

Sunny Slope Historical Resources Report

Prepared by Danielle Funderburk, Lauren Mata, Michael Megelsh,
Jordan Miles, Matthew Robinson, and Victoria Skelton
May, 2018

Introduction

The following report is intended to give historical and memorial contextualization to the Sunny Slope plantation home and property in Auburn, Alabama. Completed by graduate students in Dr. Elijah Gaddis's Documenting and Interpreting Cultural Heritage course in the spring of 2018, this report consists of significant original research as well as extensive review of secondary literature and existing research. A brief history of the landscape of Sunny Slope opens the report. The last several pages are dedicated to specific recommendations and suggestions for how to think about, remember, and interpret Sunny Slope today in its new life as a space for community learning and inquiry. I'd draw particular attention to the students' many suggestions about the way that history can supplement and enhance the experience of Sunny Slope for its many visitors and continue to serve the mission of both the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Auburn and of the university more broadly.

-Elijah Gaddis

June, 2018

The History of Native Americans Around Auburn, Alabama

Danielle Funderburk

The first human activity detected in Alabama dates back about 11,000 years to the Paleoindian era. Most of what can be inferred about the first inhabitants of this area is based on stone tools such as projectile points and scrapers for animal hides. During the Paleoindian and the Archaic Period it is believed that many of these people lived in small groups of related individuals, called bands, who frequently relocated their encampments to find more resource rich areas located near rivers and streams. Evidence from such sites indicated that the groups ate hickory, chestnut and oak nuts, fruit such as muscadines, blackberries and persimmons and deer, turkey, rabbits, turtles, raccoons and squirrels.

Around 1,000 BC, during the Woodland Period bands of Native Americans began to tend small gardens of corn, squash and sunflowers. The conservability of these foods led to a need for storage containers and the development of pottery in this region. The increase in agriculture and year-round food availability resulted in population growth. As the groups became larger and more established in distinct locations they began constructing earthen mounds. During the Woodland Period the mounds were usually three to five feet high, approximately 30 feet wide and built over the tombs of important individuals. During the subsequent Mississippian Period, beginning around 1,000 AD, towns became more politically organized with a chief and ranked society. The mounds were built larger, some over 20 feet high and served religious or ceremonial purposes in addition to the burial function. The largest sites of the Mississippian era were already in decline before the first European contact, but the arrival of Hernando de Soto in 1547 resulted in the spread of disease that killed up to 90 % of the population.

De Soto was given permission by Charles V of Spain to explore and conquer the new continent in 1540. On his travels through what is now Florida, Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi de Soto had many interactions with the indigenous people of this area. He was known to kidnap Native Americans to use as guides and porters and hold hostages in exchange for supplies. In the documents from his journey it appears they came close to Auburn, visiting a large chiefdom on the Tallapoosa River called Tuckabatchee near what is now Tallasee. Over the next two hundred years following the death and violence of De Soto's visit the descendants of the Mississippian people rebuilt their population and became known as the Creek Confederacy. When the naturalist William Bartram came through this area between 1773 – 1777 during his trip to document and acquire native plants, he gave thoughtful descriptions of their society, including the religion, agriculture and language. Bartram found large, well organized towns with a public square surrounded by communal buildings. Around the town center were scattered family compounds, often located on nearby waterways. Creek families, known as clans, were matrilineal and the female head-of-household owned the land which

would be inherited by her daughters. Sunny Slope is located in the heart of Creek country, with the largest towns on the Tallapoosa and Chattahoochee rivers.

Much of what we know about the Creeks comes from the journals of Benjamin Hawkins, the General Superintendent for Indian Affairs from 1796 until 1818. Hawkins was sent to assimilate the Native Americans to American society and in the process he learned their language and lived the towns of Tuckabatchee and Coweta. A group of Creeks, called the Red Sticks, opposed assimilation and encroachment on Creek lands. During a trip to Florida to acquire guns and ammunition the Red Sticks led a massacre of over 300 people at Ft. Mims. This began a Creek

civil war which resulted in Andrew Jackson and federal troops defeating the Red Stick revolt at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend in 1814.

