

ROBERTSON-O'BRIANT FARM

HISTORIC STRUCTURE REPORT



Prepared for
Wake County Parks, Recreation, and Open Space

Prepared by
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Parks, Recreation,
and Open Space



Historic Oak View
County Park

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PROJECT HISTORY AND METHODOLOGY

In 2008, Wake County Parks, Recreation, and Open Space (PROS) purchased a 122.35-acre tobacco farm at 15328 Creedmoor Road in northern Wake County. A preliminary examination of extant structures and preliminary documentary research by PROS staff from Historic Oak View County Park (HOVCP) and Lake Crabtree County Park (LCCP) suggested the site possesses extraordinary historical significance. The North Carolina Historic Preservation Office (NC HPO) has included this property on its National Register of Historic Places Study List and in the “Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County, North Carolina (ca.1770-1941)” National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Nomination.

Based on this preliminary examination, PROS determined in-depth research and documentation were warranted. This document serves as the first step in the preservation and interpretation of the Robertson-O'Briant Farm, and it may be used subsequently to prepare a nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, to be included in the upcoming revisions to the PROS Master Plan, to develop a master plan for a future park at this site, or to guide future preservation efforts of the extant structures and farm landscape, as resources allow.

This report contains a preliminary property history that includes the Robertson and O'Briant families' stories, agricultural history of the farm, and contextual history of the region. PROS staff made visits to the property on September 21, 2011, November 23, 2011, December 28, 2011, January 13, 2012, and February 27, 2012, to assess and photo-document the property. This information was used for thorough architectural descriptions of the house and outbuildings, as well as to assess the condition of the site and its preservation needs. This report also includes recommendations for future public interpretation based on the significance of the site and the potential for cooperation with existing Wake County parks. This report only begins to describe the rich story and historical significance of this site, so it concludes with suggestions for continued research as these projects progress.

The following PROS staff contributed to all or part of this report: Cheri Szcodronski (HOVCP), Rebekah Valasquez (HOVCP), and Matthew Fryar (LCCP), with additional assistance from HOVCP staff members Emily Catherman, Sara Drumheller, Jared Carson, Jennifer Dumond, Kathleen Hebert, Jim McPherson, and Katie Spencer.

INTRODUCTION

The Robertson-O'Briant Farm was started in the 1840s by John Robertson, who bought several adjacent parcels of land stretching from Ledge of Rock Creek to Beaver Dam Creek, both now flooded as part of the Falls Lake Reservoir. Robertson constructed the original hall-parlor house on the property, and he tended livestock and grew oats, wheat, and corn, as well as managing a general store. His son, James, inherited the property and added cash crops including Irish potatoes, bright leaf tobacco, and cotton to the livestock operations.

In 1888, James Robertson sold the farm to John O'Briant and moved to Raleigh. O'Briant was a Civil War veteran who came to Wake County when the Granville Wilt made tobacco cultivation unprofitable in Granville County. He grew bright leaf tobacco, managed the general store, and donated land for a school for white children. His son, William, took over the farm in 1903, as agriculture shifted back to potatoes when the Granville Wilt came to Wake County. After his death, William O'Briant's wife, Lena, took ownership of the property, and their sons divided the family businesses, with Wilbur taking over management of the general store and Linster continuing to farm the land.

In 1953, Lena O'Briant passed away, dividing the land among her four surviving children, who sold it to their nephew, William Thomas Moore. The land then changed hands several times as real estate investment property before being sold to Wake County Parks, Recreation, and Open Space in 2008.

Most of the structures are largely unaltered and retain most of their original elements. This document provides thorough description and photo-documentation of extant buildings and the farm landscape in order to document the floor plans, construction methods, and materials. Most of the buildings are in fair condition but suffer from neglect, and this document thoroughly describes and photo-documents the preservation needs of each building, suggests corrective action, and offers a timeline for making repairs, if practical. In some cases, the structure has been neglected too long and cannot be preserved, in which cases documentation and demolition is recommended in order to balance consideration of historical significance with the importance of public safety.

One of the most significant aspects of the farm is that its extant structures and landscape reflect changing construction methods, architectural styles, and farming techniques from the early nineteenth century through the late twentieth century. For example, the materials used to build the potato-curing barns demonstrate shifts from log to frame construction; the farmhouse demonstrates the shift from Federal to Greek Revival to Victorian architectural styles; and the conversion of the tobacco-curing barns from wood-burning to natural gas demonstrates a shift in farming techniques. Perhaps most important is that these shifts are easily visible in the most basic examination of the farm's surviving structures, making it possible to effectively interpret these themes to a public audience. Interpretive recommendations are included in this document.

The Robertson-O'Briant Farm is a property rich in history that this document only begins to explore. Its story spans at least 170 years, and in preparing this report, only a small amount could be extensively researched. Therefore, this document concludes with suggestions for further investigation, including not only additional research in documentary resources, but also further exploration of construction methods, the farm landscape, and archaeological resources.

A number of photos are included throughout the report to offer examples of architectural details and preservation needs, and additional photos thoroughly documenting each extant structure's significant elements and damages are available.

HISTORY OF THE ROBERTSON-O'BRIANT FARM

INTRODUCTION

Wake County was created in 1771 by combining portions of Johnston, Cumberland, and Orange Counties, on the border of the Piedmont and Coastal Plain regions. It has three major soil types especially suitable for producing cotton, tobacco, corn, and sweet potatoes. The western section of the county, where New Light Township and the Robertson-O'Briant Farm are located, lies in the Triassic basin. This area is characterized by red and gray sandstones and shales, as well as rock outcroppings that have made cultivating crops difficult or even impossible. The county was inhabited by English yeoman farmers during the colonial era, and continued to be rural and agricultural through the Second World War.¹

A MODEST BEGINNING: THE ROBERTSONS (1837 – 1888)

In 1837, John Herbert Robertson purchased forty-three acres from John Pennington.² These forty-three acres are located south of the present-day Boyce Bridge Road and contain the Pennington Family Cemetery. The only Pennington grave still visibly marked is John Pennington's wife, Dililah (Dilly).³ However, the cemetery contains a number of graves that are no longer marked. After the sale, the Penningtons continued to farm their remaining acreage south of the Robertson's land with free and enslaved African American labor.⁴

Most Wake County inhabitants prior to the Civil War were subsistence farmers who raised enough crops and livestock to feed their families, pay their taxes, and purchase goods they could not make themselves – Pennington and Robertson included. The centers of these farms were likely small, one- or two-room log homes surrounded by simple log outbuildings.

¹ Kelly A. Lally and Todd Johnson, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County, North Carolina (ca. 1770-1941)," Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, Wake County Planning Department, March 18, 1993, 7-8.

² Wake County Register of Deeds Office, "John Pennington to John Robertson," Deed Book 17, Page 001, January 13, 1846, Raleigh, NC. (Note: The deed text indicates the agreement was made July 19, 1837, however, it was not recorded in the Register of Deeds Office until January, 13, 1846.)

³ Ancestry.com, *North Carolina Marriage Bonds, 1741-1868* (Provo, UT: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2000), www.ancestry.com (accessed February 26, 2012).

⁴ Ancestry.com, *1830 United States Federal Census* (accessed February 26, 2012).

Although these small farm complexes were common, no complete extant examples remain in Wake County.⁵

Robertson expanded his farm by buying adjacent land from the Wilkins family, stretching from Ledge of Rock Creek on the west to Beaver Dam Creek on the east. He added eleven acres to the Pennington tract in 1842, twenty acres in 1843, and one acre in 1844.⁶ (See image 1.) In 1844, Robertson married Eliza Beck, and they likely built the original hall-parlor home that remains extant on the Robertson-O'Briant Farm today.⁷ Their son, James, was born in 1854.⁸

Early Wake County farmers frequently raised horses, cattle, sheep, and chickens that foraged in the forests and along streams most of the year. In the spring, these animals were corralled and fattened for slaughter or sale. Corn and pork were the primary foodstuffs, and in the 1850 Agricultural Census, Robertson reported growing ninety-three bushels of wheat, 375 bushels of corn, and twenty-five bushels of oats on seventy-five acres, as well as keeping three horses, seven cattle, six milk cows, two working oxen, six sheep, and thirty-six pigs. He added another seventy-eight acres of land to his farm in 1848 that were not included on the census.⁹

"Free persons of colour" were a minority in Wake County prior to the Civil War, most of whom worked as farmhands.¹⁰ One such family was the Inscores. To help manage the farm, the Robertsons hired Nancy Inscore as a domestic laborer, and she lived on the property with her three children. By 1860, Nancy was still working for the Robertsons as a domestic laborer,

⁵ Lally and Johnson, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County," 8-11, 109-110.

⁶ Wake County Register of Deeds Office, "John Wilkins to John H. Robertson," Deed Book 16, Page 32, November 11, 1843, "Clement Wilkins to John H. Robertson," Deed Book 16, Page 34, November 13, 1843, "Clement Wilkins and Susannah Wilkins to John H. Robertson," Deed Book 17, Page 2, January 13, 1846, Raleigh, NC.

⁷ Ancestry.com, *North Carolina Marriage Collection, 1741-2004* (accessed February 26, 2012).

⁸ Ancestry.com, *North Carolina Death Certificates, 1909-1975* (accessed February 13, 2012).

⁹ Lally and Johnson, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County," 10-11; U.S. Census Bureau, *1850 United States Federal Census, Production of Agriculture*, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, NC; Wake County Register of Deeds Office, "Clint Wilkins to John H. Robertson," Deed Book 17, Page 479, May 18, 1848, Raleigh, NC.

¹⁰ Lally and Johnson, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County," 22.

probably helping to maintain the house and raise James, while Nancy's son, Roland, was working for the Robertsons as a field hand.¹¹

By 1840, two-fifths of the Wake County population were enslaved African Americans, and by 1860 over one-quarter of the white population owned as many as twenty slaves. This middle class of slaveowners generally owned several hundred acres of land, some being agricultural complexes similar to those of large plantations, others smaller farms more similar to yeoman, and some with large labor forces for large-scale commercial production, and the rest with just a few laborers to maintain the farm's independence. The Robertsons owned two slaves, both men in their forties. These men probably worked side-by-side with the Robertsons and the Inscores. Slaves lived in a variety of housing throughout the county according to the means of their owners. Many middle class slaveowners constructed log houses for their slaves, and few of these have survived.¹² In addition to free and slave labor, the Robertsons probably had a number of agricultural outbuildings to support their independence as farmers. None of these structures remain at the Robertson-O'Briant Farm.

Despite the abundant labor on the farm in 1860, Robertson reported only twenty-five acres of improved farm land on the 1860 Agricultural Census, producing forty bushels of wheat and 150 bushels of corn while keeping three cattle, two milk cows, one working ox, and twenty pigs.¹³ Robertson also managed a general store on the northern portion of his property, and this may have been a greater source of income than agriculture by this time. (See image 1.)

¹¹ Ancestry.com, *1850 United States Federal Census* (accessed February 13, 2012); Ancestry.com, *1860 United States Federal Census*, (accessed February 13, 2012)

¹² Lally and Johnson, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County," 15-23; Ancestry.com, *1860 United States Federal Census* (accessed February 13, 2012); Ancestry.com, *1860 U.S. Federal Census - Slave Schedules* (accessed February 13, 2012).

¹³ U.S. Census Bureau, *1860 United States Federal Census, Productions of Agriculture*, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, NC.



Image 1: Shaffer's Map of Wake County NC, 1887
 North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
Note Robertson's Store and the expanse of Robertson's property between
 Ledge of Rock Creek and Beaverdam Creek

When the Civil War broke out in 1861, Robertson was 55 years of age and did not enlist in the Confederate Army. His son James also did not serve, since he was only seven years old at the time.¹⁴ Robertson passed away in 1876, and James inherited the farm. He married Valeria Josephine Yearly in 1878, and the two had five children: Sallie was born in 1878, Elizabeth in 1880, Luther in 1880, Robert in 1883, and James in 1890.¹⁵

Emancipation had a profound effect on the labor system of the South, and some freedmen chose to stay to work for their former masters while others sought jobs elsewhere.¹⁶ Those who were skilled in the fields obtained jobs as farm laborers, including John Ford, who went to work for James and Valeria Robertson around 1880.¹⁷ Landlords typically offered tenant

¹⁴ The National Park Service *Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System* at www.itd.nps.gov/cwss (accessed February 13, 2012) indicates a number of men named John Robertson enlisted in the Confederate Army. Ancestry.com *Civil War Soldiers Database* at www.ancestry.com (accessed February 13, 2012) indicates only one of these men was from Wake County, and he was only twenty years of age at the time of enlistment.

¹⁵ Ancestry.com, *1880 United States Federal Census* (accessed February 13, 2012); Ancestry.com, *1900 United States Federal Census* (accessed February 13, 2012); Ancestry.com, *1920 United States Federal Census* (accessed February 13, 2012).

¹⁶ Lally and Johnson, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County," 33-34.

¹⁷ Ancestry.com, *1880 United States Federal Census* (accessed February 13, 2012).

workers a plot of land as large as fifty acres in exchange for a share of the crop to cover rent, tools, and other supplies. Tenant houses were either former slave houses or simple, new buildings set away from the landowner's house.¹⁸ No structures from this time period remain at the Robertson-O'Briant Farm, but it is likely that the extant tenant house was constructed on the site of an earlier structure.

With Ford's help, Robertson's farm produced 200 bushels of corn on twenty acres, forty bushels of wheat on four acres, eight bales of cotton on ten acres, ten bushels of Irish potatoes on one acre, and 1000 pounds of tobacco on three acres, and included two horses, one ox, seven cattle, two milk cows producing fifty pounds of butter, one sheep, and ten pigs.¹⁹ These products reflect a post-Civil War decline in livestock agriculture (caused in part by 1870s legislation requiring livestock be fenced), as well as the rise in cotton and tobacco crops (caused in part by the creation of a Cotton Exchange in Raleigh in the late 1860s, in part by the increasing demand for bright leaf tobacco by Civil War veterans nationwide, and in part by the expansion of railroads in the 1880s and 1890s).²⁰

THE PROSPERITY OF BRIGHT LEAF TOBACCO: JOHN ROBERT O'BRIANT (1888 – 1900)

Granville County, which borders Wake County to the north, was well-suited to growing bright leaf tobacco. Compared to the darker, coarser variety, bright leaf tobacco is a delicate, sweet-scented, fine leaf. The bright leaf variation requires light, infertile, siliceous (gravely and sandy) soil, which is unsuitable for cultivation of almost everything else and is commonly found on the North Carolina-Virginia border. The area of Granville County known as Dutchville was an especially prosperous tobacco-producing community, and through the early 1800s, Granville County led the state in tobacco production with North Carolina growers exporting their crops through Virginia. Granville County soil was so famed that later it would be shipped as far as Australia in hope of starting tobacco business abroad. It wasn't until the 1880s that the crop

¹⁸ Lally and Johnson, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County," 33-34.

¹⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, *1860 United States Federal Census, Production of Agriculture*, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, NC.

²⁰ Lally and Johnson, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County," 32-39, 48-49.

caught on in Wake County, and New Light Township, bordering Granville County and with similar soils, was one of the primary locations.²¹ (See image 2.)

