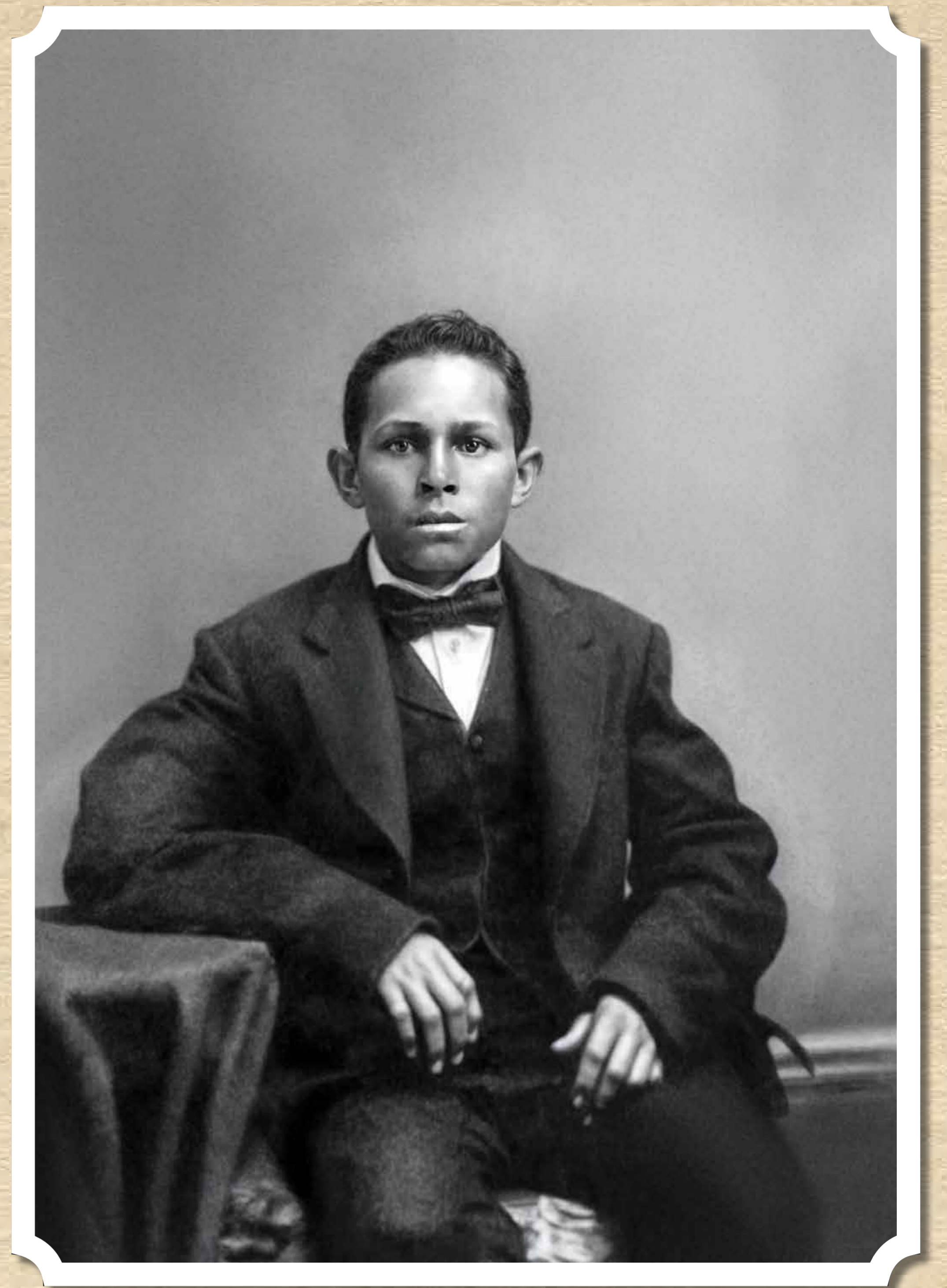
