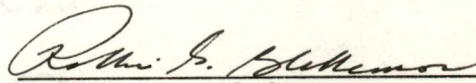


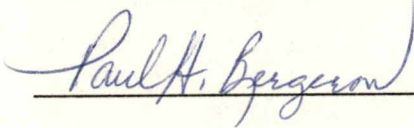
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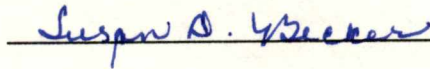
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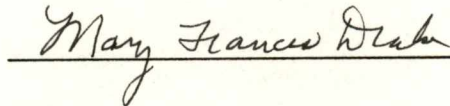


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We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:







Accepted for the Council:


Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of The Graduate School

RESIDENTIAL FURNISHINGS
OF DECEASED GREENE COUNTY, ALABAMA SLAVE OWNERS:
1845-1860

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Lee Wayne Rahe
May 1992

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DEDICATION

For My Parents

Lee and Martha Rahe

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(In the course of dissertation research, a number of scholars have assisted me generously.) In particular I am indebted to Professors Robbie G. Blakemore, Mary Frances Drake, Paul H. Bergeron, and Susan D. Becker, who served as my director and committee respectively. With their consultation, criticism, and encouragement, I was able to achieve results otherwise impossible. Whatever errors remain in my work, however, are my responsibility.

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ABSTRACT

An understanding of the interior furnishings of mid-19th century residences in the American South requires reliable information on the utilitarian function, quantity, physical characteristics, and social associations of furnishings used at the time. These aspects of interior furnishing were investigated through the analysis of the inventories of the property of deceased slave owners in the probate court records of antebellum Greene County, Alabama dating from 1845 to 1860. The data on the furnishings belonging to 322 decedents were analyzed through the use of Statistical Analysis Systems (SAS) to produce descriptive statistics on furniture, non-furniture furnishings, and constellations of furnishings in interior spaces. The statistical findings were correlated with selected economic characteristics of the decedents in the attempt to identify societal associations for furnishings. Other historical documents provided supplementary information on the sources and physical settings for Greene County furnishings. The furnishing data from the inventories were also compared to 19th century writings on residential furnishing in order to investigate the relationship of Greene County furnishing practices to those identified for American early Victorians.

Because the slave-owning decedents were found to represent a significant portion of the Greene County population, it was concluded that the furnishing forms and

constellations of forms in interiors were representative of Greene County practices. Although the decedents were wealthy, the furnishing of their homes was apparently conservative in furnishing forms and materials. Some utilitarian furnishing forms could be correlated with economic class, but most could not. However the physical characteristics of furnishings and the occurrence of discrete function interior spaces were more closely identifiable with economic class. A few furniture forms could be identified as distinctively southern, but Greene County furnishing practices appear to have been consistent with those identified in mid-19th century American publications. Examination of the data on furnishings revealed provision for social intercourse; the role of women in the furnishing of residences; the display of wealth through the ownership of certain furnishing forms and the allocation of interior spaces; personal and social values of the decedents; limited aesthetic and literary culture.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background and Need for the Study

This study of the residential furnishing practices of 322 deceased antebellum Greene County, Alabama, slave owners whose estates were probated from 1845 through 1860 provides insights into the material culture of a society from a highly romanticized era of American history, the 'Old South'. Evaluation of data from inventories recording residential furnishings in the extensive collection of Greene County Probate Court records permits development of patterns of furnishing ownership, use, and characteristics from which conclusions about the lives of American early Victorians in the lower South can be drawn.

This study was conducted in Greene County for several reasons. The political unit was firmly established.¹ Further, the antebellum probate court records have a consistent format, are continuous for the entire period, survive intact, and contain a greater number of highly detailed inventories of residential furnishings than those of

¹The 1838 movement of the Greene County Seat from Erie to Eutaw resulted in a legislative act establishing county boundaries which remained in effect until 1867, when Hale County was created from the portion of Greene County east of the Black Warrior River. Marie Bankhead Owen, The Story of Alabama: A History of the State (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., 1949), I:433. See also Appendix E, Figure E-1. Greene And Surrounding Counties: 1845-1860.

adjacent counties. Greene County is also rich in supplementary resources, including original documents, published histories, architectural studies, and surviving residences. Because the great majority of free families owned slaves, the decedent slave owners can be assumed to represent the practices of the whole population. Further, the late antebellum Greene County population was unified by professional, ethnic, economic, social, kinship, and historic attributes.²

★ Limited to the years 1845 through 1860, the period under investigation represents one of relative stability in Greene County. Because the time span was less than one generation, there appear to be no major changes in furnishing practices and values. By 1840 the pioneer era was over and the size and geographic distribution of the population were established for the remainder of the antebellum period. By 1845, the economy recovered from the recession of the late 1830s with the rise in cotton prices³ and the restructuring

²For similar considerations for geographic limitations of probate record studies, see Lawrence and Jeanne C. Fawther Stone, "Country Houses and Their Owners in Hertfordshire, 1540-1879," William O. Aydelotte, Allan G. Bogue, and Robert William Fogel, eds., The Dimensions of Quantitative Research in History (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 57-72.

³See Stuart Bruchey, ed., Cotton and the Growth of the American Economy: 1790-1860 (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1967), table P.

of the Alabama State banking system.⁴ The terminal year of this study, 1860, was the last full year Alabama participated in the prosperous antebellum United States economy. Secession from the United States in 1861 altered Greene County's social and political institutions, including the Probate Court system and the recording practices of decedents' personal property.

Antebellum Greene County,⁵ which roughly encompassed the present Counties of Greene and Hale, has a venerable position in the history of Alabama. In October of 1539, Spaniards led by Hernando De Soto were the first Europeans to visit the area.⁶ However, the first organized United States dominion over the site did not occur until the establishment of the Mississippi Territory of 1799.⁷ War with the Native Americans in the Territory hindered settlement⁸ until the 1816 Choctaw secession known as the Treaty of the Trading

⁴Clement Eaton, The Growth of Southern Civilization: 1790-1860, Harper Torchbooks, The University Library (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), 212.

⁵The author will hereafter use Greene County to refer to antebellum Greene County.

⁶M. Owen, 132.

⁷Thomas Perkins Abernethy, The Formative Period in Alabama, 1815-1828 (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1965), 17.

⁸Albert Burton Moore, The History of Alabama and Her People (Chicago: The American Historical Society, Inc., 1927), I:182.

House.⁹ Nonetheless, inhabitation of the fertile river bottoms by slave-owning planters¹⁰ began before the Indians made their final withdrawal. On March 31, 1817, the United States Congress established the Alabama Territory. By 1819, "the immigration was great, and the county soon settled up densely."¹¹ Because Greene County was created by the Alabama Territorial Legislature in 1819 before Alabama became a State, it came to be proudly known as a 'Constitutional County'.¹² The name of Greene County was chosen at that time by the inhabitants, many of whom were South Carolina natives, to memorialize General Nathaniel Greene, hero of the 1781 Battle of Eutaw Springs in South Carolina. Implementation of the Greene County government took place in 1820 with the election of civil and militia officers.¹³ The home of two Alabama Governors, Israel Pickens (in office from 1821 to 1825) and John Gayle (in office from 1831 to 1833), Greene

⁹Henry Sale Halbert, "History of Greene County" 3, Henry Sale Halbert Papers, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, AL. Hereafter referred to as ADAH.

¹⁰See Thomas Perkins Abernethy, The South in the New Nation (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1961), 460-467.

¹¹"Sketches of the Early History of Greene County, Ala.," Independent Observer, 9 June 1855, 2.

¹²The site of Greene County was originally part of territorial Marengo, Marion, and Tuscaloosa Counties. Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

County played an important role in the state's early political history.¹⁴

Navigable rivers, temperate climate, and highly fertile soil all contributed to the inevitable economic prosperity of Greene County. In 1856, the county contained 964.75 square miles of land readily accessible to two major rivers. It was bounded on the west by the Tombigbee which met the Black Warrior River at the county's southern tip. The Black Warrior divided the county from north to south, with almost 40% of the land lying east of the river. (See map in Appendix E. Antebellum Greene County: 1845-1860.) Both rivers were navigable for enough of the year to support regular steamboat service.¹⁵ The only geographic feature that was not of direct benefit to the economic development of the county was a ridge, approximately midway between the Tombigbee and Black Warrior, which divided the western portion of the county from north to south into two roughly equal halves.¹⁶ The moderate temperatures and ample rainfall

¹⁴Mary Morgan Glass, ed., A Goodly Heritage: Memories of Greene County (Eutaw, AL: Greene County Historical Society, 1977), 18-19.

¹⁵In 1856, Snedecor boasted that Greene County had "more navigable river accommodation than any other county in the State." V. Gayle Snedecor, Greene County Directory (Mobile, AL: Strickland and Company, 1856: repr., Franklin S. Moseley, ed., Eutaw, AL: By the Editor, 1963), 70.

¹⁶See Thomas McAdory Owen, History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography (Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1921), I:669.

of Greene County further enhanced the successful production of cotton on the rich soil.¹⁷

The great antebellum prosperity of Greene County was due primarily to the presence of the Black Belt in the southern and western portions of the county. This Black Belt is a crescent-shaped band of rich black soil which runs from central Alabama to the northwest into north central Mississippi and was the reason for the unequalled cotton production of mid-19th century Alabama and Mississippi.¹⁸ Fully a third of the county was this black prairie¹⁹ which after 1820, when a Mexican variety of cotton became readily available, was the most valued of antebellum Alabama agricultural regions.²⁰ The canebrake, the southern portion of the Greene County Black Belt, was originally covered with a dense growth of cane.²¹

¹⁷See "Climatic Summary of the United States: Section 100: Northern and Western Alabama" (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture Weather Bureau, 1935), 100-1; "Climatological Summary Greensboro, Alabama: 1885-1951" (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture Weather Bureau, 1952), 31.

¹⁸Eaton, 44-45. Greene County was allied to the Black Belt region not only by geography, but also by economic, slave ownership, cultural, transportation, and historical characteristics.

¹⁹Snedecor, 64.

²⁰Charles S. Sydnor, The Development of Southern Sectionalism: 1819-1848 (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1948), 13.

²¹It was an area of approximately 650 square miles in the eastern watersheds of the Tombigbee and Black Warrior Rivers, above and below their junction, lying in Marengo,

The rich canebrake lands . . . are, all their advantages considered, not only the most valuable lands in Alabama,--but . . . constitute the most desirable planting region in the United States. . . . [It is] appropriately styled Egypt--(a region to which, in times of drought, not only this place, but adjoining counties, look, for the 'staff of life').²²

Greene County was a segment of that distinctive component of American history, the 'Old South'. Called "the most obvious geographical subculture of American Victorianism,"²³ this South was characterized by an emotional and economic tie to its peculiar institution, slavery,²⁴ and identified politically and geographically by the intense controversy which led to the Missouri Compromise.²⁵ Owsley re-enforced this regional distinctiveness by describing southerners as a 'folk' or group "bound together by ties of race, language, religion, custom, tradition and history," who were set apart from other Americans by their appearance, personality traits, manners, and distinctive speech.²⁶ It

Hale, Perry, and Greene Counties. W. Stuart Harris, Alabama Place-Names (Huntsville, AL: The Strode Publishers, 1982), 35.

²²Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 11 May 1855, 2.

²³Daniel Walker Howe, ed., Victorian America (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976), 15.

²⁴See Kenneth M. Stampp, The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1956).

²⁵See J. C. Furnas The Americans: A Social History of the United States 1587-1914 (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1969), 395.

²⁶Frank Lawrence Owsley, Plain Folk of the Old South, (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1949),

was also the region where American early Victorians responded to the stresses of the 19th century shift from traditional self-sufficient life to modern society by precipitation of the cataclysmic Civil War with its subsequent isolation.²⁷

Greene County and the Black Belt have already been used as representative sources for information on antebellum southern social history. In two scholarly studies, Greene County records provided documentation for significant conclusions about life in the 'Old South'. The earlier of these, Owsley's Plain Folk of the Old South, used Greene County public records to illustrate the frequent appearance of what he called the 'Plain Folk', southerners who owned few or no slaves, within the populations of wealthy antebellum southern counties.²⁸ Boucher, in "Wealthy Planter Families in Nineteenth-Century Alabama," examined family structure and environment in the Forkland Precinct of southern Greene County for her re-evaluation of concepts about the nature of antebellum southern families.²⁹ Antebellum southern life in the Alabama Black Belt (including Greene County) was also

90-91. For a controversial recent work which radically narrows the definition of the southern character see Grady McWhiney, Cracker Culture: Celtic Ways in the Old South (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1988).

²⁷See Howe, Victorian America, 21.

²⁸See Owsley, Plain Folk of the Old South, 7-8.

²⁹See Ann Williams Boucher, "Wealthy Planter Families in Nineteenth-Century Alabama" (Ph.D. diss., The University of Connecticut, 1978).

explored in Alabama in the Fifties³⁰ and Ante-Bellum Alabama Town and Country.³¹

The primary need served by this study of Greene County records is for identification of the residential furnishing practices of slave owners in the late antebellum South. As in the rest of the South, little published information is available on the furnishings and interior arrangements of the homes of American early Victorians in Alabama. Some scholars, like Ames, have scrupulously excluded southern practices from examinations of American furnishings, pronouncing the South as a "distinctive subculture."³² Only a tiny number of portraits of mid-19th century southern rooms have been published, including an 1862 view of a bedroom in the Custis-Lee Mansion in Alexandria, Virginia;³³ an 1864 view of the entrance hall of the Charles Breen House in Savannah, Georgia;³⁴ an 1856 interior view published as an

³⁰Minnie Clare Boyd, Alabama in the Fifties: A Social Study (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1966).

³¹Weymouth T. Jordan, Ante-Bellum Alabama Town and Country, repr., Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1987).

³²Kenneth L. Ames, "Meaning in Artifacts: Hall Furnishings in Victorian America," in Material Culture Studies in America (Nashville, TN: The American Association for State and Local History, 1982), 209.

³³Harold L. Peterson, American Interiors From Colonial Times to the Late Victorians (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), plate 104.

³⁴*Ibid.*, plate, 119.

advertisement by the New Orleans cabinet maker Prudent Mallard;³⁵ a circa 1850 portrait of the Trimble family in their Wetumpka, Alabama, parlor.³⁶ In Alabama, investigations of the interiors of a few great antebellum homes such as Magnolia Grove in Greensboro and Gaineswood in Demopolis have been conducted as part of preservation activities.³⁷ A brief, illustrated history of the furnishings and interiors of The First White House of the Confederacy in Montgomery has been published which presents interiors representative of the late antebellum South.³⁸ Additional information on and early photographs of antebellum Alabama interiors appear in a collection of newspaper articles, Alabama Ante-Bellum Architecture: A Scrapbook View from the 1930's.³⁹ But such valuable art historical works on

³⁵"Advertisement of P. Mallard, Cabinet Maker and Upholsterer, New Orleans," De Bow's Review (November 1856), reproduced in Jessie Poesch, The Art of the Old South (New York: Harrison House, 1989), 322.

³⁶Wetumpka is just north of Montgomery, AL. Alabama Portraits Prior to 1870 (Mobile, AL: National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the State of Alabama, 1969), 351.

³⁷These investigations were made by the Alabama Historical Commission for the restoration and interpretation of their properties at Magnolia Grove in antebellum Greene County (now Hale County) and Gaineswood in neighboring Marengo County.

³⁸Cameron Freeman [Mrs. John H.] Napier, The First White House of the Confederacy Montgomery, Alabama (Montgomery, AL: The First White House Association, 1986.)

³⁹E. Walter and Varian Burkhardt, Alabama Ante-Bellum Architecture: A Scrapbook View from the 1930's (Montgomery, AL: The Alabama Historical Commission, 1976).

southern-made furniture as Neat Pieces: The Plain-Style Furniture of 19th Century Georgia⁴⁰ and Early Furniture of Louisiana,⁴¹ both of which contribute significant information on residential furnishings in the deep South, do not exist for Alabama.

The late antebellum era of the South is also the early Victorian era, referring to the British monarch Queen Victoria who reigned from 1837-1901.⁴² This study of Greene County decedent slave owners' furnishing practices will provide opportunities for identification of southern occurrences of the utilitarian and social roles played by furnishings in American homes in the late antebellum period. Awareness of the intense interest shown by American Victorians in the meaning of their own homes and furnishings has generated scholarly studies on both the 19th century American home and its interior fittings.⁴³ What has been

⁴⁰Neat Pieces: The Plain-Style Furniture of 19th Century Georgia (Atlanta, GA: Atlanta Historical Society, 1983).

⁴¹Jessie J. Poesch, Early Furniture of Louisiana (New Orleans: The Louisiana State Museum, 1972).

⁴²Howe, 3.