Auburn's plantation landscape

Jordan Miles

The house known as Sunny Slope has been altered many times since its initial construction, but reflects a version of Greek revival architecture popular at the time of its construction. [Greek Revival](#) architecture was celebrated by Southern Democrats as they were inspired by the ideas of Athenian democracy. While the house is modest in [comparison](#) to the larger Greek revival plantations of popular imagination, it calls on the same symbolism. The columns in front are meant to evoke a temple-like appearance, and its white paint are meant to evoke the white marble of Greek ruins. For its owners and visitors, these clear visual references to antiquity helped legitimize the plantation system of enslavement within a larger context of democratic ideals and historical precedent.

The land on which Sunny Slope sits was first owned by a Creek head-of-household who was allotted the plot of land following the [1832 Treaty of Washington](#). As a result of this treaty, Creek nation land was divided into 320 acre square allotments. Each allotment was demarcated by the [township range system](#). Sunny Slope resides on the East half of a section divided in half vertically identified as [Section 31 of Township 19N and Range 26E on the St Stephen meridian in the Tallapoosa land district](#).

Many Creek owners of allotments after the treaty of Washington were dispossessed of their land due to [rampant fraud on the part of white land speculators, and systems of indebtedness of Creeks to white settlers](#). It is likely, but not certain, that the owner of the allotment was similarly dispossessed of their land. This allotment's [land patent](#) demonstrates transfer of ownership to two individuals in 1840: John Fontaine and Wesley Williams.

[John Fontaine](#) was a [wealthy cotton merchant](#), and the [first mayor of Columbus](#), Georgia. [Wesley Williams](#) was one of the first white settlers of the nearby town of Opelika, Alabama and served as its first postmaster. The connection between the two men is unclear, although there is a

[record of correspondence](#) between them 1836 about another land matter in Macon County, Alabama.

At some point after the early 1840s the land passed from Fontaine and Williams to [William Samford](#). It is unclear how William Samford came to possess the land. It is [likely](#) that Samford's wife Susan Lewis Samford inherited the land from either her father, Lewis Dowdell, or her uncle who James Dowdell, who had both amassed large tracts of land nearby. The Samfords likely came to build and inhabit the residence of Sunny Slope in 1857. They did not live there long. At the outbreak of the Civil War, Confederate Soldiers were quartered at the home.

In [1860](#), the land value of the plantation was 1,300 dollars, and primarily produced corn, oats, and cotton. While corn and oats are not labor intensive, cotton production at the time was highly mechanized and dependent upon a slave labor force. In 1860, William Samford enslaved sixty-five people on Sunny Slope, and another [twenty-four](#) enslaved on another plantation "Eyrie" near Tuskegee, Alabama.

What is now recognized as Sunny Slope is a Greek Revival style farmhouse that represented the ["Big House."](#) The big house on a plantation was not just the largest structure, but

“big” in the way it conveyed the power and authority over enslaved laborers. During the period of slavery, Sunny Slope may have resembled a [village](#). Sunny Slope had [seven](#) slave cabins to house the sixty five enslaved people. While there has been no archeology on the site, local oral testimony suggests that they were located near what is now Kimberly Road. The landscape was likely not very forested in contrast to its current appearance, as it was almost certainly cleared for cultivation of crops.

During the Civil War the Samford family retreated to their other plantation “Eyrie.” After the Civil War, in 1878 the Keeler family, possibly carpetbaggers from Ohio, [purchased](#) the property from W.C. Dowdell, Susan Samford’s brother. After that, it became the property of the Heard family, and was likely subdivided. In [1888](#) the Heards sold the property to John P. Alvis and William Cullers. The home stayed in the Alvis family, until Sunny Slope passed through [marriage](#) from Bessie Alvis to her husband Verle Emmerick in 1905.

After slavery, the plantation landscape would have likely changed. Sharecropping, the system of land division created after the abolishment of the slave system created a very different landscape. The large antebellum plantations were divided up into smaller farms where sharecroppers built very small abodes. The big house of Sunny Slope still conveyed much of the same power and authority and dominated the landscape as it did before the war during the late reconstruction and Jim Crow periods of the New South. Over time, the land was further subdivided. The land behind the plantation is now host to a small street named Sunny Slope Lane. This cul-de-sac with brick ranch houses built in the 1970s reflects Auburn’s transition from an agricultural landscape to a residential landscape.