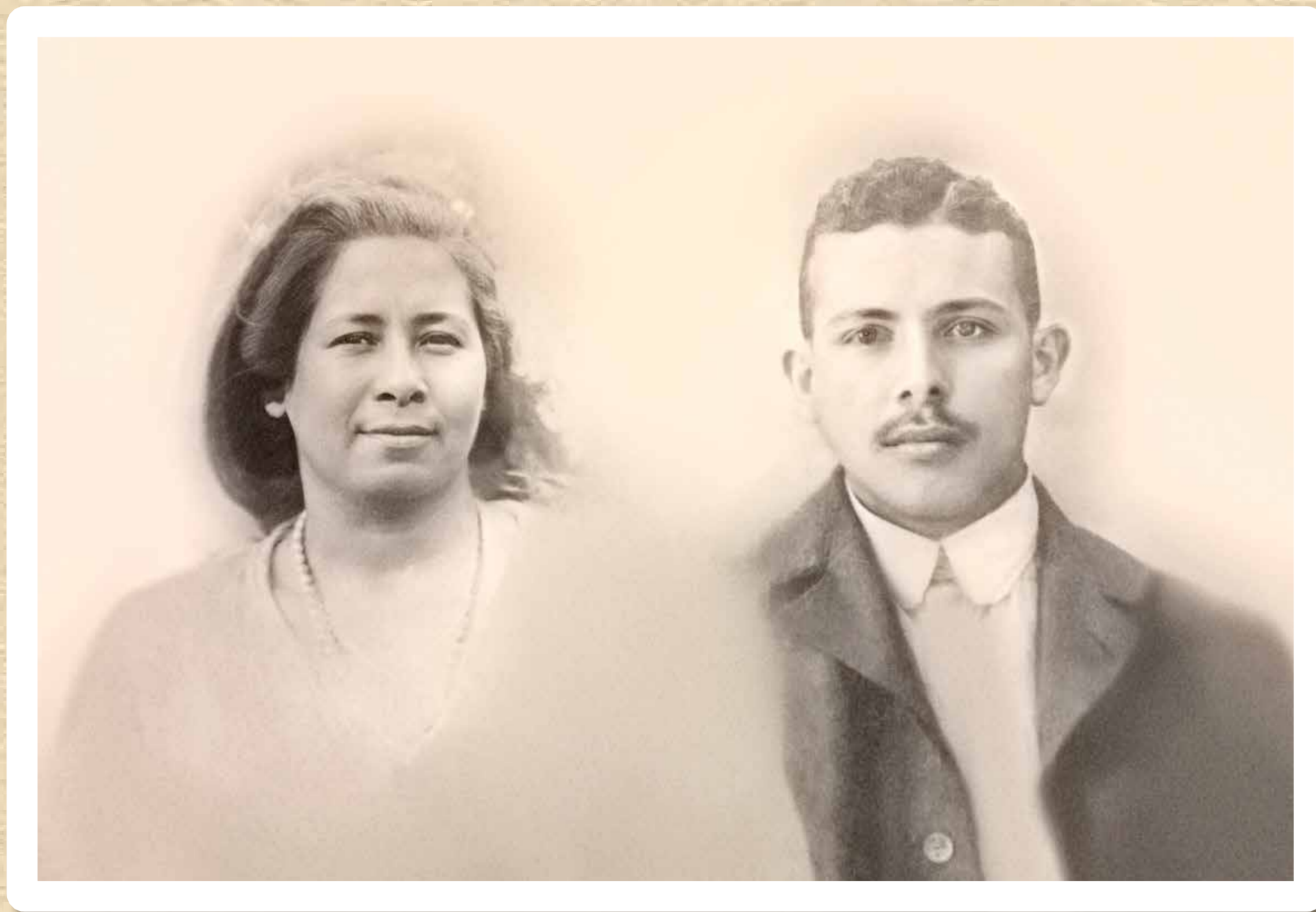