⁴³See Clifford Edward Clark, Jr., The American Family Home, 1800-1960 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986); David P. Handlin The American Home: Architecture and Society--1815-1915 (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979).; Kenneth L. Ames, ed. Nineteenth Century: Victorian Furniture: Essays from a Victorian Society Autumn Symposium vol. 8, nos. 3-4 (New York: The Victorian Society in America, 1982); Gail Caskey Winkler and Roger W. Moss, Victorian Interior Decoration: American Interiors 1830-1900 (New York: Henry Holt and Company,

called the 'American Victorian outlook' had as a central theme a crusade for an ideal American family home in which furnishings helped create the environment for desired family relationships and activities. This cause was published by a coalition of family reformers, abolitionists, temperance advocates, and religious leaders. By the time of the period of this study, those reformers were bombarding American society with their ideas about what the home should be in its role as the "key instrument for progress."⁴⁴

Because there has been little systematic analysis of probate records to identify ownership and use of residential furnishings among Alabama slave owners, this study serves a further need, that for greater insight into the furnishing of homes belonging to slave owners of lesser, as well as great wealth. Popular interest in slave owners' homes is evident in the careful preservation, study, and refurnishing of splendid residences built by the wealthiest mid-19th century slave owners. These however, fail to represent accurately the furnishing practices of the whole slave-owning society. This partial picture is often a basis in the South for what Rybczynski observed as an American "reverence for the past [which] has become so strong that when traditions do not

1986).

⁴⁴Clark, American Family Home, 28.

exist, they are frequently invented."⁴⁵ The narrow wealthy slave owner social stratum represented by remaining furnished houses perpetuates a romantic stereotype that most slave owners resided in opulent, lavishly furnished interiors in great mansions.⁴⁶

This study of Greene County furnishing practices will provide needed supplementary information for use with existing scholarly works on Alabama architecture which contain residential floor plans and views of interior architectural elements. Like this study, the architectural studies examine the homes of the entire slave-owning society, not just its leaders. The best of these architectural sources include The Alabama Catalog: A Guide to the Early Architecture of the State,⁴⁷ Architecture of the Old South: Mississippi and Alabama,⁴⁸ and Alabama Folk Houses.⁴⁹ The

⁴⁵ Witold Rybczynski, Home: A Short History of an Idea (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 9.

⁴⁶ This is a venerable misconception. "Most travelers and critics who wrote about the South during the late antebellum period . . . created the impression in the popular mind that the slaveholder [sic] was a great planter living in a white-columned mansion, attended by a squad of Negro slaves who obsequiously attended to his every want and whim." Owsley, 1.

⁴⁷ Robert Gamble, The Alabama Catalog: A Guide to the Early Architecture of the State (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1987).

⁴⁸ Mills Lane, Architecture of the Old South: Mississippi and Alabama (New York: Abbeville Press, 1989).

⁴⁹ Eugene M. Wilson, Alabama Folk Houses (Montgomery, AL: Alabama Historical Commission, 1975).

residences of Greene County so well represented in these publications are so numerous and highly regarded that they comprise the majority of the substance two specialized books: Eutaw: The Builders and Architecture of an Ante-Bellum Southern Town⁵⁰ and Historic Hale County.⁵¹

Still another need served by this study is for additional careful examination of American early Victorian interiors. Many publications on furnishings and interior decoration from the period have been studied, but little systematic analysis of public records has yet been made to ascertain the actual furnishing practices of mid-19th century Americans. Existing studies drawn from written records emphasize the homes of the North, with only the slenderest mention of those of the South.⁵² Most social and art histories of Victorian interior furnishing practices focus on the dramatic post-Civil War shifts in American residential aesthetics and function during the middle and late Victorian

⁵⁰Clay Lancaster, Eutaw: The Builders and Architecture of an Ante-Bellum Southern Town (Eutaw, AL: The Greene County Historical Society, 1979).

⁵¹Randall Curb, ed., Historic Hale County (Greensboro, AL: The Preservation Committee of the Alabama Reunion, 1989). Hale County was formed in 1867, largely from the portion of antebellum Greene County east of the Black Warrior River. Present day Greene County is the western portion of the antebellum county.

⁵²See Gwendolyn Wright, Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).

eras, abstaining from careful analysis of the late antebellum period.

Purpose and Methodology

✧ It is the purpose of this study to identify residential furnishing practices of 322 deceased probated Greene County, Alabama slave owners to add to the body of knowledge of the interior design history of the American South. A short period of time is examined in order to allow the identification of practices of a relatively stable society which may eventually be compared to practices of other societies. This study relates Greene County data to information known about furnishing practices in the antebellum South and mid-19th century America. It relies on similar studies for the development of appropriate methodological approaches.

Exploration of the records of Greene County furnishing practices addresses questions about utilitarian and social functions of furnishings. Four specific aspects of Greene County residential furnishing examined were the occurrence, physical characteristics, and spatial location of furnishings themselves as documented in the probate court records; their distribution within the Greene County decedent population; their relationship to selected records of mid-19th century furnishing practices in the United States; their revelations of utilitarian and social practices.

The Greene County furnishing practices were identified through examination of probate records dating 1845 through 1860 which record the furnishings in 325 residences belonging to 322 probated slave-owning decedents.⁵³ Furnishing practices identified included occurrence and physical characteristics of both individual furnishing items and groups, or 'horizontal constellations',⁵⁴ of items used together in identified interior spaces. Analysis of probate data produced preference and variation patterns of furnishing items and interior assemblages in late antebellum Greene County which were correlated with economic data on decedents in an attempt to identify hierarchies of furnishing occurrence and characteristics. Statistical findings on furnishings were also compared to findings from mid-19th publications and similar 20th century historical research in an exhaustive approach to address questions of behavior and meaning germane to the study of American early Victorian social history. Examination of both the late antebellum United States and Alabama State censuses provided an opportunity to develop demographic comparisons of the probated decedents to the whole Greene County, Alabama, and United States populations.

⁵³Decedents who owned 2 residences each which contained itemized furnishings and were analyzed separately were Robert C. Randolph (1854), Edwin Whitehead (1857), Robert H. McFadden (1858).

⁵⁴Ames, "Hall Furnishings," 209.

Because this study of the furnishing practices in Greene County examines records about Greene County material culture rather than furnishing artifacts themselves, established methods of historical inquiry were used to identify and evaluate the written documents used as primary sources.⁵⁵ Because the goal of cultural analysis is to develop inferences about a society through the identification of commonalities,⁵⁶ furnishing data from the Greene County Probate Court Records were subjected to quantitative analysis to produce descriptive statistics which identify patterns of ownership and occurrence. Furnishing items in the inventories were recorded primarily by utilitarian description and secondarily by quantity, physical characteristics, and interior location. These records were used to recognize the regularities and variations⁵⁷ of utilitarian and social aspects of interior furnishing practices of Greene County slave-owner society.

Interior design history, the examination of characteristics and changes through time of the fixed and

⁵⁵For procedural steps in historical research see Edna L. McBreen, "Historical Research in Home Economics: A Model for Implementation," Home Economics Research Journal 12, no. 4 (June 1984): 541.

⁵⁶E. McClung Fleming, "Artifact Study: A Proposed Model," Thomas J. Schlereth, ed., Material Culture Studies in America (Nashville, TN: The American Association for State and Local History, 1982), 169.

⁵⁷Steven M. Becklow, "Culture, History, and Artifact," in Material Culture Studies in America, 118.

moveable elements arranged within an architectural space, is an aspect of social history which no longer requires justification as a legitimate scholarly arena. Frequently pursued through an art historical approach which identifies, analyzes, and reproduces historical interior furnishing assemblage portraits, the discipline has come to rely increasingly on written records as primary sources of information about the furnishing of interiors.

This approach to the study of historic interior furnishing practices emphasizing written sources has been pursued by both American and European scholars. The strategy was used by Gloag for portions of his excellent history of customs in Georgian England.⁵⁸ A study of 19th century hall furnishings by Ames relied primarily on historic written sources (but not probate records) for insight into the significance of interior furnishings.⁵⁹ A more recent Master's thesis by Scholtes explored residential furnishing ownership of antebellum Tuscaloosa County, Alabama, residents through comparative analysis of wills and newspaper advertisements.⁶⁰ More recently, Sweeney has applied quantitative analysis to probate inventories to understand

⁵⁸See John Gloag, Georgian Grace: A Social History of Design from 1600 to 1830 (London: Spring Books, 1967).

⁵⁹See Ames, "Hall Furnishings."

⁶⁰Sharon Rae Scholtes, "Household Furnishings Forms in Tuscaloosa County, Alabama, 1819-1860" (M.S. thesis, University of Alabama, 1983).

the changes in furnishing practices and the historical context for surviving furnishings from colonial New England.⁶¹ Two important historical studies of textiles in American interiors which relied primarily on the quantitative analysis of probate court residential inventories to develop patterns of occurrence, use, and ownership were Brightman's examination of 18th century Massachusetts window hangings⁶² and Prendergast's study of textiles and their interior applications in 18th century Philadelphia.⁶³

Fine recent examples of studies in interior design history which supplement verbal historical documents with historical room portraits to examine the physical and social characteristics of interiors are Garrett's At Home: The American Family 1750-1870⁶⁴ and Grier's Culture and Comfort: People, Parlors, and Upholstery 1850-1930.⁶⁵ The most

⁶¹Kevin M. Sweeney, "Furniture and the Domestic Environment in Wethersfield, Connecticut, 1639-1800," The Antiquarian: The Bulletin of the Antiquarian and Landmarks Society of Connecticut 36, no. 2 (1984), 10-39.

⁶²Anna Brightman, "Fabrics and Styles of Colonial Window Hangings as Revealed Through Boston and Salem (Massachusetts) Records," Journal of Home Economics 56, no. 8 (October 1964), 588-592.

⁶³Susan Margaret Prendergast, "Fabric Furnishings Used in Philadelphia Homes, 1700-1775" (M.A. thesis, University of Delaware, 1978).

⁶⁴Elisabeth Donaghy Garrett, At Home: The American Family 1750-1870 (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1990). Hereafter referred to as Garrett.

⁶⁵Katherine C. Grier, Culture and Comfort: People, Parlors, and Upholstery 1850-1930 (Rochester, NY: The Strong Museum, 1988).

philosophical exploration of historical interiors, appears in Praz's important work, An Illustrated History of Interior Furnishing, which extended the interpretation of historic interiors from visual analysis into rumination on human expression.

The surroundings become a museum of the soul, an archive of its experiences; it reads in them its own history, and is perennially conscious of itself; the surroundings are the resonance chamber where its strings render their authentic vibration.⁶⁶

Both furnishings and interior assemblages offer the scholar messages about material welfare, psychic welfare, and display⁶⁷ through the non-verbal communication Hall called the 'Silent Language'.⁶⁸ As early as 1964, Gowans noted that Americans had begun to realize how much the collective efforts and ideals of a culture are embodied in furniture and furnishings;⁶⁹ parts of what Becklow called man's second, artificial environment.⁷⁰ In addition to the utilitarian roles played by the decorative arts, Sweeney wrote that "historical examples represent choices, and, as such, they

⁶⁶Mario Praz, An Illustrated History of Furnishing From the Renaissance to the Twentieth Century, trans. William Weaver (New York: George Braziller, 1964), 24.

⁶⁷Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, The World of Goods (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1979), 3.

⁶⁸Edward T. Hall, The Silent Language (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1973), xiv-xv.

⁶⁹Alan Gowans, Images of American Living: Four Centuries of Architecture and Furniture as Cultural Expression (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), ix.

⁷⁰Becklow, 121.

reflect not only aesthetic preferences but also economic and social factors."⁷¹ An early investigator of the interpretation of the social meaning in furnishings, Gloag found that:

furniture reveals many confidential things about the social life of the past and present; like architecture it amplifies and illuminates the story of civilization in nearly every country, and provides an intimate, personal record of habits, postures, manners, fashions and follies.⁷²

The complex messages of interiors, comprised of cues from individual items combined with those from groups of items, communicate behavior control as well inhabitants' preferences.⁷³ Ray, in his study of the Mallory-Neely House interiors, designated the entire room and all its parts a collective artifact to analyze its stylistic and symbolic messages.⁷⁴ Theorists have gone so far as to suggest that analyzing an interior reveals its assembler dealt not in

⁷¹John A. H. Sweeney, "Introduction," Ian M. G. Quimby, ed., Material Culture and the Study of American Life (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1978), 1.

⁷²John Gloag, A Social History of Furniture Design from B.C. 1300 to A.D. 1960 (New York: Bonanza Books, 1966), 1.

⁷³Walter B. Kleeman, The Challenge of Interior Design (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1983), 128.

⁷⁴Lawrence Allen Ray, "Victorian Material Culture in Memphis, Tennessee: The Mallory-Neely House Interiors as Artifact" (Ph.D. diss., University of Tennessee at Knoxville, 1988), 19.

physical objects but instead "symbols representing ideas and social priorities."⁷⁵

★ Interpretation of the analysis of Greene County probate records of residential furnishings presents aspects of the social history of a group of southern slave owners. Social history which employs quantitative analysis techniques can present "information about common experiences,"⁷⁶ avoiding the bias of traditional historical anecdotal evidence usually associated with the elite members of a society. Roche, in The People of Paris, applied quantification techniques to public records to examine the quality of life of 18th century wage earners and servants, particularly using legal records of decedents' residential furnishings.⁷⁷ Carson, advocating the application of material culture studies to social issues, suggested that a central question should be how distribution of wealth in the form of artifacts affected the lives of

⁷⁵Constance Perin, "The Social Order of Environmental Design," Jon Lang, Charles Burnette, Walter Moleske, and David Vachon, eds., Designing for Human Behavior: Architecture and the Behavioral Sciences, ed. Richard P. Dober, Community Development Series (Stroudsburg, PA: Dowden, Hutchinson and Ross, Inc., 1974), 32.

⁷⁶See Brooke Hindle, "How Much Is a Piece of the True Cross Worth?" Ian M. G. Quimby, ed., Material Culture and the Study of American Life (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1978), 12.

⁷⁷Daniel Roche, The People of Paris: An Essay in Popular Culture in the 18th Century, trans. by Marie Evans and Gwynne Lewis (Leamington Spa, UK: Berg Publishers Limited, 1987).

people.⁷⁸ Bonner, in his study of southern plantation architecture, stated that the houses were an intimate part of the lives of their inhabitants, reflecting "social and cultural aspects of the period."⁷⁹ Other examinations of the material life of the home, "more about daily routine than about exceptional deeds,"⁸⁰ are two prominent social histories of antebellum southern women drawn from public records and writings of ordinary people, Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies⁸¹ and The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South.⁸²

This study of Greene County social history in the form of furnishings uses premises employed in material culture studies to interpret the probate inventory data for social and utilitarian significance. Becklow defined culture as "an organization of ideas, manifest in act and artifact (though consisting of neither), by means of which man experiences his

⁷⁸Cary Carson, "Doing History with Material Culture," in Material Culture and the Study of American Life (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1978), 49.

⁷⁹James C. Bonner, "Plantation Architecture of the Lower South on the Eve of the Civil War," Journal of Southern History 11, no. 3 (1945): 370.

⁸⁰Robert Blair St. George, ed. "Introduction," Material Life in America, 1600-1860 (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), 3.

⁸¹Julia Cherry Spruill, Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies, (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1972).

⁸²Catherine Clinton, The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982).

world and takes purposive action."⁸³ Therefore artifacts, or man-made things:

reflect, consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, the beliefs of the individuals who made, commissioned, purchased, or used them and, by extension, the beliefs of the larger society to which they belonged.⁸⁴

Beliefs about appropriateness of aspects of artifacts are exchanged between members of a society and are regular enough that they could be assumed to be consistently expressed in any artifact produced or used by the society.⁸⁵ These ideas about how physical objects should mesh with a social environment⁸⁶ are also about the physical (i.e., utilitarian) and socio-psychological (i.e., aesthetic) needs of that society.⁸⁷ Yet, as differing background and education of individuals in any historic population could have generated

⁸³Becklow, 119.

⁸⁴Jules David Prown "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," Material Life in America, 1600-1860, 18.

⁸⁵See Dell Upton, "Early Vernacular Architecture in Southeastern Virginia" (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 1979), 118.

⁸⁶Harold M. Proshansky, William H. Ittelson, and Leanne G. Rivlin, "The Influence of the Physical Environment on Behavior: Some Basic Assumptions," in Environmental Psychology: Man and His Physical Setting (New York: Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1970), 27.

⁸⁷George Kubler, The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 15.

varying messages, meaning should be assigned to artifacts carefully.⁸⁸

Because the content of historic American public records was not haphazard, but the result of sophisticated judicial procedure and mature legislative policy, students examining material culture as evidence of social history have been urged to "utilize them [i.e., public records] with a full appreciation of the various motives that preceded their existence."⁸⁹ Consequently, probate records attract students of interior design history because "estate inventories reveal the kinds of activities carried on in the house."⁹⁰ Probate inventories, especially those taken on a room-by-room basis, provide the scholar with an opportunity to move, with the appraisers, through the house noting furnishings where the inhabitants had just left them.⁹¹ Another great advantage of inventory analysis for the student of interiors is the consistent description of furnishings by utilitarian names (e.g., chair) which

⁸⁸Kleeman, 131.

⁸⁹Harold B. Gill, Jr., and George M. Curtis, III, "Virginia's Colonial Probate Policies and the Preconditions for Economic History," The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 87, no. 1 (1971), 73.

⁹⁰Lois Green Carr and Lorena S. Walsh, "The Planter's Wife: The Experience of White Women in Seventeenth-Century Maryland," William and Mary Quarterly, ser. 3, XXXIV (October 1977), 543.

