

# Race and Farming in the North and South after the Civil War, 1870-1880

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## Introduction

While North American archaeology's interest in rural farmsteads is a definitive marker of the field (e.g. Adams 1990; Groover 2008), archaeological interest in the intersecting histories of race and farming in the United States is a more recent development. By analyzing historic census and map data for African American and Euro-American farms in both Fenner, Madison County, New York and Broadway, Anderson County, South Carolina following the U.S. Civil War (1861-1865), we highlight several opportunities and challenges for examining smallholder (see Netting 1993) farming landscapes during the later part of the 19th century. This preliminary work is part of the 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.

**Why did we explore farming in Fenner, NY and Broadway, SC?**

Our interest in exploring questions of race and farming across the North and South following the U.S. Civil War solidified when several Black/Multiracial families were identified in Fenner, NY during the 19th and early 20th centuries as farm owners and farm laborers - yet, African Americans heritage in Fenner township remains underacknowledged. Today, Fenner's population is over 98% white.

The township of Broadway, SC was chosen 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) the proximity of Broadway to the UofSC for potential collaborative archaeological research with descendant communities.



## Background: Race, Farming, and Reconstruction



Image Credit: E. Sachse & Co., Lithographer. The shackles broken - by the genius of freedom / lith. & print by E. Sachse & Co., ca. 1874 (Baltimore: Pub. E. Sachse & Co., N. N. Liberty St., Baltimore) Photograph: <https://www.loc.gov/item/20036907771>.

Our approach is influenced by three key bodies of scholarly literature: first, historiographical literature on 19th century farming, including past and more recent scholarship on African American farmers (Reid and Bennett eds 2012; Dangerfield 2021); second, archaeological scholarship on 19th and early 20th century farmsteads, particularly those studies attentive to settlement, race, and landscapes (Barnes 2011; Morris 2014; Franklin and Lee 2019, 2020); and third, scholarship recognizing emancipation and reconstruction as a spatially and temporally "connected and protracted process" across the US (Hahn 2009: 4-6; Gosse 2021).

We ask, how do Black and white smallholding farmers in the rural North and South fit into, complicate, and challenge understandings of race, agriculture, and emancipation during the late 19th century?

This poster outlines some of our preliminary results while anticipating how further archaeological and anthropological inquiry can contribute unique perspectives to these wider discussions.

## Methods

1. We first transcribed agricultural and population data from state and United States federal census records.

2. We modified and applied Parkerson's (1996) equation for calculating surplus from farm products and farm and household consumption:

$$S(\text{surplus}) = T(\text{total farm production}) - P(\text{planting requirements}) - F(\text{feed requirements}) - H(\text{human consumption})$$

We then applied this to the samples (shown in the Tables to the right). Commodity values for 1860 dollars come from Atack and Bateman (1987).

3. We compared various groupings of households/farms using Discriminant Function Analysis (DFA) to examine how they varied with regard to farm activities and production levels.

4. Using maps dated between 1870 and 1880, we began first order spatial analyses using the open source program QGIS to identify spatial correlations between farming households, as well as between households and landscape features. While our initial analysis has produced results for Fenner's Euro-American households (see Watson et al. 2019, Jones and Sprinkle 2021), our understanding of Fenner and Broadway's African American farming households and surrounding landscapes demands further consideration due to several conceptual and practical challenges.



## Agricultural Schedule Results

### General Farm Characteristics

#### Madison County, NY

Most historians and economists (Atack and Bateman 1987; McMurray 1996; Parkerson 1996) focus on the shift toward dairy farming in upstate NY. For certain, by the mid-20th century, it is the primary agricultural product. However, during the late 1800s, farms appear to increase production by increasing the scale of a diverse set of activities, including dairy production and growing of hay, oats, and corn. Farm acreage and surplus production increases over time, with a peak in 1870. However, the 1870 data are less detailed and we therefore had to assume input costs. Thus, our preliminary results can/should be refined.

