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LANDSCAPE MASTER PLAN

**SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE
HERITAGE FARM**

JACKSON COUNTY, GEORGIA

ROBINSON FISHER ASSOCIATES

LANDSCAPE MASTER PLAN
of the
SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE HERITAGE FARM
Jackson County, Georgia

Prepared for
THE SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE FARM FOUNDATION, INC.

by
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SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE
HERITAGE FARM

LANDSCAPE MASTER PLAN

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. LANDSCAPE HISTORICAL CONTEXT.....	1
III. LANDSCAPE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE FARM IN THE 1940S.....	9
IV. SIGNIFICANCE AND INTEGRITY.....	17
V. MASTER PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS.....	22
VI. FINAL WORDS.....	29

SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE HERITAGE FARM

LANDSCAPE MASTER PLAN

II. LANDSCAPE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

BY
IAN J. W. FIRTH

I. INTRODUCTION

In charting its future, the Board of Directors of the Shields-Ethridge Heritage Foundation has sought to understand the Shields-Ethridge Heritage Farm in the context of its present and historical landscape. The Board seeks to accommodate its mission of sharing the farm's history with the public in a way that sustains the integrity of the place. The *Landscape Master Plan* is a tool for this endeavor.

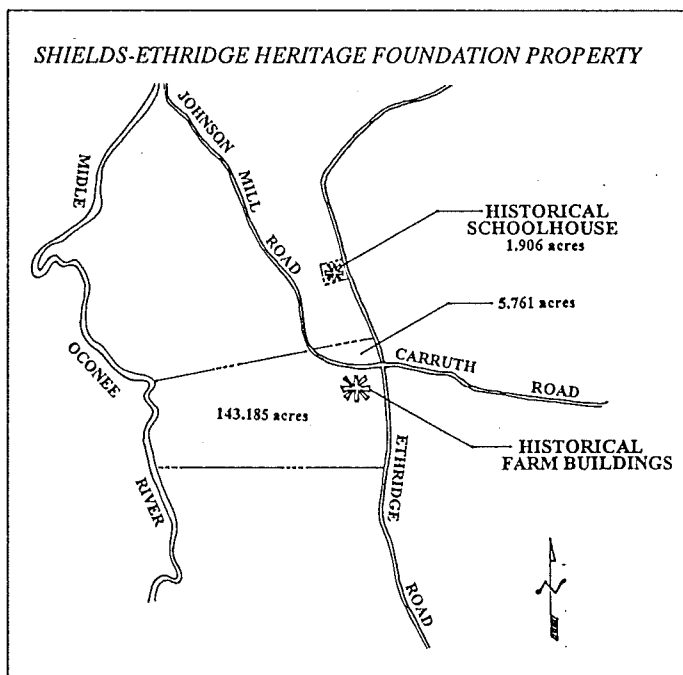


FIGURE A shows the Heritage Foundation property consisting of three parcels with a total of approximately 150 acres in Jackson County, Georgia.

A full landscape history must await further research in the collection of family documents. As this research proceeds, it will be important to place the history of the farm within a larger context. This should enable us to better appreciate the historical significance of the place—in which ways it is typical and in which ways exceptional, when compared to other farms. The most obvious context is the agricultural history of Georgia, and fortunately, there are number of good references that provide well-researched histories. Reading these references can provide a series of questions to guide the documentary research. To illustrate the method *A Century of Georgia Agriculture 1850 to 1950* by William Range was used to compile the following outline of the historical context and a list of associated research questions. This outline should be expanded through a reading of other references.

A comparison of the history of the Shields-Ethridge Farm with the history of agriculture in the state is facilitated by the fact that changes in ownership of the farm—the handing over by one generation to the next—generally coincided with the accepted divisions of the agricultural history of the state into historic periods. The history of the farm is thought to have begun a mere 12 years after the area was opened to settlement after cession by the Native Americans. Joseph Shields and his son James then farmed portions of the present historic district throughout the ante-bellum period. Joseph Robert Shields farmed his share of his father's land from the close of the Civil War to the end of the century—a period coinciding with what Range refers to as "The Long Depression" in Georgia's agriculture. Ira Washington Ethridge took over the management of the farm about the turn of the

SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE HERITAGE FARM

LANDSCAPE MASTER PLAN

century and operated it until the end of the Second World War—a period entitled “The Revolutionary New Century” by Range. Finally, Ira Lanis Ethridge oversaw the post war changes in the late 1940’s and ‘50’s, that brought an end to the long history of cotton farming and from our current perspective closed the period of historical significance. These historic periods will be used then in the following outline of the regional context and the specific questions that arise.

1. The Ante-bellum Years:

The Joseph and James Shields Period

Range’s account opens in 1850, so other references such as James C. Bonner’s A History of Georgia Agriculture 1732-1860 should be consulted to provide a fuller context for this period. Range manifesting a conventional nostalgia for the “Old South” refers to the 1850’s as “The Last Golden Decade.” But he points out that large prosperous cotton plantations were only one part of the historic scene. There was a strong contrast between the northern and southern parts of the Georgia piedmont region. In the northern part, because of the cooler climate, cotton and therefore slaves were uncommon; farms were generally small and worth only a few hundred dollars. Grains were the chief crops, but by the 1850s soils had been eroded in many areas and there was considerable migration away in search of better land. Nearer the fall line, in contrast, there were many substantial cotton plantations worth several thousand dollars. But even in this more prosperous belt, amidst the wealth there were signs of economic weakness: for example, too much wealth invested in slaves, over dependence on cotton, and poor cultivation practices. These problems were highlighted in the calls for agricultural reform made by a number of progressive planters.

Questions at the Shields-Ethridge Farm

The Shields Farm was an extensive operation of 500 acres located in a transition zone between the northern and southern parts of the Piedmont. In the Joseph Shields period this zone was occupied by self-sufficient farms producing corn and other grains, vegetables, fruit and livestock. We know from Joseph’s will that there was livestock on the farm in 1818, but what else was produced? In the 1830s improvements in transportation in the region promoted the development of a commercial agriculture dominated by the production of short staple cotton. This soon led to depletion in soil fertility and widespread soil erosion. There is a record of James Shields touring southwestern areas of the state. Was he looking for better land to grow cotton? How well educated and progressive were these early generations of the family? Is there any evidence, for example, that James subscribed to an agricultural journal, or invested in new implements, or tried to improve his land with guano or chemical fertilizers? In 1850 his plantation was valued at \$4000, and it was operated with slave labor. How many slaves were there and where were they housed?

2. The Civil War Period

In the war years farming patterns in Georgia were altered by the Confederate attempt to create a cotton famine; by the necessity of growing more food crops; by inflation and speculation; and by the disorganization of labor as white males were recruited into the armies and black slaves grew restless at the prospect of liberty.

Questions at the Shields-Ethridge Farm

It would be interesting to know how many of these factors operated on the Shields farm and to what effect. We know there must have been some disruption, for when James Shields died in 1863

SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE HERITAGE FARM

LANDSCAPE MASTER PLAN

both of his sons were serving in Confederate armies. The documentary collection contains a tax assessment from 1863 that indicates what the farm had produced that year, but how did that compare to previous years?

3. "The Long Depression": *The Joseph Robert Shields Period*

Range describes a long period of depression in the agriculture of the state in the last three decades of the 19th century. Attempts to improve the economic status of those working the land were frustrated by a combination of social and economic factors. Between 1870 and 1900 the size and value of the average farm dropped considerably. In this period the Shields' holdings were divided between Joseph Robert and William, with the former acquiring the larger share by adding additional tracts to his inheritance through purchase. Joseph Robert's 370 acres were a substantial holding, but even so his farming operations were no doubt subject to many of the problems afflicting farmers throughout the Piedmont. It would be interesting to compare his farm to his brother's, but the Shields-Ethridge documents may not contain much information on the William Shields Farm. Range discusses the agricultural problems under five headings: reorganization of labor and management, the cotton controversy, attempts at diversification, the application of science, and the agrarian revolt. Each discussion suggests a series of related questions.

Reorganization of Labor and Management

Emancipation of the slaves led Georgia's farmers to manifest a new interest in labor saving machinery, as well as attempts to recruit an alternative work force. But most plantations converted to a tenant system based on sharecropping. There was a wide variety of arrangements, and the tenant system was

sometimes combined with a contract wage system. The tenant system as it developed became widely blamed for the prevalence of poor land management practices and a resulting low productivity per acre.

Questions at the Shields-Ethridge Farm

We know there were tenants on Joseph Robert's land but there are many questions about how the system operated. Such details as the numbers and types of tenants, the location and size of their farms, the nature of their share agreements and other economic arrangements might be illuminated by accounts dating from this period. Some information can be obtained from census returns. In these returns tenant farms were considered as separate units. In 1880 Joseph Robert's return accounted for only 263 of his 370 acres, so one may deduce that tenants farmed the remainder.

The Cotton Controversy and Attempts at Diversification

An overproduction of cotton after 1870 was responsible for some of the economic ills experienced by Georgia's farmers. But there were major obstacles to the development of a more diverse agriculture, including conservatism, a lack of education and experience leading to low yields in alternative crops, livestock diseases, problems marketing other products, and an established credit system tied to cotton.

Questions at the Shields-Ethridge Farm

The obvious question is how diversified was Joseph Robert's operation. According to the 1880 census return, only 50 acres—about half the tilled land—was devoted to cotton, with the remainder producing corn, wheat and oats. In addition, the farm produced a variety of livestock products and had small areas devoted to fruits and vegetables. It seems probable therefore, that while cotton was the principal source of farm income, the operation was

SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE HERITAGE FARM

LANDSCAPE MASTER PLAN

more diversified and self sufficient than many others. Further study is necessary to confirm this.

The Application of Science and the Agrarian Revolt

There were many attempts coordinated at the local, state or national level to improve conditions on Georgia's farms. These included a variety of efforts aimed at scientific education and the dissemination of information on agricultural improvements. These were sponsored by farmers' clubs and societies as well as by the state and federal governments. Many farmers expressed their dissatisfaction with their lot by joining organizations such as The Grange and The Alliance, which advocated political actions to promote farmers' interests.

Questions at the Shields-Ethridge Farm

As a substantial landowner, Joseph Robert was probably better educated and informed than many poorer farmers. It would be interesting to know how progressive he was in his attitudes towards farming. What agricultural improvements did he introduce? What measures did he take to secure good management practices on his own or his tenants' land? What sort of yields did he obtain? Again the census returns provide some clues, but the documentary record may provide a fuller picture. Was he a member of any farmers' organizations and, if so, what role did he play? His son-in-law Ira Ethridge apparently transformed the farm early in the next century, but did Joseph Robert Shields anticipate any of these developments?

4. *"The Revolutionary New Century": The Ira Washington Ethridge Period*

The 20th century brought significant changes to agriculture in Georgia. Range discusses these under five headings: the subjugation of cotton, the

realization of diversification, the problem of marketing, the revolution in agricultural education, and the revolution in agricultural credit. Range sums up the effects under the heading "The Landed and the Landless." While there was much progress, the economic status of farmers rose and fell over the years, and varied widely between the relative prosperity of some landowners and the poverty of many sharecropping tenants. The years 1900 - 1920 were a period of prosperity enjoyed by both landowner and tenant. This was brought to an abrupt end by a sharp decrease in agricultural prices and the depredations of the boll weevil. Recovery was beginning when the stock market crash of 1929 inaugurated the Great Depression. The various government programs introduced under the New Deal in the 1930s then began to revolutionize agriculture. But many of these programs were of more benefit to larger commercial farmers than to tenant sharecroppers. The Depression was finally ended by the economic boom associated with the Second World War, but war also promoted a large migration from the land, primarily of impoverished tenant families. The developments that occurred on the Shields-Ethridge Farm in this period should be considered against this background.

