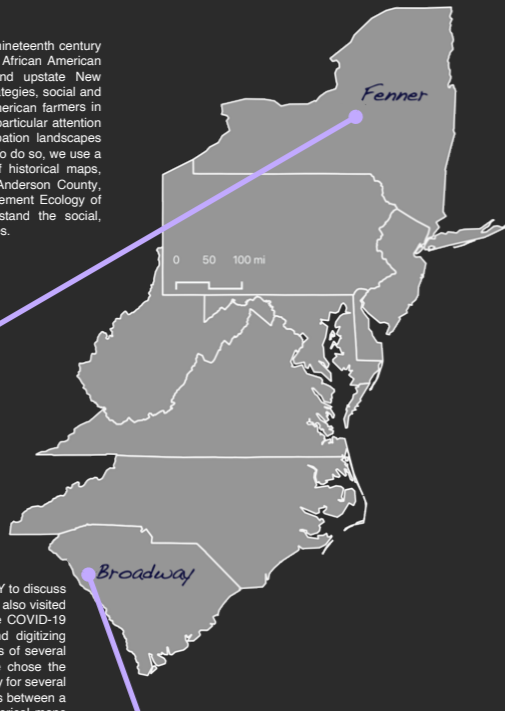
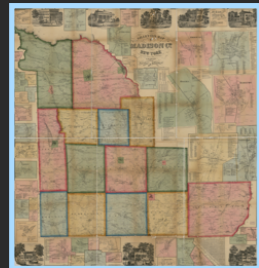


Landscapes of Black Farming: A Preliminary Investigation of Rural Life and Labor in Anderson County, SC and Madison County, NY, 1860-1880

Jordan E. Davis and Eric E. Jones

Introduction

This poster details a pilot study investigating rural landscapes of nineteenth century farming, focusing on the transformation of rural life and labor for African American farmers following emancipation in upstate South Carolina and upstate New York. Our goal is to describe the relationship between farming strategies, social and economic interactions, and the various landscapes of African American farmers in these two regions during the mid-to-late nineteenth century, with particular attention to the ways Black farmers created and navigated post-emancipation landscapes both before and after the United States Civil War (c. 1861-1865). To do so, we use a combination of census data and GIS-based spatial analyses of historical maps, archival sources, and environmental and landscape data from Anderson County, SC and Madison County, NY. This work is part of a larger Settlement Ecology of Early Rural America (SEERA) project, which seeks to understand the social, economic, and political roots of modern rural life in the United States.



Background

In the summer of 2019, Eric visited family and friends in Fenner, NY to discuss a project that would examine the history of farming in the town. He also visited two former farmsteads (photos below). Due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, our team focused 2020 and 2021 on collecting and digitizing census records and archival sources and initiating spatial analysis of several historical maps dating to the mid-to-late 1800s. Additionally, we chose the township of Broadway, South Carolina as a comparative case study for several reasons, including: (1) the authors' interest in regional comparisons between a Northern and Southern setting; (2) the availability of detailed historical maps and census data for the period; and (3) Broadway's spatial proximity to the UoSC for pursuing future collaborative research with rural communities in SC.



By exploring a Northern and Southern setting simultaneously, we aim for our project to engage with the growing body of scholarship recognizing emancipation and reconstruction as a spatially and temporally "connected and protracted process" (Hahn 2009: 4-6; Gosse 2021). We ask, How do smallholding farmers in the rural North and South fit into, complicate, and challenge understandings of race, agriculture, and emancipation during the mid-to-late 19th century? Second, How can our work identify and engage with landscapes that have been forgotten, marginalized, and/or erased?