Slavery in Auburn

Lauren Mata

After the importation of enslaved people from Africa was banned in 1808, the domestic slave trade increased. Simultaneously, the cotton gin and the high payments for cotton increased the demand for enslaved people. By 1860, the slave population in the entire state of Alabama was 435,000. Enslaved people were transported from the Upper South to the Lower South to meet planters' demands. Alabama's state capitol, Montgomery, was geographically situated to be a hub for the slave trade in Alabama. Growing industrialization and railways, in conjunction with the Alabama River, connected Montgomery to the rest of the South. Enslaved people were stored in warehouses like cattle and then marched up Commerce Street to the fountain in downtown Montgomery. Between 1848 and 1860, at least 164 licenses were granted to slave traders operating in the [city](#).

Enslaved people were marched up and down Commerce Street in chains, often purchased by white men. Their bodies were subject to examination and pricing was determined by a perceived lifetime of labor. Men between the ages of 17 and 35 were [sold](#) for approximately \$1,000 in 1860--approximately \$29,000 in 2018. If families made it to the fountain together, there was nothing dictating that they couldn't be separated--though in 1852, the Alabama Slave Code encouraged slaveholders to keep families together and avoid separating children under the age of five from their mothers.

By 1860, Alabama had transformed into a slave society, where slavery affected everything about a state, including its economy, politics, and culture. In 1864, near the end of the Civil War, a new depot was opened in downtown Montgomery, signifying the expansion and

growth of slavery. Situated a mere fifty-five miles away from Montgomery, Auburn proved to be a fruitful valley for incoming planters in the decades preceding the Civil War. Prior to the Civil War, there were approximately one thousand white people and seven hundred enslaved people in [Auburn](#). Of all the families that occupied the Auburn region, no more than six held no slaves.

The lives and circumstances of enslaved people varied from slaveholder to slaveholder, though the relationship remained defined by labor. On large plantations, such as Sunny Slope, enslaved people typically worked in the fields, though some performed domestic chores. In 1860, slave schedules reveal that Samford owned [99 people](#), 65 of whom were at [Sunny Slope](#).

Days were long and strenuous--most enslaved people started their days before sunrise and worked

until sunset. After the day had ended, enslaved people typically returned to small cabins that measured less than 300 square feet. Enslaved people frequently resisted their subjugation by feigning illness, breaking tools, and running away--though most did not make it far away from their origin. Punishment was brutal and ranged from beating and branding, to separating families. Although there were attempts to document what life was like as an enslaved person in the

Auburn-Opelika region specifically, they should be [critically](#) analyzed.

Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and the Postbellum

Lauren Mata

Following the defeat of the Confederacy in the Civil War, federal troops occupied formerly Confederate states to manage and monitor their political and social readjustments in a period known as Reconstruction. Reconstruction lasted from 1865 to 1874 in the state and was composed of two different stages: Presidential Reconstruction and Congressional Reconstruction. The first stage, lasting from 1865 to 1867, President Andrew Johnson conciliated former Confederates and pardoned large slaveholders, allowing local officials to

regain positions of power. Allowing ex-Confederates the authority to structure race relations, states enacted Black Codes to penalize day-to-day life of African Americans.

The second stage began in 1867 after the Republican-dominated Congress passed amendments to extend suffrage to formerly enslaved African American men and sent the United States Army to the South. In response to occupation from the army, and the expanding rights of African Americans, terrorist groups like the Ku Klux Klan formed. By 1875, the Democrats rewrote the state constitution, reversing Reconstruction-era changes. Without the army to enforce Reconstruction-era amendments, the South stripped enfranchisement and the ability to hold leadership from African Americans. In 1896, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation was legal, so long as separate facilities were of equal quality--a stipulation that was often ignored.