Ira Washington Ethridge introduced many changes in the early years of the century, and became well known in the county for his business acumen. Under his management the size of the farm more than doubled, much of the money apparently coming from the successful operation of his ginning business. The expansion continued throughout the period, additional land being purchased in each decade. Fortunately, the documentary record for this period is likely to be particularly rich in information, and can be supplemented by oral histories. Research should address questions posed by the general narrative of agriculture in the

SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE HERITAGE FARM

LANDSCAPE MASTER PLAN

region. The following questions are suggested by Range's account of the major themes.

The Subjugation of Cotton

The acreage devoted to cotton and the average yield per acre had been increasing steadily since the 1870's in Georgia. Production reached a peak in 1916 and then dropped sharply. The boll weevil had arrived in Georgia around 1913 and by 1919 was causing major damage. Control measures—the standard treatment was application of calcium arsenate—raised costs and placed Georgia's growers at a competitive disadvantage against western producers. As controls became effective and yields began to recover, the onset of the Depression drastically affected the market for the crop. Various measures were introduced by the Roosevelt Administration to restrain production including marketing quotas. Under the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act of 1936 payments were made to farmers for diverting land from cotton to more soil conserving crops, and for carrying out other soil conservation measures. The onset of the Second World War further limited cotton production by cutting off European markets, reducing the available work force, and requiring the diversion of cotton fields to food production.

Questions at the Shields-Ethridge Farm

We know approximately how much land was devoted to cotton at the end of this period on the Ethridge Farm, but it would be interesting to know how the acreage and yields had varied from the turn of the century. What was the maximum acreage and when was it achieved? The Ethridge Farm must have been quite successful in controlling the boll weevil—the Farm reportedly produced its own insecticide. Its application no doubt became an important part of the calendar of agricultural operations. By 1938, the time of the earliest available aerial photographs, all the cotton fields had been

terraced. This suggests this work had begun before the 1936 Soil Conservation Act took effect. When were these improvements introduced on the Ethridge Farm? What was the impact of the war on the farm in the 1940s? How much land was left in cotton and how much was diverted to food production?

The Realization of Diversification

By 1930 cotton accounted for less than half of the total value of agricultural products in the state, but it was not until the 1940s that it was surpassed as the most important single source of farm income. Livestock production then became the most important farming enterprise in the state, and with its rise came a change in attitudes towards grass—the enemy of cotton farmers, and sharecropping—as the same amount of farm labor was not needed. Among various livestock enterprises, the growth of the commercial poultry industry was the most striking development on the northern Piedmont, one of the leading enterprises being located in Jackson County. Other agricultural changes in this period included the growing of a wider range of field crops, an increase in truck farming, orchards, and the development of commercial forestry—the boll weevil forcing many farmers to look to their woodlots as sources of income.

Questions at the Shields-Ethridge Farm

The dominant position of cotton on the Ethridge Farm was no doubt ensured by the importance of the ginning business. In addition to cotton, some corn and grains, mostly wheat, were grown, and Ira Ethridge had his own threshing machine which was taken around to other farms. But it would appear that there were only limited moves to diversify beyond the level achieved in the previous century. Ella Shields Ethridge operated a small dairy business, but the other enterprises on the farm—the rearing of chickens and pigs and the care of

SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE HERITAGE FARM

LANDSCAPE MASTER PLAN

orchards—were too small to be commercial developments and were no doubt managed in a tradition of farm self sufficiency. There are indications however that commercial exploitation of the farm's woodlots began in this period. The main question therefore is what contribution did these other enterprises make to the total income produced by the farm?

The Problem of Marketing

Chronic problems in marketing agricultural products including difficulties in identifying and reaching potential markets, costly and inefficient transportation, and the many obstacles in the way of "fair" prices led to a series of governmental actions at the state and federal levels. Amongst the more significant were the promotion of new storage, processing and sales facilities, and the introduction of various quality control measures. Progress in improving transportation networks came slowly, and at the end of the period 70% of all Georgia's farms were still on unimproved dirt roads. And throughout much of the period complaints about low and unfair prices for agricultural products continued.

Questions at the Shields-Ethridge Farm

The success of the farm in this period seems to be attributable to Ira W. Ethridge's business skill in this area. His cotton gin, established around 1900, processed his own cotton, that of his tenants, and also that of many other farmers in the county. There are stories of farmers passing other gins to come to the Ethridge place. It is important therefore to find out how the business was operated. What area did it serve? How did the business compete with other gins? How were the products—the ginned cotton and the seed—marketed? What, if any, were the impacts of the various governmental schemes? For example, did the Ethridge Farm participate in the state Agricultural

Extension Service's campaign to develop "one variety cotton" communities?

The Revolution in Agricultural Education

In the early years of this century, in spite of the improved economic conditions, there were many complaints about the prevalence of poor farming practices and many of these practices were blamed on ignorance. The failure of the state to adequately fund education in rural areas was widely criticized, as well as the lack of attention to agricultural science even at the state's agricultural schools and colleges. Subsequent progress in elementary and higher education is an important part of the agricultural history of Georgia in this century. The extension of agricultural education beyond the classroom through the work of Agricultural Extension agents and others is particularly significant. The emphasis on education increased during the Roosevelt Administration; perhaps the most successful federal effort being the soil and water conservation programs, which by 1950 involved more than half of the farmland in the state.

Questions at the Shields-Ethridge Farm

The establishment in 1909 of a schoolhouse on land deeded to the county by two Shields cousins, and the provision of accommodation for the schoolteachers by the Ethridge family indicates the importance attached to education by the family. Ira had served as a teacher at church schools in the area in the 1890s. Family documents may reveal other aspects of his interest in education. Did he become involved in any of the agricultural education programs funded by the state? Did he consult any extension agents and did he subscribe to any agricultural journals? How interested was he in the latest agricultural science and technology? Questions about the involvement of the

SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE HERITAGE FARM

LANDSCAPE MASTER PLAN

farm in soil and water conservation programs have already been noted above.

The Revolution in Agricultural Credit

According to Range, "When Georgia's farmers moved into the new century they were still burdened with a credit system that prevented all but the most competent farmers from making progress" (Range p. 247). The two main problems were the difficulty of obtaining farm mortgages using land as security, and the entrenched system of granting short-term credit by landlords and merchants that used cotton as security. The mortgage situation began to be improved by the development of rural banks and the Federal Land Bank system, but both of these were severely tested by the economic reversals of the 1920s and early '30s. The short-term credit problem was an integral part of the tenant sharecropping system, and it was blamed for the chronic indebtedness of many tenants and the overproduction of cotton. The Farm Credit Act of 1933 tackled this problem by encouraging the establishment of production credit agencies. These soon had the effect of reducing interest rates and many landlords and merchants got out of the lending business. Range concludes that by the end of the Second World War "except in the most backward areas, the old plantation commissary had disappeared completely . . ." (Range p. 256)

Questions at the Shields-Ethridge Farm

Clearly Ira W. Ethridge was one of those competent farmers who was able to make financial progress. The family documents should reveal how he financed his substantial land acquisitions. The farm operated a commissary for tenants and neighboring farmers and the commissary books should reveal details about that way of providing short-term credit. It will be interesting to note what "time charges" were normal, and how the operation of the commissary fitted into the whole

economic relationship of landlord and tenant. It would also be important to find out what changes, if any, occurred in the system over the years before the commissary was finally closed in the early 1940s.

The Landed and the Landless

In his conclusion Range summarizes the changes that affected the tenant sharecropping system that characterized so many Georgia farms. Throughout the period cotton farming required a large labor force in the absence of a mechanical cotton picker. In the first 20 years of the century—a period of relative prosperity—there was an increase in the rural farming population. Many farm workers preferred to be sharecroppers rather than wage hands, as the former status usually involved less supervision by the landowner. A typical tenant holding was 30 to 50 acres, with about half of the land planted in cotton. But by 1920 as a result of population pressure many holdings were only about 20 acres and could have offered only a meager living. Tenants stayed on average only three years before moving on in search of something better, and so they had little incentive to make any improvements. The economic difficulties of the early '20s and the impact of the boll weevil prompted a larger exodus from the land, with many tenants, white and black, heading to northern cities in search of work. Between 1920 and 1930, 266,000 people left farms in Georgia. This emigration slowed in the next decade when the Depression reduced opportunities for urban employment. Poverty was widespread in rural areas—the average farm wage dropped to 50 cents a day—and there was much debate as to whether the entire tenant sharecropping system was "an inherently evil institution" (Range p. 277). As already noted, many New Deal programs intended to help agricultural areas primarily benefited more prosperous commercial farmers leaving the aid of

SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE HERITAGE FARM

LANDSCAPE MASTER PLAN

the impoverished landless population to various relief agencies. Finally the onset of the Second World War ended the Depression and stimulated agricultural production, but it also reopened the gates for emigration from the land. In the 1940s, 403,000 people left Georgia farms, most of who had been tenant farmers.

Questions at the Shields-Ethridge Farm

The story of the Shields-Ethridge Farm is more than the story of that family; it also involves the lives of their tenants. It should be possible through research in the farm documents, supplemented by oral histories, to piece together a fairly detailed picture of the tenants in this period. How many tenants were there? (The number obviously varied as the farm expanded.) What was the size of each holding and how was each managed? How long did tenants stay? Who were they, where did they come from, and if they left, when did they go? What was life like on a tenant farm? What did Ira Ethridge furnish his tenants and what shares were obtained in return? Many tenants were also employed as wage hands, how did that system work? Here is an opportunity to develop a detailed picture of the tenant sharecropping system that dominated Georgia's agriculture for nearly 100 years; a picture that recognizes the individuality of landlord and tenant, an individuality that generalizations about the shortcomings of the system across the state obscure.

5. The Post War years: The Ira Lanis Ethridge Period

Willard Range's account ends in 1950, but his final chapters identify some of the major themes of the post war years. By 1950 the amount of land in Georgia in cotton was 80% lower than it had been in the peak year of 1916. Farming in the state was becoming more diverse. In 1948 livestock

enterprises were bringing in 32% of the state's cash farm income, whereas cotton accounted for only 24%. Growing cotton was becoming difficult in some areas because the departure of sharecroppers created a shortage of pickers. More than ever there was a need to mechanize operations. Mechanization of other agricultural enterprises was in full swing, made possible in part by the rural electrification programs begun in the 1930s. The tenant sharecropping system that had been an essential feature of cotton farms was disintegrating as tenants emigrated and landlords found alternative ways of working their land. And with these changes the way of life that had characterized rural areas since the Civil War rapidly disappeared, and rural areas became absorbed into the modern urban world.

Questions at the Shields-Ethridge Farm

Lanis Ethridge in 1945 reunited the Shields' property by acquiring the William Shields tract. He then oversaw major changes that transformed the character of the landscape as cotton fields were converted to pastures. The closure of the cotton gin in the late 1950s and the cessation of cotton growing in the early 1960s mark the end of the Shields-Ethridge Farm as a cotton farm, and also mark the end of the historic period. It should be possible, again by supplementing the documentary record with oral histories, to piece together the process of transformation: the reasons the gin was closed and cotton was no longer planted, what happened to the remaining tenants, and how the farming operations were reorganized. Finally, since one of the most remarkable features of the farm today is its state of preservation, in particular the completeness of its collection of buildings from the early years of the 20th century, it is important to document exactly why the Ethridge family decided to preserve their heritage.

SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE HERITAGE FARM

LANDSCAPE MASTER PLAN

III. LANDSCAPE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE FARM IN THE 1940S

The decade of the 1950s was a watershed in the history of the Shields-Ethridge Farm and in Georgia's agriculture. For this reason the 1940s have been taken as the appropriate time frame for a summary of the historic characteristics of the farm's landscape. It is a time remembered well by Joyce Ethridge, and the appearance of the landscape is documented in aerial photographs taken in 1944. This account is based primarily on those sources, supplemented by information from the Historic District Information Form October 1989, compiled by Joyce Ethridge and Susan Deavers; from aerial photographs taken in 1938 and 1957; and the Soil Survey of Barrow, Hall and Jackson Counties, Georgia, 1977.

This description is organized under five headings: land use, farm layout, the central cluster of buildings and yards, the tenants' places, and the school house yard. National Register Bulletin 30 provides guidelines for evaluating and documenting rural historic landscapes. The ten types of landscape characteristics listed in those guidelines have been considered under these five headings.

1. Land Use

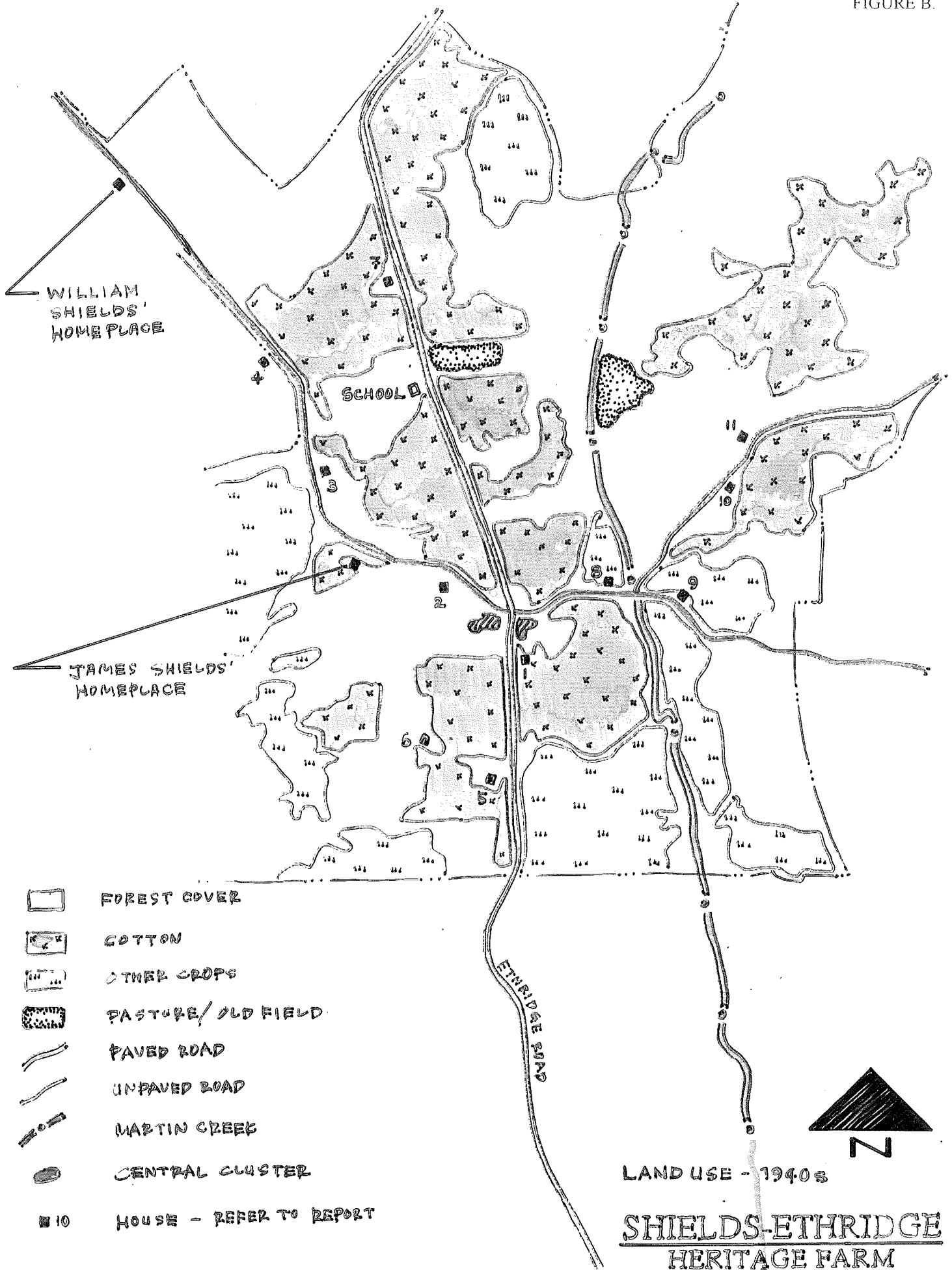
The Shields-Ethridge Farm was first and foremost a cotton farm in the 1940s, with cotton grown in the majority of its fields. See FIGURE B. Land Use 1940s.

According to Joyce Ethridge cotton was grown in nearly all the fields beside Ethridge Road, which when combined totaled about 100 acres. Cotton was also grown on the land across Martin Creek acquired by Ira W. Ethridge that added another 50 acres of fields, and in the fields sloping towards the Middle Oconee where there were a further 30

acres. But the latter were also used for growing corn and grain, mostly wheat. Corn was generally grown in the lower fields, and in the bottom land beside Martin Creek. Grain was more often found on the higher ground and was sometimes grown in fields beside Ethridge Road. Once the William Shields tract was acquired in 1945, about another 100 acres of fields were added to the farm. Some of these were used for growing cotton, some for grain.

Rather more than half the farm was woodland in the 1940s. The largest stands of trees were located beside the Middle Oconee and Martin Creek, with smaller fingers extending up to Ethridge Road along streams that fed the main river and creek. It is likely that nearly all these woods had resulted from regrowth over abandoned fields, with the exception of a few areas beside the Middle Oconee and Martin Creek. In aerial photographs the woodlands can be seen to be a mosaic of stands differing in composition and structure. Some of this variety may be due to natural factors—differences in soil, drainage and microclimate—but much of it was no doubt due to a history of disturbance by both clearance and use for grazing livestock. In the 1938 and 1944 aerial photographs the process of old field succession leading to the re-establishment of tree cover can be seen to be in progress in several areas. There are also some large and uniform stands of pines, and some of these may have been planted in the 1920s or 1930s to provide commercial timber. But most of the older, deciduous woodlands were not managed for any economic return, and they were probably valued most for the hunting opportunities they provided. Old fields and woodlands also provided places where livestock could browse and graze. Ella Shields Ethridge kept five or six milk cows that were pastured in woods to the west of the main complex of buildings. Some tenants probably also pastured their own cows in woods near their places.

FIGURE B.



SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE HERITAGE FARM

LANDSCAPE MASTER PLAN

It appears from the aerial photographs that nearly all the open fields had been terraced to prevent erosion, indicating that they were being ploughed. The only exceptions are the fields in the bottomland beside Martin Creek, and although some of these may have been used as pastures, it seems probable because of their fertility they were also tilled.

2. *Farm Layout*

The layout of the farm can be seen to be a response to natural features, particularly the landform of the area. The rolling topography of the piedmont had strongly influenced the position of the roads, the shapes of the fields and the location of the woods.

Ethridge Road, also known as Two Bridges Road, follows the ridgeline between the Middle Oconee River and Martin Creek. In earlier times this road had marked the eastern edge of the Shields' property but the land acquisitions by Ira W. Ethridge had changed this. Even when it was the eastern edge, James Robert Shields had selected the junction of this north-south road with an east-west route as the site of his new homeplace. By the 1940s this homeplace had become a central location. The east-west route is in fact several roads. Johnson Mill Road links the Shields-Ethridge place to the James Shields house site, and there turns northwest towards the William Shields place, and thence runs towards a bridging point on the Middle Oconee. Carruth Road runs east from the Shields Ethridge place to what was probably originally a ford across Martin Creek, where it divides, with Swann Road heading northeast. The latter therefore gave access to a substantial part of Ira W. Ethridge's new property across Martin Creek. In the 1940s all of these roads remained unimproved dirt roads. Carruth Road had been cut deep into the ground where it climbed the slope to

the Shields-Ethridge homeplace. Johnson Mill Road had also been incised by traffic and erosion near the ridgeline but to a lesser degree. Apart from the Shields-Ethridge homeplace and the William Shields place there were at least 14 other dwelling places on the farm in the 1940s. These were nearly all tenant sharecroppers' places, and they were scattered along the various roads. They were mostly sited immediately beside one of the roads, and were spaced fairly evenly about one quarter of a mile apart.

Most of the cotton fields were directly accessible from one of these roads, with the exception of the fields near the Middle Oconee. In the 1940s the fields were still worked with mules. Joyce Ethridge remembers there were 26 mules on the farm at that time. The reliance on mules and on human muscle power in the cultivation and picking of cotton helps to explain the varied sizes and shapes of the fields. Since large-scale machinery was not used, there had been little need to standardize sizes or shapes, so instead fields bent and curved with the topography. Few fields exceeded 12 acres in size. The largest were to be found on William Shields' property—the biggest field being just over 30 acres. Beside a few of the biggest fields there were cotton barns in which cotton could be stored before being taken to the gin. It is not known exactly how many there were in the 1940s, the woodlands hide any located at the edges of fields from an aerial view. Most of the fields were unfenced, their boundaries being defined by roads and farm tracks, ditches and natural drainage lines, and stands of trees. As already noted nearly all the fields had been terraced by the 1940s. The soil conservation terraces wound along the contours, and in larger fields they may have served to divide areas worked by different tenants or worked directly for the Ethridges by wage labor. (The 1957 aerial photograph has the acreage of all

SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE HERITAGE FARM

LANDSCAPE MASTER PLAN

fields noted in pencil, and some fields have been divided into separate units based on the lines of the terraces.)

The soils on the farm are mostly sandy clay loams and only moderately erodible, but the traditional practice of clean cultivation in the cotton fields must have meant a considerable amount of soil loss had occurred before the terraces were constructed.

The pattern of woodlands following the rivers and streams has already been noted. Away from the large stretches of woodland along the Middle Oconee and Martin Creek, most of the stands were in small blocks and had the same idiosyncratic shapes as the adjacent cotton fields.