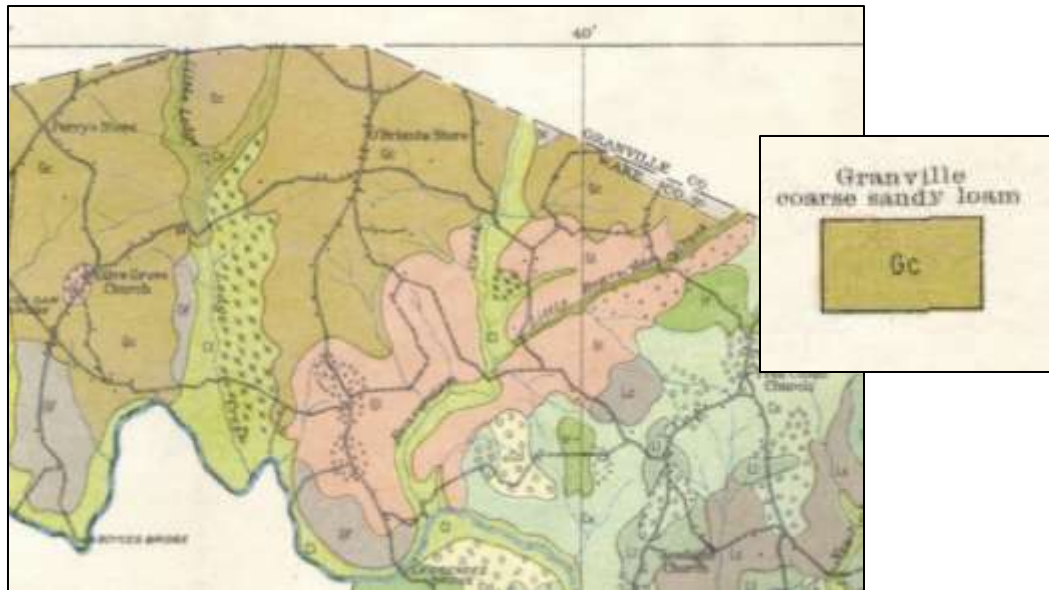


Image 2: 1914 Soil map, North Carolina, Wake County
North Carolina State Archives

Note the prevalence of “Granville coarse sandy loam” surrounding O’Briants Store

In the 1880s, the tobacco wilt struck Granville County. Now known as Granville Wilt, this plant disease is caused by a bacteria transferred in soil or water that causes the plant to wilt and die. The disease caused farmers to lose as little as one-quarter of their crop or as much as their entire crop. Many of the farmers affected chose to relocate to northwestern Wake County. These uprooted farmers congregated in an area of New Light Township known as Sandy Plain, where the soil composition was similar to that of Dutchville, making it perfect for tobacco cultivation.²²

²¹ Nannie May Tilley, *The Bright Tobacco Industry: 1860-1929* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1948), 3-4, 386, 547; Cornelius O. Cathey, *Agriculture in North Carolina Before the Civil War* (Raleigh, NC: Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1974), 34-36; K. Todd Johnson and Elizabeth Reid Murray, *Wake: Capital County of North Carolina, Volume II: Reconstruction to 1920* (Raleigh, NC: Wake County, NC, 2008), 134-135.

²² Kelly A. Lally, *The Historic Architecture of Wake County North Carolina* (Raleigh, NC: Wake County Government, 1994), 83-84; North Carolina State University College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, Plant Pathology Extension, “Granville Wilt,” <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/pp/notes/Tobacco/tcin002/tcin002.htm> (accessed February 6, 2012); Lally and Johnson, “Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County,” 50; Catherine W. Bishir and Michael T. Southern, *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Piedmont North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 134.

One of these unfortunate Dutchville farmers was John Robert O'Briant, who bought James Robertson's Wake County farm in 1888. O'Briant was born in 1834 in Granville County, the first of six children of Thomas O'Briant (1806-1880) and Elizabeth Gordon O'Briant. His sister Mary was born in 1839, brother William (known as Henry) in 1841, sister Nancy in 1846, brother Samuel in 1848, and sister Mildred in 1852.²³



Image 3: *John Robert O'Briant, c. 1862*
Robert Keech, www.ancestry.com

O'Briant married Edna Cash on October 12, 1861.²⁴ They had seven children: Ella was born in 1862 and died in her teens, Corena was born in 1866, Virginia was born in 1867, Rebecca was born in 1868, Sarrah was born in 1870, William was born in 1872, and Charles was born in 1874.²⁵

Both John and his brother Henry fought for the Confederacy in the Civil War. They enlisted in the 23rd North Carolina Infantry, Henry in Company "I" on June 17, 1861, followed by John in Company "E" on July 8, 1862. The regiment was first stationed in Virginia and fought at Malvern Hill, Fredericksburg, and Chancellorsville before being sent north to Gettysburg,

²³ Ancestry.com, *1850 United States Federal Census* (accessed February 11, 2012); Ancestry.com, *1860 United States Federal Census* (accessed February 11, 2012).

²⁴ Ancestry.com, *North Carolina Marriage Collection, 1741-2004* (accessed February 26, 2012).

²⁵ Ancestry.com, *1870 United States Federal Census* (accessed February 11, 2012); Ancestry.com, *1880 United States Federal Census* (accessed February 11, 2012).

Pennsylvania in 1863. They returned to Virginia and fought at Spotsylvania Court House, Cold Harbor, and Petersburg. The unit was mustered out on April 9, 1865, at Appomattox Court House.²⁶ (See image 4.)



Image 4: 23rd North Carolina Infantry Regimental Flag
Robert Keech, www.ancestry.com

Note the significant battles in which the regiment participated are sewn into their flag

Union troops captured John O'Briant in July of 1864 and sent him to Camp Chase, Ohio, outside Columbus. (See image 5.) Early in the war, the camp served as a training site for Union Army volunteers, but late in 1861 it became a prison for Confederate soldiers. The prison initially had very lenient discipline, with prisoners even being permitted to wander the streets of Columbus, but in 1862 these policies were changed and stricter rules enacted. As with most Civil War prisons, conditions were poor. Inhabitants suffered from overcrowding, poor food quality, exposure to the elements, and a smallpox epidemic. Nearly 10,000 men were imprisoned there by April of 1865, and over 2,000 of these men died. Fortunately, O'Briant was

²⁶ Historical Data Systems, comp., "American Civil War Soldiers" (Provo, UT: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 1999), www.ancestry.com (accessed February 11, 2012); Historical Data Systems, comp., "American Civil War Regiments" (Provo, UT: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 1999), www.ancestry.com (accessed February 11, 2012).

paroled in March of 1865 and was included in a prisoner exchange at Boulware Camp, Cox's Wharves, Virginia.²⁷



Image 5: *Camp Chase, c.1861-1865*
The Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, OH

On his return from battle, O'Briant did what most North Carolinians did after the Civil War and returned to farming, growing tobacco on his Granville County farm. The Civil War changed the tobacco industry in North Carolina when soldiers passing through the region first tasted bright leaf tobacco. These soldiers preferred the popular North Carolina variety, and soon the demand for bright leaf dramatically increased. An adept farmer, O'Briant recognized the economic profitability of the crop and reported cultivating seven acres of tobacco in Granville County in the 1880 census. He also grew twenty acres of corn, eight acres of wheat, six acres of oats, one acre of sweet potatoes, and 1/8 acre of Irish potatoes, as well as tending one ox, twenty-seven sheep, thirteen pigs, and eight cows, including two milk cows that produced fifty pounds of butter. The Granville farm was worked by fifty white laborers and fifty African

²⁷ Robert Keech, comp., "John Robert O'Briant 23rd NC Co E CSA Service Record," trees.ancestry.com/tree/25798089/person/1758951545/media/1?pgnum=1&pg=0&pgpl=pid%7cpgNum (accessed February 11, 2012); Ohio Historical Society, "Camp Chase," <http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/entry.php?rec=662> (accessed February 11, 2012).

American laborers, and O'Briant paid a total of \$275 in wages to these workers that year.²⁸ When the Granville Wilt of the 1880s made tobacco cultivation unprofitable in Granville County, O'Briant purchased 305 acres of Wake County farmland from John Robertson with his business partner, Junius Beck. The two paid three thousand dollars for the property.²⁹

By 1890, O'Briant's Wake County farm was connected to the Durham and Raleigh markets by water and rail. It bordered Beaver Dam Creek, which flowed into the Neuse River toward Raleigh, and a railroad had been constructed through Creedmoor, connecting New Light Township easily to Durham. (See image 6.) The expanding railroad system resulted in increasing dependence on shipping consumer goods in and cash crops out, especially bright leaf tobacco, which brought three times the price of cotton.³⁰



Image 6: Colton's map of North and South Carolina, 1891

North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC

Note the web of rivers and railroads connecting New Light Township to Durham and Raleigh

²⁸ Johnson and Murray, *Wake: Volume II*, 129; U.S. Census Bureau, *1880 United States Federal Census, Productions in Agriculture*, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, NC.

²⁹ Wake County Register of Deeds Office, "J.A.J. Robertson to J.B. Beck and J. R. O'Briant," Deed Book 101, Page 282, February 9, 1888, Raleigh, NC.

³⁰ Lally and Johnson, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County," 112-113.

John O'Briant was not the only member of his family to abandon Granville for Wake County; his brother Henry also lived there. Henry was a member of the New Light school board and headed up the founding of schools in the up-and-coming tobacco district.³¹ Education expanded greatly in Wake County after the Civil War because state funding for public schools became available. In the 1870s and 1880s, forty-six schools were constructed for white children and forty-two for black children countywide. The curriculum included reading (often taught from the Bible), spelling, writing, grammar, arithmetic, geography, psychology, and hygiene.³² School officials in New Light Township hoped to make theirs the first township in Wake County without a single illiterate.³³ At Henry's request, John donated one acre for a school "for the children of the white race," while Margaret Mordacai of Raleigh donated an acre nearby for "the use and benefit of the children of the colored race."³⁴ (See image 7.)

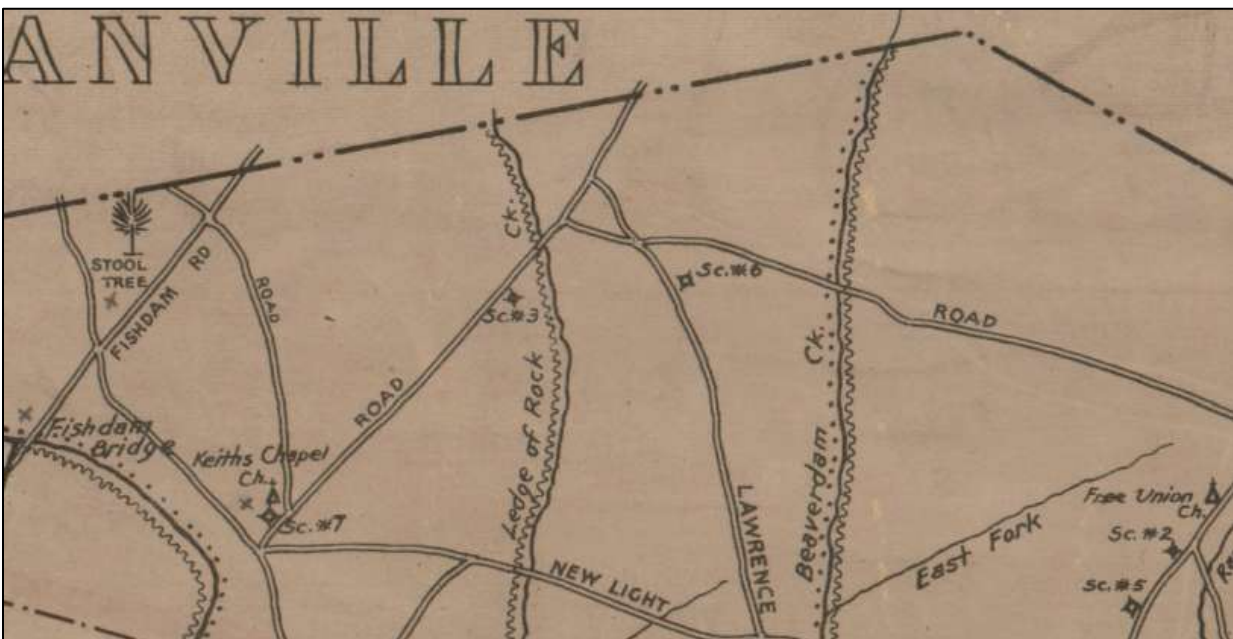


Image 7: School Map of Wake County, North Carolina, 1904
North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, NC

Note school #3 was for African American children and school #6 was for white children.

³¹ Wake County Register of Deeds Office, "Jno R. O'Briant & Wife Edna O'Briant to W.H.H. O'Briant & W.E. Allen, Public School Committee of District No. 5," Deed Book 135, Page 54, January 2, 1893, Raleigh, NC.

³² Lally and Johnson, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County," 44-45.

³³ Johnson and Murray, *Wake: Volume II*, 290.

³⁴ Wake County Register of Deeds Office, "Jno R. O'Briant & Wife Edna O'Briant to W.H.H. O'Briant & W.E. Allen, Public School Committee of District No. 5," Deed Book 135, Page 54, January 2, 1893, Raleigh, NC; Wake County Register of Deeds Office, "Mrs. Margaret B. Mordecai to J.A.J. Robertson, W.E. Allen, and W.H.H. O'Briant, Public School Committee, District 5, New Light Township, Wake County," Book 79, Page 574-575, Raleigh, NC

Local districts were responsible for funding school construction, so most were modest frame buildings heated with stoves and furnished with benches.³⁵ The Sandy Plain Elementary School was a one-room schoolhouse that served white children in grades one through seven. The teachers were usually from outside the community and boarded at the nearby home of Sirathner Cannady, a tobacco farm still standing not far from the Robertson-O'Briant Farm. African American children attended New Light Elementary School. In 1921, Sandy Plain received Wake County funds to build a new school that served both elementary and high school students, so Frank Aiken purchased the Sandy Plain Elementary School and moved it across Highway 50 to his farm for use as a tenant house.³⁶ The structure burned to the ground in 2011.

THE RETURN OF THE GRANVILLE WILT: WILLIAM AND LENA O'BRIANT (1900 – 1940)

By 1900, John and Edna O'Briant had returned to Dutchville where they lived with their youngest son, Charley.³⁷ Their eldest son, William, took over the Wake County farm. William married Lena Belle Jackson in 1896, and they had five children that survived to adulthood, Arbelle (born 1897), Lomo (born 1901), Mozelle (born 1903), Wilbur Thomas (born 1906), and Linster Jackson (born 1912). They also lost two children, a stillborn son in 1898 and a son named David who was born 1909 and died in 1913.³⁸ William and his wife purchased 140 acres of the farm he grew up on the following year.

By the turn of the century, New Light Township was enjoying the prosperity of tobacco farming, so when William took over the farm, he was able to afford a large and fashionable Victorian addition to their home. They hired a local builder, probably Edgar Gooch, to design and construct the Victorian addition on the original hall-parlor house.³⁹ The two-story, triple-A-roof style of the addition was especially popular in Wake County. He continued to grow bright leaf tobacco and potatoes, so they also constructed new tobacco and potato barns using frame

³⁵ Lally and Johnson, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County," 44.

³⁶ Lally, *Historic Architecture*, 85-86.

³⁷ Ancestry.com, *1900 United States Federal Census* (accessed February 26, 2012).

³⁸ Ancestry.com, *1900 United States Federal Census* (accessed February 26, 2012); Ancestry.com, *1910 United States Federal Census* (accessed February 26, 2012); Ancestry.com, *1920 United States Federal Census* (accessed February 26, 2012); User rmd30195, "Moore Family Tree, <http://trees.ancestry.com/pt/PersonMatch.aspx?tid=34336493&pid=18629050189&src=m&pg=32772&pgPL=pid> (accessed February 26, 2012).