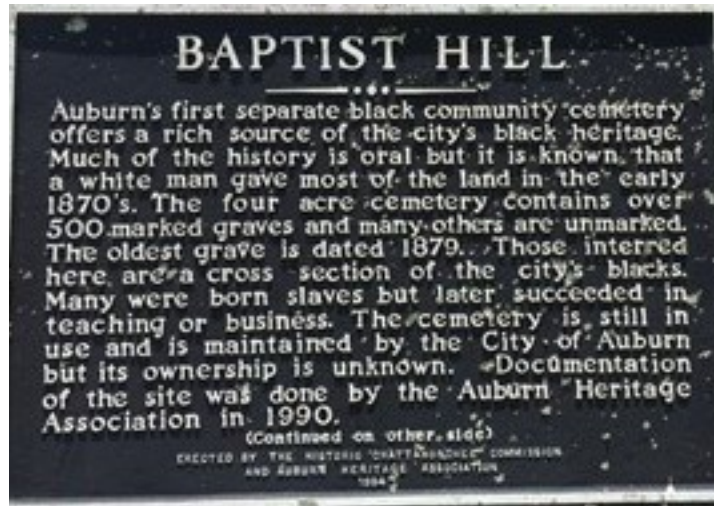
Before the Civil War ended, the Samford family left Sunny Slope. Although a specific date or year is currently unknown, newspapers reveal that William F. Samford [listed](#) 750 acres of land for sell in the area and fled to a house in Opelika, which he called “[Stony Lonesome](#).” He continued to write, sending letters to newspapers in the North and South under the pen name “Warwick,” specifying conditions that southerners demanded for Reconstruction. Newspaper searches of the “Samford” surname show that a significant portion of the articles written about William F. Samford were either critical of him, or written by him. His attempt to run for governor in 1859, for example, was polarizing and he was [badly defeated](#). He lived until 1894, but his life’s accomplishments were overshadowed by his son William J. Samford’s political success.

During the Civil War, William J. was captured by the Union Army and held for eighteen months as a prisoner of war. In 1878, he ran for Congress as a Democrat and won, but only served for one term due to health issues. In 1900, he was elected as the Governor of Alabama, but he died in office before his term ended.

Census and voter registration records from the Auburn-Opelika area reveal that a significant number of African Americans took the “Dowdell” surname after emancipation, suggesting association with the Dowdell line of inheritance. Without the will from Susan L. Samford’s father, it is, unfortunately, nigh impossible to definitively state whether someone was enslaved at Sunny Slope--however, it is reasonable to surmise that people sharing both the Samford and Dowdell [surname](#) might have ancestral connections to Sunny Slope.

Remembering Slavery and the Civil War in Auburn

Michael Meglesh



Historic Marker at the Baptist Hill Cemetery, City of Auburn

Remembering slavery and the American Civil War in Auburn and the surrounding area has experienced a varied and scattered existence. Civil War commemorations and memorials have long been a staple of both the North and the South after the war. In the South, private women's organizations made frequent efforts to honor fallen soldiers and veterans that served in the Confederate military. Additionally, these women groups primarily advocated the Lost Cause narrative that describes the Confederate cause as one that was destined for defeat yet exhibited tremendous heroism diminished the central role of slavery in instigating the war. Auburn and nearby Opelika remembered the Civil War in different ways. The newly created Lee County in 1866 was named after Confederate leader Robert E. Lee. In Opelika, the Robert E. Lee chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, Chapter No. 57 out of Auburn, erected a Confederate monument on April 6, 1911 honoring the men who fought from Lee and adjoining counties.

In Auburn, the legacy of the Civil War era persisted in different forms of commemorations as well. Most notably, Auburn University fraternities held Old South parades and balls persisted well into the twentieth century during which men and women dressed in period garb and paid homage to the nineteenth century south and their Confederate heritage. This practice was popular among fraternities. The Kappa Alpha order, which traced its lineage back to the 1860s and Confederate soldiers, openly held Old South balls until 1992. The chapter, confronted by other students and the university president, also permanently removed the Confederate battle flag from their premises as well. Moreover, the entire Kappa Alpha order, including those who still held annual balls, have since instructed gatherings that attendees could not wear Confederate uniforms anymore. Since then, the order has preferred to celebrate southern heritage after the abolition of slavery and the end of the war, by promoting “Reconstruction Balls” that focus on the New South.