⁹¹Gloria L. Main, "Probate Records as a Source for Early American History," William and Mary Quarterly ser. 3, vol. XXXII (1975), 92-93.

communicate, as Prown has pointed out, significant cultural evidence.⁹² These records of American material life, presented in the form of richly detailed probate inventories, constitute an "enormous mass of history barely conscious of itself"⁹³ that provides alert historians with concrete indexes of the commonalities of life in the past.

Scholars have found probate inventories reliable sources of information with great potential for social and economic history.⁹⁴ Comparing inventories with artifacts from historic sites, Deetz verified the accuracy of probate records, discovering that "the fit between archaeological collections and inventory material is comfortable."⁹⁵ Schoelwer found that "the remarkable consistency of the inventory data suggests a reasonably accurate reflection of reality."⁹⁶ The great quantity of repetitive data in inventories, especially the repetition of recording formats, permits the re-experiencing of the same or similar

⁹²Prown, 31.

⁹³St. George, "Introduction," 4.

⁹⁴Daniel Scott Smith, "Underregistration and Bias in Probate Records: An Analysis of Data from Eighteenth-Century Hingham, Massachusetts," William and Mary Quarterly, ser. 3, XXXII (1975), 110.

⁹⁵James Deetz, In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1977), 22.

⁹⁶Susan Prendergast Schoelwer, "Form, Function, and Meaning in the Use of Fabric Furnishings: A Philadelphia Case Study, 1700-1775," Winterthur Portfolio 14, no. 1 (Spring 1979), 26.

things through which patterns of behavior appear.⁹⁷ Understanding that probate records are free of the influence of personal manipulation yet pertinent to the fate of their creators, Main used them to identify economic outlines, social profiles, and cultural contours in colonial America.⁹⁸

Like all primary sources in historical research, probate records, which contain such tantalizing masses of information for the interior design historian, must be subjected to careful evaluation, analysis, and interpretation. One of the major problems in the use of these records has been the formidable amount of data they contain.⁹⁹ A second problem, that of unfamiliar terminology for furnishing forms, requires the complex task of identifying correct period nomenclature and its usage.¹⁰⁰ It also appears that no inventories are absolutely complete; property such as furniture within the residence of the deceased but belonging to another (e.g.,

⁹⁷Henry Glassie, Folk Housing in Middle Virginia (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1979), 13.

⁹⁸Gloria L. Main, "Probate Records as a Source for Early American History," 89.

⁹⁹Gloria L. Main, "The Correction of Biases in Colonial American Probate Records," Historical Methods Newsletter 8, no. 1 (December 1974), 10.

¹⁰⁰Sweeney, "Furniture," 11.

the surviving spouse) was excluded.¹⁰¹ Appraisers, hurried or indifferent, could have omitted or concealed other possessions which were overlooked, grouped together in mysterious 'lots', or held in low esteem.¹⁰² The possibility also exists that some small valuable possessions were concealed from the appraisers. While inventories tend to become more complex and valuable as decedents become wealthier and older,¹⁰³ furnishings held by widows, recipients of heirlooms and gifts, indulgers in personal fancy, status seekers, and skilled craftsmen using their own products could all be exceptions to rigid correlation of quantity and value of furnishings to wealth, age, and economic status.¹⁰⁴ Finally, it is necessary to remember that inventories must be examined "in light of the life and thought of the [past] . . . and not from a present-day point of view."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹Ibid.

¹⁰²Schoelwer, 26.

¹⁰³Alice Hanson Jones, "Wealth Estimates for the American Middle Colonies, 1774," Economic Development and Cultural Change 18, no. 4, part 2 (July 1970), 131.

¹⁰⁴Sweeney, "Furniture," 11.

¹⁰⁵Abbott Lowell Cummings, ed. Rural Household Inventories: Establishing the Names, Uses and Furnishings of Rooms in the Colonial New England Home 1675-1775, (Boston: The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, 1964), xiii. For example, it has been found that the season of the year in which the inventory was made can be a factor in interpreting probate data. Elisabeth Donaghy Garrett, "The American Home, Part VI: The Quest for Comfort: Housekeeping Practices and Living Arrangements

Certain conclusions about historic interior environments cannot be developed from probate inventories unless substantiating evidence in the form of diaries, interior portraits, extant furnishing constellations from the period under consideration, etc. is also present. The Greene County probate furnishing records alone cannot reveal the precise placement of furnishings within rooms; the architectural features of rooms; the spatial relationships of furnishings to one another and the architectural elements; the relationships of color, pattern, and style in the assemblage of furnishings and architectural surfaces. The terse descriptions of furnishings in the records also limit perception of their physical appearance since high-style, folk, and heirloom pieces were listed with the same concise terms. Even though the item value and material may hint at style or design, great effort must be made to avoid imaginative recreation of the aesthetic appearance.¹⁰⁶

Bias in records is a normal concern for historians, and data from probate records have been particularly subject to distrust as representative of the living population.¹⁰⁷ The assumption that they represent only the

the Year Round," The Magazine Antiques, December 1985, 1213.

¹⁰⁶See Sweeney, "Furniture," 11.

¹⁰⁷See Russell R. Menard, P. M. G. Harris, and Lois Green Carr, "Opportunity and Inequality: The Distribution

older and wealthier portion of society is fallacious, for the young as well as the old appear in these records. It is true that "death draws a thinner sample from the young."¹⁰⁸ But it has been found that analysis is not distorted if any identified bias in the records remains constant.¹⁰⁹ The attempt has been made in this study to compensate for any age related distortions by "dividing the decedents into age classes and weighting them by their relative proportion in the living adult population."¹¹⁰ Consequently, evaluation of the data in the Greene County probate records should be safe for use for cultural insight. As Gloria Main found, consistent biases in probate court records "serve as strong encouragement to historians that such records are susceptible of intelligent use."¹¹¹

Gill and Curtis pointed out that before useful extrapolation of generalizations can be made from public records, it is incumbent on historians to understand the

of Wealth on the Lower Western Shore of Maryland, 1638-1705," Maryland Historical Magazine 69, no. 2 (Summer 1974), 170.

¹⁰⁸Jones, 84.

¹⁰⁹Smith, "Underregistration and Bias," 110.

¹¹⁰Gloria L. Main and Jackson T. Main, "Economic Growth and the Standard of Living in Southern New England, 1640-1774," The Journal of Economic History 48, no. 1 (March 1988), 29-30.

¹¹¹G. L. Main, "Probate Records as a Source," 99.

public policy which generated the records.¹¹² The Greene County Probate Court, called the Widows and Orphans Court before 1830, kept records to protect the inheritance of widows, minor orphans, and legitimate heirs by ensuring appropriate distribution of decedents' property. The judicial process established by the State of Alabama required accurate identification, enumeration, and valuation of decedents' possessions in the form of inventories made by court appointed representatives who were sworn to oath. Inventories were required for the judicial supervision of property belonging to decedents who failed to make legally acceptable provision for their heirs. Decedents whose estates required probate inventories included those who were intestate or without wills (194 or 59.5% of decedents in this study); failed to make provision for the dispersal of all their possessions in their wills; left minor heirs; were insolvent at the time of their deaths.¹¹³

¹¹²Gill and Curtis, "Colonial Probate Policies," 69.

¹¹³Harry Toulmin, ed. A Digest of the Laws of the State of Alabama (Cahawaba, AL: Ginn and Curtis, 1823), 382, 386. Decedents could be probated for any combination of the above. The large number of inventoried, probated estates of wealthy decedents was probably due to insolvency generated by the factor credit system common in the antebellum South. For the relationship of the factor system and slave ownership see Ulrich B. Phillips, "The Economic Cost of Slaveholding in the Cotton Belt," Political Science Quarterly XX (1909), 271-272.

Apparently complete for the entire antebellum period, the earliest Greene County Probate Court documents were dated 1821, the first year of court sessions in the county. Probate administration records in the form of inventories, accounts of administration, and wills were kept in two formats, both still extant. The first, a collection of loose original documents tied in bundles, was filed chronologically according to the completion date of court administration.¹¹⁴ The second format was a series of bound Probate Court Record Books, volumes A through T, which were official 19th century transcriptions of the original court documents. The Record Books preserve the documents and proceedings of the court chronologically, according to the date each document entered the court docket.

There are four types of inventory records in the Greene County probate records which can include itemized residential furnishings: inventories, appraisals, sale records, and dowers.¹¹⁵ Wills made occasional mention of special bequests of furnishings, but did not contain inventories. However, bequests of furniture made in wills were included in probate inventories as part of a decedent's property. Excepting the dower, inventories were

¹¹⁴These are housed in the 1856 Probate Court Office building of the Courthouse complex in Eutaw, Alabama in the original 19th century decorative cast iron file drawers.

¹¹⁵Unless otherwise noted, the author will use the term inventory to refer to all four inventory types.

lists of all property, both real and personal (also referred to as perishable), which comprised the estate of the deceased. Land, slaves, cash, notes, corporate stocks, livestock, farm implements, crops on hand, merchandise in stores, and residential furnishings¹¹⁶ were important components of the inventories.¹¹⁷ Clothing and jewelry (excepting watches) were not commonly included in the inventories. Records labeled 'Inventories' contained only the listing and enumeration of decedents' possessions. 'Appraisals' were listings, enumerations, and valuations of decedents' possessions. During the period under study, the inventory and appraisal were usually the same document, called the 'Inventory and Appraisal'. The 'Sale' records of decedents' possessions were sometimes the most highly detailed type of inventory. However, they were often less complete than the inventory or appraisal, since items distributed as specific bequests and/or included in dowers were excluded from sale. The 'Dower' was a list of possessions allowed a widow which was acknowledged to

¹¹⁶The probate records frequently used the term 'household furnishings' to describe furniture together with the other contents of residences.

¹¹⁷The estate of Isaac C. Snedecor categorized possessions other than real estate as slaves, horses and mules, cattle, other livestock, furniture, vehicles, machines (e.g. cotton gin), and sundries. "Inventory of the Estate of Isaac C. Snedecor," Greene County Probate Court Records, vol. R (30 September 1857), 130-132. The Greene County Probate Court Records are hereafter referred to as GCPCR.

represent a subsistence level of life.¹¹⁸ Usually, the items included in the dower were enumerated in the appraisal.¹¹⁹ In the Greene County inventories, appraisals, and sale records, gender of the decedent appears to have had little effect on the degree of descriptive detail.

Before data collection and analysis, the Greene County Probate Court Records were evaluated by historical research techniques for reliability. While many original documents were missing from the bundles, random comparison of the Greene County Probate Court Record Book transcriptions with documents in the bundles revealed that the transcriptions were accurate. The inventory transcriptions were used for data collection because they were complete, accessible, indexed, and chronological by introduction to the court docket. The transcribed inventories were compared to one another to confirm that format and terminology remained consistent throughout the period 1845 to 1860. Further, appraisal valuations were compared to purchase prices of furnishings paid at the time in estate sales by Greene

¹¹⁸The dower inventory was the result of a legal safeguard in the Alabama probate laws which guaranteed subsistence support for a widow. Dower consisted of a minimum of one-third part of the real estate and one-third part of the personal estate of a decedent set aside for the use of the widow for the duration of her life. Toulmin, Digest of the Laws of Alabama, 258.

¹¹⁹See "Appraisal of the Estate of Walter R. Ross," GCPCR M (20 December 1850): 75-76.

County residents and found to be consistent. Since the appraisal and sale values for similar items closely correspond to one another both within estates and from estate to estate, they indicate real market values.¹²⁰

In order to understand how the demographics of the probated decedent population¹²¹ represented Greene County, it was necessary to identify characteristics of the living population. Unlike many periods in history,¹²² it is relatively easy to find demographic evidence in American mid-19th century census records. The United States census records for 1820, 1830, 1840, 1850, and 1860 provided the bulk of the data.¹²³ The 1855 Alabama State Census, the Alabama Social Census of 1860, and Snedecor's Greene County Directory, 1856 were used to supplement the United States censuses.¹²⁴ These records provided information on population size, age, gender, race, and distribution as well as changes in those characteristics throughout the

¹²⁰For similar findings see Jones, 10.

¹²¹Of the decedents, 73% were located in the various census records.

¹²²Aydelotte et al., "Introduction," in Dimensions of Quantitative Research, 17.

¹²³The 1820 population statistics for Alabama are available only in compendium form.

¹²⁴For the 1855 Alabama county population statistics, see the table along the margin of D. H. Cram, "La Tourette's Map of the State of Alabama and West Florida" (Montgomery, AL: 1856), William Stanley Hoole Special Collections, The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL. Hereafter referred to as Hoole.

period. Information on slave ownership and other forms of wealth, including agricultural production, was also available, particularly from the 'Slave', 'Agricultural', and 'Manufacturing' schedules of the 1850 and 1860 United States censuses.

The charge of the historian studying evidence of a culture is to examine it as best possible within its own culture.¹²⁵ In order to carry out this charge, other Greene County primary sources, including diaries, account books, receipts, letters, newspapers, travelers' reports, and maps were examined for references to residential furnishing practices and other relevant information (e.g., food service customs). The historical sources examined were in the form of either original documents, microfilm copies, or transcriptions. Greene County newspapers consulted included the Alabama Beacon, the Alabama Whig, the Eutaw Whig and Public Advertiser, and the Independent Observer. The majority of these documents were examined in the William Stanley Hoole Special Collections at The University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and the Alabama Department of Archives and History in Montgomery, Alabama.

The records of two prominent Greensboro residents, Henry Watson, Jr. and John Erwin, provided priceless

¹²⁵Thomas J. Schlereth, ed., "Introduction," in Artifacts and the American Past (Nashville, TN: The American Association for State and Local History, 1980), 3.

information on furnishings, interior spatial furnishing, original costs, and acquisition sources which was compared to the somewhat lifeless data in the Greene County probate records. Watson (1810-1870), a native of Connecticut, came to Greensboro in the mid-1830s and became an important planter, lawyer, and businessman associated with John Erwin. In 1860, Watson owned 110 slaves, books and furnishings worth \$4,600.00,¹²⁶ and total property worth \$305,128.03.¹²⁷ Watson left Greene County in 1861 and sold his property there after the Civil War.¹²⁸ 'Col.' Erwin (1799-1860), a native of Virginia, came to Greensboro early in the 1820s to practice law and served in 1831 as state senator and in 1836, 1837, and 1842 as state legislator for Greene County.¹²⁹ Erwin owned 160 slaves in 1860¹³⁰ and in

¹²⁶His books, maps, and globes were valued at \$1,600.00 and his furniture, pictures, silver, etc. at \$3,000.00.

¹²⁷Without the value of slaves his total property value was \$219,078.03. Henry Watson, Jr., "Recapitulation of Wealth: Henry Watson, Jr. Papers (1810-1870)," ed. Kenneth M. Stampp, Records of Antebellum Southern Plantations From the Revolution Through the Civil War, ser. F (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1986). Hereafter referred to as Watson Papers.

¹²⁸Watson Papers.

¹²⁹The title 'Col.' was honorary. T. M. Owen, III:547.

¹³⁰United States Bureau of Census, "Slave Schedules," Eighth Census of the United States, 1860.

1870¹³¹ his estate owned residential furnishings worth \$2,915.00¹³² and total property worth \$134,026.00.¹³³

Recommending use of the mass of 19th century American publications on homes and their furnishings in the study of the history of American life, Ames has pointed out that the rich resources of literature "must always be weighed against other forms of evidence."¹³⁴ Comparison of American Victorian publications from 1845 to 1860 with data from other Greene County records enabled this study of 19th century southern interior design to better address issues of social and cultural history beyond the confines of aesthetic analysis of furniture.¹³⁵ Three mid-19th century American books on architecture describing interior furnishings and their use examined for this study were

¹³¹The probate of Erwin's estate was begun in 1860 in the Greene County Probate Court in Eutaw. In 1867, his estate probate and probate records were transferred to the Hale County Probate Court in Greensboro.

¹³²This figure includes furniture, silver, and books.

¹³³This figure includes \$3,450.00 in personal property and \$105,576.00 in cash, notes, and stock. The earliest real estate valuation of \$25,000.00, dated 1870, is also included. Since his probate records were made after the Civil War, the total property value does not include the value of slaves owned before emancipation. "Appraisal of the Estate of Col. John Erwin," "Minutes of the Hale County Probate Court" A (8 September 1871), 504-508; "Will Bundles," Hale County Probate Court, Drawer 14.

¹³⁴Ames, "Hall Furnishings," 210.

¹³⁵Kenneth L. Ames, "Furniture Study: Moving into the Mainstream," in Nineteenth Century, 10.

Downing's 1850 The Architecture of Country Houses,¹³⁶ Wheeler's 1851 Rural Homes,¹³⁷ and Vaux's 1857 Villas and Cottages.¹³⁸ Downing's book, which appeared in at least 16,000 copies, was especially influential. Books on housekeeping written by American women which directly or incidentally described furnishings and interiors were also popular with American early Victorians. Those examined included Beecher's A Treatise on Domestic Economy,¹³⁹ Leslie's Lady's House-Book,¹⁴⁰ and Cookery as It Should Be.¹⁴¹ This study also incorporated information from English texts on furnishing, decoration, and architecture which were "wildly popular" in late antebellum America.¹⁴² These included Cobbett's The English

¹³⁶Andrew Jackson Downing, The Architecture of Country Houses, repr. (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1969).

¹³⁷Gervase Wheeler, Rural Homes (New York: Charles Scribner, 1851).