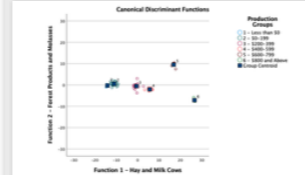
Year	Sample Size	Total Farms	Avg Total Acres	Avg Improved Acres	Avg Value	Surplus 1860 Dollars
1855	116	240	76.4	59.8	\$3,003	\$152.30
1860	67	253	95.6	69.3	\$3,640	\$276.80
1865	176	245	82.7	63.1	\$2,635	\$136.30
1870	62	218	106.4	81.7	\$5,513	\$613.77
1875	95	236	112.2	71.3	\$4,214	\$233.50
1880	100	239	85.0	62.4	\$3,362	\$259.70

#### Anderson County, SC

Historians note several characteristics distinguishing Anderson County's agricultural history from other SC upcountry counties, as well as from the state's well-known Lowcountry, including few large-scale plantations and a smaller historic enslaved population. Yet, by the middle of the 19th century Anderson Co. boasted a highly productive and diversified agricultural economy accompanied by a history of smaller, family-owned farms (Revels and Sherrer 2002). Based on our initial analysis of 1870-1880 agricultural data, cotton and corn were the primary crops produced during this period.

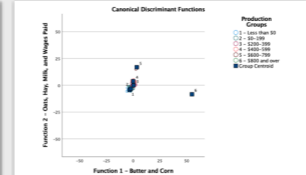
Year	Sample Size	Total Farms	Avg Total Acres	Avg Improved Acres	Avg Value	Surplus 1860 Dollars
1870	141	199	97.2	23.2	\$651	\$65.68
Black	71	71	14.2	10.4	\$101	\$4.36
White	70	128	179.1	36.0	\$1,200	\$126.15
1880	125	278	57.5	27.3	\$482	\$196.90
Black	96	-	43.0	25.7	\$391	\$200.70
White	29	-	105.7	32.5	\$783	\$184.30

### Fenner 1870

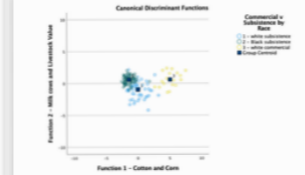


Both graphs show the results of discriminant function analysis (DFA) comparing farms of different production levels. At this time, the are no Black/Multiracial farmers listed in the non-population agricultural census in Fenner township, although a few do appear as farm laborers. The functions show the factors that most distinguish the groups in that axis of the graphs.

### 1880

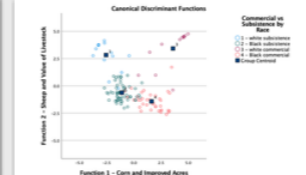


### Broadway 1870

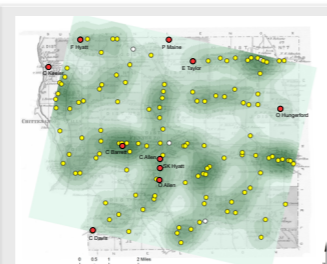


Both graphs show the results of the DFA comparing farms of different production levels according to the racial classification of the head of household. The functions show the factors that most distinguish our preliminary groupings.

### 1880



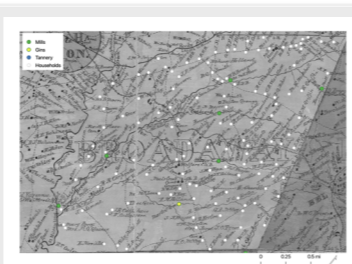
## Socio-Spatial Analysis Results



#### Town of Fenner, NY

Exploring Social Interaction and Labor Sharing

We began with a nearest neighbor analysis of farms on an 1875 property map in QGIS. The 10 most productive farms from 1870 are highlighted in red, and cheese factories in white. There is a higher number of farms near the town center, and there are highly productive farms in most clusters. These clusters are a good place to start analysis of social interaction and labor sharing. McMurray (1996), Parkerson (1996), and Atack and Bateman (1987) all note that farms were interconnected economically and socially at this time. This was a trend that continued through the 20th century and still exists today among the remaining smallholding farms in Fenner.



#### Town of Broadway, SC

Exploring Landscapes of Production and Travel Costs

The spatial placement and position of mills, tanneries, and other landscape features have been an almost constant element of geographical studies of agricultural production. In Broadway, the 1877 map contained a high degree of non-household landscape features which were quickly digitized and are now available for spatial analysis. To begin, we selected mills, tanneries, and (cotton) gins across Broadway, as Anderson County is noted as a high producer of cereals, livestock, and cotton during the later part of the 19th century (Revels and Sherrer 2002: 18). The number of nearby production centers may be a good place to begin evaluating the relative costs of production-related travel.

## Geographies of Black Farming

Between 1870 and 1880, smallholding farm owners, tenants, and sharecroppers are enumerated with agricultural data across Fenner and Broadway. These datasets can be used to estimate farm productivity. However, the cartographic absence of many of these farmers in both locales—both Black and white—raised several conceptual and methodological considerations for our preliminary study.