One of the notable characteristics of this landscape was the general absence of straight lines. The few that existed were surveyor's lines defining property boundaries. The southern boundary of the farm ran in an almost straight east-west line between the east side of the floodplain of Martin Creek and the Middle Oconee. North of this there was a line still visible in the '40s that ran approximately east-west crossing Johnson Mill Road just north of the James Shields house site. It was marked on the ground by the edges of several fields and woods. This was a line separating the land given to Ella and Ira W. Ethridge by Joseph Robert Shields in 1908 from the next tract north, that had been the Emory Shields homeplace—before it was purchased by Ira and Ella in 1933. (This is now the northern boundary of the land given by Joyce Ethridge to the Shields-Ethridge Farm Foundation, Inc.) Lastly, the north-south alignment of Ethridge Road followed three straight lines as it ran through the farm, probably due to its historic role as a property boundary, before the expansion of the farm in the 20th century. But none of these lines would have been as noticeable

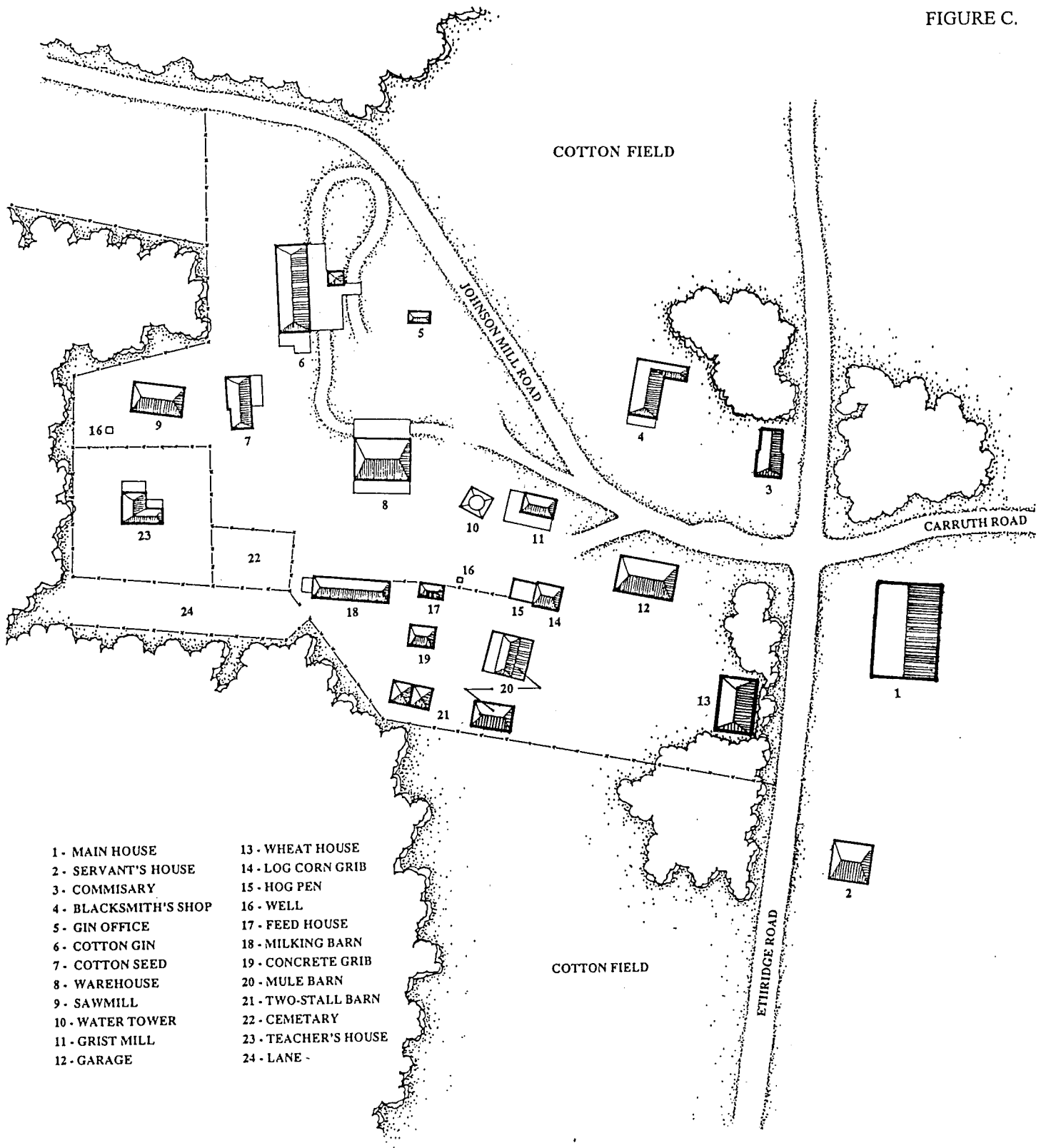
on the ground as they were from the air because of the rolling nature of the terrain.

3. The Central Cluster of Buildings and Yards

The central cluster occupied an area of about 6 acres at the crossing of the north-south and east-west routes. (See FIGURE C. 1940's Farm Complex Layout) Whereas now one sees the cluster as divided into two halves by Ethridge Road, in the 1940s it would have been much more one undivided place—the Ethridge place. In the 1940s the dirt roads would have been generally free of fast moving traffic. Buildings had been located close to the edge of the roads, and in many places there was probably no clearly marked edge separating road surface from the dirt of the adjacent yards. However there were important functional differences between the eastern and western halves of the cluster. On the east side the buildings and yards grouped around the main house were largely devoted to satisfying the domestic wants of the Ethridge family. On the west side the buildings and yards housed activities related to the operation of the farm. There were also significant differences in the ages of the buildings—the main house had been built in 1866 whereas nearly all the farm buildings that existed in the 1940s are thought to have been constructed after Ira Ethridge took over management of the farm.

Ira W. Ethridge had named his farm "White City Farm." It is not known where this idea came from: it is possible he had been inspired by The World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 or The Cotton States Exposition that followed it in Atlanta in 1895 but we have no clear evidence of this. In any case he used the name on his office stationery, and he had the trunks of trees beside Ethridge Road whitewashed. Appearances were therefore important. Ira W. Ethridge was a successful farmer

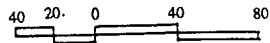
FIGURE C.



- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 1 - MAIN HOUSE | 13 - WHEAT HOUSE |
| 2 - SERVANT'S HOUSE | 14 - LOG CORN GRIB |
| 3 - COMMISARY | 15 - HOG PEN |
| 4 - BLACKSMITH'S SHOP | 16 - WELL |
| 5 - GIN OFFICE | 17 - FEED HOUSE |
| 6 - COTTON GIN | 18 - MILKING BARN |
| 7 - COTTON SEED | 19 - CONCRETE GRIB |
| 8 - WAREHOUSE | 20 - MULE BARN |
| 9 - SAWMILL | 21 - TWO-STALL BARN |
| 10 - WATER TOWER | 22 - CEMETARY |
| 11 - GRIST MILL | 23 - TEACHER'S HOUSE |
| 12 - GARAGE | 24 - LANE - |

1940s FARM COMPLEX LAYOUT
SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE HERITAGE FARM
 JACKSON COUNTY, GEORGIA

ROBINSON FISHER ASSOCIATES



SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE HERITAGE FARM

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and businessman in Jackson County and he was proud of his status.

In the 1940s the front of the main house gave evidence of the prosperity of the Ethridge family in this century. The rebuilding of the porch in 1914 had added a certain grandeur to the "plantation plain" house, and the enclosure of the front yard by a wrought iron fence in 1921 enhanced the ornamental effect. On the other hand the appearance of the house also indicated a strong conservatism. The house behind the porch retained many of its original features from the 1860s and the front yard remained a swept yard. The yard was dominated by two southern magnolias that had been planted when the house was built. It had few other ornamental plantings — a wisteria vine beside the porch planted in the 1920s and some annuals in concrete urns by the entrance. (Boxwoods were added in 1945 in front of the porch.) The house and front yard seem therefore to have indicated both progressiveness and conservatism on the part of its owners. Ira W. Ethridge had built up the ginning business and enlarged the farm, but at the same time he continued to operate it as a cotton farm along traditional lines. Ira was interested in the latest technology, for example he installed a telephone around 1916 by building his own line to the Jefferson city limits, but he was also thrifty, throwing away nothing that might still be of use. Ella reportedly shared some these qualities keeping careful records of her own small dairy business.

The yards at the sides and back of the main house were primarily workplaces in the 1940s. To the south, set back a little from the road, was the servants' house—reportedly built in the 1920s perhaps to replace an earlier structure. In the 1940s this house was occupied by Bruce ("Rooster") and Ruby Shields, an African American couple.

"Rooster" was the driver (foreman) of the hands on the farm and Ruby served as cook in the main house. The space between the servants' house and the main house was a swept yard in the '40s; in earlier times it had been the site of the old kitchen. Beyond the servants' house on the south side of the complex was a vegetable garden, a rectangular plot of about one third of an acre, enclosed by a hedge. To the east of this garden lay the family's orchard. In the 1880 census there is a record of two acres of apple trees and one acre of peaches on the farm. It seems likely this was the same orchard, but by the 1940s it was less than two acres in size. The trees were arranged in rows aligned northeast to southwest, and the orchard extended out into the cotton field behind the main house. At the rear of the house there were a number of structures related to the supply and storage of provisions, including a well, a smokehouse and a chicken house. There was a small fenced run beside the latter, but chickens did not always stay in that run. Joyce Ethridge remembers "wild" chickens roosting in the magnolia trees. Directly behind the servants' house was a small hay barn, and there may have been some other small buildings. For example, the aerial photographs suggest there was one at the edge of the orchard, but these photographs are of limited value as a tree canopy obscured most of the backyard. A very large water oak still stands today in the yard, and several pecan trees that judging from their size may have been planted about the turn of the century. Beneath these trees the ground surface was probably a mixture of rough grass and trodden dirt paths. Carruth Road ran close to the north wall of the main house. The road bed was separated from the backyard by a four or five foot drop, but beside the house the difference in levels was much less. There were no ornamental plantings between the road and the house, and across the road was an extension of the backyard. The workaday character of this space in the 1940s is indicated by

SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE HERITAGE FARM

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the presence of a potato curing house and a log house, built in the 1930s, used mainly for cookouts. On the north side of these buildings Ira had planted a small stand of pines, probably in the 1930s using trees left over from planting operations elsewhere on the farm. Pines were planted on both sides of Ethridge Road, and were probably intended to improve the appearance of the central complex when it was approached from the north.

On the west side of Ethridge Road, the twenty or twenty-one farm buildings housed a wide variety of activities, animals and equipment. There was no clear spatial organization, such as a central rectangular yard, instead buildings had been placed at convenient distances from the roads and each other, and aligned with the contours. Although there was no obvious division of the area into separate sectors, the buildings were not a random jumble; different types of activities were concentrated into separate parts of the yard.

The largest and most important single building was the cotton gin house. This had been located above a bend in Johnson Mill Road on the west side of the complex at some distance from the main house, perhaps because of the noise and bustle associated with its operations. Photographs in the family albums show the activity in this area. One dated March 1918 entitled "A busy day at the Gin" shows seven or eight wagons waiting to deliver their cotton to the gin. The wagons are not in a single line but fanned out across the slope near the building. Wagons would approach the gin house from the east, running down slope into the shed porch to be weighed and then their load would be sucked up into the gin. They could then proceed empty down the slope into Johnson Mill Road where they could turn to come back and collect the seed from a drive-under seed box at the front of the

porch. The open area above the gin house could accommodate about a dozen wagons. It was not completely open, but shaded by several trees, mostly pines with one or two large oaks. Near the gin house arranged around the open space are several buildings that were associated with the ginning operation: the office building, the cottonseed house and the warehouse. The original location for the wagon scales was the shed on the north side of the warehouse; wagons would pull through this shed as they approached the gin house. Beside the warehouse Ira W. Ethridge had erected a water tower around 1913 after his first gin house had been destroyed by fire. Water was pumped by an engine from Martin Creek into the tank. The gin house had been rebuilt in concrete block to make it less susceptible to fire. The blocks, manufactured by Ira's brother Scott Ethridge in Jefferson, included some decorative designs that were used to ornament the building. However the area of the gin house seems to have been very much a workplace, and attempts to enhance the appearance of White City Farm with whitewash probably did not reach this far from Ethridge Road.

Behind the gin house and the cotton seed house there was another open space that can be clearly seen in the 1944 aerial photographs. This was the yard of the farm's sawmill. Like the cotton gin, the sawmill may have been located at this end of the complex because of the noise associated with its operation. (The mill was dismantled in the early 1970s and the equipment sold, but the large concrete base can be seen behind the seed house.)