¹³⁸Calvert Vaux, Villas and Cottages, repr. (New York: DaCapo Press, 1968).

¹³⁹Catharine E. Beecher, A Treatise on Domestic Economy repr. (New York: Source Book Press, 1970).

¹⁴⁰Eliza Leslie, Miss Leslie's Lady's House-Book; A Manual of Domestic Economy (Philadelphia: A. Hart, 1853).

¹⁴¹A Practical Housekeeper, Cookery as It Should Be; A New Manual of the Dining Room and Kitchen (Philadelphia: Willis P. Hazard, 1856).

¹⁴²Loudon's 1833 book was enormously influential on both Downing and Louis A. Godey, publisher of Godey's. Mrs. Parkes' book was originally published in 1844 and reprinted yearly for over a decade. Winkler and Moss, 3.

Housekeeper,¹⁴³ Mrs. Parkes's An Encyclopedia of Domestic Economy,¹⁴⁴ and Loudon's An Encyclopedia of Cottage, Farm, and Villa Architecture and Furniture.¹⁴⁵ American periodicals which made information on fashionable furnishing ideas available to southerners were The Peterson Magazine¹⁴⁶ and Godey's Lady's Book, which became Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine in July 1851.¹⁴⁷ It has been said that Godey's, which published the most information on home furnishing and decoration, reached a circulation of 150,000 before the Civil War¹⁴⁸ and had greater real influence on American life than any other periodical.¹⁴⁹ However, in applying information from these publications to findings on Greene County furnishing practices, it was necessary to

¹⁴³Anne Cobbett, The English Housekeeper, 6th. ed. (London: A. Cobbett, 1830).

¹⁴⁴Mrs. Parkes, An Encyclopedia of Domestic Economy, T. Webster, ed. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1855). Hereafter referred to as Mrs. Parkes.

¹⁴⁵John Claudius Loudon, An Encyclopedia of Cottage, Farm, and Villa Architecture (New York: R. Worthington, 1883).

¹⁴⁶The Peterson Magazine, vols. 17-38 (January 1850-December 1860).

¹⁴⁷Godey's Lady's Book, vols. 40-48 (January 1850-June 1854); Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine, vols. 49-61 (July 1854-December 1860). Hereafter referred to as Godey's.

¹⁴⁸Jean Hoornstra and Trudy Heather, eds., American Periodicals 1741-1900, Title Index, (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1979), 93.

¹⁴⁹James Playsted Wood, Magazines in the United States (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1956), 54.

remember Furnas' observation that they were "upper-stratum affairs."¹⁵⁰

An important consideration in this study of Greene County furnishing practices was the careful selection of inventories for analysis and comparison to other historical sources. The population of 322 probated decedents¹⁵¹ was selected on the basis of ownership of slaves, itemization of residential furnishings in probate documents, and occurrence of minimum number and types of utilitarian furnishing forms. The researcher assumed that the probate records from 1845 to 1860 accounted for the estates of all deceased Greene County slave holders that required the legal intervention of the Probate Court. Although it was found that there was a time lag between the date of death and initiation of probation, this study examined only estates entered in the court 1845 through 1860.¹⁵² All 483 probated Greene County estate inventories were examined, but only 322,¹⁵³ 65% of the total, which met the slave

¹⁵⁰Furnas, 559.

¹⁵¹Other scholars have used decedent populations selected on economic criteria in connection with probate inventory analysis. See Roche, The People of Paris.

¹⁵²The number of probated decedents included in the study varied from year to year within the 16-year period. Their number within a single year ranged from a high of 28 in 1857 to a low of 10 in 1860, averaging 20 per year. GCPCR J-T.

¹⁵³See Appendix A: Alphabetical List of Decedents. These were all adults. Minors rarely held any substantial wealth, occasionally owning slaves and furniture (usually

ownership and furnishing criteria defining a residence (identified below), were included in the study.

Slave ownership was identified as the first criterion for the definition of the decedent population because it was assumed that wealth in this form would insure ownership of residential furnishings.¹⁵⁴ The great majority of free Greene County families owned slaves¹⁵⁵ which were crucial possessions in the county's economy and the subject of meticulous records on both living and decedent free populations. As early as 1823, the Alabama Probate Courts were enjoined to protect slaves from sale in the settlement of estates more carefully than land.¹⁵⁶ In addition, the large population of slaves which provided manpower for the development and productivity of the plantations was a valuable speculative investment¹⁵⁷ because in Greene County it was on the whole faithful and docile.¹⁵⁸ As in the rest

only a piece or two, or the furnishings for a single room). For similar findings see Jones, 111.

¹⁵⁴There were 47 probated Greene County slave-owning decedents not included in this study who owned insufficient furnishings; 7, who owned no bed; 16, who owned furnishings which were not itemized.

¹⁵⁵Other studies of Greene County have used slave ownership as a criterion for analysis. See Owsley, 7.

¹⁵⁶Toulmin, Digest of the Laws of Alabama, 339.

¹⁵⁷See James Oakes, The Ruling Race (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1982), 39-41.

¹⁵⁸John Witherspoon DuBose, "Recollections of the Plantation," Alabama Historical Quarterly I, no. 2 (1930), 114; William Edward Wadsworth Yerby, History of Greensboro,

of the antebellum South, slaves also served as important statements of social status.¹⁵⁹ Consequently, in terms of recorded forms of property, the wealth and importance of Greene County inhabitants was defined primarily by their slaves.

The decedent population was further defined on the basis of the information on residential furnishings contained in the probate inventories. Estate inventories which did not itemize furnishings were excluded.¹⁶⁰ Two inventories with itemized furnishings were excluded because it was not possible to separate residential furnishings from those of a hotel or store.¹⁶¹ Most importantly, estate inventories were selected according to parameters which defined the number and types of furnishings constituting a residence. This was done to prevent

Alabama from its Earliest Settlement (Montgomery, Alabama: The Paragon Press, 1908), 16.

¹⁵⁹See Furnas, 395-396. It has been argued that the planters who owned large numbers of slaves dominated the 'Old South'. See Eugene Genovese, The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 13-39.

¹⁶⁰Decedents whose estate inventories did not itemize furnishings were not necessarily poor. James L. Judge owned 75 slaves, but the appraisal simply noted "Household and Kitchen Furniture--\$400.00." "Appraisal of the Estate of James L. Judge," GCPCR K (15 August 1860): 176-178. Such summary description of furnishings was the exception and not the rule in Greene County.

¹⁶¹An example of this is the estate of William A. Locke, who owned, among other furnishings, 57 bedsteads and 2 billiard tables. "Appraisal of the Estate of William A. Locke," GCPCR J (9 April 1846): 618-620.

occasional furnishing forms outside the context of home environments from obscuring the furnishing patterns. It was assumed that a residence or the intention to furnish a residence was indicated by the presence of at least one form from each of three of four basic groups of furniture forms as identified by utilitarian function. The four utilitarian groups are seating (e.g., chairs and sofas), reclining (e.g., beds and couches), surfaces (e.g., tables and desks), and storage (e.g., chests and wardrobes).¹⁶² Consequently, estates which listed only one or two furnishing form groups were eliminated. Further, a furnished residence was defined as containing at least one reclining form.¹⁶³ All the probated slave owners' inventories meeting these furnishing criteria were included in the data analysis.

The data used for statistical analysis in this study were collected on two specifically designed recording instruments. (See Appendix B: Recording Forms.) The first, the 'Furnishing Form', was used for manual copying of the inventory furnishing lists. A small number of inventories which were either highly detailed or had

¹⁶²Edward Lucie-Smith, Furniture: a Concise History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 8.

¹⁶³The requirement of a bed for the identification of a residence has been used in previous studies of probate inventories. See Main and Main, 40; Menard et al., "Opportunity and Inequality," 176. The presence of a bed has also been taken as a symbol of the home. Roche, 129.

furnishings identified by location in interior spaces were copied using photoreproductive equipment to insure absolute accuracy in recording. A second form, the 'Estate Form', was used to record economic and demographic information taken from probate, census, and other records of the probated decedents.

Because this study attempted to identify the furnishings of a residence in as much detail as possible, most of the inventories used for statistical analysis were produced by condensing information drawn from original inventory, appraisal, sale, and dower records. Although the inventory, appraisal, sale, and dower records served different purposes in the probate process, the substantive similarity of these documents permitted practicable integration of their contents. Because many probated decedents had more than one of these inventory types, the researcher developed an expanded residential furnishing inventory for each of those decedents to produce the most detailed possible account of furnishings. By visual comparison and elimination of duplicate information, all available furnishing lists for each residence were consolidated into a single expanded inventory.¹⁶⁴ The record containing the most detailed descriptions was

¹⁶⁴The expanded inventories were 185 (57% of the 325 residences) combinations of appraisal, inventory, and sale records and 121 (37%) combinations of appraisal and sale records. The remainder of the inventories were 17 sale records only (5.3%) and 2 inventories only (.7%).

designated the primary inventory for each decedent and became the basis for comparison to the other, secondary inventories. Initially, items described identically were eliminated from all lists but the primary. From the remaining items, the more descriptive entry was selected (e.g., 'small walnut table' selected rather than 'table').¹⁶⁵ Items remaining in the secondary lists after elimination of duplicates and substitution of more fully descriptive entries were added to the expanded primary inventory.

The researcher of historic interior design must find meaning in probate inventory furnishing lists beyond mere accounting of wealth. In order to generate meaningful conclusions about furnishing practices for the Greene County decedents, it was necessary to tabulate and correlate data from a large number of the inventories.¹⁶⁶ The Greene County probate inventories lent themselves well to quantitative analysis because their relatively uniform format and nomenclature permitted the development of manageable categories which could be interpreted alongside full inventories.¹⁶⁷ That these records could be used to

¹⁶⁵The selection of the more descriptive term was further based on comparison of the item value, room location, and/or parallel sequence in the inventory list whenever possible.

¹⁶⁶This procedure was suggested by Ames, "Hall Furnishings," 210.

¹⁶⁷See Menard et al., 170.

represent a considerable portion of the Greene County living population and that they exist in sizeable numbers further enhanced their value for insight into furnishing practices.

Quantification is an appropriate tool of the historian dealing with the large amounts of data in probate sources for it "throws into relief the patterns worth the effort of explanation."¹⁶⁸ But the development of descriptive statistics from data must be viewed as merely a method of arranging evidence to create patterns which answer historical questions. Gowans was among the first to perceive that knowledge of such patterns of physical expressions of culture permits development of understanding of the character, aspirations, and moods of historic American civilization.¹⁶⁹

In order to analyze the Greene County probate inventory data, quantitative analysis techniques were used to produce two types of furnishing patterns from the utilitarian forms and their descriptions in the records. The first was the frequency of occurrence for furnishing forms based on their utilitarian function (e.g., rocking chair). The descriptors which were correlated with selected forms were social function (e.g., parlor),

¹⁶⁸Henry Glassie, "Meaningful Things and Appropriate Myths: The Artifact's Place in American Studies," Material Life in America, 1600-1860, 82.

¹⁶⁹Gowans, Images of American Living, ix.

structural material (e.g., mahogany), surface decoration (e.g., blue color), textile (e.g., plush), seat material (e.g., cane seat), style (e.g., cottage chairs), and item value of each form. (See Appendix C: Furnishing Form File: Variables and Descriptors.) Only the two most frequently occurring form descriptors, structural material and item value, were correlated with one another.

Because some inventories were taken on a room-by-room basis, a second type of furnishing pattern identifies assemblages of forms based on their social function or interior space using descriptors such as parlor, etc. The interior spaces analyzed were the passage, parlor, sitting room, dining room, and bedroom.¹⁷⁰ Kitchens were excluded from this study because in Greene County they were commonly structures detached from the dwellings and like other kitchens in the South were probably used as a working rather than living spaces.¹⁷¹ Furthermore kitchens, the province of servants, were an interface between slave and free societies and as such did not encourage their use as living spaces for whites. Interior descriptors identified utilitarian forms as either present in a specified interior space (e.g., chair in the parlor) or as appropriate for, but not necessarily located in, an interior space (e.g.,

¹⁷⁰The term chamber was occasionally used for bedroom in the records.

¹⁷¹See Garrett, 95-96.

parlor chair). These interior space descriptors permitted identification of occurrences of utilitarian forms, structural material, surface decoration, textile, seat material, and style for furnishings.

Other studies using probate records have found that division of wealth into categories can be useful in the analysis of probate inventory data.¹⁷² Social and economic descriptors of Greene County decedents were compared to the living slave-holding population to establish how the decedents represented the living. The furnishing form and interior space patterns developed from the inventories were correlated with the selected decedent economic descriptors: number of slaves,¹⁷³ total value of residential furnishings, total value of the probated decedent.

Quantitative analysis of the data by the computer produced the furnishing and interior space patterns and the economic correlations. A program developed for this study generated descriptive statistics from three data sets. The first was the 'Furnishing Form File', which contained utilitarian, physical, and economic descriptors of the furnishing forms recorded in the Probate Court Records. (See Appendix C: Furnishing Form File: Variables and

¹⁷²See Menard et al., 179.

¹⁷³The researcher has used number of slaves owned rather than total value of slaves owned because the value of slaves changed dramatically from 1845 to 1860.

Descriptors.) The second was the 'Estate File', which contained social and economic descriptors of the estates of probated decedents. (See Appendix D: Estate File: Variables and Descriptors.) The third data set, created by merging the estate and furnishing files, permitted the correlation of variables in the first two sets.

The data sets were analyzed by applying procedures in SAS, Statistical Analysis Systems, versions 5.0 and 5.16. Univariate analysis by the procedure 'frequency' generated descriptive statistics in the form of total number, percentage, mean average, smallest value, largest value, and range of values. Multivariate analysis using the 'sort', 'means', 'tables', and 'tabulate' procedures produced number and percentage statistics of correlated variables. The procedure 'merge' was used to create the third data set. Data from all three sets were subjected to both univariate and multivariate analysis procedures.

Significance

This study broaches a new area of investigation in 19th century American interior design history, the application of quantitative analysis of probate court inventories to reveal interior furnishing practices in the late antebellum South. To date, published studies using quantification of probate data to examine use and distribution of wealth, including household furnishings,

address the American colonial era. Students of American Victorian social history, interior design history, and material culture have assumed that extant 19th century printed materials and anecdotal remnants accurately represent the home furnishing practices of their time. Consequently, conclusions on mid-19th century American 'residentiality' have been inferred from histories of individual homes, contents surviving in historic structures, or generalizations drawn from 19th century writings rather than careful analysis of the mass of readily available data in public records.

A special advantage of probate record analysis, as in this study of Greene County, for insight into interior furnishing history is the opportunity for correlation of furnishings with such social indicators such as wealth.¹⁷⁴ A true picture of the furnishing practices of a society requires identification of the relationship of wealth in the form of furnishings to the economic status of householders.¹⁷⁵ It has been found that individuals from all economic levels wealthy enough to maintain furnished

¹⁷⁴See Sarah F. McMahon, "Provisions Laid Up for the Family: Toward a History of Diet in New England, 1650-1850," Historical Methods 14, no. 1 (Winter 1981), 6.

¹⁷⁵Edgar de Noailles Mayhew and Minor Myers, Jr. A Documentary History of American Interiors From the Colonial Era to 1915 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1980), xiii.

homes were included in the probate inventories.¹⁷⁶ Consequently, comparison of probate inventory information with census and other social and economic records allows development of a valid picture of the use and distribution of interior furnishings within a society.

Although "language separates us by at least one step from the real, material world,"¹⁷⁷ analysis of inventory records such as those from Greene County makes a significant contribution to American interior design history through understanding of furnishing occurrences and use in the late antebellum South. Cummings noted that probate inventories, especially those taken room-by-room, provide social historians of the pre-camera age with plausible patterns of living.¹⁷⁸ Complete inventories, like Lord Botetourt's, have been published to justify the refurnishing of specific historic residences.¹⁷⁹ Mayhew and Myers used furnishing inventories to complement historical illustrations and to document historic interior settings, weaving them into a story of life rather than

¹⁷⁶Sweeney, "Furniture," 11.

¹⁷⁷Hindle, 9.

¹⁷⁸Cummings, Rural Household Inventories, xiii.

¹⁷⁹An Inventory of the Contents of the Governor's Palace Taken after the Death of Lord Botetourt: An Inventory of the Personal Estate of His Excellency, Lord Botetourt, Royal Governor of Virginia, 1768-1770 (Williamsburg, VA: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1981).

presenting them as isolated documents.¹⁸⁰ However, the only located published study which reports quantification of data in American probate inventories in an attempt to reconstruct the furnishing of residences is Sweeney's research on furnishing practices in colonial Connecticut.¹⁸¹

Aspects of probate record analysis may present a more accurate view of past furnishing practices than more customary historical approaches. Quantification and examination of the full mass of data in a collection of probate inventories can prevent the bias inherent in the omissions necessary for anecdotal representation (both visual, e.g., paintings, and verbal, e.g., diaries) of the nature of historic interiors. Further, analysis of furnishings in the Greene County probate records may help discredit an assumed gender bias of using men to represent the furnishing practices. Although most inventories record males' possessions, these furnishings nonetheless represent the living environment of families and society.