THE CAROTHERS FAMILY

THE CAROTHERS FARM is named after husband-and-wife John Henry and Carrie Carothers, who saved and purchased 26 acres at the height of the Great Depression in 1933 for \$675. Henry and Carrie descended from people once enslaved in Williamson County. John Henry's parents were farmers who rented their home and the land they worked. Carrie's father also farmed, and her mother was a laundress, a common occupation for working-class African American women who needed to supplement the family's income.



Undated tintype photograph of Alex Carothers, John Henry's father. Digitally restored.



Combined portrait of Carrie and John Henry Carothers. Digitally restored.



Undated photograph of Ruby and John Eddie Carothers in the yard of the Carothers home.

JOHN HENRY AND CARRIE CAROTHERS married in 1907, and had their son Ezeal in 1909. The Carothers family saved for 26 years while they rented a house and farmland elsewhere in Williamson County. After the Carothers moved into the house in 1937, Carrie created a kitchen garden, while John Henry built an outhouse, a chicken coop, and other farm buildings.

After Carrie's death in 1948, Ezeal, his wife Viola, and two children Ruby and John, moved in with John Henry. In addition to farming their own land, John Henry and Ezeal made additional money by working at the nearby farm of Nashville businessman Lester Huffines.

JOHN HENRY lived in this house with his family until his death in 1980. Ezeal and Viola were the last Carothers to farm the land, and continued to live here until Ezeal's death in 1998.