To the south of the warehouse and water tower, away from Johnson Mill Road, was the area devoted to the farm's livestock. The most important animals on the farm were the 26 mules that were used to till the fields and pull the wagons and other farm equipment. The mules were still used in the 1940s

SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE HERITAGE FARM

LANDSCAPE MASTER PLAN

though by that time Ira Ethridge was probably also using tractors. There were two large barns standing in a yard enclosed with post and rail fences. The main mule barn—the one still there today—is a two-story structure, with an upper floor used to store fodder. Around the edges of this yard still stand a number of smaller buildings: a two-stall barn, two corn cribs and a feed house. One of the cribs and the lower part of the mule barn have been constructed with the same type of concrete blocks as were used in the gin house. The other crib is a log structure—thought to be much older—and beside it there was a small hog pen. It is thought that the hogs were able to crawl below the crib and thus prevent rats from infesting that space. Not far from the feed house is one of the two known wells on the complex. To the west of the mule barn is the dairy or milking barn. The cows browsing in the woods came to the barn along a broad lane that was fenced on both sides. Although there were no trees around the mule barnyard, the lane to the milking barn was well shaded. The long low wooden barn had six stalls, and chickens are said to have laid eggs in the feeding trough between milkings.

At the junction of the old Johnson Mill Road with Ethridge Road there is a group of buildings that were associated with the day to day operation of the farm. None of these buildings is very large, but each must have been a focus of constant activity throughout the year. The commissary represents one of the key features of the tenant sharecropping system and its prominent location at the road junction was therefore appropriate. The commissary ceased operation sometime in the early 1940s—it was no longer in use when Ira Ethridge died in 1945. (The commissary is thought to have been moved about thirty feet when Ethridge Road was realigned in the 1950s.) Nearby the blacksmith's shop, which included a carpenters

shop, was obviously the center for most of the maintenance and repair activities that were necessary on any farm but were particularly important on this farm given its wide array of activities, buildings and equipment. The space between the shop and the old Johnson Mill Road was probably used to leave items awaiting repair, and Joyce Ethridge remembers there was a junk pile on the west side of the shop. On the opposite side of the old Johnson Mill Road, the grist mill stands at the point where wagons could pull off the road to enter the gin yard. The grist mill included a hammer mill and planing mill, with the power provided by an International Harvester engine. It seems likely that the hands who were employed in the blacksmith's shop would also have operated the mill machinery. All of these buildings are thought to date from the turn of the century, but a fourth building was probably added around 1920. This is the garage—its size and more substantial construction may reflect Ira's enthusiasm for automobiles. Joyce Ethridge remembers that he liked to have the latest models and enjoyed motoring to Florida for his winter vacations. The garage has space for three vehicles plus a pump room. As the front faced the main house some care was taken with its appearance, in particular the gable has an elaborate pattern of shingles. South of the garage, the wheat house also has some ornamental details on its facade—notably the balcony on the second floor. In addition to being a granary, this building was used to store wagons, buggies and gear, so this may be the reason it was located between the mule barn and the main road. (Like the commissary, this building was moved back when Ethridge Road was realigned.) One early photograph, in which Bruce Shields and other farm hands are lined up with some mules behind the wheat house, indicates there was another small building more or less in the location where the wheat house now stands. It is not known what that

SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE HERITAGE FARM

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building was used for, but according to the 1944 aerial photograph it was there in the 1940s.

The realignment of Ethridge Road in the 1950s, 50 feet west of its historic position, led to the removal of several of the trees that had lined the west side of the road. The 1944 aerial photograph shows a tree canopy over most of this area. There was also a belt of trees along the northern margin of this cluster of buildings. There was no tractor shed in 1944, this must have been added by Lanis Ethridge, but instead a stand of trees stood between the back of the blacksmith's shop and the cotton field to the north. As already noted there were no trees of any size on the south side of the complex between the wheat house and the milking barn, so on this side there was an uninterrupted view from the yards to the adjacent cotton field. This side of the complex was fenced, however, whereas the north and east sides were not. Joyce Ethridge remembers there was a fence on the west side behind the cotton seed house but its alignment around the saw mill yard behind the gin house has not been determined. Beneath the canopy of trees that shaded the cluster of buildings, the ground throughout the area was mainly trodden dirt with a thin cover of rough grass in places and, of course, a carpet of leaves each fall and winter.

In the woods on the western side of the complex are a number of elements that although they were beside the farm complex were not functionally part of it. A family cemetery had been established on the highest point in the area before the complex was developed. The earliest burial in this cemetery is thought to date from 1870. By the 1940s the area had been fenced, and some boxwoods had been planted around the burial plots. Beyond the cemetery, north of the lane between the woods and the milking barn, is the teacher's house. In 1938 this house had been allocated to the African

American teacher who had begun to teach at the farmstead school in that year. Before then it is thought that it was a tenant house and it is likely that there had been the usual array of tenant farm buildings around it. It is not known how many if any of these remained in the 1940s. The well which is located between the teacher's house and the saw mill might have originally been in a small farm yard.

4. The Tenants' Places

The tenant's places scattered along the roads that ran through the property would have been an important feature of the landscape in the 1940s. Each tenant farm would have been a center of activity, small in comparison to the main farm complex but with its own rhythm of daily activities. As already noted nearly all the tenants' places had been sited near the main roads, but there was also a network of farm tracks to which they related. For example, near the southern boundary of the property two tenant farms were located at the head of a track that ran from Ethridge Road down through fields and woods towards the Middle Oconee River. Some of the tenants' places had been sited beside streams or creeks, while others located on rises must have been dependent on wells for water.

The different parts of the Ethridge Farm were often referred to by the names of tenants who occupied that area. Joyce Ethridge believes that most of the tenants had stayed with the Shields and Ethridges for many years, so their names became attached to their places. In the 1940s ten of the tenant places were occupied by African Americans and four by white families. One of the latter places was not a farm however; the occupier, R.H. Wall, was a cotton buyer. In referring to their places sometimes tenant's nicknames were used. Joyce Ethridge remembers the following people and places:

SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE

HERITAGE FARM

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1. Bruce ("Rooster") and Ruby Shields, as already noted, lived in the servants' house next to the main house;
2. ("Preacher") and Kate Riley occupied the tenant place just beyond the cotton gin house on Johnson Mill Road;
3. Bass Griffeth's place was further along the same road - it had formerly belonged to Emory Shields;
4. Lewis Butler's place was further north near the start of a track leading from Johnson Mill Road to the Middle Oconee River;
5. Leonard Reynold's family lived just off Ethridge Road near the southern boundary of the farm;
6. James and Sarah Bailey's house was behind the Reynold's place on a track leading down to the river;
7. Ellis Wood's place was on Ethridge Road north of the school house, near the northern boundary of the property;
8. James K.C. Jackson and his wife Ruth lived on the north side of Carruth Road near Martin Creek;
9. Mag and Cicero Chandler lived along the same road on the far side of the creek;
10. John Craven's place was up Swann Road on the right hand side;
11. Gott ("Uncle Golly") and Bertha Shields' place was further up on the left hand side;
12. Owen Jackson lived past this near the limit of the property acquired along this road by Ira W. Ethridge; and finally
13. John Stewart's place was at the very northeastern corner of the property along Ethridge Road, halfway to Arcade.

Amongst these tenants, John Stewart, John Craven and Leonard Reynolds were white. Reynolds left in the 1940s and was replaced by Charlie and Stella Wilhite who were black. The black families that had Shields as their surname may have had a long

association with the Shields family going back to the ante-bellum period.

The appearance of the tenants' places must have varied reflecting their different locations, the various ages of the buildings, the different sizes of the holdings and of course, the different characteristics of each family. Most places seem to have had in addition to the house three or four outbuildings arranged around a small yard. At Preacher Riley's place for example, there was a small barn, a chicken house, a garage, plus a well house and a privy in the yard. In front of the house, an unpainted L shaped frame structure, there was a small swept yard. On the side nearest the gin house there was a large vegetable garden. The yard was fenced on the south and west sides, perhaps because there might be cattle in the woods on those sides. It is not known how much land each tenant worked as part of his sharecropping agreement with Ira Ethridge. Joyce Ethridge estimates the typical holding varied between 15 and 30 acres. Most, if not all the black tenants were also employed as farm hands for a wage. In the 1940s there were about 20 hands and they were paid on average 75 cents for a day's work. Some tenants would supplement their income with other work. For example, there was a barber's shop at James Johnson's place.

When Lanis Ethridge acquired the William Shields' homeplace in 1945 it became another tenant place. Of course it was not a typical tenant's place as it had been operated as an independent farm since the 1860s. The main dwelling is more substantial than a typical tenant's house, and there was a greater array of outbuildings including a large barn used for both mules and cows. In all there were at least nine outbuildings. (The farmstead cannot be seen on the 1944 aerial photograph but nine buildings can be counted on the 1957 photograph.)

SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE

HERITAGE FARM

LANDSCAPE MASTER PLAN

5. *The Schoolhouse*

This is the final element in the landscape of the historic district that requires special mention. The presence of the school is a reminder that the influence of the Shields and Ethridge families extended well beyond the boundaries of their farm. An "Educational Survey of Jackson County Georgia" conducted in 1915 had reported 26 pupils at the school, distributed through seven grades. As all of these children were white, only a small number could have lived on the Ethridge property. The rest must have come from the surrounding area. In the 1940s the school was being attended by black children; the exact number has not been determined, but again the majority probably did not live on the farm. Most, if not all of the children must have walked to school, so there would have been several paths tracing ways through surrounding woods and fields converging on the schoolhouse. For example, there was a track from the schoolhouse running southwestwards to Bass Griffeth's place on Johnson Mill Road. The 1915 Survey reported that the building was well-kept but that the grounds were not, and referred to the two acres as "unimproved grove, grounds neglected; no school garden; no toilets." It is not known whether anything had changed in the grounds by the 1940s. At some date a well had been dug and the well head is the main feature of the grounds today. Judging from the aerial photographs the schoolhouse yard was very open with few, if any, trees near the building.

IV. SIGNIFICANCE AND INTEGRITY

According to the National Register nomination: "The Shields-Ethridge Farm is significant as an outstanding rural farm complex that developed from the mid-19th into the mid-20th century. The large collection of dwelling houses, agricultural and industrial outbuildings, and related sites represents the varied activities and lifestyle of a piedmont Georgia farmstead over more than a 150-year period. The Shields-Ethridge Farm is significant in the areas of architecture, agriculture, industry, education, and landscape architecture. These areas support National Register eligibility under Criteria A and C."

In the area of architecture the nomination notes "its very intact collection of 19th and early 20th century domestic, agricultural, industrial and educational buildings;" in the area of agriculture—its continuous operation as a farm from the early 19th century; in the area of industry—the cotton gin, grist mill, hammer mill and saw mill; in the area of education—the schoolhouse and teacher's residence; in the area of landscape architecture—the "landscape of work" and the "ornamental yard." (The nomination also notes the district's archaeological potential.)

Among these historic resources the diverse collection of farm buildings and the industrial machinery they contain are without question the most remarkable items. These are the elements that set this place apart: the Shields-Ethridge Farm has "the broadest assortment of 19th and early 20th century domestic, agricultural and industrial outbuildings know to exist on a single farm in Georgia"—National Register nomination, page 14. But it should be added that it would be difficult to appreciate fully the architectural and industrial significance of these resources if they were to be

SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE HERITAGE FARM

LANDSCAPE MASTER PLAN

divorced from the context provided by the landscape of the farm. The preservation of the landscape is equally essential to an appreciation of the agricultural and educational significance of the place.

Of course, landscapes cannot be preserved like objects under glass in museums. Landscapes cannot be separated from their natural and cultural environments and so they undergo continuous changes. An examination of the changes that have occurred since the 1940s at the Shields-Ethridge Farm, and an evaluation of the potential effect on visitors' appreciation of its historical character should provide some guidance for how to steer future changes.