While this study is not the first to establish patterns of interior furnishing based on quantitative analysis of probate record data, it extends this methodology. As in the examination of the inventories of Ham House in England, it was thought that augmentation of

¹⁸⁰Mayhew and Myers, xi.

¹⁸¹See Sweeney, "Furniture."

inventory data with contemporary historic sources would make this study more valuable to other scholars.¹⁸² Following this approach, this study is one of the first to combine quantitative analysis of furnishings and assemblages of furnishings in 19th century American interiors with contemporary historical documents. The documents consulted to enhance linkage of records about artifacts with life in the past were newspapers, personal account records, diaries, contemporary publications, and census records.¹⁸³

Research on antebellum southern interiors like those in Greene County assists the reassembly and interpretation of the Alabama historic homes so important for scholars, collectors, and the public. Southerners, like other contemporary Americans "attach great importance to exhibiting objects in period rooms" to recreate a total environment.¹⁸⁴ Consequently, the furnishings for such installations "must be collected fully, examined thoroughly, and interpreted accurately before they are

¹⁸²Peter K. Thornton and Maurice F. Tomlin, The Furnishing and Decoration of Ham House (London: The Furniture History Society, 1980), ix.

¹⁸³Other American studies dealt with the colonial era, for which there are no United States census records.

¹⁸⁴Germain Bazin, The Museum Age, trans. Jane van Nuis Cahill (New York: Universe Books Inc., 1967), 252.

allowed to reach the general public."¹⁸⁵ One of the greatest puzzles in recreating historic interiors is the identification of furnishing constellations which have been dispersed not only by inheritance, disinterest, or poverty, but even more by the human tendency to change things around.¹⁸⁶ ✕ The findings of this study will provide significant assistance in identification of furnishing occurrences, characteristics, and arrangements in a way that no existing collection of artifacts can.

This study also examines a portion of the social history of a 'golden era' in Southern history which continues to capture both the scholarly and public imagination. For most Americans after the Civil War the slave-owning planter society became "a cherished memory, lovingly embroidered;"¹⁸⁷ probably most prominently in

¹⁸⁵Wilcomb E. Washburn, "Manuscripts and Manufacts," Thomas J. Schlereth, ed., Material Culture Studies in America (Nashville, TN: The American Association for State and Local History, 1982), 104.

¹⁸⁶See Peter Thornton, Authentic Decor: The Domestic Interior 1620-1920 1st American ed. (New York: Viking, 1984), 12; John Demos, A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony (London: Oxford University Press, 1981), 20-21. "It is probable that the rooms did not remain as we see them for very long, for small revisions take place endlessly in any house." William Seale, The Tasteful Interlude: American Interiors Through the Camera's Eye, 1860-1917 (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1975), 10.

¹⁸⁷Howe, 16. For an example of poetic romantization of a southern interior by a long-time resident of Magnolia Grove in Greensboro, see Margaret W. Hobson, "Old Fashioned Room," Songs and Stories from Magnolia Grove (Privately Printed, n.d.), n.p.

Margaret Mitchell's Gone With the Wind. This study of Greene County records utilizes a large body of 19th century southern probate inventories for systematic analysis of the home life of that society in the form of furnishings. It is a study of the homes of members of a prosperous American society who were under great social and political stress. It examines the conscious and unconscious behavior of Greene County residents expressed through their furnishings. It permits observation of aspects of the home life of those people at a time when they focused their psyches, talents, and learning into engagements where they shaped the ideas that led to new arts, actions, and nations.¹⁸⁸ The revelations of human behavior derived from this study will provide a basis for comparison to both northern and other southern regions in the historical process of identifying distinctive characteristics of the southern antebellum American Victorian subculture.

A last, but important, benefit from this study will be insight into individual and societal furnishing practices within the full slave-owning economic spectrum of a late antebellum southern county. While the 'Quality' folk with large land holdings and many slaves¹⁸⁹ are present, the study examines the whole slave-owning population, including

¹⁸⁸Glassie, "Meaningful Things and Appropriate Myths," 69.

¹⁸⁹See Furnas, 395.

those 'Plain Folk' identified by Owsley.¹⁹⁰ As Dodd wrote in 1919, "the life of the plain people of the lower South is more important than that which displayed itself in the great houses, at the races, or at the resorts."¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ See Owsley, Plain Folk, 7-8.

¹⁹¹ William E. Dodd The Cotton Kingdom: A Chronicle of the Old South, Allen Johnson, ed., The Chronicles of America Series, Abraham Lincoln Edition, vol. 27 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1919), 91.

CHAPTER II

THE POPULATION: SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Identification of social characteristics of the Greene County population from 1820 to 1860 was necessary in order to determine how the 322 deceased slave owners represented the living population. The degree of similarity between decedent and live population characteristics reveals the usefulness of the findings on decedent furnishing practices in understanding the practices of the living population. Establishment of demographic characteristics of the decedent population permitted selected comparisons of decedents' characteristics with those of other antebellum populations of interest to historians: Greene County, the Alabama Black Belt, the State of Alabama, and the United States.

In order to identify selected social characteristics of the Greene County population, historical records from Greene County, the State of Alabama, and the United States dating from 1819 to 1860 were examined. The social characteristics of aggregate population, gender, family size, age, political affinity, and literacy were examined. When possible, findings on these characteristics were used to compare the living population with the decedents. Data for the decedent and live populations on race,¹ precinct of residency,

¹No decedents were identified as any race other than white. Although 30% of the decedent population was not identified by race, the free black population of Greene

birthplace of individuals, and early residency² in Greene County were recorded, but not addressed because of insufficient data. The social characteristics of political affiliation and literacy were not recorded for the decedent population, but may have influence furnishing practices among the living population which are revealed in the inventories of the decedents.

Aggregate Population

The whites and the black slaves formed the two important groups within the aggregate living population of Greene County. While the aggregate, or whole, population grew throughout the antebellum period, it increased most dramatically during the first year of Alabama statehood. Between 1820 and 1830, the population grew from 4,518 to 15,026; by 1840, to 24,024; by 1850, to the maximum antebellum population of 31,441. The 1855 Alabama census recorded 29,601 inhabitants, a reduction of almost 6% from 1850. The 1860 aggregate figure of 30,895 was an increase over 1855, but recorded a loss of over 2,000 white inhabitants and an increase of almost 1,500 slaves from 1850. During the antebellum period, the aggregate Greene County

County was so small that it was extremely unlikely that any of the decedents were not white.

²These were registered male voters who had settled in Greene County before 1824. Identified by date of settlement in Snedecor, 6-48.

population varied from 3.5% of Alabama's total population in 1820 to a high of 4.9% in 1830 to a low of slightly over 3% in 1860.³

Slaves

During most of the antebellum period in Greene County the black slaves that comprised the greatest portion of residents' total wealth were the majority of the population. Greene County shared this phenomenon with the eight other Alabama Black Belt counties.⁴ The actual size of the slave population grew steadily until 1850, decreased by 1855, and increased to its largest number in 1860. The slave population percentage of the aggregate population, however, increased in every census. In 1820 the 1,691 slaves were 37% of the county's population; in 1830, 7,427 (49%); in 1840, 16,421 (67%); in 1850, 22,097 (68%); in 1855, 21,478 (73%); in 1860, 23,634 (76%).⁵ Although only 4% of the state's total slave population in 1820 lived in Greene County, this

³United States Bureau of Census, Fourth Census of the United States, 1820; Fifth Census of the United States, 1830; Sixth Census of the United States, 1840; Seventh Census of the United States, 1850; Eighth Census of the United States, 1860; State of Alabama, Census, 1855. Hereafter, these records will be referred to as 1820 Census, 1830 Census, 1840 Census, 1850 Census, 1860 Census, and 1855 Census.

⁴The nine counties were: Greene, Dallas, Lowndes, Macon, Marengo, Montgomery, Perry, Sumpter, and Wilcox. Edward A. Evans, "A Study of Some Phases of Social and Economic Conditions of the Free Inhabitants of the Alabama Black Belt in 1860" (M.A. thesis, University of Alabama, 1940), 90.

⁵1820 Census; 1830 Census; 1840 Census; 1850 Census; 1855 Census; 1860 Census.

percentage increased by over 50% to 6.2% in 1830; 6.5% in 1840; 6.5% in 1850; 5.8% in 1855; 5.4% in 1860.⁶

Free Blacks

Throughout the antebellum period in Greene County, there was a tiny population of free blacks. In the census of 1820 there were 2 individuals; in 1830, 14; in 1840, 47; in 1850, 49; in 1855, 8; and in 1860, 10.⁷ Because of their small numbers and lack of wealth, they apparently played an insignificant role in Greene County. According to the United States censuses, only one free black owned real estate (worth \$200.00 in 1850) and only one owned taxable personal property (worth \$300.00 in 1860).⁸ No evidence of slave ownership by free blacks in Greene County was located.

Whites

Although a minority of the population for much of the antebellum period, the politically and economically dominant white population of Greene County increased in number until 1850. Only in the 1820s were the whites a clear majority. In 1820, the white population was 2,827 (62%) of the county's total; in 1830, 7,585 (51%); in 1840, 7,556 (32%); in 1850,

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸1850 Census; 1860 Census.

9,265 (30%); in 1855, 8,115 (27%); in 1860, 7,251 (24%).⁹ This steady decline in the percentage of whites in the Greene County aggregate population was similar to but greater than the rest of Alabama.¹⁰ However, in the United States slave states, the percentage of whites in the aggregate population increased.¹¹

An attempt was made to understand the percentage of the adult population represented by the decedents. Because none of the decedents were identified as being under the age of 21, they were compared to the living white adult¹² population 20 years or older. The number of Greene County white inhabitants over the age of 20 in 1860 was 3,493.¹³ The decedent slave-owning population of 322 may be said to represent the equivalent of 9.2% of the adult living white population.

In the 1860 United States Census, the seventeen Greene County election precincts, also identified as road beats, were used to organize the collection of population statistics. The precincts containing the two largest towns,

⁹1820 Census; 1830 Census; 1840 Census; 1850 Census; 1855 Census; 1860 Census.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹1850 Census.

¹²No evidence of free black ownership of slaves was found in the records about Greene County.

¹³In 1840 there were 3,259 whites 20 years or older; in 1850 , 4,207; in 1855, 3,868; and in 1860, 3,493. 1840 Census; 1850 Census; 1855 Census; 1860 Census.

Greensboro and Eutaw, had the largest number of white inhabitants. Precincts 1 through 7, on the east side of the Black Warrior River, contained 41.5% of the white population while the remaining 58.5% resided in the western part of Greene County.¹⁴

Gender

Throughout the antebellum period, males outnumbered females in the living white population of Greene County. The percentage of males among Greene County white adults was 68% in 1840, 54% in 1850, 51% in 1855, and 55% in 1860.¹⁵ The great majority of the estates in the decedent population were owned by males, with women holding only 42, or 13% of the total.¹⁶ The average living male to female ratio in 1860 was 1:.87,¹⁷ while the ratio of male to female decedents

¹⁴1860 Census.

¹⁵In 1840 there were 2,220 white males 20 years or older; in 1850 , 2,275; in 1855, 1,985; and in 1860, 1,934. In 1840 there were 1,039 white females 20 years or older; in 1850 , 1,932; in 1855, 1,883; and in 1860, 1,559. 1840 Census; 1850 Census; 1855 Census; 1860 Census.

¹⁶There is no significant difference between the percentage of females among probated slave owners (13%) and probated Greene County decedents as a whole (12%) from 1845 to 1860.

¹⁷The male to female ratio in Greene County was 1:.87 in 1820; 1:.87 in 1830; 1:.82 in 1840; 1:.96 in 1850; 1:.93 in 1855; 1:.87 in 1860. The number of males was 1,509 in 1820; 4,059 in 1830; 4,149 in 1840; 4,740 in 1850; 4,212 in 1855; 3,887 in 1860. There was a total of 1,318 white females in 1820; 3,526, in 1830; 3,407, in 1840; 4,525, in 1850; 3,903, in 1855; 3,364, in 1860. 1820 Census; 1830 Census; 1840 Census; 1850 Census; 1855 Census; 1860 Census.

was 1:15. The imbalance between male- and female-owned estates clearly indicates male dominance of wealth among the probated slave holders; factors other than gender distribution contribute to this same conclusion for the living population.

Family Size

In comparison to averages for the state and nation during the antebellum period, Greene County families were smaller and decreased steadily in size. In 1830 the white Greene County family averaged 5.9 members; in 1840, 5.5; in 1850, 5.3; and in 1860, 5.1.¹⁸ A significant variation in family size within the county appeared in 1860 when an average of 5.96 persons per family for the portion of Greene County east of the Black Warrior River was compared to a 4.33 average for the western portion.¹⁹ The average family in Alabama was larger, with 5.8 members in 1850 and 5.4 in 1860. The family size in the United States was also larger than the average Greene County family with national averages of 5.5 members in 1850 and 5.4 in 1860.²⁰ The number of members in Greene County families was consistently less than the average revealed by Kiger in an analysis of the Alabama Large

¹⁸1830 Census; 1840 Census; 1850 Census; 1860 Census. The pertinent data for 1820 and 1855 are not available.

¹⁹These figures exclude the residents of hotels and schools. 1860 Census.

²⁰1850 Census; 1860 Census.

Planter class.²¹ He reported of 6.5 members in 1830, 6.4 in 1840, 5.6 in 1850, and 5.2 in 1860.²²

Search through the Greene County Probate Court and census records revealed the family size of deceased slave owners through identification of spouses, children, and other dependents.²³ There were 2 to 17 members in the families of 68% of the decedents for whom families were identified.²⁴ Families with 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 members each represent about 10% of the decedent population families. Decedents' families with 5 members made up 15%. An average of 7.0 members comprised decedent families

²¹This group was comprised of heads of households who owned fifty or more slaves in 1860. Joseph C. Kiger, "Some Social and Economic Factors Relative to the Antebellum Alabama Large Planter" (M.A. thesis, University of Alabama, 1947), 7.

²²Some wealthy families were considerably larger. Boucher discovered that five families in the Forkland Precinct of Greene County that owned 100 or more slaves had an average size of 8.6 in 1850 and 8.0 in 1860. Boucher, 47. The reason for the large size of some families probably lies in the extended nature of the antebellum Southern family. "Kinship extended beyond traditional linear relations. Planters customarily adopted the orphaned offspring of brothers or sisters, while grandparents might supervise the rearing of motherless grandchildren. . . . Parental death created households with a variety of stepbrothers and sisters as well as half brothers and sisters. In addition, many planters engendered overlapping generations." Clinton, Plantation Mistress, 39.

²³The number of family members gleaned from the public records includes only biological and/or legal kin. This was not necessarily a record of the number of inhabitants in a residence.

²⁴The number representing the size of the family includes the decedent. GCPCR J-T.

compared to an average of 5.2 members for the living population in 1860.²⁵

Age

The percentage of whites over the age of 40 in the total Greene County population showed an overall increase during the antebellum period. In 1820, individuals 44 years and older made up 7.8% of the white population.²⁶ In 1830, whites over the age of 49 were 5% of the total white population; in 1840, 5.2%; in 1850, 7.6%; and in 1860, 9.2%.²⁷ By 1860, residents 50 years or older made up a larger portion of the white population in Greene County than in most Black Belt counties.²⁸

Historical records provided the ages for 139 (43%) of the decedent population. Between 1840 and 1860, less than 10% living population was over the age of 50, compared to more than 50% of the decedents with ages recorded. The high percentage of older individuals expected within a probated decedent population²⁹ appears to occur within the Greene

²⁵In 1840 the average number of family members in the total white population was 5.5; in 1850 , 5.3; and in 1860, 5.1. 1840 Census; 1850 Census; 1860 Census. These data are not available for 1855.

²⁶1820 Census.

²⁷The age ranges for the census were changed in 1830. 1830 Census; 1840 Census; 1850 Census; 1860 Census.

²⁸Evans, 72.

²⁹See Menard et al., "Opportunity and Inequality," 170.

County decedent population as well. However, the percentage of decedents with ages recorded is too small to provide substantive evidence for meaningful conclusions. The percentage comparisons for the 30 to 39 age group (20% decedent to 26% living) and the 40 to 49 group (22% decedent to 17% living) were more similar than expected.³⁰

Political Character

Identification of the political philosophy of Greene County residents may serve to help explain choices in the residential furnishings revealed by the examination of the inventories. Desirous of financial success for their plantations and other business ventures, the residents evidenced a cautiousness in their political activities and a desire for national political stability which would foster commerce. Their financial pragmatism may have manifested itself in their furnishing practices in the form of frugality in the selection of furnishing materials as well as conservative choices regarding the quantity and length of service of furnishings in homes.

From the earliest period of Alabama statehood, Greene County residents and the two state governors from that county, Israel Pickens and John Gayle, supported issues which

³⁰1840 Census; 1850 Census; 1860 Census; GCPCR J-T. These data are not available for 1855.

enhanced opportunities for success in commercial ventures.³¹ The slave holders of Greene County, who were engaged in commercial agriculture, came to embrace the Whig philosophy in Alabama politics, especially regarding policies which fostered banking, corporations, and internal improvements.³² Whig politics were so entrenched in Greene County that it had no Democratic Party representatives from the county at the time the 1855 Alabama Legislature voted on state aid to railroads.³³

In terms of the great political issue of secession, the antebellum period was one during which the majority of Greene County voters made an apparently reluctant change from support for the Union to participation in secession. Like the residents of other Alabama Black Belt counties, Greene County voters supported the Whig Party in the presidential election of 1848. In the presidential election of 1852, it was one of a minority of eight counties in the state to vote for the Whig candidate. In 1856 they voted for the American Party candidate, the choice of Alabama's former Whigs. In the crucial presidential election of 1860, it (along with Macon County) was one of only two Alabama Black Belt counties

³¹See J. Mills Thornton, Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama 1800-1860 (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 14, 31. Thornton identified the agriculture of the Black Belt as "an extension of national and international trade." J. Mills Thornton, 41.