Viola and Ezeal Carothers

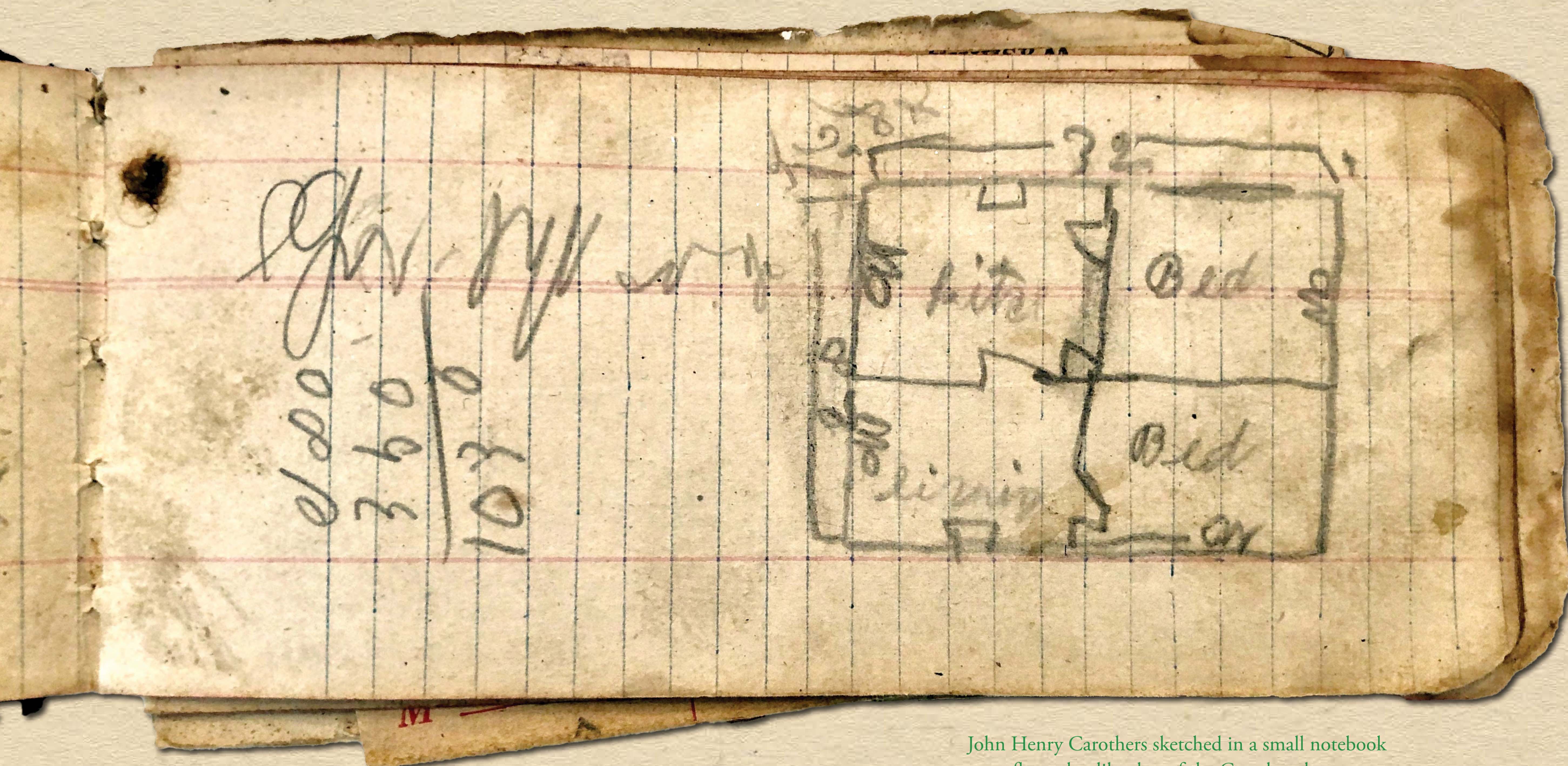
THE CAROTHERS HOUSE

THE CAROTHERS HOUSE is a historic home built in 1937 by father and son John Henry and Ezeal Carothers. The house was once the centerpiece of the Carothers family farm. Cedar forest and limestone outcroppings meant



John Henry and Ezeal carved 1937 into the south side of the home's foundation. Photo courtesy of the Center for Historic Preservation at MTSU