³⁹ Wake County Register of Deeds Office, "John R. O'Briant and wife Edna to William R. O'Briant and wife Lena," Book 187, Page 52, August 18, 1903, Raleigh, NC; Lally, *Historic Architecture*, 301.

construction rather than the earlier log construction methods, which was common to middle class agricultural complexes throughout the county during this time.

William not only grew bright leaf tobacco on his father's farm, but he also managed the general store established by the Robertsons.⁴⁰ Known as Bill O'Briant's General Store, William supplied rice, sugar, salt, snuff, kerosene, sewing thread, pencils, and candy. He allowed customers to barter for supplies if they had too little cash to purchase necessities, accepting eggs, wild strawberries and blackberries, or other items. The store served as a community center for Sandy Plain where residents went to vote, hold meetings, and discuss local news.⁴¹

The O'Briant's community was more well-known for its illegal moonshine stills than for farming in the early 1900s. Referred to as "The Harricane," it included about eighty acres of the Sandy Plain, Purnell, Stoney Hill, and New Light communities in Wake County, as well as parts of Granville and Franklin Counties.⁴² It is unclear whether the O'Briants participated in this underground whiskey still culture, but their prosperity with bright leaf tobacco and the general store probably prevented the poverty that led many residents to these illegal activities.

By 1910, four in five plantation owners rented a portion of their land to between five and nine tenant farmers, while middle class farmers relied heavily on farmhands and at least one tenant family to grow a combination of food and cash crops. The O'Briants were situated in the latter group. In the Pennington Cemetery, there is a well-marked headstone for George G. Roberson, son of Lee and Savannah Roberson. The Robersons were African American tenant farmers working on or near the O'Briant's Farm in the early 1900s. In 1900, they were living in Granville County, then moved to New Light Township in Wake County by 1910. It is probable that they were descendants of African Americans enslaved by relatives of the Robertsons, who owned land in both counties, however this connection remains unclear.⁴³

⁴⁰ Ancestry.com, *North Carolina Death Certificates, 1909-1975* (accessed February 26, 2012).

⁴¹ Lally, *Historic Architecture*, 84-87.

⁴² Lally and Johnson, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County," 132; Johnson and Murray, *Wake: Volume II*, 671-672.

⁴³ Lally and Johnson, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County," 53; Ancestry.com, *1900 - United States Federal Census* (accessed February 27, 2012); Ancestry.com, *1910 United States Federal Census* (accessed February 27, 2012); Ancestry.com, *1920 United States Federal Census* (accessed February 27, 2012).

Between the Civil War and World War I, the community of white and black tobacco farmers in Sandy Plain enjoyed relative prosperity. But around 1910, the Granville wilt spread to their farms in Wake County. Some families moved to areas where the soils were not yet infected. Others shifted from farming their own land to sharecropping or working land owned by relatives. Most farms stopped growing only tobacco and began also growing vegetables or tending milk cows, pigs, and chickens.⁴⁴ The O'Briants followed this trend by growing potatoes and tending livestock; both potato-curing sheds were added to the farm around this time.

On May 18, 1917, the Selective Service Act was passed to coordinate registration of all American males between the ages of 21 and 30 (later 18-45) to be drafted for service in World War I. There were three registration dates: June 5, 1917, included all men 21 to 31 years of age, June 5, 1918, included all men who turned 21 over the previous year, and September 12, 1918, included all men 18 to 45 years of age. William registered in the last registration period, and since the armistice came that November, it is unlikely he actually served in the war.⁴⁵

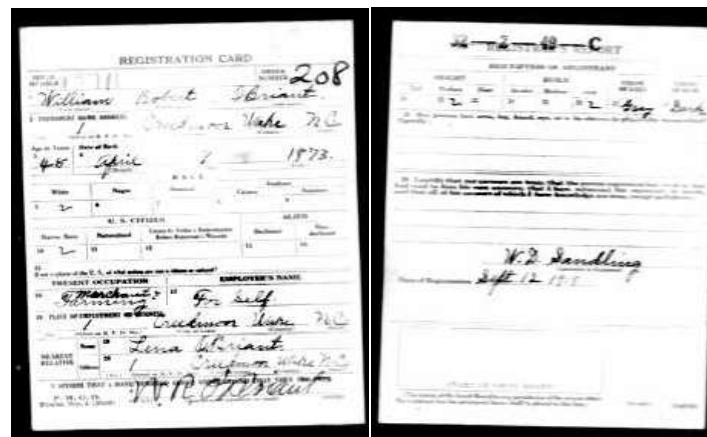


Image 8: World War I Draft Registration Card for William O'Briant
Ancestry.com

William died in 1929, and his wife, Lena, inherited the farm and store. She lived on the farm with her youngest son, Linster, and his wife, Malissa, while her oldest son, Wilber "Tommie" and his wife, Estelle, lived nearby and ran the store.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Lally, *Historic Architecture*, 84-88.

⁴⁵ Encyclopedia Britannica, "Selective Service Act," *Encyclopedia Britannica Online* (Encyclopedia Britannica Inc., 2012), <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/533193/Selective-Service-Act> (accessed February, 10, 2012); Ancestry.com, *World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918* (accessed February 10, 2012).

⁴⁶ Ancestry.com, *1930 United States Federal Census* (accessed February 26, 2012).

Farm tenancy continued to rise throughout the 1920s, and the tenant house was added to the Robertson-O'Briant farm around this time. Reflecting their place in the middle class of farmowners, it was constructed to house two families. The 1930 Federal Census shows two African American families living between Tommie and Linster O'Briant: Taylor Barham and his wife, Mary, as well as George Pegram, his wife Julie, and their four children. Both men are listed in the census as farm laborers, and they appear to have been tenant farmers for the O'Briants.⁴⁷

The tobacco industry began to rebound between the two world wars, and the O'Briant's exemplify this trend with the construction of a tobacco barn, tobacco pack house, and ordering pit around 1930. Tobacco continued to be prosperous with a wilt-resistant variety developed by E.G. Moss of the Oxford, NC Agricultural Experiment Station developed a wilt-resistant variety in 1944 preferred by many Sandy Plain farmers, probably including the O'Briants. Some even regained losses caused by the return of the Granville Wilt just prior to the First World War.⁴⁸

Agriculture went through another period of diversification during the 1920s and 1930s, increasing production of potatoes, beans, fruits, nuts, and poultry. The potato sheds at the Robertson-O'Briant Farm were converted to house poultry, probably during this time. This shift may also have been prompted by the 1933 Agricultural Adjustment Act, which initiated a tobacco crop reduction program to battle plummeting prices during the Great Depression. The O'Briants may have compensated for losses in tobacco and potato production through poultry and other livestock, so it is probable that the livestock barn was constructed around this time.⁴⁹

A NEW ERA: WAKE COUNTY PARKS, RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE (1940 – 2008)

Post-World War II farms experienced a significant change – electrification. Federal funding brought lights, refrigerators, washing machines, and other modern conveniences to the farms of rural Wake County. New homes included indoor kitchens and plumbing, and detached

⁴⁷ Lally and Johnson, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County," 69; Ancestry.com, *1930 United States Federal Census* (accessed February 26, 2012).

⁴⁸ Lally, *Historic Architecture*, 88.

⁴⁹ Lally and Johnson, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County," 72-77, 115.

kitchens were attached to older houses. This is likely when the kitchen was added to the original hall in the farmhouse, as well as the bathrooms in the parlor and central hall.⁵⁰

When Lena O'Briant passed away in 1953, her property was divided among her four surviving children, Mozelle O'Briant Brinkley, Arbelle O'Briant Emory, Linster Jackson O'Briant, and Wilbur Thomas O'Briant.⁵¹ Lomo O'Briant Moore preceded her mother in death in 1949, but in 1955, her four siblings each sold a portion of their inheritance – totaling 139 acres – to her son, William Thomas Moore, Jr., and his wife, Thelma.⁵² Mozelle, Arbelle, and Wilbur then sold their remaining parcels to Linster.⁵³

During the 1950s and 1960s, Wake County experienced a sharp decline in farms, and the Robertson-O'Briant Farm follows this unfortunate trend. It changed hands as a real estate investment property from the Moores to John and Dorothy Lee, then to Elizabeth Niven Sinclair. Sinclair owned the property for over forty years while relatives of the O'Briants continued to rent and farm there. In 2008, Wake County Parks, Recreation, and Open Space purchased the remaining 122 acres including the remaining structures to be included in the park system as open space property.⁵⁴ The Open Space Program began in 2000 with the goal of preserving 30% of Wake County land as forests, greenways, parks, meadows, fields, wetlands, floodplains and farms that have not been converted to residential, suburban or commercial development. The program is overseen by the citizen-appointed Open Space and Parks Advisory Committee and the Land Acquisition Review Committee, composed of management-level county staff.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Lally and Johnson, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County," 77, 115.

⁵¹ Ancestry.com, *North Carolina Death Certificates, 1909-1975* (accessed February 26, 2012); "Will of Lena Jackson O'Briant Allen," North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, NC.

⁵² Ancestry.com, *North Carolina Death Certificates, 1909-1975* (accessed February 26, 2012); Wake County Register of Deeds Office, "Mozelle Brinkley et al to Williams T. Moore, Jr., and wife, Thelma M. Moore," Deed Book 1201, Page 295, August 3, 1955, Raleigh, NC.

⁵³ Wake County Register of Deeds Office, "Mozelle Brinkley et al to Linster J. O'Briant," Deed Book 1201, Page 484, August 15, 1955, Raleigh, NC.

⁵⁴ Lally and Johnson, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County," 77-78; Wake County Register of Deeds Office, "William T. Moore, Jr. and Wife, Thelma M. Moore, to Williams T. Moore, Jr., Inc.," Deed Book 1414, Page 95, June 17, 1960, "William T. Moore, Jr., Inc. to John I. Lee," Deed Book 1512, Page 222-223, July 11, 1962, "John I. Lee and wife, Dorothy T. Lee, to Elizabeth Niven Sinclair," Deed Book 1592, Page 563, April 30, 1964, "Elizabeth Sinclair Family Properties, LLC to The Trust for Public Land," Deed Book 13227, Page 1877-1878, August 27, 2008, Raleigh, NC.

⁵⁵ Wake County Parks, Recreation, and Open Space, "Open Space Program," <http://www.wakegov.com/parks/openspace/default.htm> (accessed February 26, 2012).

DESCRIPTIONS OF STRUCTURES

INTRODUCTION

The Robertson-O'Briant Farm landscape includes the main house and a number of outbuildings related to daily life, tobacco cultivation, and potato cultivation. Extant structures include the farmhouse, two tobacco-curing barns and a pack house, two potato-curing sheds, a tenant house, a corn crib, the foundation of a kennel, a storage shed, an outhouse, and two wells. There is also a family cemetery on the southern end of the property. The property reflects typical antebellum, middle class farms, with a modest dwelling surrounded by agricultural outbuildings of log construction. After the Civil War, these farms, including the Robertson-O'Briant Farm, frequently shifted to frame construction and added updated architectural elements to their main dwellings.⁵⁶

THE FARMHOUSE

The farmhouse was constructed in two phases. The original house, circa 1835-1840, was a hall-parlor floor plan with a sleeping loft on the second floor. This structure now makes up the east end of the house. The west end of the house is a turn-of-the-century Victorian addition that faces Creedmoor Road.

⁵⁶ Lally and Johnson, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County, North Carolina (ca. 1770-1941)," Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, Wake County Planning Department, March 18, 1993, 105-117.

THE ORIGINAL HALL-PARLOR HOUSE

The original hall-parlor house is simple in design and has little ornamentation, reflecting the modest beginnings of Wake County's prosperous farmers. The hall-parlor plan was especially common, with the entrance into the hall and a stair leading to sleeping chambers on the second floor. It is primarily Greek Revival style architecture with some Federal style elements.⁵⁷ (See images 9-11.)

The roof is metal with gable ends facing Creedmoor Road (Highway 50). Its boxed cornice and tight eaves suggest its early nineteenth-century construction, as well as its half-round, pine log floor joists and hand-hewn sill. It retains the original weatherboard cladding and has a brick and stone pier foundation. The foundation was originally left open to ventilate the space under the house, but it is now enclosed. The front door was replaced in the mid-twentieth century while most of the first floor windows are original, six-over-six, double hung. The doors and windows appear to be in their original places. An exterior, single shoulder end chimney completes the east façade and has a very roughly-coursed stone base. It is possible the whole chimney was originally

⁵⁷ Lally and Johnson, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County," 125-129.



Image 9: *The south façade of the original hall-parlor house*



Image 10: *The east façade of the original hall-parlor house*



Image 11: *The north façade of the original hall-parlor house*

stone, but its weight would likely have caused it to pull away from the house and to be replaced with a lighter brick by the late 1900s. The stack is 1:7 common bond brick with a corbeled cap. (See image 12.)

The east façade features a shed roof porch, which includes the main entrance to the hall, the parlor window, and an opening that may have been a door to the central hall at one time. The porch features turned wood porch posts. (See image 13.) It is original to the house but was altered with the turn-of-the-century renovations. An original storage room on the east end of the porch features nineteenth-century cut nails in the weatherboard. (See image 14.) When the turn-of-the-century addition was constructed, an infill room was added to the west end of the porch. This part of the porch was constructed with modern framing and round wire nails in the weatherboard. The porch was probably enclosed at this time, and a new surround was added to provide continuity. The porch window may have been recentered to maintain symmetry.

The original hall has been altered with the addition of modern kitchen counters and appliances, but the room retains its original architecture. The original sheathing on the hall ceiling is covered by a late-twentieth-century tile ceiling and a



Image 12: *There is a roughly coursed stone base on the east exterior end chimney.*



Image 13: *The shed roof porch. Note the parlor window, possible former door to the center hall bathroom, and turned porch posts.*



Image 14: *An original storage room is on the east end of the hall-parlor porch.*

modern drop ceiling, and the linoleum flooring was installed on top of the original pine. This part of the house is transitional Federal-Greek Revival style, exemplified in the fireplace mantel. The mantel is original and features recessed panel frieze and recessed panel pilasters. (See image 15.)

The wood paneling in both the hall and the parlor is original and features flush-sheathed wainscoting. The original pine floor is visible in the parlor, and the boards are face-nailed and approximately seven to eight inches wide. (See image 16.) A modern bathroom was added to the north end of the parlor, possibly during the 1940s. The southeast parlor wall is Victorian tongue-and-groove paneling where the original staircase was removed and a wall constructed around the turn of the century. (See image 17.)

The hall-parlor house includes a sleeping loft on the second floor. It was originally accessed by a staircase leading from the hall up a few steps, then turning to the right, through the parlor to the second floor. This staircase was removed after 1900 and the wall was filled in with the same style of tongue-



Image 15: *The original hall with a modern drop ceiling, linoleum flooring, original wood paneling and wainscoting, and transitional-style mantel*



Image 16: *The parlor retains its original wood paneling, wainscoting, and pine floor.*



Image 17: *The southeast parlor wall is Victorian tongue-and-groove paneling where the original staircase was removed and filled in.*

addition. The balustrade is intact on the second floor. (See image 18.)

Two small windows look east over the shoulders of the chimney with their original single sash and recessing wood panels. (See image 19.) The original window facing Creedmoor Road is also intact, but now not visible behind the addition. This window was four-over-four glazed with a double hung sash and retains the original shutter. (See image 20.)