³²See Ibid., 40, 41, 45.

³³See Ibid., 326.

and one of only five in Alabama to vote for John Bell, the candidate of 'Whiggery'.³⁴ Even though the Party had disappeared by 1858, Greene County contained a pocket of old Whig cautiousness, supporting the national candidates who stood for the union throughout the highly emotional political environment of the 1850s.³⁵

Public discussion of the issues of abolition, secession, and states' rights did take place in cautious Greene County. As early as 1835, Greene County residents took a strong stand against the abolition movement.³⁶ In 1850, long arguments on the secession issue were published by the Greensboro Alabama Beacon, one of two Greene County newspapers affiliated with Democrat politics.³⁷ However, the Eutaw

³⁴See Marshall J. Rachleff, "Racial Fear and Political Factionalism: A Study of the Secession Movement in Alabama, 1819-1861" (Ph.D. diss., University of Massachusetts, 1974), 463-471.

³⁵Support for Whig party politics can be seen in the publication of successive 'party' newspapers in Eutaw. The Eutaw Whig and Observer began publication in 1839. It became the Alabama Whig by the 1850s. After a merger with The Independent Observer in 1856, it carried the title Eutaw Whig and Observer. Rhoda Coleman Ellison, A Check List of Alabama Imprints: 1807-1870 (University, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1946), 6.

³⁶In 1835, the citizens of Greene County formed a vigilance committee and published a set of resolutions condemning the acts of the immediate abolitionists as illegal under the "Union of States." Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 9 September 1835, 3.

³⁷Moore, History of Alabama, I:515.

Whig provided a voice for those allied with Whig ideals.³⁸ Although secession was a frequently discussed issue, Melvin Durward Long's assessment of the attitude of the Alabama voter in 1860 is probably appropriate for the Greene County voter as well.

The basic issue governing his choice was not specifically his attitude on secession. It was largely determined by his personal temperament, the extent of party loyalty and what he determined to be party loyalty, all related to an association of a particular means to accomplish ends related to Southern Rights.³⁹

The county was strongly divided on this issue even in late 1860, when a friendship-shattering debate on secession was held in Greensboro's Franklin Hall.⁴⁰ A few prominent Greene County residents spoke against the powerful movement for disunion after Lincoln's election. The proprietor of the Alabama Beacon in Greensboro experienced a 'takeover' of his newspaper after expressing support for the Union late in

³⁸The two Democrat newspapers were the Alabama Beacon (opposed to disunion) in Greensboro and the Independent Observer in Eutaw. The third, the Eutaw Whig published in Eutaw, was affiliated with Whig politics. State of Alabama, Social Census: 1860, 68. Hereafter referred to as Social Census.

³⁹Melvin Durward Long, Jr., "Alabama in the Formation of the Confederacy" (Ph.D. diss., University of Florida, 1959), 49-50.

⁴⁰Yerby, 197.

1860.⁴¹ In December of that year another Greensboro resident, Henry Watson, wrote:

I find matters in a bad condition here. The people are almost to a man for secession and the most that the most staunch union man can now do, with any hope of doing the least good is to advise delay till a sufficiency of the states may agree to secede, together to make the new government a reputable one.⁴²

When the time came for action on the issue of disunion, Greene County voters elected 'Immediatists' who supported the Secession Ordinance at the Alabama Convention.⁴³ The fear of radical republican policies and of slave insurrections fostered by the followers of John Brown⁴⁴ apparently pushed

⁴¹John G. Harvey, editor and proprietor of the Alabama Beacon in Greensboro, published on November 16, 1860, less than two weeks after Lincoln's election, "we shall oppose the movement now on foot to induce Alabama to secede from the Union." He maintained that position until November 30, when William H. Fowler purchased the newspaper and immediately used it to support secession. By the time Harvey regained ownership in May of 1861, he endorsed the secession actions of the convention, the state, and the other Southern states. Long, 143.

⁴²Watson was a native of Connecticut who left Greene County in 1861. Henry Watson, Jr., Greensboro, AL, to [Allen, Thayer, and Peck, Northampton, MA], L, 14 December 1860. Watson Papers.

⁴³See J. Mills Thornton, 344. In the Alabama Convention, the chief objection to the adoption of the Secession ordinance was that it should be subject to the people at the ballot box, not the result of a representative vote. Long, 152.

⁴⁴After John Brown's raid, Alabama newspapers, including the Alabama Beacon, reported that one of his confederates, John Henry Kagi, had created a map showing Alabama Black Belt counties which were marked for slave insurrections. These were Russell, Macon, Lowndes, Autauga, Dallas, Wilcox, and Monroe. Rachleff, 280-281. The Eutaw Whig responded to the rumor of such a plot for burning and murder with the suggestion that their instigators should be sent to "where

them into compliance with their Black Belt neighbors. By late 1860, the majority of residents echoed the viewpoint of prominent Whig leader Stephen F. Hale⁴⁵ from Eutaw, who advised the course of "separate state secession."⁴⁶ In compliance, Greene County representatives voted for the Alabama Secession Ordinance of January 10, 1861.

Literacy

The level of literacy of a population reveals opportunities for influence on residential furnishing practices through printed materials as well as potential for general cultural sophistication. Publications in mid-19th century America provided information on styles and characteristics of furnishings and interiors which probably influenced Greene County residents' development of taste and decisions for purchases.

Since many of the pioneer planters were university educated men, it is not surprising that the white population of Greene County, like that of other antebellum Black Belt counties, was more literate than Alabama as a whole.⁴⁷ The

they would be burried [sic]." Ibid., 283.

⁴⁵Stephen Fowler Hale, 1816-1862, was a prominent Greene County lawyer and member of the Whig Party who was elected as a State Representative for three terms; 1843, 1857, and 1859. The eastern division of antebellum Greene which became Hale County in 1867 was named for him. T. M. Owen, III:724-725.

⁴⁶Long, 137-138.

⁴⁷Kiger, 16-17.

percentage of white citizens in Greene County over the age of twenty who could not read and write was 2.1% in 1840; 5.6% in 1850; and 1.4% in 1860.⁴⁸ For the whole of Alabama, the percentage of adults who could not read and write was 6.7% in 1840, 7.9% in 1850, and 7.1% in 1860.⁴⁹

The citizens of Greene County demonstrated their literacy through maintenance of a variety of public and private institutions. From 1824 through 1860, they supported several newspapers. They financed the publication of Snedecor's 1856 Directory and Map of Greene County by private subscription for over 300 copies before printing.⁵⁰ Some subscribed to such magazines as the London Quarterly Review, the Edinburgh Review, the Foreign Quarterly, Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine.⁵¹ The Alabama Social Census of 1860 listed 60 libraries with miscellaneous content, 25 law libraries, 2 literary libraries, and 20 'private' libraries in Greene County with a combined collection of approximately 25,000 volumes.⁵² Since the

⁴⁸The figure for 1850 appears inconsistent. It was in fact contested in the Alabama Beacon in 1855. Noting that the Greene County figure for illiterates was ten times that of surrounding counties, the newspaper accused the census report of 1850 of being "glaringly inaccurate." Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 11 May 1855, 2.

⁴⁹1840 Census; 1850 Census; 1860 Census.

⁵⁰Snedecor, 3.

⁵¹"Subscription Receipt, 1841." Watson Papers.

⁵²1850 Census; Social Census.

first public school (in Greensboro) did not open until 1858, private institutions dominated the educational system.⁵³ One of the most important private schools was the Green Springs Academy founded by Henry Tutwiler in 1847.⁵⁴ Education was also available to wealthy young women. In 1834, the Greensboro Female Academy had 90 students.⁵⁵ The 1841 curriculum of the Academy provided the customary academic courses with opportunities for the study of French, Latin, "ornamental work", music, philosophy, drawing, and painting.⁵⁶ In 1853, the Mesopotamia Female Seminary advertised similar learning opportunities.⁵⁷

Literacy in Greene County, like the other Alabama Black Belt counties during this period, was associated with wealth. In his study on antebellum Alabama Large Planters, Kiger reported that this group contained no illiterates in 1850 and only two in 1860.⁵⁸ Large Planters, holding 50 or more slaves, represented 30% of the white families of Greene County in 1850 and 24% in 1860. These wealthy citizens

⁵³Yerby, 80.

⁵⁴Its goals were to prepare young men for the business of life or for advanced university study and was popular and influential with the sons of Black Belt planters until its closing in 1877. Neighbors, 56-57.

⁵⁵Henry Watson, Jr., Greensboro, AL, to [Julia Watson, East Windsor, CT], L, 15 July 1834. Watson Papers.

⁵⁶Yerby, 79.

⁵⁷Eutaw The Alabama Whig, 29 September 1853, 3.

⁵⁸Kiger, 16-17.

supported educational resources for their own families. They purchased reading materials, sent their children to private academies, or even retained private teachers for their children.⁵⁹ Consequently, private wealth provided opportunities for the maintenance of a relatively high level of literacy within the wealthy Greene County planter population.

Summation

Using data collected from public and historical records, it was possible to develop some understanding of how the decedent population represented selected social characteristics of the living population of Greene County from 1845 through 1860. The decedent population failed to represent the living population of the county in that its members were disproportionately male and probably significantly older. The decedents were exclusively white, part of the slave-owning minority of the aggregate population. Members of the decedent population had larger families than the average in Greene County, but not so large as the very wealthiest members of the population. Although it was not possible to derive quantifiable data on the political beliefs and literacy of the decedents, it is probable that they were as literate and politically cautious as the living population.

⁵⁹See an advertisement for a private teacher by a gentleman in the Greensboro area. Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 18 June 1855, 3.

CHAPTER III

GREENE COUNTY POPULATION: ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

"This is the richest county of Alabama, and the road is lined with valuable plantations!" Frederick Law Olmsted so described Greene County in his 1861 travelogue, The Cotton Kingdom.¹ That prosperity which impressed Olmsted was the result of a combination of the county's geography with its inhabitants' cultural heritage and enterprise. Profits from its large slave-worked cotton plantations created the society, wealth, and physical environment which characterized this Black Belt county. By 1860 both northerners and southerners acknowledged the economic importance of Greene County in antebellum Alabama.

Like the social characteristics presented in Chapter II, selected economic characteristics of the Greene County population were identified and compared to those of the decedents. The economic characteristics examined were occupation, number of slave owners, number of slaves owned, slave value, residential furnishings value, liquid asset (cash, notes, stock) value, total personal property value, acreage ownership, real estate value, and total estate value. Understanding of the economic identity of the living

¹Frederick Law Olmsted, The Cotton Kingdom: A Traveler's Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States, repr., Arthur M. Schlesinger, ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), 551.

population and the decedents permits insight into perception of furnishing affordability as well as perception of appropriate social and economic associations of furnishings. Such insights relate to utilitarian forms, physical characteristics, and interior constellations of furnishings associated with the decedent and, by extension, living populations.

Overall Economy

Agriculture was the primary component of the Greene County economy and its farmers became major agricultural producers in antebellum Alabama. In 1840 they generated 7,934.5 bales of cotton, making Greene County eleventh out of the 49 Alabama counties. In 1850 when they produced 25,680 bales and in 1860, 57,858 bales, the county became respectively the fifth and fourth largest producer among Alabama's 52 counties. Although cotton was the dominant crop, these farmers were also leading producers of Indian corn, peas and beans, sweet and Irish potatoes, swine, and wool.²

Compared with agriculture, other forms of economic productivity in Greene County between 1845 and 1860 were almost insignificant. The few manufacturing establishments there in 1860 included 6 businesses engaged in producing

²"Agriculture Schedule," 1840 Census; 1850 Census; 1860 Census.

flour and meat; 4, carriage making; 6, sawing lumber; 2, making boots and shoes; 2, ginning cotton; 2, tinsmithing; 2, printing.³ Income derived from the practice of learned professions was even less important than manufacturing as total professional income in the late 1850s was not equal to even half the manufacturing value.⁴ The value of goods sold by merchants in Greene County was more important to the economy than professional incomes.⁵ But this was still minor when compared to the value of crops.

The only important financial institution in Greene County, the Planter's Insurance Company of Greensboro, was focused on the major agricultural commodity, cotton. Incorporated in 1854 as a bank,⁶ the company provided financial services to Greene County residents who had previously relied on banks or commission merchants in Selma or Mobile.⁷ It had an initial capital stock subscription of

³"Manufacturing Schedule," 1860 Census.

⁴The learned professions were primarily physician, attorney, teacher, and minister. See Taxable Property of Greene County for 1857; Recapitulation of Tax Book of Greene Co. for 1858; General Recapitulation of Taxes of Greene Co. for the Year 1859; Recapitulation of the Taxes of Greene County for the Year 1860 (Greene County, AL: 1857, 1858, 1859, 1860). Watson Papers.

⁵See *ibid*.

⁶"An Act to Incorporate the Planter's Insurance Company, 2 February 1854." Watson Papers.

⁷Yerby, 73.

\$130,000.00 and was headed by Henry Watson, Jr., who served as president.⁸ It advertised:

Will insure Houses, Furniture, Merchandise, Gin Houses, Cotton and produce generally, against losses by Fire. Will take River and Marine risks upon cotton and Merchandise and make insurance for limited periods, upon the lives of White persons and of Slaves.

Office at Greensborough [sic], Ala.

As late as September of 1860, the Planters' Insurance Company solicited customers by reminding planters that "the serious losses of Cotton during the last Spring by Fires in Mobile and elsewhere have called your attention to and impressed upon you the importance of securing yourself against such loss by Insurance."¹⁰

Occupations of Whites

The white residents of Greene County practiced a variety of occupations.¹¹ The percentages for the major occupation groups for the living individuals identified with occupations in the 1850 and 1860 censuses and in Snedecor's 1856

⁸At the outbreak of the Civil War, all but \$50,000.00 of the capital stock was returned to the stockholders, that difference being retained to keep the charter alive. At that time business was abandoned until better times. Yerby, 73-75.

⁹Eutaw The Alabama Whig, 7 June 1855, 4.

¹⁰"Planter's Insurance Company, Advertising Circular, 10 September 1860." Watson Papers.

¹¹Statistics for the occupations of slaves were not developed.

Directory¹² were agriculture 62.5% (1850), 68.3% (1856), and 56.5% (1860); the learned professions¹³ 7.4% (1850), 9.4% (1856), and 10.2% (1860); the skilled trades¹⁴ 7.7% (1850), 9.5% (1856), and 12.1% (1860); commerce¹⁵ 5.2% (1850), 8.1% (1856), and 9.4% (1860); transportation¹⁶ 1.6% (1850), 1.6% (1856), and 1.7% (1860); government¹⁷ , .7% (1850), 1.1% (1856), and .9% (1860); miscellaneous¹⁸ 14.9% (1850), 2.0% (1856), and 9.1% (1860). The only increases in the real number of practitioners of occupational groups between 1850 and 1860 were those in commerce (32.4%) and in skilled trades (15.8%).

As revealed in the historic records, those engaged in agriculture identified themselves with a variety of labels.

¹²Snedecor, "Voter List," 6-48.

¹³This group included such occupations as physician, teacher, attorney, clergyman, and newspaper editor.

¹⁴This group included such occupations as cabinet maker, silver smith, marble cutter, tailor, baker, mechanic, saddler, printer, blacksmith, plasterer, and shoe maker.

¹⁵This group included occupations such as merchant, commission merchant, clerk, warehouse keeper, jeweler, book seller, and grocer.

¹⁶This group included such occupations as ferry man, steamboat captain, stage coach driver, hotel keeper, bar keeper, and livery stable keeper.

¹⁷This group included all elected and appointed officials as well as employees and contractors of the local, state, and federal governments.

¹⁸This group was comprised almost entirely of students, farm laborers, and ditch diggers.

These were cropper, farmer, planter, plantress, or overseer.¹⁹ An overall decrease of 1,633 to 1,083²⁰ in the number of farmers occurred from 1850 to 1860. Less than 4% of the working population was made up of physicians, attorneys, merchants, ministers, and teachers who gave farming as a second occupation;²¹ physicians represented about one-third of this group. When these individuals are added to the group listing agriculture as the sole occupations, the total agricultural population becomes 72.3% of the total occupational listings for 1856 and 59.9% for 1860.²²

The percentage of Greene County inhabitants participating in agricultural occupations was significantly higher than in other regions of the United States. In 1850, of individuals indicating occupations in the United States,

¹⁹The terms farmer and planter were not used consistently in the Greene County census records to describe any specific activity or level of wealth. In 1850, the term planter was rarely used. In 1860, most individuals engaged in agricultural occupations to the east of the Black Warrior River (including some of the richest) called themselves farmers while those living to the west of the Black Warrior referred to themselves as planters, even if they owned no property at all.