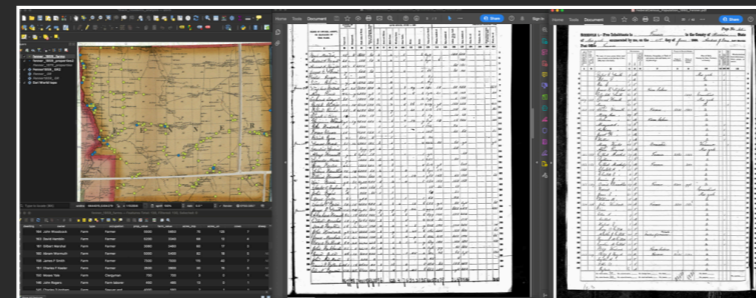
Methods

One of our first realizations was that our methods for recovering the nineteenth century landscapes of farmer owners and laborers could be aided by examining the period's Federal and State Census records. Census materials were used to map households to agricultural and demographic information, including metrics of agricultural productivity to the gender and age compositions of individual households. However, we note that several factors impact the reliability of historical census data (Clark et al. 1983; Petty in Reid and Bennett 2012: 31), including but not limited to, residential mobility, census coverage, enumerator variability, and of particular relevance for our preliminary study, debates over the under- and over-counting of Southern populations between 1870 and 1880 (Anderson 2015: 101-102). Additionally, we quickly learned that while some of our methods could be used across our two areas of interest, the racial, political, and socioeconomic histories of Fenner, NY and Broadway, SC demanded more specific methodological considerations.

Fenner, NY

The first step in locating farm owners and laborers in Fenner was to digitize and georeference a map of the town from 1859. The next step was to create two shapefiles (digital spatial databases), one for *farmers* (landowning "farmer" or "farm laborer") and one for *laborers* (non-landowning "farm laborer" or "day laborer"). We then went through the household census and non-population agricultural schedules from 1860 and matched those households and farms to those with the same names on the 1859 historic map, using QGIS.

During this process, we recorded farmers and laborers who were listed in the census and agricultural stats but did not show up on the map. Some farmers not on the 1859 map could be placed by looking at maps from 1853 and 1875 to corroborate their location with their order in the census. However, our focus here is on the laborers. To put them on the map, we first displayed farmers we could place on the map by their number visited in the census, from which a general path taken by the census enumerator could be seen. 43 of the 48 laborers were between households in the census that were also on the map. In these cases, we placed the "potential laborer location" between those households on the map. This created a shapefile for laborers who were not originally recorded on the map.



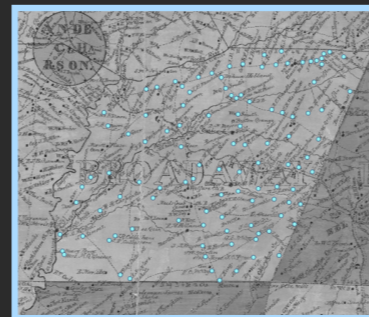
Screenshot of the process of constructing the shapefile for properties. The map, shapefile, and associated table in QGIS is on the left, the non-population agricultural stats are in the middle, and the household data is on the right.

Broadway, SC

The methodological process outlined above for Fenner was initially pursued for the town of Broadway, SC. Due to the larger proportion of Black and Multiracial farmers, an additional step was needed to identify and record the racial characteristics of the households. This led to recognition of racial and socioeconomic disparities in the cartographic recording and representation of farming households.

Of the 125 named households on the 1877 map of Broadway, roughly 100 were positively identified with white heads of household. While these households may reflect a large proportion of Broadway's farming landscape, this sample of primarily white landowning households is not representative of the town's broader agricultural landscape which included the farming landscapes of additional farm owners, renters, and sharecroppers not recorded on the map, both Black and white. While noting the number of households on the map that could not be positively linked to the census, we found that a total of 192 farmers were not recorded on the map -- a number amounting to roughly 2/3 of Broadway's historic farming population present in 1880.

As such, while our primary focus in Fenner was to place farm laborers back onto the landscape with confident identification of the map's households, our analysis in Broadway necessitated an effort to spatially represent the location of the majority of farmers that were not initially recorded in the map of 1877, especially non-white and non-farm owning households in the township.



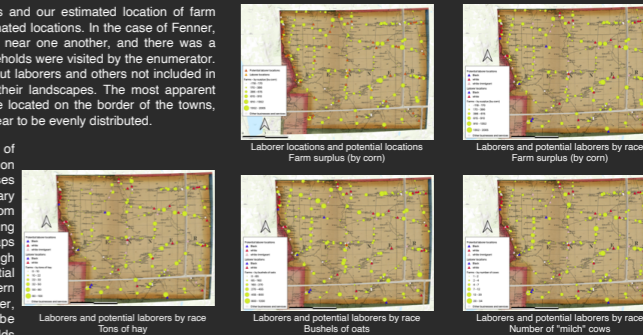
Map of Broadway, SC with identified farming households in 1880. This map represents only 1/3 of all farmers in the township. All of the households recorded on this 1877 map were historically classified as white households.