about half of the farm was not suited for cultivation, but the rock and timber were great building materials. John Henry and Ezeal gave their home a striking stone look using rock quarried on site. They turned cedar trees into posts for the front porch.



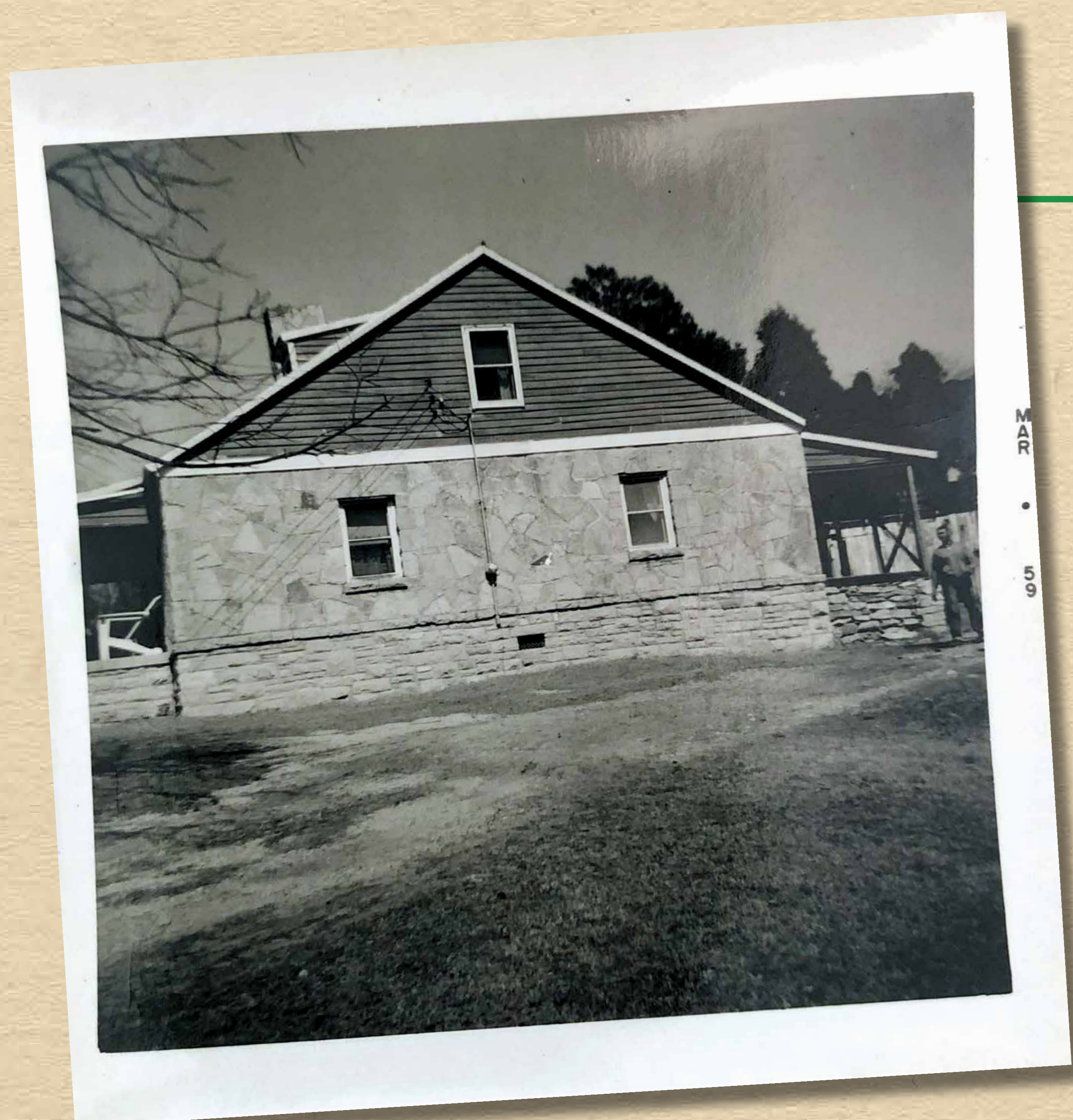
John Henry Carothers sketched in a small notebook a floor plan like that of the Carothers home.