Changes Since the 1940s

In this summary the five headings introduced in the description of the historic landscape will be used.

1. Land Use

The farm ceased to be a cotton farm in the 1960s. Mechanized cotton picking was introduced, but machines were only used for a couple of years. The cotton gin was last operated in 1956. Today the farm has no land that is tilled regularly, and all the remaining fields are kept in grass. The farm now produces beef cattle and on the southern boundary there are three modern broiler houses for rearing chickens. A higher percentage of the farm is now woodland. The main areas in which the trees have spread are on the eastern and western sides of the property, away from the center of the farm. See FIGURE D. Land Use Late 1970s.

2. Farm Layout

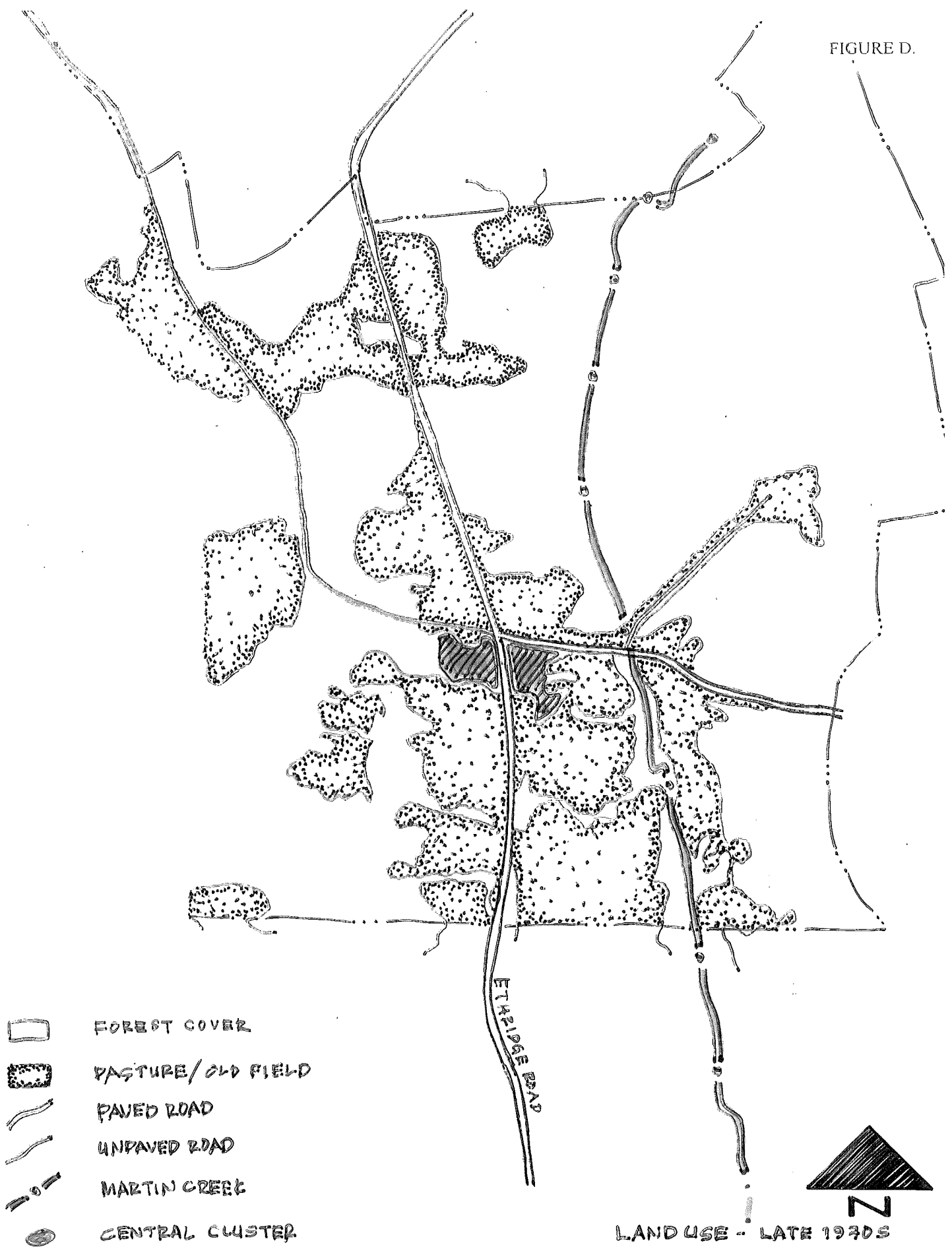
The roads that cross the property still follow the historic routes, but there have been changes in construction and alignment. Ethridge Road was







paved in the 1950s and at that time a number of sections were realigned. As already noted, the most significant changes were in front of the main house where the road bed was shifted about 50 feet to the west. Carruth Road was paved at a later date and the junction with Ethridge Road was altered so that the road now passes north of the pine trees planted by Ira W. Ethridge. The old road bed has been left as an abandoned gully beside the house, hidden from Ethridge Road by some hollies. Johnson Mill Road has not been paved, but no doubt its condition has been improved since the 1940s. It has also been realigned so that it runs north of the farm complex to meet Ethridge Road directly opposite Carruth Road. Swann Road also remains unpaved, but following the sale of some land and the threat of suburban development, this road has been closed.

The field pattern has been altered by the abandonment of some areas to forest, but where the fields remain open the characteristic variety of shapes and sizes remains. Some field boundaries have shifted slightly as trees and scrub have invaded edges. Most fields are now fenced as pastures. Where the fields remain as grasslands, the soil conservation terraces can be clearly seen. Elsewhere the terraces no doubt remain, though covered by trees. Changes in the pattern of fields and woods have further obscured the straight lines associated with old property boundaries, none of which is clearly visible today.

Viewed from the air, the woodlands can be seen to still be a mosaic of stands of different ages and compositions. But as there has been less disturbance in the wooded areas in recent years, these differences between stands are becoming less marked as they mature and become dominated by climax hardwoods.

FIGURE D.



-  FOREST COVER
-  PASTURE/OLD FIELD
-  PAVED ROAD
-  UNPAVED ROAD
-  MARTIN CREEK
-  CENTRAL CLUSTER

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3. *The Central Cluster of Buildings and Yards*

This cluster is now divided into two distinct parts by Ethridge Road. The eastern half has remained in active use as the Ethridge family's home, and naturally some changes have been made. But most of these have occurred at the rear of the main house so the front retains much of its historic character. There is now a lawn in the front yard, but otherwise this enclosed space has changed very little. Most of the ornamental plantings that have been added since the 1940s such as azaleas have been placed on the south side of the house. The backyard is no longer primarily a workplace—its main feature now is a swimming pool—however the collection of outbuildings is fairly intact and the same oaks and pecans provide shade. The vegetable garden has disappeared. That area now serves as a corral for cattle, and the orchard has also gone, replaced by a grove of oaks.

Across Ethridge Road the western half of the cluster is no longer in active use as the center of agricultural and industrial activities on the property. Nevertheless, it retains nearly all the buildings that were there in the 1940s: the sawmill, the second mule barn and the small building that stood behind the wheat house have gone, and a tractor shed has been added, but the rest of the structures remain. As already noted, the commissary and wheat house were moved when Ethridge Road was realigned, but this has not significantly altered their relationships with the rest of the complex.

The main changes that have taken place are the results of disuse. Most of the buildings show signs of physical deterioration, and much of the equipment they contain is no longer operational. The fact that it is still there however, is remarkable given the long period of disuse. The

ground surface throughout the area now has a cover of grass; even the old road bed of Johnson Mill Road has this cover. Some of the fences around the livestock yards remain, but these are now mostly wire rather than rail fences. Beyond the teacher's house, a log corn crib has been added, brought there from another location for safekeeping. Past this, where dairy cows used to browse in the woods, a new clearing was made in the 1950s and a fish pond impounded. A small building was erected beside this pond and used for picnics and children's play. There is however sufficient distance left in woodland between this pond and the complex of farm buildings to screen them from each other.

4. *The Tenants' Places*

At the fifteen tenant places that were on the property in the 1940s only 8 houses remain; the other seven have been destroyed, in most cases as a result of fires. Of the eight surviving houses, two have been sold and five remain as rental properties. None of them is still operated as agricultural holdings and all have been altered since the 1940s, but the extent of modernization has varied considerably. One tenants' place remains largely intact but stands empty. This was "Preacher" Riley's place in the 1940s. The house and its outbuildings still stand though their condition is deteriorating. The yard is becoming somewhat overgrown and the site of the vegetable garden is used to demonstrate plowing during Mule Day at the farm.

5. *The Schoolhouse Yard*

The schoolhouse is currently being repaired. Because the exact condition of the yard in the 1940s is not known, it is not possible to say how it has changed. The well head is still there, but the yard is probably more overgrown than it was when the school was in use. Any paths to and from the

SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE HERITAGE FARM

LANDSCAPE MASTER PLAN

school through the adjacent woods are now overgrown and difficult to trace.

Conclusions

The potential effects of these changes on visitors' appreciation of the historic character of the farm and the conclusions that can be drawn will be discussed under the same five headings.

1. Land Use

For someone driving in an automobile down Ethridge Road, there is little obvious evidence that this was once a cotton farm; but for visitors who stop to take a closer look there are several good indications. In the fields, the presence of the soil conservation terraces indicates that row crops, though not necessarily cotton, were grown. Details of the farm layout particularly the variety of field sizes and shapes and the remains of sharecroppers' places suggest the main crop was cotton, if one knows something of the history of agriculture in the state. But, of course, the clearest indications of the historic importance of cotton are the presence of the cotton gin and related buildings in the main farm building complex. The absence of cotton from the fields today therefore should not be regarded as a major obstacle to visitors' understanding of the history of the farm, as long as these pieces of evidence are preserved and interpreted. In the same way, the buildings and machines in the central complex can be used to explain that cotton was not the only product of the farm—the gristmill and dairy barn are sufficient to make that clear. But some program of interpretation is necessary, as the present character of the landscape, dominated as it is by grass and trees, is quite different from its historic appearance.

2. Farm Layout

In order to understand the farm layout a visitor would need to traverse the property along the historic north-south and east-west routes. Fortunately, this is still possible, although reconstruction and realignment have altered the historic characteristics of the roads themselves. Of the three main roads, Johnson Mill Road retains more of its historic character than the others. The views from each of the roads across the farmland have changed as fields have been converted to woodlands. About half the fields that lay beside these roads, and more if one includes Swann Road, have disappeared beneath trees. It is important that this process is halted, if not reversed, if the historic layout is to be understood. It should be an objective in the management of the grasslands to prevent the steady creep of woodland into remaining fields.

The woods themselves are losing some of their historic characteristics associated with various disturbances, such as cutting and grazing, and gaining a more natural character. In this case, an increase in natural values probably more than offsets any decrease in the historic character. At the same time it might be concluded that continued exploitation of the woodlands for timber would be appropriate as long as the scale of the cuts is compatible with that of the historic mosaic.

3. The Central Cluster of Buildings and Yards

The residential areas on the east side of the central complex are not open to most visitors, but nevertheless, they are very important parts of the historic landscape. Fortunately, the front of the main house has changed remarkable little since the 1940s. Major changes have occurred at the sides and back, but most of these have been additions rather than subtractions. Thus, the historic

SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE HERITAGE FARM

LANDSCAPE MASTER PLAN

character of the backyard as a place of work can be deduced from the presence of the various outbuildings. The two most significant losses are the vegetable garden and the orchard. The original line of Carruth Road through the backyard is marked by the remaining gully, and this provides valuable evidence of the original relationship of the road to the house and yard.