The loft was expanded at the turn of the century to streamline the new roofline created by the Victorian addition. There is a stove flue in the northeast corner of the loft, possibly from the later addition of a stove in the hall, which was converted to a kitchen probably in the 1940s. (See image 21.) The rafter tips are nailed and sash sawn. The second floor may now be accessed through the exterior second story windows, although it would be possible to access from the interior by removing the wall panel in the hall and the floor panel in the loft.



Image 18: *The hall-parlor sleeping loft*



Image 19: *Two small windows look east over the shoulders of the chimney and have the original single sash, recessing wood panels.*



Image 20: *The original window facing Creedmoor Road on the west façade retains its original shutter and latch.*



Image 21: *There is a stove flue in the northeast corner of the loft.*

THE VICTORIAN ADDITION EXTERIOR

Around the turn of the century, a Victorian I-house was added to the hall-parlor home facing west (Highway 50). The addition is a central hall plan, which became popular in the late nineteenth century. This house form was especially common in Wake County, and most surviving examples, including the Robertson-O'Briant farmhouse, are two-story, one-room deep structures with exterior end chimneys.⁵⁸ (See images 22-24.)

Decorative trim, such as sawn porch ornament, eave brackets, and turned porch posts, became more readily available with the expansion of the railroads around the turn of the century.⁵⁹ The farmhouse addition features many of these delicate details, however it appears that at least some of these elements were locally constructed rather than shipped by rail. The addition is nearly identical to the nearby Cannady-Brogden House, so it may have been constructed by the same builder, Edgar Gooch.⁶⁰ (See image 25.) Many

⁵⁸ Lally and Johnson, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County," 131-135.

⁵⁹ Lally and Johnson, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County," 131-135.

⁶⁰ Beth Keane, "Cannady-Brogden House," Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, Retrospective, November 2000.



Image 22: *The west façade of the Victorian addition.*



Image 23: *The northwest façade of the Victorian addition.*



Image 24: *The south façade of the Victorian addition.*



Image 25: *The National Register listed Cannady-Brogden House, which is strikingly similar to the Robertson-O'Briant House, was constructed by local builder Edgar Gooch.*

components of the addition are similar to items in the 1902 Wholesale Sash, Door and Blind Manufacturers' Association of the Northwest Universal Design Book and the 1903 E.L. Roberts & Co. catalog, both from Chicago.⁶¹ This suggests that the O'Briants wanted a home incorporating the latest styles in architectural details, so the builder may have ordered simpler stock materials

⁶¹ *Universal Design Book* (Chicago, IL: Shattock & McKay, 1902. Reprint: Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1996); *Roberts' Illustrated Millwork Catalog: A Sourcebook of Turn-of-the-Century Architectural Woodwork* (Chicago, IL: E.L. Roberts & Co, 1903. Reprint: New York, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1988). Note: Based on topography and transportation options at the turn of the century, it is likely stock materials were shipped from Baltimore companies rather than Chicago. Although these catalogs are from Chicago millwork companies, they are likely accurate representations of stock millwork available nationwide.

while using popular catalogs to gain inspiration for his own carpentry designs.

The three-bay addition is an example of the popular central gabled (triple-A) roof, which was extremely popular in Wake County around the turn of the century and may have been inspired by Gothic Revival styles.⁶² Its returned gables are a holdover from the previous popularity of Greek Revival architecture. The center gable features a decorative round louver window. Its peak features a decorative bracket similar to those in the Universal

⁶² Lally and Johnson, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County," 131-135.

Design Book but was probably constructed locally incorporating the stock bracket's half-circular shapes and spindles.⁶³ (See images 26-27.) Corner boards and a stamped tin roof offer additional decorative elements. (See image 28.) The roof retains its original weathervanes from the early twentieth century, including the original glass bulbs. (See image 29.)

The addition is flanked by external, single shoulder end chimneys. The stack patterns are an unusual random-ratio common bond brick, and they have corbeled caps matching the earlier chimney on the east façade. (See image 30.) The foundation is a brick pier foundation similar to that on the original hall-parlor part of the house, also now enclosed. (See image 31.) The first floor addition retains the original two-over-two windows, but the second story has six-over-six replacements. The double-leaf front doors are original to the addition. They are paneled in a common Victorian pattern with a single window pane and were probably ordered from a catalog. A double-leaf storm door has been added. (See images 32-33.)



Image 26: The center gable of the west façade features a louver window and decorative millwork bracket.

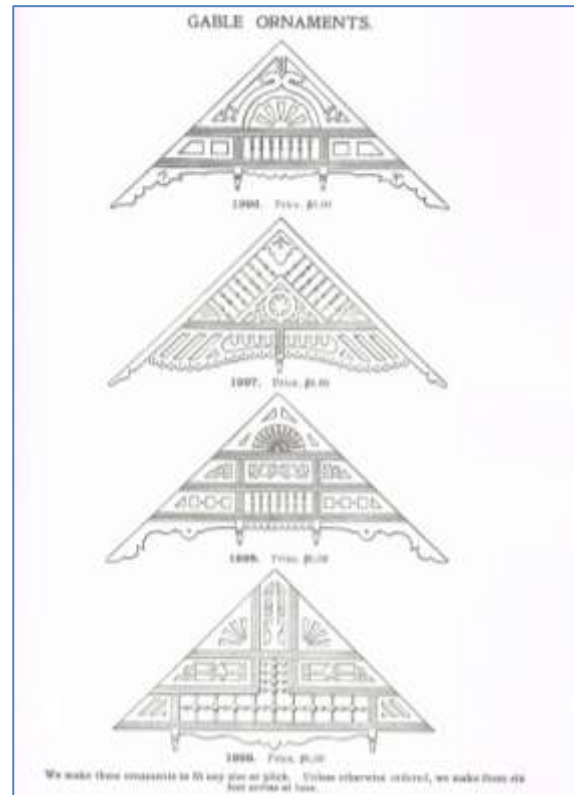


Image 27: Gable ornaments available from the Universal Design Book. These ornaments include half-circular shapes and spindles, which may have inspired a local carpenter to design the gable ornament in Image 26.

⁶³ *Universal Design Book*, 169.



Image 28: *The Victorian addition features a decorative stamped-tin roof.*



Image 31: *The original brick pier foundation is now enclosed.*



Image 29: *The Victorian addition retains original weathervanes including original glass bulbs.*



Image 32: *The original front doors are paneled in a common Victorian pattern.*



Image 30: *The north and south façades feature external, single shoulder end chimneys and returned gables (south façade pictured here)*

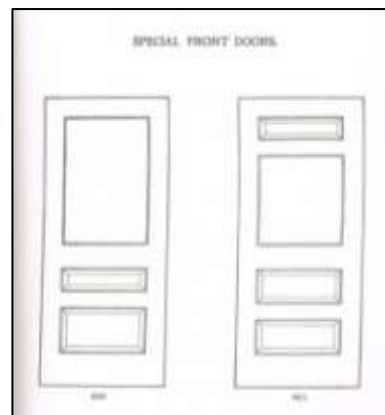


Image 33: *These front doors were available through the Universal Design Book and could be ordered in any dimensions. Note design 600 is identical to the farmhouse front doors.*

The I-house is decorated with fashionable sawn gable ornaments and extensive millwork. The porch features a hipped roof, beadboard ceiling, and turned porch posts. The porch gingerbreading is a delicate foliate pattern with turned drop pendants and sawtooth drapery running between posts. This façade, especially the front porch, is almost identical to that of the Cannady-Brogden House, (see image 25)



Image 34: The Victorian porch features delicate millwork that may have been partly ordered from popular catalogs and partly designed and carved by a local builder.

suggesting many of its elements were handcrafted by the same local builder, such as the turned porch posts and foliate brackets. However, many of the porch details are remarkably similar to items in the Roberts Catalog and Universal Design Book, including the turned porch spindles, the turned drops, and the sawtooth drapery, so some of the basic elements may be stock materials. (See images 34-38.)

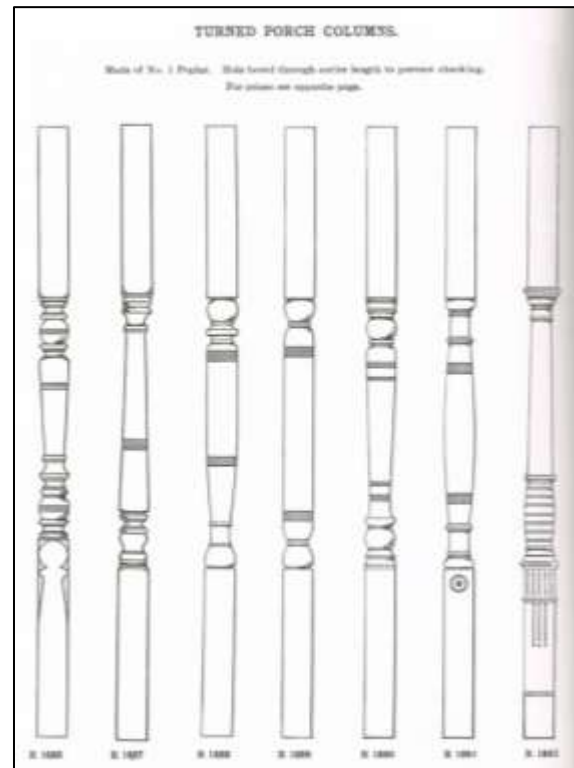


Image 35: Porch columns available through the Roberts Catalog. Note the similarity of design R1887 to those in Image 40, which suggests the farmhouse porch columns may have been inspired by the catalog designs but designed and carved locally.



Image 36: *The Victorian porch features foliate patterned brackets, drop pendants, and sawtooth drapery.*

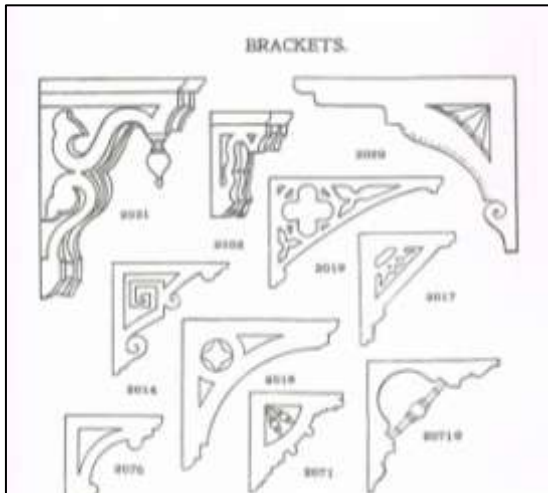


Image 37: *Porch brackets available from the Universal Design Book. Note the foliate pattern of design 2031 is similar to that in Image 36, which suggests the farmhouse porch brackets may have been inspired by millwork catalogs but designed and carved locally.*

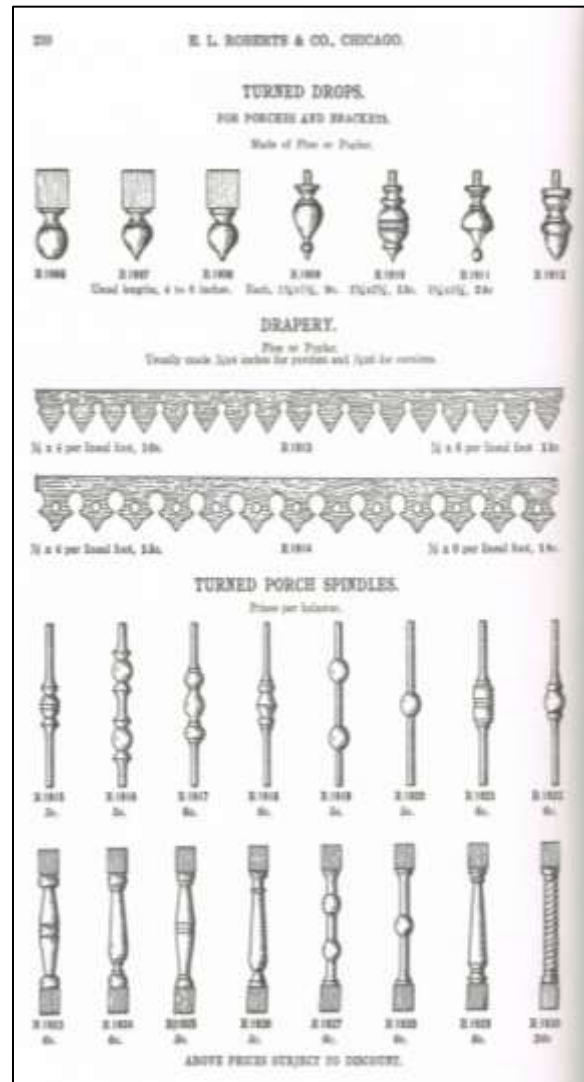


Image 38: *Stock porch materials available from E.L. Roberts and Co. Note turned drop R1908, drapery R1913, and spindle R1923 are identical to elements in Images 35 and 37.*

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THE VICTORIAN ADDITION INTERIOR, FIRST FLOOR

The interior of the addition is a typical I-house floor plan with a wide central hall flanked by a room on each side. A beautiful closed string staircase ascends from the doorway along the south wall to a landing, then turns 180 degrees and continues to the second floor. The staircase is decorated with turned balustrades, drop pendants, and carved newel posts, as well as inlaid paneling on the outer side of the staircase. It is the most impressive decorative interior element, and it appears to have been inspired by millwork catalogs of the day but designed and carved by a local builder. The stair plan, turned rosettes, newel posts, stair rails, balustrade spindles, and other decorative elements are similar to those in the catalogs, but they do not exactly match.⁶⁴ (See images 39-48.)



Image 39: The central hall is flanked by identical rooms and features a closed string staircase.



Image 40: The staircase is the most impressive decorative element in the farmhouse.



Image 41: The staircase features delicate drop pendants.



Image 42: The staircase features a decorative newel post and other delicate millwork features.

⁶⁴ Roberts' Illustrated Millwork Catalog.

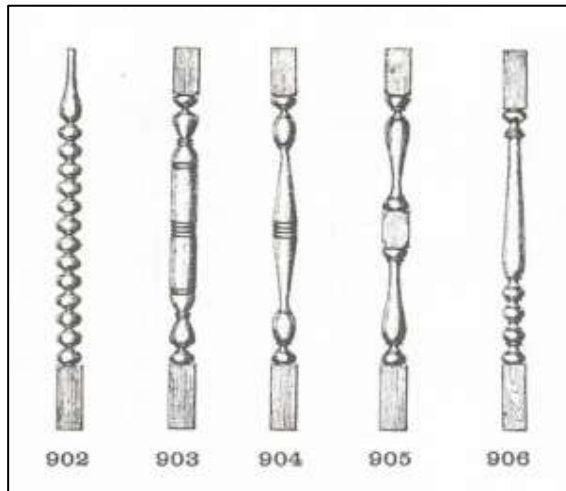


Image 43: Stair balusters available from the Universal Design Catalog. Note the similar elements between design 904 and the farmhouse staircase, suggesting they may have been designed and carved locally.

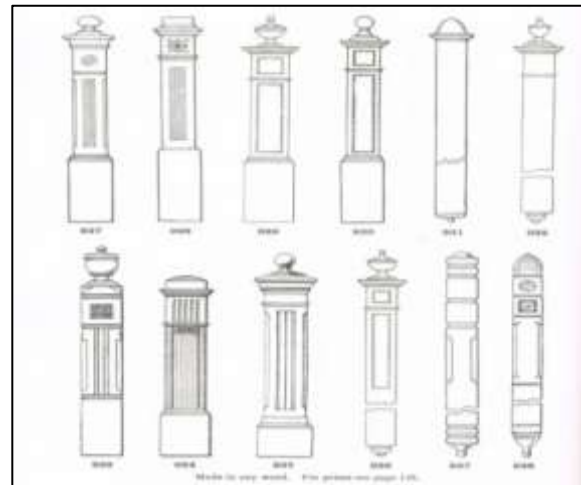


Image 46: Base newel posts available from Universal Design Book. Note some features of designs 927 and 935 are similar to the farmhouse staircase but not identical, suggesting they were locally designed.