Image Credit: Lanney & Goebel. Savannah, Ga., early Negro life. Savannah Georgia South Atlantic States, Nonn. Savannah, Georgia. Lanney & Goebel photographers, dealers in photo stocks. 141 & 143 Broadway St., Savannah, Georgia, between 1867 and 1869. Photograph: <https://www.loc.gov/item/2015620291/>.

While accounting for similar levels of production and farm size, evidence of cartographic disparities between Black and white farm owners in Broadway, SC merits discussion. Of the 125 named households on the Broadway map, 105 were identified with white heads of household. Of the remaining households, none of the Black farm owners, laborers, or sharecroppers listed on the 1870 and 1880 federal agricultural schedules were identified on the 1877 Map. Given that the map's publication date coincides with the end of Reconstruction in the South, racialized forms cartographic erasure and disavowal should be considered as potential factors contributing to the map's silences on Black presence.

### Locating the "Landless" - Farm Laborers, Tenants, Sharecroppers

Due to the mobility of farm laborers, cartographic tendencies to record only land owners on official maps, and census enumeration thresholds omitting farms of limited size and surplus values, we encountered several challenges while working to spatially locate farm laborers, tenants, and sharecroppers on the landscape in South Carolina and New York. Locating households with multiple properties—such as B B Breazalee in Broadway (above)—may be a good first step for spatially locating possible individuals who did not own land formally. Alternatively, these additional properties may indicate the subdivision of property within a single landowning family. Both possibilities are considered valuable directions for our future research.

## Discussion and Future Research

We ultimately aim for this study to contribute to broader understandings of how race and smallholder farming have and continue to shape rural landscapes in the United States, both past and present. **Our preliminary results suggest that while race may be strongly correlated with the average value of farms during the late 19th century, contextual factors complicate our understandings of farm productivity.** For example, in SC we identified several highly productive Black (and white) farmers in 1870 and 1880—however, their socio-economic position as tenants and sharecroppers meant that their surplus production was often systematically circumscribed.

Below, we highlight some of the challenges and opportunities for future research in Fenner, NY and Broadway, SC.

### Enhancing Agricultural Census Data

While noting the value of the mid to late 19th century agricultural schedules, scholars have drawn attention to a set of factors potentially impacting the reliability of 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). Still, even with confidence in census figures, several questions remain about the daily practice of farming:

*In what ways was labor mobilized within households and across social networks? How did social constructions of gender, sex, and age play in household management and interactions with the market economy? Can we think about smallholder farming with and beyond the "human," engaging with crops, livestock, and farming ecosystems?*

**Future Research:** We want to enhance our study by exploring other lines of inquiry, including use of local records, family genealogies, and oral histories alongside low-impact archaeological investigations.

### Ongoing Fieldwork in Fenner, NY:

In the summer of 2019, I (Eric) visited with family and friends in Fenner to discuss the project and survey two former farmsteads. The old Allen house foundation is now on the Cody Farm property. The photos above are looking at the location of the house and barn and from the house to the Cody Farm. To the right are foundation stones and artifacts from the property. I visited this last summer to catch up with everyone after two years away due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and to visit some of the 19th century cemeteries.

### Interrogating Race and Agricultural Landscapes in the U.S. North and South

By exploring a Northern and Southern setting simultaneously, we noted two important trends in the study of race and farming: In the South, anti-Black racism remains an indispensable consideration in the study of African American smallholding, but analysis has historically tended to separate the experiences of African American farmers from other racialized groups, including Native Americans and Euro-Americans. In comparison, the North's claim to a largely mythologized, abolitionist heritage has often resulted in what Charles E. Orser Jr. (2015: 324) has called a "tyranny of racialization's silence and invisibility," whereby discussions of race and racism, if held at all, are framed as exceptions to the North's moral ethos and assertions of a race-less past.

While our study is admittedly in its early stages, we hold that locally-grounded and anthropologically comparative approaches to smallholder farming can foster potentially valuable understandings of race and agriculture across the U.S. North and South during the late 19th century.

## Acknowledgments

This work would not be possible without the town and family history from and support of the entire Jones family, particularly Dave, Lynne, and Jeanne, and the entire Cody family. Additional thanks to previous work completed by undergraduate and graduate students affiliated with the Settlement Ecology Research Group (SERG). Special thanks to the ASPIRE program and the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of South Carolina for funding the authors' research activities during the summer and fall of 2021 which contributed to this poster.

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