THE CAROTHERS HOUSE testifies to their craftsmanship. The patterns created by careful arrangement of stones on the exterior walls, as well as the stone mantle around the living room fireplace, reflect the family's masonry skills. Locals knew of John Henry Carothers' talent in building with rock; he helped construct at least two other limestone houses in Williamson County that no longer stand.



1956 photograph of the Carothers home.

THE FAMILY made changes to the house to meet their needs for more space and modern comforts. A back porch was added in 1947, which provided a covered outdoor workspace close to the kitchen. The house gained electricity in 1953. In 1984, the family added a bathroom and utility room.



The Carothers family photographed their home often. This image of the south side highlights the two patterns used on the exterior of the house.

BLACK FARM OWNERSHIP

THE CAROTHERS FAMILY acquired their farm during a time when many African Americans were leaving rural areas. Across the Jim Crow South, the vast majority of Black farmers did not own the land they worked and were often caught in cycles of debt. To escape the violence and constant humiliation of Jim Crow segregation, and to gain better education and job opportunities, hundreds of thousands of Black families left for cities in the north. Known as the Great Migration, this saw the African

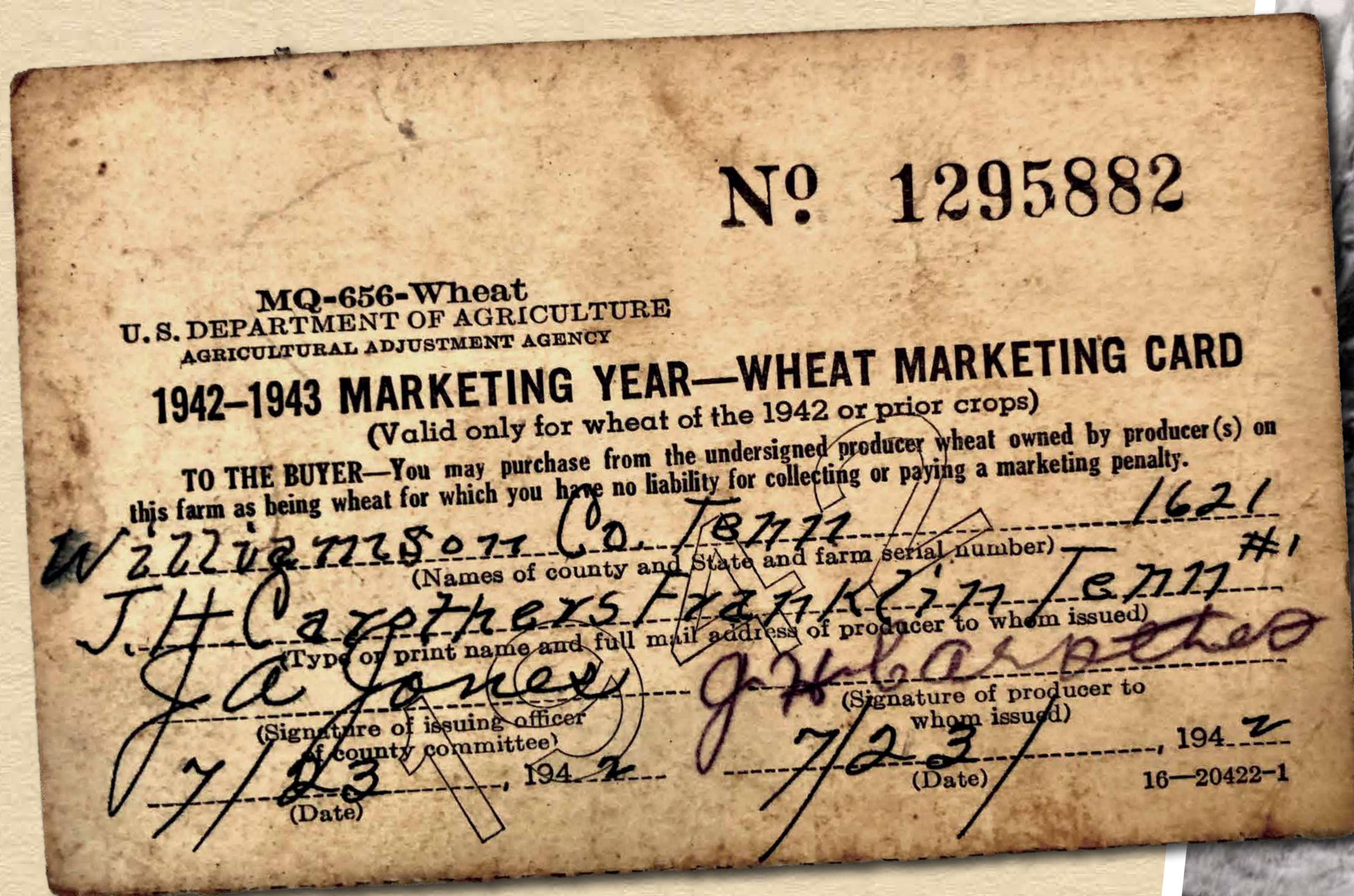
American population in rural Middle Tennessee drop from 22% in 1890 to just 13% in 1930.