Remembering slavery, however, is less public and frequent in Alabama, including Auburn and the surrounding communities. As noted in Meriwether Harvey’s “Slavery in Auburn,” there was a significant amount of slaves that resided in the area. Pebble Hill, built in 1847, Sunny Slope,

built circa 1850, and Noble Hall, built in 1854, were all sizable plantations in Auburn. Yet, the memory of slavery is primarily nonexistent. Two places that do acknowledge the presence of the people that lived in slavery are the Pine Hill and Baptist Hill cemeteries located within Auburn's city limits. The Pine Hill Cemetery features nineteenth century gravesites of notable figures in Auburn, yet only one African American, Gatsby Rice, has marked grave. All other individuals who experience slavery are interred in unmarked graves. At the Baptist Hill Cemetery, the town's first separate black community cemetery, over 500 graves are marked. Although there are others that are unmarked, many of the marked graves are of people who were at one time enslaved. While many were slaves in their formative years, the people interred at Baptist Hill passed away free. Registered as a historic site with the Alabama Historical Commission, Baptist Hill is a testament to the black community in and around Auburn that endured slavery and then lived their lives free from it.

Cunningham, S.A. *Confederate Veteran: Published Monthly in the Interest of Confederate Veterans and Kindred Topics*, Volume 19, 1911.

Harvey, Meriwether. *Slavery in Auburn, Alabama: A Description of the Institution of Negro Slavery as It Existed in and near Auburn from 1850 to 1860*. AUBURN, AL: 1907

Sunny Slope & the Loveliest Village on the Plains:

Auburn in the 20th Century

Victoria Skelton



Sunny Slope saw the dawn of the twentieth century with the Emrick family continuing to own the property. Although Sunny Slope experienced little change in its day-to-day existence, its surrounding community witnessed a sea change over the next hundred years.

The 1920s saw a rise of commemoration of the Civil War in the Auburn area with a memorial erected at the Kappa Sigma fraternity house on campus. Around 1950, the Auburn chapter of the Kappa Alpha fraternity began celebrating “Old South Week,” an annual, week-long commemoration of the culture of the Antebellum South. The fraternity’s Old South activities evolved over the years to include dressing up in Confederate uniforms and marching down South College Street in a parade while waving Confederate flags, and culminating in a reading of the Alabama secession proclamation on Toomer’s Corner. The week would usually end with the “Old South Ball,” where fraternity members and their dates would dress up in period antebellum upper-class costumes and celebrate the end of Reconstruction.

While these commemorations continued on Auburn's campus, the university ushered in a new era of integrated education on January 4, 1964 when Harold Franklin, a retired Air Force officer and graduate of Alabama State College (now University), was finally admitted to the graduate history program. Though "differences" arose between Franklin and his advisors, leading him to leave Auburn early, Franklin made history at the university and opened the door for the university's entrance into a desegregated America.

The subsequent school years witnessed the student population of Auburn rise above 10,000 students, and the university and surrounding town only continued to grow. During that time, Sunny Slope experienced its first major breakup of land since the antebellum period when the Emrick family decided to sell some of the neighboring property.

Despite these major changes to Sunny Slope's neighbors - an integrated and swelling student population, and the reduction of Sunny Slope's property - the Old South Weeks continued, and the old plantation house continued to greet visitors on their drive into Auburn. Change seemed to begin in earnest in 1985, when Auburn University President James E. Martin ordered the Kappa Alpha fraternity not to drape a massive Confederate flag in front of its house, at the time located on the corner of South College Street and Samford Avenue. The decision

caused an uproar in the community, forcing Auburn residents to choose sides: that of the fraternity's right to their Old South Week "tradition," and that of others' right to live in a community that did not glorify a period of mass enslavement and violence against African-Americans. These battles continued until 1992, when protests from the Auburn community forced the fraternity to end their Old South Parades for good.