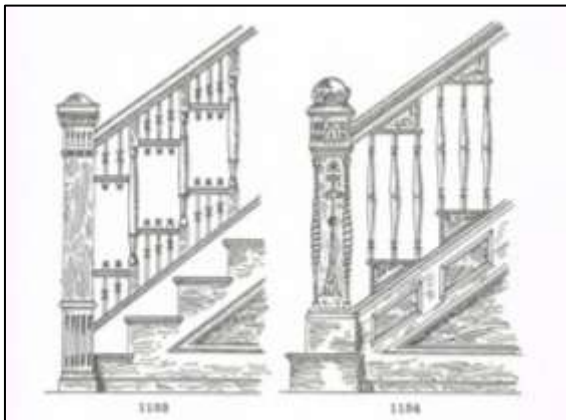


Image 44: Stair elevations from the Universal Design Book. Note design 1154 features inlaid paneling similar to the farmhouse staircase.

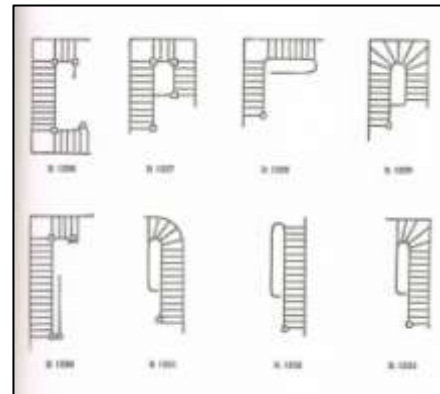


Image 47: Stair plans in the Roberts Catalog. Note the similarity of shape between design R 1227 and the farmhouse staircase, suggesting it was locally designed.

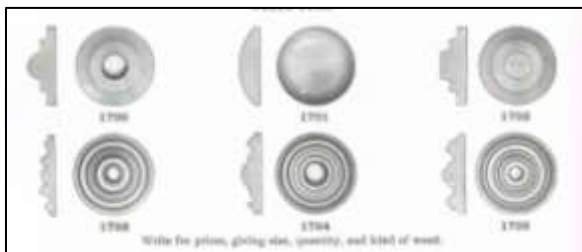


Image 45: Turned rosettes available from the Universal Design Book. The similarity between design 1703 and the farmhouse staircase suggests these elements are stock materials.

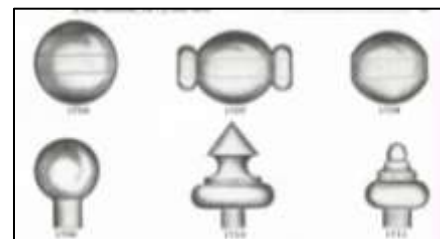


Image 48: Drop pendants available from the Universal Design Book. Note design 1709 is identical to the drops on the farmhouse staircase, suggesting these elements are stock.

An understair closet reveals the original color of the pine used to construct the staircase. Modern coat closets have been added, as well as a modern bathroom in the infill room accessed through the central hall. (See images 50-52.)

The north and south rooms on the first floor have the original tongue-and-groove paneling and ceilings, as well as beadboard wainscoting below the chair rail. (See images 53 and 59.) They are decorated with late Victorian mantels, the south room mantel with mirrored overmantel decoration, indicating this room was likely the formal parlor. The mantel is strikingly similar to a Roberts & Co. design, but it is unclear whether these details were prefabricated or designed and made by the builder. (See images 54-55 and 60-61.)

These rooms retain their original pine floorboards and carved baseboards. The doorways and window surrounds are decorated with geometric cornerblocks. The cornerblocks in the Roberts & Co. catalog combine geometric patterns with foliate designs, and the absence of these elements suggests the builder designed the blocks himself. The same is true for the baseboards. The doors are a five-paneled Victorian design.⁶⁵ (See images 62-63.)

⁶⁵ *Roberts' Illustrated Millwork Catalog.*



Image 49: *The staircase features an understair closet that reveals the original color of the pine.*



Image 50: *Modern coat closets have been added to the central hall.*



Image 51: *A modern bathroom has been added in the infill room.*



Image 52: The north room, first floor, with the original tongue-and-groove paneling and ceilings and bead board wainscoting below the chair rail.



Image 55: The first floor retains its original pine floorboards. (south room and central hall pictured here)



Image 53: The simplicity of the north room mantel suggests this was a family room.



Image 54: Mantle available from the Universal Design Book. Note the similarity to the North Room mantle, suggesting it may have inspired the builder to design and carve an original piece.



Image 56: The doorways and window surrounds are decorated with geometric cornerblocks.



Image 57: Cornerblocks available in the Universal Design Book. Note the similarity of designs 1025-1026 to the farmhouse; the differences suggest they were locally designed.



Image 58: *The first floor features tongue-and-groove paneling and ceilings, as well as beadboard wainscoting. (south room here)*



Image 59: *The south room mantel is more elaborate, so this room was likely the parlor.*



Image 60: *Mantle available in the Roberts Catalog. Note the similarity to the South Room mantle, which suggests the builder may have used catalog images as inspiration for the mantle design.*



Image 61: *The doors are a common five-paneled Victorian design, suggesting they were ordered from catalogs as stock materials.*

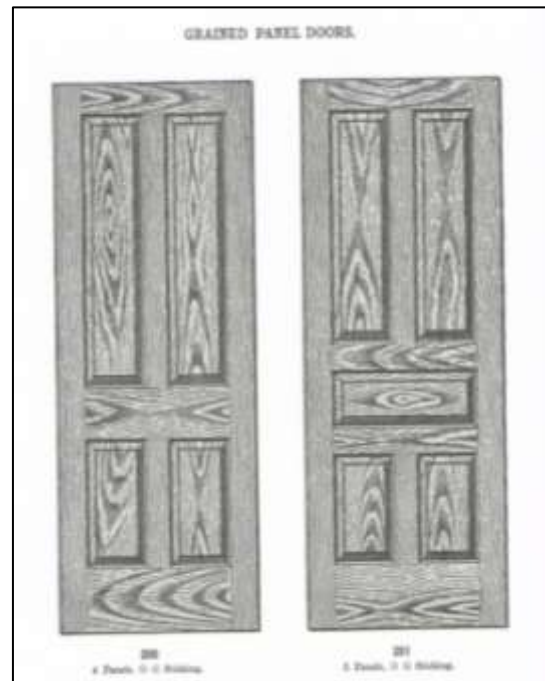


Image 62: *Panel doors available from the Roberts Catalog. These doors are identical to those in the farmhouse, suggesting these simple elements were ordered from catalogs.*

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THE VICTORIAN ADDITION INTERIOR,
SECOND FLOOR

The second floor rooms are similar to the downstairs rooms but have more alterations. The north room features tongue-and-groove paneling and ceiling, original floorboards, and geometric corner blocks on the door and window surrounds. (See images 63-64.) The south room retains some of these original elements but three of the walls have been covered with a mid-century wood paneling. (See images 65-66.) Both rooms have late Victorian mantels that are more modest mantels than those downstairs, and each room has had closets added. (See images 64 and 66.)



Image 63: *The north room on the second floor retains its original tongue-and-groove paneling, pine floorboards, and geometric cornerblocks.*



Image 64: *The mantel in the north room on the second floor is simpler than those downstairs.*



Image 65: *The south room has modern paneling over the original tongue-and-groove paneling.*



Image 66: *The mantel in the south room on the second floor is simpler than those downstairs.*

INFILL ROOM, FIRST FLOOR

Connecting the original dwelling to the I-house addition is a small infill room with a tongue-and-groove ceiling. This room has sheetrock walls that probably cover original tongue-and-groove paneling. (See image 67.) There is a six-over-six double hung window on the north wall that was originally a door. (See images 68-69.) On the south end of the infill addition, there is a bathroom accessed through the central hall. (See image 70.)



Image 67: *The original hall-parlor house is connected to the Victorian addition by a small infill room.*



Image 68: *The infill room window was originally a door, and the door's ghost marks remain.*



Image 69: *The infill room door led out the north façade and the stairs are still in place.*



Image 70: *A modern bathroom was added to the central hall.*

**TOBACCO-CURING BARN AND
PACK HOUSE**

Two flue-cured tobacco barns and a tobacco pack house are located south of, and somewhat removed from, the farmhouse. The older barn, circa 1910, was constructed with round pine logs and clay chinking, a stone curtain foundation, and a dirt floor. These early barns were constructed with tightly-fitted logs that retained the heat needed for the curing process. (See images 71-73.) A second tobacco-curing barn is located nearby. This barn, circa 1930, is frame construction and covered with weatherboard to improve insulation. (See images 74-75.)

Both buildings have tin roofing and tin exterior cladding that was added later to improve heat retention. They each have a large window opposite the main entrance for ventilation after curing, which are now covered by the tin cladding. The tin cladding has helped to preserve the original frame and log materials, and both structures are in good condition. Open sheds extend from the main entrance of each barn that were used to shelter workers while they stripped the leaves from the stalk. Leaves were tied to long poles called looping sticks and then hung in the barn rafters. Fires were set outside the barn to heat the building to



Image 71: *A log tobacco-curing barn is located south of the farmhouse.*



Image 72: *The log tobacco-curing barn features clay chinking.*



Image 73: *The log tobacco-curing barn retains its original pine rafters.*

approximately 120 degrees without exposing the leaves to the smoke. The fires were constantly watched for six to seven hours while the tobacco cured. Later, the barns were converted to gas heat, but they retain the original flues.

East of the two tobacco-curing barns is a tobacco pack house, circa 1930. It is a two-story frame building with a metal roof. (See image 76-78.) The site also retains the ordering pit adjacent to the pack house, which at one time was covered, but the roof has now collapsed. (See images 79-80.) After curing, the tobacco was untied from the looping sticks and placed into burlap sacks. The sacks were placed in the ordering pit to be moistened. If the ground was too dry, water could be added. Once pliable, the leaves were loaded into the first floor of the pack house by the door adjacent to the ordering pit. Here, the leaves were graded and packed into bundles, called hands, then stored on the second floor. A second floor doorway allowed the packed tobacco to be lowered to the ground and taken to market for sale.⁶⁶



Image 74: *A frame tobacco-curing barn is located at the southernmost end of the domestic building complex.*



Image 75: *The frame tobacco-curing barn retains its original pine rafters.*

⁶⁶ Lally and Johnson, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County," 121-122; John Michael Vlach, *Barns* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), 140-142, 189-190.



Image 76: *A tobacco pack house is located between the two tobacco-curing barns.*



Image 79: *An ordering pit is located adjacent to the pack house.*



Image 77: *The pack house interior retains its original appearance. (first floor pictured here)*



Image 78: *Pack house, second floor*



Image 80: *The south façade of the pack house features doors to access the ordering pit.*

P O T A T O S H E D S

POTATO-CURING SHEDS

To the north of the farmhouse are two potato-curing sheds. The earlier shed, circa 1910, is log construction with concrete chinking. The logs were hewn on one side and left round, with the bark attached, on the other. The notching is no longer visible as the exterior has been covered with rough board and batten siding ranging from seven to nine inches wide. (See image 81.) The interior has a central flue and three hanging racks on each side with a flue vent above each rack. (See image 82.) Potatoes were placed in bins and hung on the racks, while a fire was set in the center of the building to heat the potatoes for curing.

The second shed is frame construction, circa 1915. (See image 84.) The exterior cladding is six-inch weatherboard, and the wall studs are 2x10s allowing a gap between the interior and exterior walls. This gap has been filled with sawdust to serve as insulation for the curing process. Varying amounts of sawdust remain in place, in most areas filling the wall four to five feet high. (See image 85.) An unusually large 8x10 beam serves as the sill plate at the shed's entrance. A number of repairs have been made to the interior walls using parts of shipping crates, including one with a handwritten address to



Image 81: A log potato-curing shed is located northeast of the farmhouse.



Image 82: The log potato-curing shed interior features stove vents and bin racks.



Image 83: The log potato-curing shed has a small second-story loft with a sawdust floor.

the Robertson-O'Briant Farm. (See image 86.) A central flue and two hanging racks on each side with square, wood-framed flue vents above each rack complete the interior. (See image 87.)

Both sheds have second-story lofts accessible by gable end windows. The central flue passes through the lofts to the exterior of the sheds, while the smaller flue vents lead into the lofts. They both have unfinished floors covered with several inches of sawdust insulation. (See image 83.) The sheds were converted to chicken coops in the mid-twentieth century by adding screen doors and incubation equipment. The original solid door remains on the log shed, and the frame shed has only the screen door. Both sheds have metal roofing.⁶⁷



Image 84: *A frame potato-curing shed is located northwest of the farmhouse.*



Image 85: *The frame potato-curing shed has sawdust insulation.*



Image 86: *The interior of the frame potato-curing shed was repaired using shipping crates.*



Image 87: *The frame potato-curing shed interior retains stove vents and bin racks.*

⁶⁷ Lally and Johnson, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County," 123.

T E N A N T H O U S E

TENANT HOUSE

At the northernmost edge of the domestic outbuildings, a tenant house was constructed circa 1930. (See image 88.) Tenant farming increased continuously between the 1800s and the 1940s. Most middle class farms, like the Robertson-O'Briant Farm, relied on hired farmhands and at least one tenant family to grow a combination of subsistence and cash crops. Based on photos from a 1994 state survey, the original structure included an adjacent structure, possibly connected by an infill room that may have originally been a dogtrot. (See image 94.) This part of the building has since collapsed, but it was accessed by a doorway in the south façade of the remaining structure. (See image 89.) The structure could accommodate two families, appropriate for a middle class farm. Tenant houses built during this time were generally one-story, side-gabled structures, making this example unusually large at two-stories.⁶⁸

The tenant house is a frame structure with the original board and batten cladding and a metal roof. It is remarkably similar in appearance and construction to a



Image 88: A 1930s tenant house is located north of the farmhouse.



Image 89: The southern section of the tenant house has collapsed.



Image 90: The first floor of the tenant house served as the main living space.

⁶⁸ Lally and Johnson, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County," 53, 69, 135.

flue-cured tobacco barn, but instead of the typical stone curtain foundation, the tenant house has a field stone pier foundation. It is a vernacular structure likely built by someone familiar with tobacco barn construction rather than house construction, possibly even the O'Briants themselves.

The first floor served as the main living space and a vent in the northeast corner indicates it was heated by a stove. The interior walls are horizontal, four-inch paneling that cover the original board and batten cladding, and they retain the original blue paint. The floor is constructed of rough-sawn yellow pine floorboards ranging from eight to eleven inches in width. The building was electrified around 1960. Single sash, recessing glazed windows look out the north and west façades. An intact door enters the east façade and is solid wood and of a very crude construction, befitting the rest of the house. (See images 90-93.)

No staircase remains to access the second floor, but it may have led from the south entrance via the infill room. The second story remains crude and probably served as a sleeping loft. The walls lack interior paneling and blue paint, but there is a finished floor and gable end window similar to those on the first floor. (See image 95.)



Image 91: A vent in the northeast corner suggests the house was heated by a stove.



Image 92: The interior walls are horizontal, four-inch paneling that cover the original board and batten cladding, with the original blue paint.