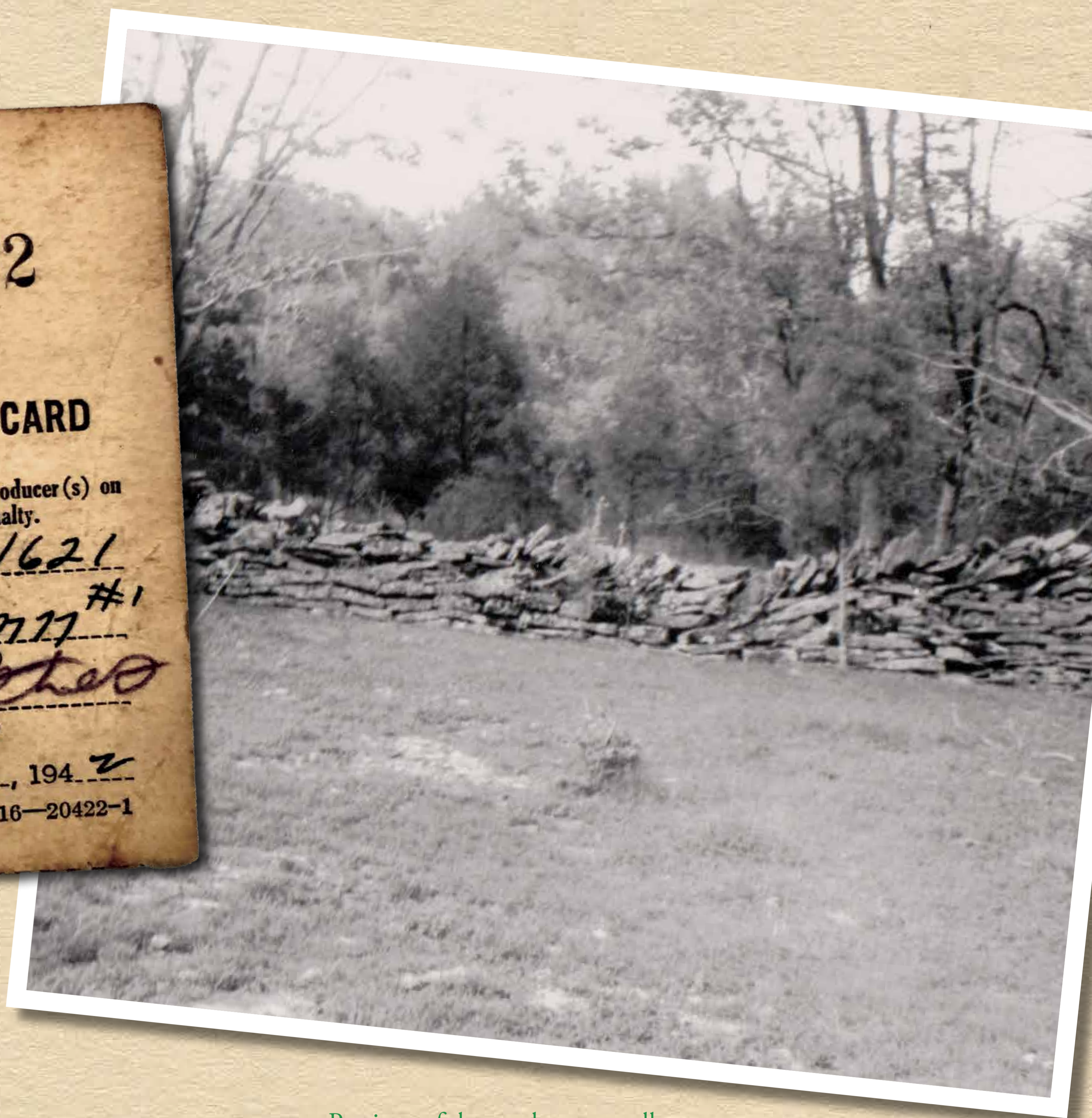
1958 photograph of Ezeal Carothers near a woodpile on the farm.

ABOUT A THIRD of Black farmers in Williamson County owned all the land they farmed in 1930.

The Carothers family fell into the category of “part-owners,” meaning they farmed their own land in addition to working on land owned by someone else.



John Henry Carothers' 1942 wheat marketing card issued by the Agricultural Adjustment Agency to help regulate the buying and selling of wheat.



Portions of dry stack stone walls on the Carothers Farm.

BY OWNING their own farm, the Carothers family could freely build and later renovate their home to suit themselves, participate in market agriculture on their terms, and grow much of their own food.



1959 photograph of Ruby Carothers with the family dog. The family repurposed the board-and-batten smokehouse in the background by turning it into a storage building and tool shed.

PRESERVING AN IMPORTANT HISTORY

THE CAROTHERS FAMILY knew the importance of their home and the need to protect it. Situated only 20 miles south of Nashville, the property witnessed increasing development throughout the 20th century as modern highways, suburbs, and commercial development inched closer.



Aerial photograph of the Carothers Farm

EZEAL CAROTHERS and his daughter, Ruby Kinnard, listed the property in the National Register of Historic Places in 1989. This designation officially recognized the historic significance of the home and helped pave the way for its preservation today.

THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES IS THE FEDERAL LIST OF HISTORIC AND CULTURAL PLACES AND OBJECTS CONSIDERED WORTHY OF SAVING.

IN 2019, residential developers acquired the property. The early action of the Carothers family and the partnership of Goldberg Companies Inc., the city of Franklin, the African American Heritage Society of Williamson County, and Middle Tennessee State University's Center for Historic Preservation led to the preservation of the Carothers House and the creation of this exhibit. Archival materials related to the history of the John Henry and Carrie Carothers family and farm are located at the Williamson County Archives and Museum.



Four generations of the Carothers family photographed in the home. John Henry is seated with his two great-grandchildren.



This exhibit is sponsored by the Center for Historic Preservation at Middle Tennessee State University.

Unless otherwise noted, all photographs are courtesy of the Williamson County Archives and Museum.