But Auburn's connection to the Antebellum South did not end with the Old South Parades' demise; the same year that the Kappa Alpha fraternity was banned from flying the Confederate flag (1985), the Auburn Heritage Association donated the Pebble Hill plantation house to Auburn University. When Dr. Ann Pearson donated Sunny Slope to the university in 2016, then, the property became entwined in a century-long relationship between Auburn University and remembering a romantic Antebellum South. In the twentieth century, and into the twenty-first, the history of Sunny Slope has been intimately bound to its neighbors' reminiscences of a nostalgic Antebellum South.

Building an Archive

Victoria Skelton

Several archival surveys have already uncovered relatively sparse materials relating to Sunny Slope and the surrounding area, particularly in relation to the changing ownership of Sunny Slope from Creek Allotment, to the Samford family, to the Emricks, to Auburn University. These documents and other materials were primarily found through research conducted in online archives of maps and newspaper records, or in the Auburn University Libraries' Special Collections. Additionally, informal discussion with longtime Auburn resident Jim Jenkins and community members contacted through the Auburn Housing Authority has highlighted potential interest in conducting future oral histories about Sunny Slope and its neighbors.

The following documents listed here are a sampling of places to begin constructing an archive of material relating to Sunny Slope. For greater details, please see the more in-depth archival surveys in areas such as Creek Allotment, the Civil War in Auburn, and white Americans' land ownership in the area.

PRIMARY SOURCES

- Jim Jenkins, Emrick family's neighbor and contact for Sunny Slope's modern history
- The Samford Papers, Auburn University Libraries Special Collections
- Ancestry.com records, including:
 - *1860 U.S. Federal Census - Slave Schedules*. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2010.

- *Alabama State Census, 1820-1866*. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2010.
 - *Alabama, Select Marriage Indexes, 1816-1942*. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc, 2014.
 - Year: 1870; Census Place: *Auburn, Lee, Alabama*; Roll: *M593_23*; Page: *365A*; Family History Library Film: *545522*.
 - Year: 1880; Census Place: *Auburn, Lee, Alabama*; Roll: *19*; Page: *145C*; Enumeration District: *094*.
 - Year: 1880; Census Place: *Auburn, Lee, Alabama*; Roll: *19*; Page: *133D*; Enumeration District: *094*.
 - Year: 1900; Census Place: *Birmingham Ward 3, Jefferson, Alabama*; Page: *6*; Enumeration District: *0139*.
 - *Alabama, Voter Registration, 1867*. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2015.
 - *Chamber County, Alabama, Wills*; Author: *Alabama. Probate Court (Chambers County)*; Probate Place: *Chambers, Alabama*.
- “*Life Goes to the Old South Ball*,” *Life* 28 (May 22, 1950): 167.

SECONDARY LITERATURE

- Harvey, Meriwether. “Slavery in Auburn, Alabama,” (Alabama Polytechnic Institute Historical Studies, 1907).
- Lindsley, Susan. *Susan Myrick of Gone with the Wind: An Autobiographical Biography*.

Atlanta, Georgia: Thomas Max Publishing (2011).

- Logue, Mickey and Jack Simms. *Auburn, A Pictorial History of the Loveliest Village*. 3rd edition. 2013.
- Smith Jr., Albert J. *DNA of a Southern Boy*. (2015).
- Stanley, James Dowdell. *Some Memories*.
- Watts, Trent. *White Masculinity in the Recent South* (Louisiana State University Press, 2008).

POTENTIAL MATERIALS

Several holdings in the Auburn University Libraries' Special Collections were briefly surveyed, but should be examined at greater length, if not transcribed. The Samford Papers will likely need to be transcribed, and should be examined at much greater length to contextualize the family's relationship to Sunny Slope.

In addition to written materials, oral histories should be conducted to give increased context to the history of Sunny Slope as a plantation - via interviews with families descended from enslaved persons in Auburn - and within the community more broadly. In consideration of planned genealogical workshops, these oral histories can be both a form of community engagement, and a means of “building an archive” of living history.

Frameworks of Interpretation

Matthew Robinson

1. Visitor Experience

The current visitor experience of Sunny Slope is that of a renovated historical home that maintains a small fraction of the former property. The property is owned by Auburn University and is utilized as a meeting and classroom space for the university's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI). Currently, there is little to no interpretive signage or materials for the visitor to learn about the history of the property. There is a small area in the foyer that features portraits of several of the Samford family members that were connected to the plantation, but no exhibit or information related to the enslaved peoples who lived there. Adjacent to the main road, there is a historical marker for the Civil War regiments that mustered on the property at the beginning of the war.