Image 93: The original single sash, recessing glazed windows on the north and west façades.

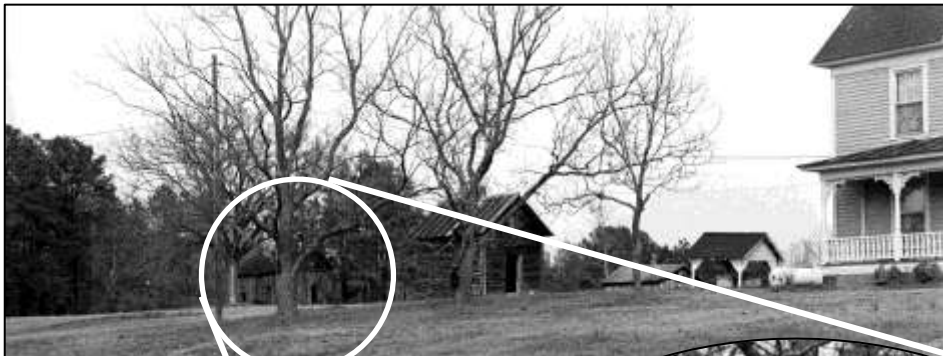


Image 94: *A 1994 Survey Photo from the North Carolina Historic Preservation Office shows the tenant was once large enough for two families.*



Image 95: *The second story remains crude and probably served as a sleeping loft.*

CORN CRIB

There is a small corn crib, circa 1920-1930, adjacent to the farmhouse on the south side of the property. It is a gable-front, frame structure with vertical weatherboard and a metal roof. (See image 96.) Corn is a staple crop making corn cribs a necessary agricultural outbuilding; they were used to store corn both for the family and the livestock. These buildings were often of plank construction, and they were well-ventilated with gaps in the planks and an elevated foundation. (See image 97.) The building was converted to a chicken coop in the early to mid-twentieth century and later used as a storage shed.⁶⁹ (See image 98.)



Image 96: A corn crib is located south of the farmhouse.



Image 97: Corn cribs commonly have gaps in the cladding for ventilation.



Image 98: The corn crib was later used as a chicken coop and then a storage shed.

⁶⁹ Lally and Johnson, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County," 120.

LIVESTOCK BARN/KENNEL

Southeast of the farmhouse is the original location of a livestock barn. The building may have been built as early as the 1930s, but was certainly built by 1959. A 1938 aerial photo shows a large structure on this part of the property, but the photo quality is not high enough to determine if the building is the livestock barn, while a 1959 aerial photo clearly shows this structure. The building was dismantled sometime after 1994. Although the building no longer remains, photos indicate it was typical to Wake County farms with entrances on the gable ends, stalls on the first floor, a second floor for hay storage, and a side shed for additional stalls or storage space.⁷⁰ (See image 99.)

A dog kennel was constructed on the original barn site, although the original barn foundation is still visible in some places. (See image 100.) The kennel has been removed, but its concrete slab foundation remains. (See image 101.)



Image 99: A 1994 image from the North Carolina Historic Preservation Office shows the livestock barn, now lost, and the corn crib.



Image 100: In some places, the foundation for the livestock barn is still visible.



Image 101: A dog kennel replaced the livestock barn and its foundation remains.

⁷⁰ Lally and Johnson, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County," 120.

S T O R A G E S H E D

The shed was originally a gable front structure with a concrete slab floor, doors in the west and south façades, and an open side shed on the south façade. At some point, the open shed was enclosed with the rest of the building by moving the south wall to the edge of the open shed and adding plywood to fill in the east and west façades. There is also a plank floor on this portion of the shed. The plywood walls and floor are now in poor condition while the original wood paneled walls are still in good condition. The building may have been constructed as early as the 1930s – a 1939 aerial photo suggests there is a small structure on this location, but the photo is not clear enough to be certain – but it was definitely built by 1959 because a 1959 aerial photo clearly shows this structure.⁷¹ (See images 102-103.)



Image 102: A storage shed is located adjacent to the farmhouse and was originally a gable front structure with an open shed to the south.



Image 103: The interior of the shed reveals that the north section of the building was the original shed and the south section was enclosed later.

⁷¹ Lally and Johnson, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County," 123.

O OUTHOUSE

U T H O U S E

An outhouse was constructed circa 1920-1930 behind the farmhouse. It is a small weatherboard structure with a metal roof, and it had a two-seat bench inside. It was probably used until the 1940s when indoor plumbing and electricity came to rural Wake County.⁷² (See images 104-105.)



Image 104: A 1920s outhouse is located east of the farmhouse.



Image 105: The outhouse features a two-seat bench.

⁷² Lally and Johnson, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County," 77, 115, 123.

WELLS

Wake County residents typically dug wells in close proximity to their dwelling for their water supply. The Robertson-O'Briant Farm has two wells. The original nineteenth-century well is located close to the main house and was probably dug in the early 1800s by the Robertsons. This well is covered by a gable-roofed shelter, a common well covering throughout the county. (See image 106.) A modern septic system is located adjacent to this well, probably added around 1940 with the addition of indoor plumbing. The second well was added by the 1950s and is about thirty feet deep. Its location adjacent to the cultivated fields suggests it was used for agricultural purposes, and its proximity to the tenant house suggests it may have been used for domestic purposes by the tenant families as well.⁷³ (See image 107.)



Image 106: A well is located adjacent to the farmhouse that was probably dug in the nineteenth century by the Robertsons.



Image 107: A second well was dug in the twentieth century, probably for agriculture.

⁷³ Lally and Johnson, "Historic and Architectural Resources of Wake County," 119.

PENNINGTON CEMETERY

On the southernmost corner of the property, accessed by Highway 50, there is a small cemetery, approximately 100 feet by 75 feet. It has not been well maintained, but the boundaries are basically visible. It has not become overgrown with the early succession scrub forest that surrounds it, but it does have a thick layer of forest debris covering the grave sites. (See image 108.)

There are only two well-marked graves in the cemetery. One belongs to Dililah Pennington, the wife of John Pennington who owned one of the original parcels that made up the Robertson-O'Briant Farm. There is a headstone and footstone to mark this grave. (See image 109.) The other belongs to George G. Roberson, the son of an African American tenant farming family living and working either on or near the Robertson-O'Briant Farm in the early 1900s. This grave also has a headstone and a footstone, and both stones are engraved. (See image 108.) There are several grave depressions marked with field stone headstones and footstones. (See image 110.) The forest debris covers any other grave depressions or field stone markers.



Image 108: *The Pennington Cemetery is located at the southernmost corner of the property.*



Image 109: *The Dililah Pennington Grave is one of two well-marked graves.*



Image 110: *There are grave depressions marked with field stone headstones and footstones.*

FARM LANDSCAPE

The farm landscape indicates the division of operations on the farm with outbuildings related to tobacco cultivation on the south side of the property and those used in potato cultivation on the north side. The landscape also reveals the social divisions between the property owners and the workers at the Robertson-O'Briant farm, with the owners living in a large, fashionable home at the center of the property and tenant farmers living in smaller, simpler structures close to the fields and far from the owners' house. Outbuildings related to daily life, including the well and outhouse, were constructed central to the property and close to the farmhouse to facilitate frequent access. (See images 111-114.)

The property is split by Boyce Bridge Road, which runs east-west south of the house, and at least one recently constructed logging road that travels north-south. (See image 115.) Several branches of a small creek water the property. They come together near Boyce Bridge Road and continue southeast, draining into Falls Lake. (See image 116.) The presence of mature vegetation in the riparian zones indicates these areas were left uncut when the farm was in cultivation. The vast majority of the previously cultivated land has begun to



Image 111: The view south from the tenant house with the log potato-curing shed (left), farmhouse (center), and frame potato-curing shed (right).



Image 112: The view north from the tobacco pack house with the log tobacco-curing barn (left), farmhouse (center), and kennel foundation (right).



Image 113: The view east from the farmhouse with the tenant house (far left background), frame potato-curing shed (left), log potato-curing shed (center), and 19th-century well (right).

grow a variety of early succession scrub plants. Only a few acres adjacent to the farmhouse and outbuildings are actively maintained by Wake County Parks, Recreation, and Open Space. There are no extant structures on the tract south of Boyce Bridge Road, but there is a small cemetery.

The Creedmoor Road neighborhood consists primarily of farms featuring turn-of-the-century I-houses with outbuildings related to tobacco farming. Some of the farms continue to cultivate crops and raise livestock, while others appear to no longer be actively farming. There is also a variety of twentieth-century infill housing including 1930s bungalows, mid-1900s ranch-style houses, and mobile homes.



Image 114: *The view east from the log potato-curing shed of the formerly cultivated fields.*



Image 115: *A logging road cuts north-south across the property.*



Image 116: *Several branches of a small creek water the property and drain into Falls Lake.*

PRESERVATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT

INTRODUCTION

The most critical preservation concern at the Robertson-O'Briant Farm is the neglect of the buildings over the last few decades. The property has been unoccupied since it was purchased by the county in 2008, so the house and outbuildings have been poorly maintained and improperly used. Failure to maintain the roofs and weatherboard, remove debris, properly control water drainage, and maintain delicate millwork have resulted in significant damage. In addition, most of the outbuildings are being consumed by plant overgrowth, which is extremely destructive to log and frame buildings. Without action, the remaining structures on the farmstead are in danger of losing significant, character-defining elements or of being lost entirely. Fortunately, most of these problems are routine maintenance issues or cosmetic concerns – there is very little serious structural damage. The following assessment recommends action by prioritizing original architectural elements and structures significant to the cultural landscape, while also considering the safety of the public.

THE FARMHOUSE

Since it was occupied until the 1990s, the farmhouse is in good condition. However, there are some maintenance issues that need to be addressed. In general, the exterior of the house is in good condition, and aside from some minor wear and tear, the primary problems are damaged window panes and roofing panels, deteriorating millwork, improper water drainage, and plant overgrowth. The interior of the house is also in relatively good condition. There is a lot of wear and tear, water damage to the infill room, exposed wires and gas lines, and a buildup of debris and dirt.

FARMHOUSE EXTERIOR:**WINDOWS, ROOF, AND WEATHERBOARD**

At one time, the windows and doors were covered with plastic that now is mostly lost, leaving only the wood frame nailed to the original door and window surrounds. There are also many cracked, broken, and missing window panes. This should be addressed by either replacing the plastic covering or, preferably, by replacing the window panes and removing the remaining plastic and frames. Proper window coverings are necessary to prevent break-ins and protect the interior of the house from the elements. (See images 117-118.)

There are also a few loose roofing panels that should be fixed as soon as possible. (See image 119.) The weatherboard on the house is in good condition with the exception of a few broken boards on the east façade of the original house and on the hall-parlor porch, which has resulted in bird nesting activity. (See image 120.) These nests should be removed and the weatherboard repaired to prevent damage to the insulation or rotting of the porch supports. The chimneys on the east and south façades are pulling away from the rest of the house. They have been reinforced but should be monitored for increasing damage. (See images 121-123.)



Image 117: Remaining wood frame from plastic covering on hall-parlor shed room



Image 118: There are many cracked or missing window panes, including this one in the parlor.



Image 119: There is damage to the roof on the north façade of the Victorian addition



Image 120: *The weatherboard is damaged in a few places, including here on the south façade.*



Image 121: *The east façade chimney is leaning.*



Image 122: *The chimneys have been reinforced.*



Image 123: *Improper repairs to east chimney*

FARMHOUSE EXTERIOR:**DECORATIVE MILLWORK**

The Victorian addition features extensive millwork that is significant to the character of the house. These architectural details are very delicate and, having been neglected for several decades, are showing signs of severe damage. If prompt action is not taken to protect these features, they are in danger of being lost entirely. The gable ornament is broken and missing its spindles, one of the porch posts is broken and lying in the yard, parts of the foliate millwork are damaged, and a section of drapery is missing. There are also many nails sticking one to two inches out of the porch railing that pose a threat to public safety and should be removed, and there is damage to the porch roof, possibly caused by poor drainage. The Christmas lights hung on the porch should be taken down. (See images 124-127.)



Image 124: *Damage to center gable millwork and missing spindles*



Image 125: *One of the original porch posts was replaced and the original is lying in the yard.*



Image 126: *Damaged foliate millwork*



Image 127: *Damage to porch roof*

FARMHOUSE EXTERIOR:**WATER DAMAGE**

There is severe water damage on the north façade of the house where the Victorian addition attaches to the infill room. There are no gutters to direct water out of this corner, so the weatherboard shows signs of rot, there is extensive algae growth on the steps to the infill room door, and the interior corner of the infill room shows signs of water damage. (See image 128.) This should be addressed as soon as possible to prevent severe structural damage.

It is also very wet underneath the house, which was at one time a pier foundation to allow ventilation but is now enclosed preventing adequate evaporation. The hall-parlor porch ceiling and floor are uneven, possibly from water damage or the foundation shifting. (See images 129-130.) This should be assessed by a restoration specialist and repaired as recommended.



Image 128: *There is significant water damage to the north façade of the infill room*



Image 129: *Uneven ceiling in hall-parlor porch*



Image 130: *Uneven floor in hall-parlor porch*

FARMHOUSE EXTERIOR:

PLANT OVERGROWTH

There is extensive overgrowth around the foundation of the house, the base of the Victorian porch, on the chimneys, and on exterior steps. (See images 131-134.) Plants must be trimmed or removed to protect the house from increased moisture in areas of heavy grasses, damage from the roots of ivy and larger plants, and the roots of algae.



Image 131: *Overgrowth of heavy grasses around the foundation on the south façade*



Image 132: *Overgrowth on north chimney*



Image 133: *Roof damage caused by overgrowth on north chimney*



Image 134: *Algae overgrowth on the infill room steps and door*

FARMHOUSE EXTERIOR:**WEAR AND TEAR**

The house also suffers from wear and tear. The paint on both sections of the house is in very poor condition and should be repainted, preferably using its original colors, to protect the weatherboard. The porch floors are quite worn and even cracked in some places, and almost all the corner boards are worn or cracked on their bottom edges. (See images 135-136.)

At one time, there was a wooden awning over the original hall door in the north façade. The awning has fallen and is lying on the doorway steps; it is not original to the house and should be disposed of. (See image 137.)

The porch on the hall-parlor house is screened in but there are missing and damaged screens. (See images 138-139.) There is also wear and tear on the porch posts, as well as damage from the screen being stapled to the posts. (See image 140.) This should be corrected by removing the screens and painting the porch to protect the original materials. There is also discarded debris in the porch that should be disposed of. (See image 141.)



Image 135: The Victorian porch shows wear and tear.



Image 136: Damage to northwest corner board on Victorian addition



Image 137: Fallen awning on north façade



Image 138: *Missing screen on hall-parlor porch*

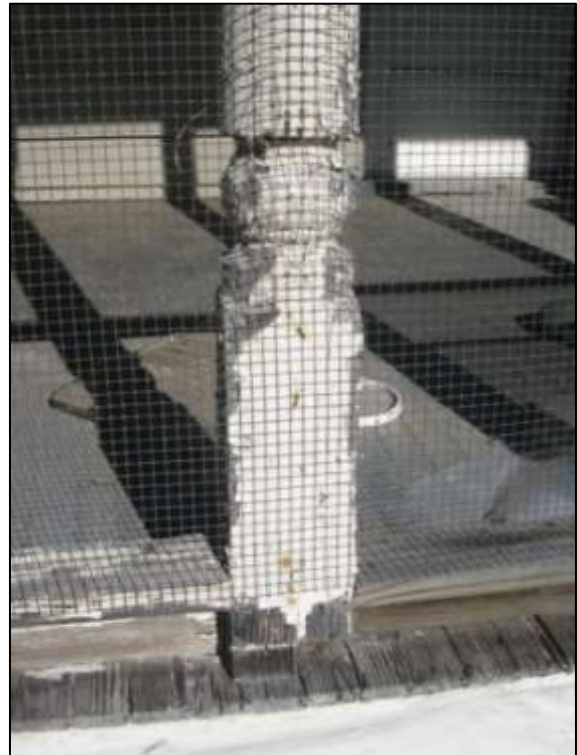


Image 140: *Damage to hall-parlor porch post*



Image 139: *Damaged screen on hall-parlor porch*



Image 141: *Debris in hall-parlor porch*

THE FARMHOUSE INTERIOR:**WATER DAMAGE**

The infill room interior has water damage that matches exterior problems with drainage control. The north façade lacks any gutters, and there is a buildup of moisture where the infill room and Victorian addition form a corner. (See image 142.)

