and they lived on the farm until their deaths in 1981 and 1991, respectively. The Lusters grew corn, wheat, tobacco, sorghum, hay, and vegetables and raised livestock. Unfortunately, the construction of Highway 840 in the 1990s took about 20 acres. The Luster family then raised beef cattle on just over 60 acres, furthering the legacy of Grant Luster Sr., whose cherished dream to own land and pass it on within his family had become a reality.



*Mattie and Grant Luster Jr.,
likely in the early 1970s.*

The Dix Farm (1916, Trousdale County)

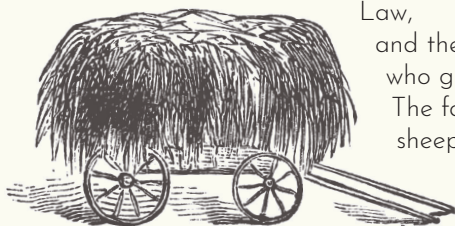
Saul Vaden had been enslaved in the Elmwood community of Smith County. Post-emancipation, he moved to Trousdale County with his wife, Mollie Vaden. They purchased land on what is known as Vaden Hill. Their son, John Vaden, left Tennessee for St. Louis but returned home and purchased 35 acres in 1916. John married

Fannie
Law,

and they had 11 children, who grew up on the farm. The family raised cattle, sheep, hogs, chickens, tobacco, wheat,



*John Vaden, founder
of the Dix Farm.*





sorghum, and corn. The Vadens were very involved in their local church, Gravel Hill Baptist, where John served as a deacon for 43 years. Alexander Dix, a grandson of John and Fannie Vaden, first received 7 acres from his mother, Bessie Vaden Dix, in 1975 and later purchased additional acreage from his siblings. By 2016, Alexander was continuing the family legacy by raising beef cattle on 21 acres. He also served on the Trousdale County Agricultural Board.

The McKinnie Farm

(1918, Hardeman and Fayette counties)



Founder Paul McKinnie bought 142 acres of land for the cultivation of cotton,

McKinnie family on the front porch.

corn, vegetables, and timber. He later sold

90 acres to his brother, Jeff Edward McKinnie Sr., a teacher and World War I veteran. Jeff married first Ruby E. Duncan, with whom he had three daughters and one son, and later Rachel Virginia Cook, with whom he raised two daughters. On the farm, the family hosted the annual Hickory Valley picnic, a carnival-type event started by Ruby's father, Grandee Duncan, before he passed away in 1929. The McKinnie family raised cattle, cotton, vegetables, fish, and timber and used natural resources from the land by hunting and harvesting berries. One of Jeff's daughters remembered him as "an excellent provider and role model for his immediate and extended family." The second and third generations of the McKinnie family continue to farm the land today and allow sections of it to be leased for hunting.

The Tennessee Century Farms program continually adds new farms to its roster. However, sometimes farms are sold out of the family and are no longer Century Farms, although their application materials remain archived. One of these farms is Williamson County's Cartwright Farm, the first African American-owned farm in the county to be accepted into the program, in May 2010. In 1898, brothers Benjamin, Walter (a well-respected blacksmith), and Sylvester Dotson purchased 215 acres and raised cattle, horses, hogs, tobacco, cherries, and other fruits and vegetables. The family passed down the farm for three generations before selling it.

This brochure was created and published by the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area and the Tennessee Century Farms Program, both of which are administered by the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation. The Heritage Area is a partnership project of the National Park Service.

Images courtesy of the farm families via their applications to the Tennessee Century Farms Program, unless otherwise noted. Text by Abby Coomes, Antoinette van Zelm, and Carroll Van West based on the families' application materials. For more information about the Tennessee Century Farms Program and to download an application form, please visit tncenturyfarms.org.