Guided Tours

The most informative and engaging experience for visitors of Sunny Slope would be the availability of guided tours. Further research on the property would be required to develop a walking tour of the house and landscape. Other materials in this report would provide a useful starting place and context. Likewise, a docent or OLLI staff member would need to be trained and provided with relative materials to successfully give tours of the house. Materials should be created to inform future tours as those resources would be applicable to other programs and future interpretation of the site.

Self- Guided Tours

The resources and staffing needed to offer formal guided tours of the house and property make it a challenging task. Alternatively, creating materials and resources to develop a self-guided walking tour of Sunny Slope could offer visitors a more educated and richer experience when visiting the home. Self-guided tours could be offered through print materials, digital

applications, and interpretive signage. While more research into the history of the home could be required, developing a map of points of interest around the property would be useful for offering self-guided tours. Points of interest might include the civil war monument, pecan grove, historical landscape features, architectural style and additions, outbuildings such as the barn and well, and historical features that are no longer visible such as the area of the slave cabins.

2. Points of Interpretation

The minimal level of interpretation that is currently present at Sunny Slope has been focused on the Samford family and their connection to Auburn University. Future interpretation could serve visitors better to focus on a more inclusive, fuller, and accurate history of Sunny Slope and the historical context in which Sunny Slope was built. Sunny Slope offers a site that can be utilized to tell not only the history of Auburn, but more broadly the early history of Alabama, and the legacy of a slave society in the 19th-century American South.

Specific points of interpretation might include:

- Creek Allotment and Removal
- Alabama Fever and 19th-century Migrations
- Lives of Enslaved Peoples
- Planter Class Families in Antebellum and Postbellum Periods
- Memory vs. History of Auburn

Interpreting Creek Allotment and Removal offers an understanding of how the area transitioned from traditional Creek territory to sections privately owned by individual Creeks, and ownership after Creek Removal. The early history of Alabama would include the migrations of planter families seeking newly available land and the subsequent forced relocation of enslaved people. A critical point of interpretation of any plantation is the account of people who lived and were enslaved on the property. Offering visitors historically accurate accounts of the daily lives

of those people and of specific individuals when possible is critical to the collective understanding and memory of slavery in Auburn. Interpreting the history of the families that owned Sunny Slope before and after the Civil War offers insight to the economic, political, cultural and social history of the area. Finally, analysis of the ways in which slavery and the

Civil War have been remembered and memorialized in Auburn through the lens of Sunny Slope offers visitors not only a historical knowledge but insight into cultural issues that impact Auburn today.

3. Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Sunny Slope offers a great opportunity for Auburn students in public history to gain experience working with a historic home and helping to develop the beginning pieces of future interpretation. A key element to being successful in public history is the ability to work in collaboration with many people including those trained in other disciplines. Public history students and Sunny Slope would benefit from collaborating with students and professors from other fields in the beginning stages of interpretative research and programming. Developing tours of the home would require interpretation of the architecture that public history students may lack experience and knowledge of. Working with people in architectural studies would offer public history students the experience of working with an interdisciplinary approach to projects and allow the interpretation of Sunny Slope to be broader and more engaging to a larger audience.

4. Exhibit Space

As Sunny Slope serves as the office and classrooms for OLLI at Auburn there is currently limited space for implementing interpretive elements within the actual home. There are several ways of mitigating the limitations of space and budget for future exhibits. Installing a small exhibit space within the home would offer an area for students to develop temporary exhibits focused on the findings of archival research of Sunny Slope. Utilizing existing meeting or classroom space for this would both enrich the experience of OLLI students and other visitors and make good use of limited space. These exhibits could be restricted on the use of artifacts and instead utilize copies of documents such as letters, or slave schedules from the plantation. Similarly, exhibits could be designed digitally and displayed on a monitor in the front conference room. Digital exhibits would allow for a greater number of exhibits to be developed and displayed simultaneously.