²⁰In the agriculture group, it should be noted that the actual number of overseers increased by 20, or 14.4%, and the number of farmers or planters decreased by 570, or 40.8%. See 1850 Census; 1860 Census.

²¹The pertinent data for 1850 are not available.

²²Dual listings of occupations was available only for 1856 and 1860.

62.5% were engaged in agriculture, compared to 68% in Greene County. By 1860 those pursuing agricultural occupations made up 59.9% of the Greene County occupation-identified population compared to 30.7% for the United States.²³

Individuals making up slightly over 64% of the decedent population were identified by occupation. Of that group, almost 95% practiced agriculture.²⁴ Agriculture was the occupation of a disproportionate percentage of the decedents in comparison to the live population in 1850 (62.5%) and 1860 (59.9%). There were smaller percentages of the decedents compared to the living population in the learned professions (6.7% of the decedents to 10.2% of living population in 1860), skilled trades (2.4% to 12.1% in 1860), and commerce (1.9% to 9.4% in 1860) occupation groups. There were no members of the decedent population engaged in the occupation groups identified as transportation, government, or miscellaneous.²⁵

²³1850 Census; 1860 Census.

²⁴The occupations and number of the 7.4% of decedents listing double occupations were planter and physician (7); planter and attorney (2); planter and miller (1); planter and warehouseman (2); agriculture and manufacturing (2); well borer and overseer (1).

²⁵GCPCR J-T; 1850 Census; 1860 Census; Snedecor, "Voter List," 6-48.

Number of Slave Owners

Ownership of slaves, that peculiar institution which set American 19th century southerners apart from the rest of the United States, provides a meaningful basis for economic analysis of the Greene County population. The clear majority of families in Greene County owned slaves.²⁶ In 1840, 72% of the county's families owned slaves; in 1850, 77.8%; in 1860, 78.3%.²⁷ The population of deceased slave owners (322) examined in this study also made up a clear majority (67%)²⁸ of total probated decedents (483) in Greene County from 1845 through 1860. Two justifications have been used for the comparison of the decedent population with slave-

²⁶These families are the number of dwellings visited which were recorded in the census documents. Although there was occasionally more than one slave owner residing in a single dwelling, the figures shown here rely on the assumption published in the "Introduction" to the 1860 Agricultural Census. "It would probably be a safe rule to consider the number of slave holders to represent the number of families directly interested in the slave population in 1860." United State Bureau of Census, Agriculture of the United States in 1860 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1864), clxxii.

²⁷The increase in slave ownership by Greene County residents from 1840 to 1850 was also an increase in rate of growth of ownership. In this decade the number rose 39%, from 967 to 1,346. Between 1850 and 1860, however, there was a decrease of 21%, from 1,346 to 1,115. 1840 Census; 1850 Census; 1860 Census. The pertinent data for 1855 are not available.

²⁸Slave owners represented 81% of all probated decedents. See GPCR J-T. The smaller percentage for the decedent population (67%) is due to the parameters establishing criteria for records of furnished residences.

owning families. The first is the assumption published as part of the 1860 Census that each slave owner represents the interest of a family.²⁹ The second is the definition of the decedent population by a minimum number of furniture forms, from which it is inferred that each decedent represents the furnishing and maintenance of a family residence.

Number of Slaves Owned

Members of the Greene County population from 1840 to 1860 owned a large number of slaves. Furthermore, there was a decrease in the number of living owners of small slave holdings and an increase among those holding larger numbers. The owners of less than 10 slaves were the only group to diminish significantly during the period under study.³⁰ The only group of slave holders which increased steadily from 1840 to 1860 was that owning 50 or more slaves.³¹ Those slave owners residing in Greene County identified by Kiger as large planters (owning 50 or more slaves) came to represent a significant portion (98 or 7.2% in 1850 and 113 or 10.1% in

²⁹See Agriculture of the United States in 1860, clxxii.

³⁰The majority of the 200 slave owners who disappeared from the census records between 1850 and 1860 held 2 to 9 slaves.

³¹See "Slave Schedules," 1840 Census; 1850 Census; 1860 Census.

1860) of the total slave-owning population by the end of the antebellum period.³² Greene County slave owners also held significantly larger numbers of slaves in 1850 than those of other slave owning regions, averaging 16.4 slaves per owner compared to 11.7 in Alabama and 9.2 in the slave-holding states. The difference was even greater in 1860 when the per capita slave ownership of Greene County slave holders was 21.2,³³ roughly twice the 12.9 in Alabama and slightly more than twice the slave state per capita of 10.3.³⁴

The probated decedents held far more slaves than the average number for Greene County, Alabama, and the slave holding region of the United States. The decedents owned an average of 28.3 slaves. The male decedents owned twice as many slaves on the average (30.3) than did the female decedents (14.8).

Table I, reveals how much greater the size of the slave holdings belonging to decedents was than those of the living population. The lower middle class slave owners (owners of 1-9 slaves) were a significantly smaller percentage (37.6%) of decedents than of the living population (54% in 1850 and 47.3% in 1860). However, the middle class slave owners (owners of 10-49 slaves) were a significantly larger

³²See Kiger, 7, 9 ff.

³³Greene was second in Alabama only to Marengo County in per capita ownership of slaves in 1860. Evans, 78.

³⁴1850 Census; 1860 Census.

TABLE I

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF THE DECEDENTS
 ACCORDING TO RANGES OF NUMBER OF SLAVES OWNED
 COMPARED TO THE NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE
 OF LIVING GREENE COUNTY SLAVE OWNERS:^a 1850-1860

Slave Number ^b	Decedents		Living Pop.		Living Pop.	
	N & %		N & %		N & %	
	1845-1860		1850		1860	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1-9 ^c	121	37.6	726	54.0	527	47.3
10-49 ^d	163	50.6	523	38.8	475	42.6
50-499 ^e	38	11.8	98	7.2	113	10.1
Total	322	100.0	1,347	100.0	1,115	100.0

Source: GCPCR J-T; 1850 Census; 1860 Census.

^aBoth decedent and living slave owners can be taken to represent families.

^bOwnership of a portion of a slave has been counted as a whole slave. The number ranges for slave ownership are taken from "Classification of Slaveholders in the United States," 1860 Census.

^cThis represents the lower middle decedent class.

^dThis represents the middle decedent class.

^eThis represents the wealthy decedent class.

percentage of decedents (50.6%) than of the living population (38.8% in 1850 and 42.6% in 1860). Only among the holders of 50 slaves or more (the wealthy slave owners) were the decedent and living populations similar percentages.³⁵

Slave Value

The worth of slaves was a significant portion of the wealth of Greene County decedents.³⁶ The \$4,932,675.00 total slave value held by the decedent population represents 82.5% of their total personal property value³⁷ of the same group and just over 54.5% of the total value of all of the property owned by decedents. The mean value of slaves per decedent, \$15,609.70, is 83% of the mean personal property holding and equivalent to 91.6% of the mean real estate value for the 52.8% of the decedents for whom the value of real estate was recorded.

³⁵The lower middle class slave owners correspond to Owsley's small and large farmers; the middle class to his planter class; the wealthy class to his great planters. See Owsley, 7.

³⁶The data on slave value are available only for the decedent population.

³⁷The total personal property value included all possessions except real estate.

Residential Furnishings Value

The value of residential furnishings meticulously recorded in the Greene County Probate Court Records made up only a tiny portion of the wealth of the decedent population. The value of furnishings,³⁸ which ranged from a low of \$13.96 to a high of \$1,764.81 among 319 decedents,³⁹ averaged \$271.88 per estate. This average represented 1.5% of the average personal property and .8% of the average total value of the decedent population. On the average, male decedents owned furnishings worth \$276.77 and female decedents, \$239.79. However, furnishings provided a greater portion of the value of female-owned than male-owned estates. Value of furnishings represented 1.8% of the average total value of female-owned estates and .9% of the male-owned estates.

The data in Table II record the amount and distribution of the value of residential furnishings held by deceased slave owners in Greene County. More than one-third owned furnishings worth less than \$100.00 and another 40%, furnishings worth no more than \$300.00. Only slightly more than 4% (13) held furnishings worth more than \$1,000.00, the value of a young adult male slave in the early 1850s.⁴⁰

³⁸This included furniture, non-furniture furnishings, silver, and books.

³⁹The probate records of 3 decedents enumerated but did not record the value of their residential furnishings.

⁴⁰For prices of prime field hands in the late antebellum period see Phillips, "Economic Cost," 267.

TABLE II
NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF THE DECEDENTS
ACCORDING TO FURNISHING VALUE RANGES

\$ Value	N	%
None Recorded	3	0.9
1-100 ^a	112	34.8
101-300 ^b	127	39.4
301-2000 ^c	80	24.9
Total	322	100.0

Source: GCPCR J-T.

^aThis represents the lower middle decedent class.

^bThis represents the middle decedent class.

^cThis represents the wealthy decedent class. Only 13 decedents owned furnishings worth more than \$1,000.00.

No records were discovered which provided the total value of residential furnishings held by the living population. However, a tenuous comparison of the value of furnishings held by the decedent and living populations can be made using Greene County property tax records.⁴¹ Residents were required to pay annual property tax on their furnishings on the appraised value above \$200.00. The total annual appraised furnishings value over \$200.00 in 1860 was

⁴¹This information was identified as "Furniture, &c." in the report of the taxable property. V. Gayle Snedecor, Assessor, Recapitulation of Taxes of Greene County. For the Year 1860, Greene County, Alabama. Watson Papers.

\$100,420.00 for the living population.⁴² The total furniture value above \$200.00 per estate for the decedents⁴³ from 1845 to 1860 was \$41,771.81.⁴⁴ The value of decedent population furnishings above \$200.00 is equal to 42% of the taxed total for the 1860 living population.⁴⁵ The deceased slave owner population of 322⁴⁶ represents 27% of the living holders of taxable property in 1860. Because the furnishings value above \$200.00 for the equivalent of 27% of 1860 taxable property holders was equal to 42% of the total taxable furnishing value in 1860, it may be inferred that deceased slave holders owned furnishings more valuable than those owned by the living population.⁴⁷

⁴²This information is available only as the sum reported. Ibid.

⁴³Furnishings worth more than \$200.00 were owned by 126 (39%) of decedents.

⁴⁴The average value of furnishings per decedent was \$271.88.

⁴⁵The valuations should be comparable, as both the tax assessments and probate valuations should be based on value of items in a forced sale. See G. Main, "Correction of Biases," 10.

⁴⁶All 322 decedents were holders of taxable property in the form of slaves.

⁴⁷This inference is based on the assumption that decedent and living taxable property owning populations holding furnishings of equal value should have parallel population representation and furnishing value percentages. That is, if the decedents represented 27% of property holders and owned the equivalent of 27% of the furnishing value above \$200.00, then decedent and living populations should have furnishings of equal value.

Cash, Notes, and Stock Value

While the average holding of currency, gold, notes, and corporate stocks among the members of the decedent population was \$5,015.21, property in the form of capital was recorded for only one-quarter of the decedent population.⁴⁸ The total of \$406,232.00 held by those decedents was equal to only 7% of their personal property value and 5% of their total estate value. Some 22% of the decedents recorded with these assets held a value of less than \$500.00; 21%, \$500.00 to \$1,000.00; 33%, \$1,000.00 to \$5,000.00.⁴⁹ The small percentages, small number of holders, and relatively low value of these various types of capital reveal that such property was scarce among Greene County decedents.⁵⁰

Personal Property Value

The 1860 Census was the only census to record personal property identified by the 1860 Census as any taxable property other than real estate. In Alabama, like other slave states, slave value constituted the majority of the

⁴⁸These data were not available for the living population.

⁴⁹See GCPCR J-T.

⁵⁰The lack of cash was probably due to the fact that these data are for probated, often insolvent decedents.

personal property total value.⁵¹ The value of the decedents' slaves made up 81.2% of their average personal property value.⁵² Gavin Wright observed that slave ownership produced significantly more concentrated wealth than other forms of property.⁵³ He also noted that it was the combination of slaves and cotton produced (both forms of personal property) which made southerners very rich.⁵⁴

Slave holders in Greene County had very high personal property valuations in 1860 for two reasons: an increase in the average size of their slave holdings and a sharp rise in slave value in the late antebellum period.⁵⁵ In 1859, the Alabama Beacon commented on a recent sale of slaves.

The Highest Yet.--Messrs. F. F. and C. W. Hill, Executors of Mrs. Nancy A. Hill, sold in Greensboro, on Tuesday last, 27 negroes, on twelve months credit, without interest, for \$27,260. In the lot, were 7 children, ranging in ages from 1 month to 6 years; also, 7 negroes may be classed as old, their ages exceeding 45. One was about 70, and three others in the neighborhood of 60.

The purchases were all made by the legatees, and the prices paid, on an average, at least 20 per cent. above Traders' cash rates.⁵⁶

⁵¹See 1860 Census. Antebellum personal property value census data are available only for 1860.

⁵²See GCPCR J-T.

⁵³Gavin Wright, The Political Economy of the Cotton South (New York: W. W. Norton and Company Inc., 1978), 27.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Phillips, "Economic Cost," 267.

⁵⁶Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 4 February 1859, 2.

Apparently, the market surged ahead of the appraisers since the 1858 inventory of the above estate listed 25 slaves appraised at \$20,000.00.⁵⁷

In terms of personal property, the inhabitants of Greene County were considerably wealthier than those of Alabama and the nation. In 1860, the value of personal property per family in Greene County was an average of \$19,217.18, a figure over three times the average \$5,763.02 value of an Alabama family and over twelve times the national family average of \$1,565.70. The per capita average for Greene County residents was \$3,768.80, over three and one-half times that of the state per capita average of \$1,052.20 and almost thirteen times the U.S. average of \$296.79.

Inventories of the decedents' holdings for the probate process were required to be comprehensive, including "all of the goods and chattels, rights of, and debts due or accruing to the testator or intestate, at the time of his death."⁵⁸ As a result, the personal property records of the probated decedents are more comprehensive than those in the censuses. It is the broader definition of personal property which could make the decedent population appear wealthier than the live 1860 population.

⁵⁷"Appraisal of the Estate of Nancy A. Hill," GCPCR R (20 November 1858): 1067-1070.

⁵⁸Toulmin, Digest of the Laws of Alabama, 343.

The mean personal property value of the decedents was \$18,741.00 while that of the 1860 Greene County living personal property-owning individuals was \$19,284.90.⁵⁹ The high 1860 figure is probably the result of the great increase in the value of slaves in the late 1850s.⁶⁰ But when the decedent population average value is understood to represent a larger quantity of property than the figure for the living population in 1860, the decedents appear to be even poorer.

Real Estate Holdings

Acreage holdings were recorded for 163 (50.6%) of the decedents. The majority (80%) of decedent land owners held between 160 and 3,020 acres. Most land-owning decedents (51.6%) held 320 to 1,080 acres. Of these, slightly over half owned 320 to 640 acres and the remainder, 640 to 1,280 acres.⁶¹ From 1845 through 1860, the mean acreage held by the 163 decedents was 959. This average represented large land holdings, since the mean average for living land-owning individuals in 1850 was 558 acres and in 1860, 645 acres.⁶²

⁵⁹GCPCR J-T; 1860 Census.

⁶⁰See Phillips, "Economic Cost," 267.

⁶¹Some decedents also held land outside Greene County. GCPCR J-T.

⁶²1850 Census; 1860 Census.

Real Estate Value

For the period under consideration, analysis of United States Census and Alabama Records reveals that the total per family and per capita value of real estate in Greene County remained very high compared to both the state and nation. An 1848 summation of the taxable property in the county reported "in point of value of land Greene ranks largely above any other county in the State."⁶³ In 1850 the total value of real estate in Greene County was \$3,975,699.00 and in 1860, \$10,692,562.00; these figures included both improved and unimproved land. In both years, the percentage of land owners, representing just over two-thirds of the families, remained fairly constant. In both enumerations, the largest percentage, approximately 50%, of land owners held real estate worth \$1,000.00 to \$5,000.00.⁶⁴

Average land values for the last antebellum decade also show a 40% increase in the value of real estate owned by Greene County residents compared to the state and nation. In 1850, the average value of real estate per family in Greene County was \$2,586.20, a figure almost two and one-half times greater than the average value of \$1,068.91 for an Alabama

⁶³"Greene County-Its Taxable Property" Greensboro Alabama Beacon, n.d. Watson Papers.

⁶⁴In 1850, only 18% of land owners had real estate valued at more than \$5,000.00. In 1860 the same group made up 45% of land owners. 1850 Census; 1860 Census.

family and \$1,083.66 for a U.S. family. In 1860, the average value of real estate per family in Greene County was \$7,508.82, a figure over three times greater than the \$2,438.32 for the Alabama family and over three and one-half times greater than the national family average of \$2,097.59. The per capita real estate value shows a pattern similar to that of the family averages. For 1850, the average per capita real estate value of Greene County residents was \$482.91, over two and one-half times that of the state average of \$184.92 and the \$195.08 average for the United States. By 1860, the per capita value of Greene County residents was \$1,472.60, almost three and one-half times that of the state per capita of \$445.17 and over three and one-half times the \$397.62 United States per capita.⁶⁵

The value of real estate was recorded for 170 (52.8%) of the decedents.⁶⁶ Members of the decedent population were characterized by considerably greater wealth in the form of real estate than members of the living population. While representing only about 9% of adult whites, the value of real estate recorded for decedents, just over \$3,000,000.00, represented 75% of the Greene County real estate value of \$3,975,699.00 for 1850 and 28% of the \$10,692,562.00 value for 1860. The average value of the land held by the

⁶⁵1850 Census; 1860 Census.