There is also water damage in the northwest corner of the north room on the second floor, but there is no obvious damage to the roofing and the source should be investigated further. (See images 143-145.)



Image 142: *Water damage in the infill room interior corresponds to similar exterior water problems.*



Image 143: *Water damage to floor in second floor north room*



Image 144: *Water damage to ceiling and walls in north room, second floor*



Image 145: *Water damage to window in north room, second floor*

FARMHOUSE INTERIOR:**EXPOSED WIRES AND GAS LINES**

There are exposed wires and gas lines throughout the farmhouse that currently are not a safety issue because there is no electric power or gas connected. (See images 146-148.) However, these issues must be addressed before the house can be opened to the public.



Image 146: *Exposed wire in the hall*



Image 147: *Exposed wires in the central hall bathroom*



Image 148: *Exposed gas line to first floor south room fireplace*

D E B R I S FARMHOUSE INTERIOR: DEBRIS

There is a buildup of debris in the house, including food items in the hall cupboards and personal items in the hall shed room and the south room on the second floor. (See images 149-151.) These items encourage pest activity and should be disposed of as soon as possible. There is also a buildup of dirt, dust, and dead insects throughout the house that contribute to its wear and tear and should be cleaned. Both bathrooms are in very poor condition and need considerable cleaning and repairs before being made available to the public. (See image 152.)



Image 149: *Discarded food in hall cupboards*



Image 150: *Discarded personal items in second floor, south room*



Image 151: *Debris in parlor*



Image 152: *Damage to parlor bathroom*

W FARMHOUSE INTERIOR:

E WEAR AND TEAR

A The rest of the house reflects usual
R wear and tear including worn floors, worn
doors and door frames, minor damage to
the walls and ceiling, and peeling paint.
(See images 153-156.) Two of the five
fireplace hearthstones have been cracked.
(See images 157-158.)

N The staircase in the central hall
D shows severe wear and tear in many
places. It is a beautiful and intricate
architectural element that is significant
because it appears to have been designed
and constructed almost entirely by a local
builder, who also designed and constructed
most of the millwork on the Victorian porch.
T Like the porch, prompt action should be
E taken to repair and protect the staircase.
A The carving in the newel post at the base of
R the staircase is broken, there is a finial
missing from the newel post at the top of the
stairs and other finials are damaged, and
the treads and risers show wear from heavy
use. (See images 159-161.)



Image 153: *Wear and tear on original floor in the south room, first floor*



Image 154: *Wear and tear on window frame in the north room, first floor*



Image 155: *Ceiling damage in the north room, second floor*



Image 156: *Peeling paint in the north room, first floor*



Image 159: *Damaged carving on newel post*



Image 157: *Cracked hearthstone in the first floor north room*



Image 160: *Damaged finial*



Image 158: *Cracked hearthstone in the second floor north room*



Image 161: *Wear and tear on staircase*

LOG TOBACCO-CURING BARN

The tobacco-curing barns have tin covering their exterior cladding, so they are in good condition. Still, there are some general maintenance problems and neglect issues that need to be addressed. On the log barn, the tin cladding is pulled back from the west façade ventilation door, and the original wood covering is partially missing. Both should be replaced to protect the original cladding and prevent weathering the interior. (See image 162.)

Also, a build-up of discarded items around the foundation is causing damage to both the foundation and the tin cladding. These items are also cluttering up the shed area. (See images 163-164.) The shed roof has damaged support beams and is beginning to collapse. About half of the beams are in good condition, so the broken or rotted beams should be replaced to repair and stabilize the structure. On the north interior wall, the base log is beginning to rot. (See images 165-167.)

There is extensive plant overgrowth on the building, in some cases even growing through the walls, and a large poison ivy vine is growing up the northeast corner of the log barn. This plant overgrowth must be removed. (See images 168-170.)



Image 162: *Damaged tin cladding*



Image 163: *Discarded items damaging the foundation*



Image 164: *Discarded items under the shed*



Image 165: *Collapsing shed roof*



Image 168: *Plant overgrowth surrounding barn*



Image 166: *Some of the shed roof support beams are in good shape while others need to be replaced.*



Image 169: *Plants growing through barn walls*



Image 167: *Rotted base log*



Image 170: *Poison ivy vine*

FRAME TOBACCO-CURING BARN

The frame barn is in good condition, however, there is a lot of plant overgrowth that needs to be cut off of and away from the building. Some of these plants are growing through the walls of the barn and causing damage to the interior walls and roof support beams. (See image 171.) The shed roof is starting to collapse in places where the support beams are damaged, but since about half of the beams are in good condition, replacing the damaged beams will stabilize the shed. (See image 172.) The rear ventilation door is damaged and missing part of its tin cladding. (See image 173.) Both should be repaired to prevent further damage to the door or weathering inside the barn. The foundation is breaking down in some places and the roof covering is coming loose. (See image 174.) Both should be thoroughly inspected and repaired by a restoration specialist.



Image 171: Plant overgrowth around frame barn



Image 172: Some shed roof support beams are in good condition but others need replaced.



Image 173: The unprotected rear door needs to be repaired.



Image 174: The roof is damaged and needs to be assessed and repaired.

TOBACCO PACK HOUSE AND ORDERING PIT

The pack house has been used a storage building and is full of discarded items that need to be removed. (See image 175.) There was a fire in the building at some point, and the interior walls are scarred. (See image 176.) This area should be assessed to determine if there is significant structural damage and the damaged portions should be repaired or replaced if necessary.

The front door is damaged leaving the doorway open and the interior vulnerable to the elements. (See image 177.) The remaining three doors are also damaged although currently they cover the openings. These should all be repaired or replaced to prevent interior weathering. The front sill is also rotted and should be replaced. (See image 178.) In many places the weatherboard is in poor condition, and although there are some patches, damaged cladding should be replaced. (See images 179-180.)

Plant overgrowth is causing damage to the roof and beginning to attach to the weatherboard. Plants must be trimmed back from the building, especially the roof, which has been patched in places. The



Image 175: *Discarded items litter both floors.*



Image 176: *Fire damage on the second floor*



Image 177: *The damaged front door fails to protect the building from the elements.*

foundation appears to be in good condition, but it should be assessed, as well as the roof and fire-damaged areas, by a restoration specialist. (See image 181.)

The ordering pit was at one time covered, but this roof has collapsed. In its current condition, the collapsed roof poses a threat to public safety and should be removed. The pit still remains and, once the debris is removed, will be useful for public interpretation without reconstruction of the covering. (See image 182.)



Image 180: *Damaged corner boards*



Image 178: *The front door sill is damaged*



Image 181: *Roof damage, now temporarily patched*



Image 179: *Damaged weatherboard*



Image 182: *Collapsed roof over ordering pit*

LOG POTATO-CURING SHED

The potato-curing barns were converted to chicken coops in the mid-twentieth century and were not well cared for. They are both structurally sound but exterior elements are in poor condition.

The primary problem with the log shed is that overgrown vines, bushes, and small trees are engulfing the building and causing damage to the roof and weatherboard, both of which are damaged or dislodged in many places. (See images 183-185.) The front door is solid wood with a screen door added when it was converted to a chicken coop, but the solid door no longer closes properly to prevent interior weathering. Also, the loft access door is damaged and no longer covers the opening, and there are discarded items stored there. Both doors should be repaired to prevent further damage. There is also a gap between the roof and the chimney that could allow moisture into the loft, although so far the loft does not show signs of water damage or rot.



Image 183: *The log shed suffers from severe plant overgrowth.*



Image 184: *The weatherboard on the log shed is damaged in several places.*



Image 185: *The roof on the log shed is damaged*

FRAME POTATO-CURING SHED

The frame shed is suffering from severe plant overgrowth, resulting in damage to the roof and weatherboard, and even growing inside the building. (See image 186.) The weatherboard is in especially poor condition on this shed, and it is displaced or damaged in many places. (See image 187.) The front door and gable window do not close properly and need to be replaced to prevent interior damage from the elements. (See image 188.) The shed has been used for storage, and the discarded items should be removed. (See image 189.)



Image 186: *The frame shed suffers from severe plant overgrowth.*



Image 187: *The weatherboard on the frame shed is in poor condition.*



Image 188: *The frame shed's front door no longer closes properly.*



Image 189: *There are discarded items inside the frame shed.*

TENANT HOUSE

The tenant house is in such a state of disrepair that it cannot be salvaged, and in its current condition, it poses a threat to public safety. The southern portion of the building has already collapsed and the remaining structure is now leaning and partially collapsed. (See images 190-191.) Neither the first nor second floors are structurally sound. (See images 192-193.) The building should be thoroughly documented and carefully dismantled, retaining materials for use in either reconstructing the tenant house or repairing the other historic structures on the property.



Image 190: *Collapsed portion of tenant house*



Image 191: *Leaning portion of tenant house*



Image 192: *The first floor is highly unstable.*



Image 193: *The second floor is highly unstable and partially collapsed.*

CORN CRIB

The corn crib was converted to a chicken coop in the mid-twentieth century and then used as a storage shed. It is in fair condition. The building interior is several feet deep with discarded items that must be cleaned out to prevent damage to the floor, foundation, and walls. (See image 194.) Plant overgrowth is minor, but there is damage to the weatherboard in some places, most of which has been patched. (See images 195-196.) The foundation and roof appear to be in good condition, but the foundation appears to have been repaired and both should be assessed by a restoration professional. (See image 197.)



Image 194: *The corn crib is filled several feet deep with discarded material.*



Image 195: *Plant overgrowth is minimal at the corn crib, but should be monitored.*



Image 196: *The weatherboard on the corn crib is damaged in some places.*



Image 197: *The foundation appears to have been repaired and should be assessed.*

KENNEL

The concrete slab foundations are all that remain of the dog kennel. (See image 198.) Since the kennel was added in the late twentieth century and does not contribute to the character of the farmstead, these foundations should be removed, taking care not to damage foundation stone from the livestock barn originally located in that area.



Image 198: *The kennel foundation should be removed.*

S T O R A G E S H E D

STORAGE SHED

The storage shed is in fair condition. The original part of the shed is in good condition, while the shed roof addition, which was enclosed using plywood, is collapsing. In its current condition, the building is a threat to public safety. The best option to retain the building is to restore it to its original appearance by moving the south wall back to its original location thereby restoring the open shed. The back wall of the shed addition has collapsed, as well as part of its roof and floor. (See image 199.) The interior appears to have been used as a workshop and much of these materials remain. This debris should be removed. (See image 200.)



Image 199: *The collapsed walls and roof of the shed addition are a threat to public safety.*



Image 200: *The discarded workshop items in the storage shed should be removed.*

O U T H O U S E

OUTHOUSE

The outhouse is in very poor condition. It is leaning significantly and has been engulfed by heavy vegetation. (See image 201.) It is not a critical structure to this property and poses a threat to public safety. The best option is to dismantle the structure, saving materials as practicable to be used in rebuilding the outhouse or for repairing other historic buildings on the property. It could possibly be reconstructed as a modern bathroom facility should the park open to the public.



Image 201: *The outhouse is in very poor condition.*

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NINETEENTH-CENTURY WELL

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The original well has long since been closed, but the well cover has started to lean and should be repaired. There are also discarded items under the cover that should be removed. (See image 202.)



Image 202: *The well cover is leaning.*

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PENNINGTON CEMETERY

The Pennington Cemetery is in good condition with the major concerns being the thick layer of forest debris covering graves that are no longer marked and the care of the existing headstones. The Dililah Pennington footstone is overgrown with lichen (Wake County PROS staff cleaned the headstone during field work. See images 203-204.) The George G. Roberson headstone is no longer attached to its base, putting it in danger of falling off and breaking. (See image 205.) The cemetery should be assessed by a cemetery restoration specialist and preserved as recommended. Repairs should be completed only by trained professionals.



Image 203: *Lichen overgrowth on Pennington headstone before cleaning*



Image 204: *Pennington headstone after cleaned*



Image 205: *Damage to Roberson headstone*

FARM LANDSCAPE

The majority of the landscape is reclaimed agricultural land in early stages of forest succession. A small acreage is maintained by Wake County Parks, Recreation, and Open Space east of the farmhouse. East of this area, just inside the tree line, there is a trash dump site that should be cleaned up. (See image 206.) Just past the dump site is the stream that waters this property, and the trash is not only a threat to public safety but also to the stream's water quality.



Image 206: *There is a trash dump in the woods east of the farmhouse.*

PRESERVATION TIMELINE

INTRODUCTION

This section offers recommendations to prioritize repair and restoration projects for each surviving structure on the property. The immediate need for the property is to remove the debris, stabilize the structures and delicate architectural elements, and bring in a restoration specialist to evaluate each structure and make recommendations for repairs and restoration.