5. Community Collaboration and Programs

The continuing effort to research and develop the history and interpretation of Sunny Slope offers several ways to incorporate community involvement. The Samford-Wise Papers held in the special collections and archives at Auburn consist of twenty-six letters that include correspondence of William F. Samford and William F. Dowdell, two of the earliest individuals connected to the Sunny Slope property. These letters have been digitized but have yet to be fully transcribed. Creating an open-source transcription project would allow for community engagement and increase accessible primary sources for future research. Similarly, there has been preliminary genealogical research on families and people connected to the home. The most well documented and available genealogical records are of the families that once owned the property. An open-source community project focused on genealogical research of people that were once enslaved at Sunny Slope could offer significant value to future interpretation. Programs could also be hosted at Sunny Slope that would at once benefit the community and encourage visitation to the site such as history harvest, oral history programs, or genealogical workshops.

6. Future Public History Class Projects

The future interpretation of the Sunny Slope Plantation is almost entirely dependent on the contribution and efforts of students and faculty engaged in public history at Auburn University. Arguably, it is their responsibility to ensure that the plantation homes owned by Auburn University are interpreted with historical accuracy and integrity telling the story of not only those who lived there but those people who suffered through enslavement there.

Sunny Slope should not be viewed as a burden of responsibility but as a wealth of opportunity for future public history students, both from the History Department and OLLI, to acquire experience in the field. Students could have the opportunity to research, develop, and design tours, exhibits, programs, and interpretive materials. In this way, Sunny Slope could act as a kind of educational laboratory for public history at Auburn University.

Sunny Slope: Partnerships and Potential

Danielle Funderburk

The two largest historical organizations in Auburn, Alabama are the Auburn Heritage Association and the Lee County Historical Society. While the AHA works primarily in the city of Auburn to place historic markers near places and buildings of note, the LCHS has a multi-acre site museum of nine relocated and renovated buildings located in Lochapoka and organizes most of their activities around that space. The AHA is recognized mostly for their annual Pine Hill Lantern Tour, when members dress as people from Auburn history and tour the old cemetery. The LCHS hosts annual Pioneer Days and an Old Time Music Festival in Lochapoka, this year they are hosting a Creek Indian Festival on May 12. While both of these organizations have memberships who fundraise to further their goals, neither would be an appropriate match to oversee the care and maintenance of Sunny Slope.

As Sunny Slope is now owned by Auburn University it is most likely that the administration would provide the best options for its future use. There are several organizations under the Auburn auspices that could work with the current tenants of Sunny Slope, OLLI (the Osher Lifelong Learners Institute). The Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art is located a quarter mile from Sunny Slope and currently OLLI uses that facility to conduct their weekly lectures. The museum also has a docent corps of older Auburn citizens who may be interested in learning more about Sunny Slope and conducting tours of the site. Another quarter mile up College Street is the Davis Arboretum, which specializes in native herbaceous plants. The Arboretum could be an advantageous partner if the University decides to develop the grounds around Sunny Slope, perhaps to enhance the already existing pecan orchard or to create a garden space reflective of the time when the house was built.

Auburn University is nationally recognized for its College of Architecture, Design and Construction. This department could provide a beneficial association for Sunny Slope and help further the research into the building and surrounding spaces. The History Department at Auburn also has a growing public history curriculum and Sunny Slope could present an opportunity for graduate students to create and display rotating exhibitions about the history of the house, the university, the town of Auburn and the surrounding areas.

The university also owns two other historic houses that were constructed in the 1840's, the same decade that Sunny Slope was built. Pebble Hill, also known as the Scott-Yarbrough house, is managed by the College of Liberal Arts as a space for public engagement with cross-disciplinary scholarship. The Halliday/Cary/Pick House, known as the Cary Center for the Advancement of Philanthropy and Nonprofit Studies, is administered by the College of Human Sciences. These three historic houses could present an attractive tour for visiting scholars or students and their parents. A group of volunteers, or students from architecture, history, or a major from human sciences, such as interior design could be trained in the history of these spaces. This would contribute an important dialogue for Auburn University to connect with a troubled past while maintaining the historic homes for the future.