Across Ethridge Road the farm buildings and their contents are in a remarkable state of preservation, albeit somewhat dilapidated. Indeed the dilapidation is an important part of the appeal of the complex as it gives the impression that as activities ceased and farmhands left, the doors swung closed and the place was left alone. Very little reorganization or tidying up has taken place that would separate the present from the past. One of the major challenges facing the Shields-Ethridge Farm Foundation is to undertake necessary repairs and other curatorial work without creating a "museum showcase" appearance - to quote one visitor. Although the equipment inside each building indicates its historic function there is a need for some form of interpretation, as many visitors do not know enough about agricultural history to read that evidence. Similarly, many visitors would not realize that the ground surface has changed, nor would they recognize the original line of Johnson Mill Road without some guidance. The realignment of that road has altered the character of the north side of the complex. On the south side the relationship of the farm buildings to the adjacent fields has not changed, apart from minor alterations to the fences. On the west side the woods have advanced into the saw mill yard, and it would be appropriate to remove trees to reestablish the historic boundaries of the complex. Elsewhere the amount of tree cover is about the same as it was in the 1940s, but in the long term it

will be necessary to do some planting to maintain the canopy.

4. The Tenants' Places

The loss of about half of the tenants' houses and the alterations in the character of those that remain in occupation mean there is little left to indicate the historic character of a sharecropper's farm. The sites of the abandoned places are mostly overgrown, and it is only possible to recognize old places if one knows where to look. Fortunately, the presence of one fairly intact and empty tenant's place close to the center of the farm provides an excellent opportunity to interpret the historic character and significance of all the tenants' places.

5. The Schoolhouse Yard

Repairs currently being carried out should ensure the preservation of the building. The yard may be little changed, but one needs to know more about its historic appearance before any conclusions can be reached. The main challenges to the preservation and interpretation of this place are posed by its distance from the center of the farm. It is important that visitors understand the various connections between the school and the farm and this requires some type of interpretation program.

SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE HERITAGE FARM

LANDSCAPE MASTER PLAN

V. MASTER PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this master plan is to further the mission of the Shields-Ethridge Farm Foundation Inc.—"to provide the public with an educational and interpretive facility that accurately tells of Georgia's rich agricultural history." This plan therefore focuses on the Foundation's property, the 154 acres that include the complex of farm buildings and run from Ethridge Road west to the Middle Oconee River. See FIGURE E. Master Plan.

This plan makes recommendations to address the following issues:

- the arrival and orientation of visitors;
- circulation in the central complex of farm buildings;
- fences around the complex;
- the management of vegetation in and around that area;
- the location of signs;
- the use of the tenant's place next to the main complex;
- trails between the complex and other points of interest; and
- the protection of the wider farm landscape.

In all the recommendations the first concern is to protect the integrity of the historic resources, so that their significance can be understood by visitors, and the historic character of the place fully appreciated.

1. The Arrival and Orientation of Visitors Issues

Visitors can be categorized into several groups:

- the general public who come to "Mule Day"
- school groups; and
- other groups and individuals that arrive by appointment.

These groups have different needs but they all share the following common ones:

- a safe and convenient route into and out of the central complex of farm buildings;
- an approach to the complex that helps them to understand its historic character and organization; and
- a place to gather, meet a guide or pick up a brochure, and use a bathroom.

Differing needs:

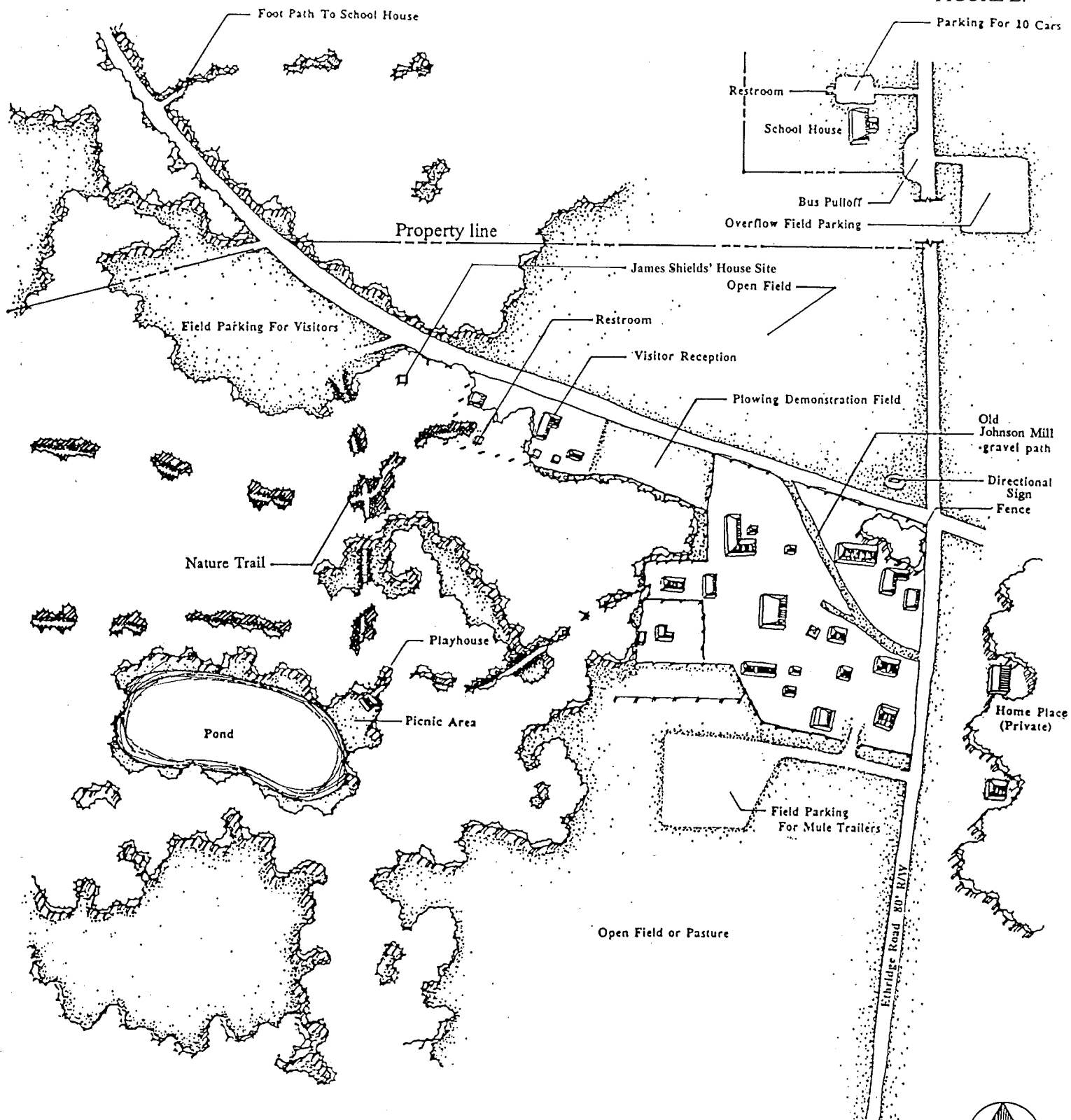
- On Mule Day a parking space of about 1-1/2 acres is needed to accommodate visitors' cars. In addition to this, a separate parking location is needed for at least a dozen horse/mule trailers.
- School groups arrive in one or more buses. Children can be dropped off at the complex, but they need a place to gather, to be divided up into smaller groups to tour, or wait for a wagon ride up to the school building.
- Other groups that arrive by appointment may be able to park by the road in front of the main house, but on occasions the use of this area as a reception point can lead to intrusions into the private home of the Ethridge/Chaisson family. An alternative meeting place is preferred.

Current Management Practices

At the present time there are a number of different ways visitors are met and conducted through the complex:

- On Mule Day the field north of the main house is opened for parking, but this has a number of drawbacks. The field is not part of the Foundation property and views of the parking from Ethridge Road detracts from the scenery. Visitors must cross Carruth and Ethridge Roads and the latter is potentially dangerous. Walking from this parking area does not use a historic route into the complex and therefore

FIGURE E.



MASTER PLAN
 SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE HERITAGE FARM
 JACKSON COUNTY, GEORGIA
 1998
 ROBINSON FISHER ASSOCIATES



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HERITAGE FARM

LANDSCAPE MASTER PLAN

does not help visitors understand the historic character of the place.

- Other groups are usually met opposite the main house and the wheat house is used as a place to provide orientation and other information to school groups. Groups are also taken to the schoolhouse which provides a large indoor meeting place.
- Portable toilets provide bathroom facilities for all groups. These are usually located near the grist mill.
- There is limited parking at the schoolhouse and difficulties for school buses.

Recommendations

1A. A parking lot for visitors should be developed on the site of a former field, now overgrown, to the west of the main complex beside Johnson Mill Road. This should provide about 1.75 acres for parking when the existing tree cover is thinned. Access would be via Johnson Mill Road, and visitors would have to be directed to the lot by a sign at the junction with Ethridge Road. At the edge of the old field lies the site of James Shield's homeplace, and this should be protected when the parking lot is developed.

1B. The approach to the complex should be along Johnson Mill Road. The proposed parking lot is 200 yards from the main complex of buildings. Visitors would walk along Johnson Mill Road to the complex. This approach would bring visitors along one of the historic routes and should help them understand the historic character of the place. Johnson Mill Road is a little used dirt road, and its use by pedestrians should not present significant safety problems.

1C. The empty tenant's place, formerly Preacher Riley's place, should be used as the point at which visitors are introduced to the farm. This place

stands midway between the proposed parking lot and the central farm building complex. It can provide both indoor and outdoor spaces where tour groups can be organized, brochures and similar items can be made available, and bathrooms can be provided. The main building is not large enough to serve as an indoor meeting place/auditorium for presentations about the farm which are planned for large school groups and others. That type of activity is better located in the schoolhouse. However, the latter is too far from the center of the farm to serve as an orientation point, so these places will serve different needs—a point for reception and orientation at the tenant's place, a space for meetings and presentations at the schoolhouse. Recommendations on the rehabilitation of Preacher Riley's place are given below.

1D. On Mule Day the field immediately to the south of the central complex should be used as the place where trailers are parked and the mules are off-loaded. The mules can then be taken through the mule barnyard and down the abandoned road bed of Johnson Mill Road to the area next to Preacher Riley's place that is used for plowing demonstrations. This use of the mule barnyard is historically appropriate and should help visitors to understand the historic character of that area. The impact of the trailers on the field will depend on weather conditions during Mule Day, but it should not significantly affect the use of that area as a pasture for cattle during the rest of the year.

2. Circulation in the Central Complex of Farm Buildings

Issues

Any paths should follow historic routes wherever possible, otherwise they would tend to compromise the integrity of the place and prevent public understanding of its historic character. Paths

SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE HERITAGE FARM

LANDSCAPE MASTER PLAN

should give a sense of direction, particularly an indication of where to enter or leave the complex. Paths should reduce, not increase, the likelihood of soil erosion, and damage from human and animal feet.

Visitors to the farm will not expect paths like urban sidewalks, and it can be expected that most will have suitable footwear. However, some hard surfaces are necessary to allow people in wheelchairs to negotiate the slope on which the complex is located. (Accessibility to individual farm buildings for the handicapped is outside the scope of this plan, but needs to be considered as part of the treatment plan for each structure.)

Current Management Practices

Visitors are allowed to wander around the complex. Some find it difficult to orient themselves even with the aid of a plan, particularly during Mule Day, when visitors enter the complex at various points. Although there are no hard surfaces, the ground is well drained and firm and compacted through use. There are only a few areas where erosion can be seen as a significant threat.