FARMHOUSE EXTERIOR

Within One Year

- Assess and repair roof
- Repair damaged windows & remove plastic
- Repair or replace gutter system
- Remove plant overgrowth and algae growth
- Remove debris around house and on porches
- Repair or replace damaged weatherboard
- Remove Christmas lights
- Remove fallen awning

Within Five Years

- Paint the exterior
- Repair or replace damaged millwork
- Repair damage from poor water drainage
- Remove porch screen

Long Term

- Repair damaged porch floors
- Repair damaged corner boards
- Remove foundation infill to allow ventilation

Ongoing

- Monitor windows to ensure glass is intact
- Monitor gutter system
- Monitor plant growth
- Maintain exterior paint
- Monitor roof condition
- Monitor chimneys

FARMHOUSE INTERIOR

Within One Year

- Remove debris and clean
- Cover exposed wires and gas lines

Within Five Years

- Repair damage from poor water drainage
- Repair staircase millwork

Long Term

- Repair broken hearthstones

Ongoing

- Monitor wear & tear on floors, doorways, windows, ceiling, and staircase
- Maintain interior paint

LOG TOBACCO-CURING BARN

Within One Year

Remove poison ivy vine and other overgrowth
Repair tin cladding
Repair or replace rear ventilation door
Remove debris outside and inside building

Within Five Years

Repair shed roof

Long Term

Replace rotten logs

Ongoing

Monitor roof condition
Monitor plant growth

FRAME TOBACCO-CURING BARN

Within One Year

Remove plant overgrowth
Repair tin cladding
Repair or replace rear ventilation door
Assess and repair roof

Within Five Years

Repair shed roof
Assess and repair foundation

Long Term

No long-term recommendations

Ongoing

Monitor roof condition
Monitor plant growth

TOBACCO PACK HOUSE

Within One Year

Repair or replace doors
Assess and repair roof
Remove debris
Remove plant overgrowth
Repair or replace damaged weatherboard
Remove Ordering Pit roof debris

Within Five Years

No five-year recommendations

Long Term

Replace fire damaged weatherboard
Replace front sill
Assess foundation

Ongoing

Monitor roof condition
Monitor plant growth

LOG POTATO-CURING SHED

Within One Year

Remove plant overgrowth
Assess and repair roof
Repair or replace doors and windows
Remove debris
Repair or replace damaged weatherboard

Within Five Years

No five-year recommendations

Long Term

No long-term recommendations

Ongoing

Monitor plant growth
Monitor roof condition

FRAME POTATO-CURING SHED

Within One Year

Remove plant overgrowth
Assess and repair roof
Repair or replace doors and windows
Repair or replace damaged weatherboard

Within Five Years

No five-year recommendations

Long Term

No long-term recommendations

Ongoing

Monitor plant growth
Monitor roof condition

TENANT HOUSE

Within One Year

Thoroughly document materials, floor plan

Within Five Years

Dismantle structure

Long Term

Rebuild structure

Ongoing

No ongoing recommendations

CORN CRIB

Within One Year

Remove debris
Remove plant overgrowth
Assess and repair damaged weatherboard

Within Five Years

Assess and repair foundation
Assess roof condition

Long Term

No long-term recommendations

Ongoing

Monitor plant growth
Monitor roof condition

STORAGE SHED

Within One Year

Remove debris
Stabilize or dismantle collapsing shed

Within Five Years

Assess roof condition

Long Term

Restore shed to original appearance

Ongoing

Monitor plant growth
Monitor roof condition

OUTHOUSE

Within One Year

No one-year recommendations

Within Five Years

Dismantle structure

Long Term

Rebuild structure

Ongoing

No ongoing recommendations

NINETEENTH-CENTURY WELL

Within One Year

Remove debris

Within Five Years

Rebuild covering

KENNEL

Long Term

Remove remaining concrete slabs

PENNINGTON CEMETERY

Within One Year

Remove forest debris Assess, clean, and repair existing headstones

Within Five Years

No five-year recommendations

Long Term

Perform ground-penetrating radar to locate unmarked graves Treat headstones to prevent plant growth
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Ongoing

Monitor cemetery for vandalism Maintain grounds Clean headstones as necessary

FARM LANDSCAPE

Within One Year

Remove debris in dump area

Within Five Years

No five-year recommendations

Long Term

No long-term recommendations

Ongoing

Monitor property for illegal dumping

INTERPRETIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Wake County Parks, Recreation, and Open Space (PROS) uses parks and open spaces to “promote environmental and cultural resource stewardship and provide safe recreational and education opportunities for all county citizens.”⁷⁴ The Robertson-O'Briant Farm has great potential as a park within PROS because of its potential to fulfill this mission – one of the greatest strengths of this property is the opportunity for interdisciplinary, practical learning and recreation. It is ideal for a cultural park because of its extant historic structures relating to the agricultural and social history of the North Carolina Piedmont and Wake County. It has acres of land including mature pine forest, early succession growth, and riparian zones that can be used to interpret the ecology and environmental history of the region. The need to maintain the historic structures, as well as the possibility of adding nature trails, provides opportunities for students and volunteers in the area to gain hands-on experience in historic preservation and park management. It demonstrates the strong link between environmental and cultural resources; the lives of the people who lived on this property were shaped primarily by the abundance and limitations of their environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR USE OF HISTORIC STRUCTURES

Most of the extant historic structures are in good condition and are structurally sound, making it possible to allow full public access. However, all structures should be thoroughly assessed by a restoration specialist prior to allowing public access. The farmhouse would be best used with the first floor as an exhibit space and the second floor for staff offices without access for the general public. The staircase in the central hall is in structurally sound but shows signs of severe wear and tear. Many of the floors, which are original to the house, also show signs of severe wear and tear and should be protected by limiting access. The Victorian porch is in good condition and could serve as the main entrance. Access to the South Room should be limited as much as possible or the floor protected with carpeting. The North Room is in better condition and could be a primary exhibit space with a walkway through the room designated

⁷⁴Wake County Parks, Recreation, and Open Space, “It’s the NATURE of our Business” Brochure, obtained May 7, 2012.

with handrails and protected with carpet. The infill room, Parlor, and Hall could serve as secondary exhibit spaces. These rooms could also have designated walkways, with the Hall serving as the handicap entrance and exit.

Most of the outbuildings require minimal attention to be safe for public access, and most are structurally sound making it possible to allow full access. All structures need to be free of debris and discarded personal items before allowing public access. The shed roofs on both tobacco-curing barns must be repaired or removed before allowing public access to these buildings, but the buildings are structurally sound, and the public should be given access to interior spaces to allow complete understanding of tobacco agricultural practices. The first floor of the pack house is also stable and important to interpretation of the site, but the fire-damaged areas of the second floor should be assessed and repaired if necessary before allowing public access. A railing should be installed to prevent visitors from walking into the ordering pit. The potato-curing sheds and corn crib are in good condition for public access once debris is removed. The equipment shed needs to be repaired before access is permitted, and the tenant house and outhouse should be dismantled and public access prohibited entirely. These buildings, as well as the livestock barn that has been lost, may still be interpreted to the public through reconstructed buildings, interpretive signage, and photographs.

CULTURAL INTERPRETATION RE COMMENDATIONS

The property would best be used as a historic site similar to Historic Oak View County Park. The walk-in visitor would experience opportunities to learn about how the Sandy Plain community was shaped by agriculture, the history of tobacco and potato farming, and the Robertsons' and O'Briants' roles in the community. Currently, PROS interprets only one of the two major crops grown in the region, with Historic Oak View County Park providing programming and interpretation of a nineteenth-century cotton farm. The Robertson-O'Briant Farm grew primarily tobacco, which is a significant part of the agricultural history of Wake County and the North Carolina Piedmont.

Although the farmhouse could be restored and furnished as a historic house museum, a more effective use of the house would be as an exhibit space. House museum collections are expensive to acquire, difficult to protect, and require labor-intensive maintenance

to care for properly. Instead, it would be preferable to restore the architecture and develop exhibits about agricultural and environmental history, the Robertson and O'Briant families, the history of the Sandy Plain community, the development of public education in Wake County, architectural trends, archaeological methods, cemetery restoration, and other topics related to the site. Exhibits could be permanent (although installed to prevent permanent changes to the house) or temporary, and travelling exhibits could also be obtained.

The visitor experience could be enhanced by leasing the fields currently maintained by Wake County Parks, Recreation, and Open Space to a local farmer to grow tobacco and potatoes. The opportunity to see active farming on the property would complete the visitor's understanding of the agricultural history of both the Robertson-O'Briant Farm and Wake County, and leasing the land would provide income to fund maintaining the property. PROS could partner with organizations such as 4-H and the Future Farmers of America (FFA) to maintain these fields and present educational programming to the public, similar to the cultural programming provided at Historic Yates Mill County Park by the Yates Mill Associates. These organizations could lead programming explaining the history of farming methods and allowing visitors to take part in planting, harvesting, and curing the crops.

Another excellent partnership opportunity is with the North Carolina State University (NCSU) history department. NCSU offers a degree in public history, which includes fields such as museum management, historic preservation, and cultural resource management. The Robertson-O'Briant Farm could serve as the site for field schools in each of these categories, offering the students an opportunity for hands-on, practical experience while providing well-qualified volunteers to assist PROS with maintenance and operation of the site.

ENVIRONMENTAL INTERPRETATION RECOMMENDATIONS

The second part of the walk-in visitor's experience would be opportunities for environmental education and recreation. The Robertson-O'Briant Farm offers opportunities to educate the public about many aspects of environmental science, including botany, forestry, ecology, and ornithology. These opportunities could take shape through hiking trails with interpretive signage about plant and animal identification, forest and stream ecology, and

logging, or through guided educational programs on these topics. There is also the opportunity to develop a system of bike trails similar to those at Harris Lake County Park, which are maintained by Triangle Off-Road Cyclists. Again there are excellent opportunities to partner with local universities for field schools in environmental sciences, as well as with Falls Lake State Park for environmental programming, since it is located adjacent to the farm on the eastern border.

In 2005, the National Park Service issued a directive to all parks mandating that interpretation include both cultural and natural resources, and since then, park systems nationwide are expanding their interpretation from a singular focus on either cultural resources or natural resources to instead recognize the undeniable link between the two.⁷⁵ The Robertson-O'Briant Farm is an excellent example of this link. Access to waterways – and thereby access to markets – was a critical factor in early settlement patterns and affected the property lines of farmers across North Carolina. The migration of the Robertson-O'Briant Farm property owners and the crops they cultivated throughout the nineteenth century were linked directly to the soils of the Sandy Plain area and the persistence of the Granville Wilt. Cultural events also impacted environmental patterns: technological developments in the early decades of the twentieth century resulted in a sharp decline in agriculture across the country by mid-century. The result was decreasing acreage cleared for pasture or cultivation, increasing pollution from fertilization, and shifts to logging as former farms were reclaimed by forest. PROS has the opportunity to be on the forefront of park interpretation by emphasizing the significance of environmental conditions in shaping the history of a community.

STAFFING RECOMMENDATIONS

Adequate staffing is the primary concern for implementing interpretive recommendations. The Robertson-O'Briant Farm could be maintained with minimal staff by utilizing interpretive options that are self-guided or volunteer led. Cell phone tours, interpretive signage, and information kiosks are good options for a quality self-guided experience. Providing programming through a friends group (similar to the Yates Mill Associates) or outside organizations (such as 4-H or FFA) are good options for volunteer-led educational opportunities.

⁷⁵ National Park Service, "Director's Order #6: Interpretation and Education," January 19, 2005, <http://www.nps.gov/policy/DOrders/DOrder6.html> (accessed March 12, 2012).

Partnering with NC State University for field schools, with Falls Lake State Park for environmental programming, and leasing land for active farming are good options to maintain and interpret the property with minimal PROS staff. By utilizing these options, the park could be overseen and maintained by the five full-time staff typical to PROS parks. Staff offices could be located on the second floor of the farmhouse, which includes two large rooms.

One of the primary goals in hiring staff should be to combine expertise in cultural resources with expertise in environmental education. This site is an excellent example of the interconnectedness of environment and culture, and conveying this message to a public audience requires an equal focus on both areas of study though equal interpretation and programming, which requires equal expertise among staff members.

GUEST SERVICES RECOMMENDATIONS

For the property to be opened to the public, parking, restrooms, and handicap accessibility must be addressed. There is a small driveway south of the farmhouse. The configuration of the historic structures makes it impossible to expand the driveway to an adequate parking lot, although this space could be used for handicap or staff parking. There was at one time a driveway to the tenant house, and there is sufficient space there, on the north end of the property, to re-grade the driveway and build a parking lot for at least twenty cars. Since this is a good distance from the farmhouse, an information kiosk should be placed at this parking lot site, and walking trails built to direct visitors to historic structures.

There are two restrooms on the first floor of the farmhouse that, after renovation, would be adequate for visitor and staff use. However, these restrooms are not handicap accessible and would require extensive renovation to meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. Since these renovations would likely be permanent and not reversible, the best option would be to build a new restroom on the property that is ADA compliant. This could be done on the north end of the property near the suggested parking lot, which would also provide easy restroom access for visitors utilizing trails only. With five full-time staff, these restrooms could be available from park opening in the morning until park closing at dusk.

The farmhouse and outbuildings also do not meet ADA requirements. If the main parking lot is constructed on the north end of the property but the main exhibit space is the farmhouse, handicap parking spaces should be placed at the current driveway immediately south of the house. There is ample space there to include one or two handicap accessible spaces, which is all that is required for a main parking lot of 50 spaces. The Victorian porch on the farmhouse is a significant character-defining feature and should not be altered to achieve accessibility compliance. Instead, accessibility should be achieved by constructing a ramp to the porch and front door of the hall-parlor portion of the house. There is an extant sidewalk from the driveway to the hall porch, but it is in poor condition and should be restored. The door to the screened porch is not ADA compliant, and to achieve compliance, the screen should be removed to open the full space between porch posts. The front door has a non-compliant door handle, but since the door is not original the handle may be replaced without affecting the integrity of the structure. The doorways in the house are character-defining features, and since they range from 2'11" to 3'9" they do not need to be altered to be ADA compliant. Only the first floor of the house is recommended for public access, with the second floor used for staff offices, so accessibility is not required for the second floor.

In general, the outbuildings are accessibility compliant with the exception of the Pack House and the Corn Crib, both of which have steps at the entrance. The steps are part of the character-defining features of these structures and should not be altered with the addition of a ramp, so providing an alternate experience through images, video, or other visual alternatives is the best option for these buildings, as well as the second floor of the farmhouse, if desired. Building paved pathways to each building is necessary.

To comply with public safety regulations, fire alarms with audio and visual cues, lighted exit signs, fire extinguishers, and other safety equipment and signage must be added to the farmhouse and the farm outbuildings, as well as all other requirements of the North Carolina Office of State Fire Marshal.

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION

This report serves a preliminary investigation into the history, architecture, and preservation issues of the Robertson-O'Briant Farm. All of these areas require additional research. Further study in genealogy, land deeds, legal documents, and other archival materials, as well as contextual research on the social and agricultural history of New Light Township, Wake County, North Carolina, and the South will result in a more complete picture of the significance of this property on the local and national levels. A restoration specialist should be contracted to thoroughly assess the condition of all extant structures. Architectural details that are currently not visible may be investigated further during restoration efforts, such as covered ceilings or flooring in the farmhouse, paint analysis in the tenant house and farmhouse, notching in the log tobacco-curing barn and potato-curing shed, and more. Further investigation into preservation issues will be possible as restoration efforts begin and specialists are contracted to assess the condition of the buildings.

In addition to these areas, specialists should be brought in to assess possible biological and archaeological significance, including studying and restoring the cemetery. Wake County Parks, Recreation, and Open Space (PROS) should also develop a master plan for this property to guide long-term planning, regardless of its status as open space versus a public park.

BIOLOGICAL SURVEY

A thorough biological survey should be completed to develop appropriate environmental interpretive programming. This information may be used to develop programs similar to the other Wake County Parks, including nature hikes, birding programs, interpretive plant and animal identification trails, and the Natural Resources Inventory Database.

PROS also has the opportunity to partner with North Carolina State University (NCSU) and other local universities to hold laboratory classes or field schools in environmental science and ecology on the property. The streams, riparian zones, and multiple stages of forest succession are valuable teaching tools for these types of educational opportunities.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY

The Pennington Cemetery should be assessed by an archaeological expert. Most of the graves are covered by forest debris and are unmarked, but the size and age of the cemetery indicate the likelihood there are many more graves than those that are marked. Ground-penetrating radar, which records Geographic Information System (GIS) coordinates, would be the best possible option for studying this cemetery. It is also interesting that the largest headstone in the cemetery is for an African American tenant worker, since the lower classes usually had small, simple markers for graves. Further research is needed to discover the age of the stone and who may have installed it.

LONG-TERM PLANNING

Although PROS may not have the funding to establish the Robertson-O'Briant Farm as a public park in the immediate future, it is critical that a master plan be developed to guide long-term planning and protect the rich cultural and environmental resources on the property. In addition to problems caused by neglecting the extant structures, there are problems caused by the absence of PROS staff on the property, including vandalism, theft, and illegal dumping. Staff presence – even intermittently – will deter trespassing on the property and help protect its resources. A master plan will also guide the restoration and ongoing maintenance of the buildings, as well as provide opportunities for current PROS staff to develop programming that will be ready when the property does open to the public.