Results

Fenner, NY

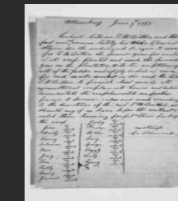
The maps on the top show the locations of farms and our estimated location of farm laborers. We feel confident about 43/48 of the estimated locations. In the case of Fenner, it is rare to have multiple people not on the map near one another, and there was a relatively systematic spatial patterning to how households were visited by the enumerator. As a result, we feel as though we can confidently put laborers and others not included in the 1859 map on the map and begin to discuss their landscapes. The most apparent pattern is that 4 out of the 5 Black households are located on the border of the towns, while immigrant households and white laborers appear to be evenly distributed.

The bottom row of maps shows the locations of laborers by race relative to farms and their production of the major cash crops of this time. Previous analyses of ours showed that hay and oats were the primary crops that distinguished highly profitable farms from subsistence farms during the mid-1800s. Dairy farming became the third such product in the 1870s. The maps show laborers located near farms that have high production in at least one of these. Upon initial inspection, there does not appear to be a pattern based on race or immigration history. However, analysis of nearby townships appears to be necessary, given the pattern of Black households living near the Fenner western and southern borders.



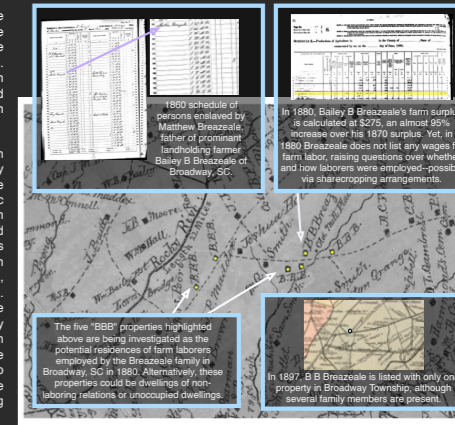
Broadway, SC

Given the huge disparity in laborers not included on the maps for these two towns, we knew we would need to explore alternative methods for placing farmers onto the historic landscape in South Carolina. We are currently developing methods that are responsive to SC's distinctive history of African and African American enslavement. Following Saidiya Hartman's (2008) theorization of the "afterlife of slavery," we remain particularly aware of the potential ways slavery's racialized violence continued following emancipation, especially across former plantation geographies. We focus on one particular case to show how our work is progressing: the Breazeale property.



Freedmen's Contract from Williamsburg District, South Carolina circa 1865

Tracing the ties between African American households and former enslaving families may ultimately facilitate the placement of laborers onto the landscape. Given the legal and socioeconomic restrictions structuring (but not determining) African American mobility in the South during this period (Cohen 1991; Chay and Munshi 2013), this process can support the exploration of African American relationships to specific places and landscapes, potentially across space as well as over time. However, while some enslaved persons took the surnames of former enslavers, a previous study estimates that a vast majority of Freed(w)men in South Carolina were given or chose alternative surnames (Thompson 2015: 30-31). At this time, no Black farmers were identified with the surname Breazeale in Broadway Township, necessitating additional strategies to identify past social relations.



Conclusions and Future Directions

We began our study with an understanding that "maps are culturally specific epistemological statements that invite dialogues and debates about space and place" (Weik 2009: 49). Our analysis of maps dating to the mid-to-late nineteenth century from both upstate New York and upstate South Carolina were found to be particularly unrepresentative of non-white and non-landholding agricultural landscapes. A potentially wide range of factors likely contributed to the cartographic absence of African American farmers (and many white farm laborers) across these two historical landscapes, not limited to cartographic errors. Despite these challenges, it is possible to enhance our understanding of these rural agrarian geographies through methods of critical cartography, archival research, and GIS-based historic landscape reconstruction.

Moving forward, we want to enhance our study by integrating other lines of inquiry, including use of local records, family genealogies, and oral histories alongside low-impact archaeological investigations of identified historic properties and landscapes in both New York and South Carolina. We are especially interested in expanding our analysis both temporally and geographically, and invite collaboration with scholars studying similar questions of settlement ecology, rural transformation, and methods of landscape reconstruction in other settings. Additionally, we hope to engage more actively with scholarship in Black geographies in order to interrogate the normative rendering of Black life as "ungeographic" (McKittrick 2006; McKittrick and Woods 2007). We ultimately aim for this work to facilitate wider discussions of rural American places and landscapes.

Acknowledgements

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