Recommendations

2A. The old road bed of Johnson Mill Road within the complex should be returned to something like its historic appearance. This would then provide a central route through the cluster of buildings to help guide visitors, and provide a hard surfaced route across the slope for handicapped visitors. The road bed should be cleared of grass and a hard surface reestablished and stabilized. A barrier at the junction with the present-day line of Johnson Mill Road will be required to prevent any unauthorized use by vehicles (see next section).

2B. Beside the gristmill, where wagons used to leave the road to go to the cotton gin, the hard surface should be extended a short distance (about

10 yards) to indicate this route. There was not a clear road bed in the area of the cotton gin historically, so one should not be created now. People will tend to fan out across the slope in the same way that wagons did, and there should be no change to the present grassed surface.

2C. Where the grassed surface becomes worn and there is danger of erosion, such as at the entrance to farm buildings, the surface can be stabilized by the use of some crushed stone. These patches will soon blend in with the rest of the site. The objective should be to retain the farm's character and avoid treatments more appropriate to urban parks.

3. Fences Around the Complex

Issues

In the 1940s there were fences on the southern and western sides of the complex, but not on the others. Today the absence of any barriers on the sides next to the roads gives rise to concerns about security.

Existing Conditions

There are fences on the south sides of the complex today but not on any other sides. Some of those on the south are not in the same positions as they were when the mule and dairy barns were in use.

Recommendations

3A. The fencelines that existed when the complex was in active use should be restored. On the south side the positions of the existing fences should be corrected, and the type of fencing returned to post and rail around the mule barn.

On the west side a post and wire fence should be re-erected behind the site of the sawmill. (Additional investigation is needed to determine the historic position of the fence in that area.)

SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE HERITAGE FARM

LANDSCAPE MASTER PLAN

3B. A new post and wire fence should be erected beside the new line of Johnson Mill Road. This should be kept simple, but should be sufficient to discourage people from casually wandering into the complex. A simple barrier, such as a chain across the entrance to the old road bed of Johnson Mill Road can be used to indicate when the complex is closed to visitors.

3C. At this time there does not seem to be a real need for any fences or barriers beside Ethridge Road, as this side is overlooked by the main house and that fact seems to discourage casual trespass. If a need develops, this side should be fenced in the same manner as the north side.

4. Management of Vegetation in the Central Complex

Issues

The chief changes that have occurred since the complex ceased to be a busy center for farm activities include:

- the invasion of the western edge by trees and scrub, and
- the extension of the ground cover of grasses and forbs.

While the former should be reversed to reestablish the historic dimensions of the complex, the latter can be accepted as a consequence of the change of use, and as a beneficial development that tends to reduce erosion.

Current Management Practices

The open areas are mowed periodically throughout the growing season to maintain a short grass cover suitable for walking over.

Recommendations

4A. The trees behind the cotton gin house should be thinned and the scrub cleared to reestablish an

open space where the saw mill yard was in the 1940s.

4B. The grass cover throughout the complex should be maintained by periodic mowing as it is now. Bare patches beside buildings should be treated as recommended above in 2C.

4C. The present tree canopy should be preserved; the condition of trees should be monitored to ensure public safety, and when a tree is removed another should be planted. The historic mixture of hardwoods, mostly oaks, and pines should be continued.

5. Location of Signs

Issues

There will be a need for a sign near the junction of Ethridge Road and Johnson Mill Road to direct visitors to the proposed parking lot.

There is a need for signs within the central complex identifying the individual buildings. Some visitors are not adept at reading plans or brochures, and many probably do not know enough to deduce the function of a building from its form and contents. However signs can be very intrusive, as by definition they have to be noticeable and they were not part of the historic scene.

Current Management Practices

On Mule Day temporary signs, usually numbers relating to the plan in the brochure, are placed on buildings.

Recommendations

5A. As most visitors arrive at the farm traveling south on Ethridge Road, a sign should be erected on that road before the junction with Johnson Mill Road, naming the farm and directing visitors to the parking lot.

SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE HERITAGE FARM

LANDSCAPE MASTER PLAN

5B. Signs at the central complex should be kept to a minimum. There will be a need for signs at the parking lot and tenant's place, but at the farm yards and buildings signs should not be necessary if a brochure is produced that clearly identifies each structure. The present practice of using temporary signs during Mule Day should be continued until such a brochure is available.

5C. The issue of the type of signs and content of the brochure should be considered further when more documentary research has been done into the history of the farm.

6. The Use of the Tenant's Place

Issues

As noted above there is need for a place for visitor reception and orientation upon arrival. Preacher Riley's place would be the first group of buildings visitors encounter when they arrive, if they park in the proposed lot off Johnson Mill Road. This makes it the best point for visitor orientation. This place now stands empty. It is probably the least altered sharecropper's house left on the property, so it provides an opportunity to tell the story of sharecropping and to remember the various tenant families who made their homes on the Shields-Ethridge Farm.

Existing Conditions

The buildings appear to be in need of major repairs, but they can be saved, and they could be rehabilitated to provide visitor orientation facilities. Most of the old yard is neglected but not yet overgrown. The old vegetable garden plot is now used as a field where plowing with mules is demonstrated.

Recommendations

6A. A plan to rehabilitate Preacher Riley's house as a visitors center should be developed. This plan

should consider issues such as the preservation of the integrity of the building during rehabilitation; the type and number of visitor facilities required, and accessibility to the handicapped.

6B. The outbuildings should be repaired, some might only be stabilized, but the small barn might be useful for the storage of maintenance equipment.

6C. The old yard around the house should be maintained as an open space in mown grass. Not enough is known at this time about the historic appearance of the yard to propose any restoration work, but, if more information can be obtained, that is an option that should be considered as part of an interpretation program.

6D. A self-contained restroom containing a vault to hold waste effluent and requiring periodic pumping out should be located in the vicinity of the former privy.

7. Use of the Schoolhouse

Issues

The Foundation is rehabilitating the schoolhouse and intends to use it as part of its interpretive program. It is of the size to make it useful for meetings and presentations to groups, but it is remote from the body of the Foundation's farm property, making logistics problematic. It needs its own parking area and restroom facility.

Recommendations

7A. A self-contained restroom containing a vault to hold waste effluent and requiring periodic pumping out should be discretely located near the schoolhouse.

7B. A gravel parking area for 10-15 cars should be created among the trees north of the schoolhouse. A school bus stop should also be created along

SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE HERITAGE FARM

LANDSCAPE MASTER PLAN

Ethridge Road by the schoolhouse to discharge and pick up students, with a footpath leading up to the building. If future need demands, an overflow parking area should be located on the opposite side of Ethridge Road slightly to the south of the schoolhouse. This area is on family property, not on the Foundation's.

8. Other Site Attractions and Trails from the Central Complex and Other Points of Interest

Issues

Although the farm buildings and their contents are the main attractions for visitors to the farm, there are other points of historical interest, notably the schoolhouse, areas for nature study, and areas for passive recreation, such as picnicking and fishing. Some visitors would welcome an opportunity to go for a walk just to enjoy the exercise and the natural setting.

Current Management Practices

Visitors can walk or drive along roads between various points on the property, but there are no trails open to visitors off the roads.

Provision is made to take some groups on a wagon ride from the main complex to the schoolhouse. There is no set route for this wagon ride, it sometimes cuts across the field south of the schoolhouse.

Recommendations

8A. The old track in the woods running from the site of Bass Griffeth's place (formerly the Emory Shields' place) to the schoolhouse should be reopened. This track in combination with Johnson Mill Road should be used as a route for both walkers and wagons between the central complex and the schoolhouse. It would provide a safer and

more scenic route than Ethridge Road and it would cause less disturbance to farmland (that is not Foundation property) than a route across the open field.

8B. A passive recreation area should be developed at the pond. This would afford visitors the opportunity to picnic and relax before or after a visit to the farm's historical attractions, and give them the feeling of spending time in the country. This area is convenient to both the historical complex and the parking and visitor reception area.

8C. A loop trail should be developed for walkers on Foundation property between the central complex, the pond area, the Middle Oconee River and back to the parking area. This trail should be laid out in the field. It could lead beside the creeks that run westward to the river and take walkers through a mixture of woodlands and wetland habitats. There would be considerable natural interest at various times of the year. The route might include the banks of the fishing pond to the west of the dairy barn. The trail should be for walkers only and should be designed to discourage use of bikes or other vehicles that create erosion problems.

9. Protection of the Wider Farm Landscape Issues

It is important that the historic characteristics of the farm landscape around and beyond the central area be protected against inappropriate development. If measures are taken to achieve this they will affect areas outside the ownership of the Foundation.

Historic Characteristics

The historic characteristics of the landscape have been discussed in previous sections of this report. In summary, the important characteristics outside

SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE HERITAGE FARM

LANDSCAPE MASTER PLAN

the central complex of farm buildings are the following:

- what remains of the historic pattern of open fields;
- soil conservation terraces that indicate the historic use of these fields;
- the small scale of the mosaic of stands within the woodlands;
- the earth construction and historic alignment of Johnson Mill Road;
- the schoolhouse yard;
- the historic appearance of the Shields-Ethridge homeplace, beside the complex of farm buildings; and
- the tenant homesteads that dot the landscape.

Recommendations

9A. The Foundation should encourage family members to grant conservation easements covering their share of the Shields-Ethridge Farm. The objectives of the easements would be to preserve the farmland in agricultural use, to maintain the characteristic patterns of fields and woods, to provide scenic easements along the roads, and to preserve the tenant homesteads. The latter pertains more to the preservation of the land use, than to any strict building preservation, although certain physical changes, such as the introduction of mobile homes, seem incompatible.

9B. The Foundation should seek to acquire the ownership of Johnson Mill Road in order to preserve historic landscape character and to provide controlled access to the farm.

10. Protection of the Wider Natural Landscape

Issues

Beyond the historic characteristics of the farm landscape, the woodlands, streams, floodplains and

watersheds of the Foundation's property are part of a regional landscape that is undergoing the process of urbanization. What appears today as abundant natural lands is in fact shrinking at a rapid rate. The western half of the Foundation's property today is wooded, but in the past was used for forestry and agriculture. In the future the Foundation may wish to again cut timber, or establish agricultural fields in order to generate revenue.

Natural Characteristics

To the west of the farm core wooded land with various age stands, spread over various topography, extends to the Middle Oconee river.

Current Management

Over the past few decades there has been some timbering, cattle grazing, and some domestic dumping. Recently or at least since this area became part of the Foundation's, these activities have been limited.

Recommendations

10A. The Foundation should consider granting a conservation easement to a land trust organization to assume a fiduciary responsibility for environmental protection. In partnership with a land trust the Foundation can pursue its interests, such as developing future revenue from forestry or agriculture, within the context of environmental conservation and historical appropriateness. A conservation easement has the potential for tax benefits to the Foundation.

SHIELDS-ETHRIDGE HERITAGE FARM

LANDSCAPE MASTER PLAN

VI. FINAL WORDS

The Shields-Ethridge family and the Foundation have shown admirable restraint in the management of their property. The farm retains so much of its historic character because very few "improvements" have been made, and no inappropriate commercial developments have been introduced. It is hoped that the very special qualities of the place will be preserved. In an era when entertainment environments based on history are increasingly being developed, the Shields-Ethridge possesses what most of these do not: *authenticity*. The Foundation should safeguard this precious resource. Although some changes have been recommended in this plan to accommodate visitors, they should be carried out with the wise restraint and concern for the historic character of the place that has been shown so far.

Measures required for the preservation of the historic resources should be given priority over measures that are recommended for the accommodation of visitors. It should be recognized however, that the two are interconnected. As visitation to the farm increases and there is a wider recognition of its historic importance, so the Foundation may find it easier to obtain funds from private foundations and public agencies.