⁶⁶The value of land owned was recorded for 7 decedents, but not the acreage.

decedents for whom real estate values were recorded was \$17,026.30. This was far greater than the average of \$2,327.69 per family for the live population land owners in 1850 and more than double the \$7,535.28 average for that group in 1860.⁶⁷

Total Value

The components of total wealth⁶⁸ differ for the decedent and living populations. The total value of the decedents was developed from the actual dollar values recorded for all property in the probate documents. On the other hand, the living population's total wealth taken from the 1860 Census includes only taxable property (e.g., slaves), omitting non-taxable items (e.g., residential furnishings worth less than \$200.00) included in the probate records. Nonetheless, comparisons between the two are informative.

The entire 1860⁶⁹ total value of \$38,057,828.00 for living Greene County residents represented a great increase in wealth during the last decade before the Civil War. This accumulation of wealth can be explained by a combination of

⁶⁷GCPCR J-T; 1850 Census; 1860 Census.

⁶⁸This is recorded as aggregate wealth in the 1860 Census.

⁶⁹Data on personal property were not recorded in the 1850 census, consequently no total value statistics could be developed for 1850.

two factors: first, the increase of the farm acreage owned with a resultant increase in the value of land holdings⁷⁰ and second, the significant rise in the value of slaves.⁷¹ In 1860 a large number of families, 45% of the total and 50% of the living property-owning families, were each worth more than \$10,000.00; the mean worth of a family in the United States was about a third of that figure. The average Alabama family was worth about \$8,000.00.⁷² In 1860, the average total wealth per family in Greene County was \$26,726.00, a figure almost \$4,000.00 higher than the average for families in the nine Alabama Black Belt counties. However Greene County residents were not the wealthiest in the Black Belt counties, for they ranked third, after those of Dallas and Marengo Counties, in both average family and per capita wealth.⁷³ In spite of the great wealth of Greene County residents, there were no recorded millionaires residing there.⁷⁴

⁷⁰See 1850 Census; 1860 Census.

⁷¹See Phillips, "Economic Cost," 267.

⁷²1860 Census.

⁷³Evans, 93.

⁷⁴According to the United States censuses, the wealthiest individual living in the county was Duncan Dew, Sr. In 1850, he resided in the Eutaw Precinct and owned \$41,300.00 worth of real estate. At that time he was one of only thirty-two holders of real estate worth more than \$20,000.00. But by the 1860 census, the 65-year-old native of North Carolina was identified as the wealthiest man in

Table III reveals a distribution of wealth similar to the distribution of slave holdings. There is a smaller, but not significantly smaller percentage of lower middle class decedents who owned total property worth less than \$5,000.00 than there is within the living population. There is also a similar percentage of wealthy members (owning more than \$20,000.00 worth of property) in the decedent and living populations. However, the percentage of middle class decedents (40.4%) is significantly greater than the living middle class population (24.4%).

The average total wealth of Greene County families (\$26,726.00) compares favorably with the average total wealth of the decedents (\$27,977.00).⁷⁵ Male decedents held significantly higher per capita total wealth (\$31,387.00) than females (\$13,496.00). Among living families, real estate value made up 28% of the total wealth but among decedents, 34%. Even though it has been shown that the decedent population held greater wealth in the form of real estate value than the living population, this comparison reveals a great similarity between the two groups in terms of total wealth.

Greene County. As a planter who owned 233 slaves, the total value of his taxable property at that time was \$800,000.00. 1850 Census; 1860 Census.

⁷⁵The total worth of the decedent population was \$9,015,034.00.

TABLE III
NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF THE DECEDENTS
ACCORDING TO TOTAL PROPERTY VALUE^a RANGES COMPARED TO THE
1860 LIVING GREENE COUNTY POPULATION^b

\$ Value	Decedent Pop. 1845-1860		Living Pop. 1860	
	N	%	N	%
None Recorded ^c	3	0.9	169	11.9
1-5000 ^d	96	29.8	462	32.6
5001-20000 ^e	130	40.4	343	24.2
20001 and above ^f	93	28.9	445	31.3
Total	322	100.0	1,419	100.0

Source: GCPCR J-T; 1860 Census.

^aThe total property value for decedents includes all property; for the living population it includes only the value of real estate and taxable personal property.

^bThe living population represents individuals.

^cThe 'None Recorded' total value category for the 1860 living population is made up of those individuals who listed either personal property or real estate value but not both.

^dThis represents the lower middle decedent class.

^eThis represents the middle decedent class.

^fThis represents the wealthy decedent class. Only 1 decedent, but 17 members of the living population, owned property worth more than a total of \$250,000.00.

Summation

Examination of the economic characteristics of Greene County permit an understanding of the relationship of the worth of the decedent and the living populations. The decedents failed to represent the living population of the county in that they held larger numbers of slaves, higher acreages of land, and had higher average real estate value than the living population. There was also a higher percentage of land owners among the decedents than the living population. However, the great majority of the decedents, like most occupation-identified inhabitants of the county, practiced some form of agricultural occupation. According to the types of property comprising their wealth, the decedent population differed from the living in that they owned more slaves and land. Although residential furnishings formed only a tiny portion of the decedents' wealth, the value of those furnishings reveals that decedents owned furniture more valuable than the general population. Male decedents were wealthier than female, owning on the average more slaves, greater value of furnishings, and greater value of total property. Like other antebellum Southerners, the decedents held only a small portion of their wealth in the form of cash or financial investments, preferring slaves⁷⁶ and land. As

⁷⁶For their use of the factor credit system which kept them short of cash see Phillips, "Economic Cost of Slaveholding," 271-272.

among the living population who owned slaves, slaves made up a large percentage of the decedents' personal and total wealth. Most importantly, they were very similar to the living population in per capita personal property and total property valuations. Although slightly less wealthy in terms of per capita total wealth than the living population, the probated slave-owning decedents should be taken to represent living slave holders in Greene County during the late antebellum period. Consequently, the decedents examined were a group with slightly above average prosperity within a wealthy Alabama Black Belt population.

CHAPTER IV

PHYSICAL AND CULTURAL ENVIRONMENTS

The nature and use of residential furnishings are affected by a variety of factors. Whether a home is rural or urban, private sanctuary or social backdrop, large and stylish or small and humble, and/or filled with local products or imported items affects the structural materials, appearance, and utilization of the furnishings. These environments significantly affect the furnishing patterns of a locale. To identify characteristic unity and diversity in Greene County residential furnishings, it is important to examine physical, social, and procurement environments of the late antebellum period.

Geography

The plantation is typically represented as the residential as well as economic focus of antebellum southern life. The romantic picture of the southern estate includes a stately, pillared mansion with kitchen and smokehouse nearby as well as extensive barns, stables, workshops, warehouses, and slave cabins beyond those.¹ In Greene County, however, at least 60% of the wealthy planters maintained permanent homes in towns near their farms, making

¹Clinton, Plantation Mistress, 17-18.

the grand, isolated plantation house the exception rather than the rule.² Mockingbird Hill, near Newbern, is an example of the modest type of country house which was used as a plantation overseer's home. The plantation owner, Henry Watson, resided in a more impressive house in the town of Greensboro.³ There were, of course, many planters of modest means who resided on their farms, living in simple houses.⁴

In agricultural Greene County, the towns and villages were residential and trading centers which provided slave-owning planters with social and cultural as well as economic opportunities. The two largest towns in the 1845 to 1860 period, Greensboro and Eutaw, were the most important of these. (See map in Appendix E. Antebellum Greene County Communities.)

Greensboro, with 1,400 residents in 1856, was the oldest,⁵ if not the leading, town in Greene County. As early as 1823, Greensboro installed twenty street lamps⁶ and

²This occurred throughout the Alabama Black Belt. Owsley, 88.

³Curb, Historic Hale County, n.p..

⁴Bonner, "Plantation Architecture," 372.

⁵Snedecor, 66.

⁶Alyce Billings Walker, ed., Alabama: A Guide to the Deep South, ed. Harry Hansen, American Guide Series (New York: Hastings House, 1975), 278-279. Most southern towns depended on whale oil as the fuel for public lighting. Eaton, 258.

a newspaper was published.⁷ By the 1830s, Henry Watson found that "its population embraces many well informed, talented and sophisticated [members]."⁸ In 1835, Harriett Rabb described the expanding community.

Nearly all the Canebreakers [sic] I believe are moving up here. . . . Mr. Croome is building a very fine large house Our town has improved a great deal but not so much as for you not to know it.

This addition of the wealthy Canebrake landowners enriched the society of the town. Greensboro also offered the advantage of natural beauty.

The walks in the neighborhood are delightful. The whole country is in full leaf . . . and the woods ornamented with different varieties of flowers. The dogwood, the buckeye, and the calicanthy [sic] are now in full bloom. The hills to the north of us are perfumed with this last.¹⁰

By the 1850s Greensboro was an important center of Alabama civilization. Numerous fine residences stood along the streets of the town. The citizens erected a Town Hall, an Armory, and a Jail.¹¹ Besides stores, professional

⁷The first newspaper was the "Halcyon", with the first number published on April 24, 1823. Ellison, A Check List of Alabama Imprints: 1807-1870, 8.

⁸Henry Watson, Jr., Greensboro, AL, to [Julius A. Reed, New Haven, CT], L, 12 February 1834. Watson Papers.

⁹The residence being built by the Mr. Croome is possibly the structure today called Magnolia Grove. Harriett Rabb, Greensboro, AL, to [Sophia Peck, East Windsor, CT], AL, 9 November 1835. Watson Papers.

¹⁰Henry Watson, Jr., Greensboro, AL, to [Rosanna Reed, New Haven, CT], L, 9 April 1838. Watson Papers.

¹¹Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 12 January 1850, 2.

offices, hotels, and manufactories, it contained 2 female schools, the Southern University,¹² a public hall, and 5 churches. The contribution of \$15.75 by ladies of the Greensboro Female Academy to preserve Mount Vernon provides still another example of the high level of Greensboro civilization.¹³

Eutaw, founded in 1838 as the county seat, had the largest population of any town in Greene County by 1860.¹⁴ Situated on a high plateau about 3 miles west of the Black Warrior River, it incorporated the old village of Mesopotamia.¹⁵ The Greek Revival Courthouse of 1839 stood in the center of the Public Square, flanked by the 1842 Sheriff's Office and the 1856 Greene County Probate Office.¹⁶ Eutaw also offered 3 hotels, several retail

¹²Chartered by the Alabama Legislature in 1856, the school remained in Greensboro until 1918, when it merged with Birmingham College to form Birmingham-Southern College in Birmingham. Owen, 435. The first session began in 1859. Yerby, 86.

¹³Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 5 March 1858, 2.

¹⁴The name Eutaw refers to Eutaw Springs in South Carolina where General Nathaniel Greene distinguished himself in a battle against the British. Glass, Goodly Heritage, 31. The population in 1850 was 2,000. Seventh Census, 1850.

¹⁵Lancaster, 19-22. The village of Mesopotamia was settled mainly between 1818 and 1821 by Presbyterians of Scotch-Irish descent. Glass, Goodly Heritage, 23. Captain John Nelson, a member of the commission selecting a new site for the county seat, is credited with changing the name to Eutaw. M. B. Owen, I:434.

¹⁶Lancaster, 26-33. This Probate Court Office building is the location of the records on which this study is based.

stores, 3 schools, 5 churches, 3 manufactories, 2 fraternal organization halls, and 2 newspapers.¹⁷ Surrounded by lands of great fertility,¹⁸ Eutaw was chosen by successful planters for their residences, leaving supervision of their plantations to overseers. That Eutaw "sparkled as the center of lively social activity," was evident in the beautiful homes lining orderly streets.¹⁹

Smaller communities served as the social focus for planters who chose not to live in Greensboro or Eutaw. Havana was associated with the nearby mineral water at the Greene Springs.²⁰ The community of Newbern, founded southeast of Greensboro by wealthy North Carolinians, has been held up as representative of the prosperity of canebrake agriculture.²¹

Newbern is mainly desirable as a place of residence, and is composed principally of handsome mansions scattered along a straight and wide street, stretched out for more than a mile, in the almost native forest.²²

¹⁷Snedecor, 66.

¹⁸M. B. Owen, 434.

¹⁹Glass, Goodly Heritage, 34.

²⁰W. Stuart Harris, Alabama Place-Names (Huntsville, AL: The Strode Publishers, 1982), 80-81.

²¹Ibid., 121.

²²Snedecor, 67.

Clinton, founded in the northern part of the county about 1819, was named for a local family.²³ Besides the usual commercial buildings, fine homes in the village included the W. H. Pippen house, first in the area to display tin gutters.²⁴ Forkland was so named because it was established in the "Fork", a triangle formed by the joining of the Tombigbee and Black Warrior Rivers in the southern portion of the county.²⁵ The fertile prairie surrounding the village supported prosperous plantations with famous mansions like Thorn Hill, built by James Innes Thornton after 1831, and Rosemont, built by William Allen Glover between 1825 and 1832.²⁶ Smaller settlements included Erie,²⁷ Knoxville, Springfield, Mt. Hebron, Harrison Post Office, Hollow Square, Hopewell Post Office, Millwood, Boligee, Pleasant Ridge, Union, and Drake's Landing.²⁸

Undoubtedly, Greene County communities shared the general appearance of other antebellum Southern towns. That

²³Harris, 43.

²⁴Glass, Goodly Heritage, 72.

²⁵Snedecor, 67.

²⁶Glass, Goodly Heritage, 98-111.

²⁷Erie was the county seat from 1819 to 1838. Snedecor, 65.

²⁸Snedecor, 67-68. Other antebellum settlements such as Bragg's Bluff (now called Tishabee), New Prospect Post Office, Daniel's Prairie Post Office, and McConico's Post Office were very small communities at the time. Glass, Goodly Heritage, 101; D. H. Cram, La Tourrette's Map of the State of Alabama and West Florida, 1856, Hoole.

is, on the whole they exhibited the "untidy, slipshod, and individualistic characteristics of an agrarian society dependent on slave labor."²⁹ The public water wells in Greensboro were poorly situated in the middle of two main street intersections.³⁰ Further, for many years the sticky, black prairie soil made the Greensboro streets sometimes impassable during the rainy winter months.³¹ But, communities in Greene County offered lighted streets, thriving churches,³² numerous institutions of learning, a University, public and private libraries, regularly published newspapers,³³ and other 19th century cultural

²⁹Eaton, 247.

³⁰Yerby, 125.

³¹Ibid., 195.

³²In 1856, there were 3 Episcopal (two adjacent to Eutaw and the other Greensboro), at least 10 Methodist, 10 Missionary Baptist, 11 Presbyterian, and 4 Primitive Baptist Churches. Snedecor, 55-58.

³³In 1856, the weekly newspapers were: The Alabama Whig at Eutaw, the Alabama Beacon at Greensboro, and The Independent Monitor at Eutaw. Ibid., 59. In 1860, Greene County, 1 of 52 counties in the state, published 3 of Alabama's 73 weekly political newspapers. Eighth Census, 1860.

advantages.³⁴ Most importantly, they provided settings for the primary residences of wealthy planters.

Society

During the antebellum period, the wealth and background of Greene County inhabitants supported a variety of entertainments and social activities outside and within residential settings. Residents participated in horse races, socials, concerts, and dances. An example of one of the festive occasions too extensive for a private home was the 1846 fancy dress party held at the Greensboro Franklin Hall.³⁵ In 1850, an advertisement for another public gathering appeared.

The Ladies of the Presbyterian Sewing Society propose giving a SUPPER, on the night of the 30th of April, in the Franklin Hall, for the purpose of raising a fund to purchase a Parsonage. Admittance one dollar--children half price--Supper Free.

ICE CREAM and STRAWBERRIES, extra charge.

There will be sold on the occasion, a variety of articles, made by the Ladies' and Misses' Sewing Societies.³⁶

³⁴The citizens of Greene County addressed issues of civic appearance and sanitation during the period. The "Ordinances of the Intendant and Council of the Town of Greensboro' [sic]" included a prohibition against the practice of allowing the filth from privies to stand on property in the town. Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 28 March 1846, 1. In Eutaw there was support for the maintenance of the public graveyard. Eutaw Independent Observer, 9 June 1855, 2.

³⁵"Invitation to Mrs. Henry Watson, Jr., June 1846." Watson Papers.

³⁶Greensboro Alabama Beacon, Alabama, 20 April 1850, 3.

Occasionally, traveling theatrical companies and circuses gave professional performances.³⁷ Greene County residents also traveled to visit family in other parts of the country,³⁸ fairs, resorts, the northern United States, and even Europe.³⁹

An important early influence on the development of refined domestic social life in Greene County was that of the settlers in the 'French Grant'. During the 1820s, the charming manners and elegant deportment of the French emigres combined with the southern culture of the pioneer planters to form the beginnings of society in Greensboro.⁴⁰ The Frenchmen were credited with introducing Parisian dances,

³⁷Shows that played Greensboro included Mabie's Menagerie and Circus in 1858 and Bailey and Company's Great Circus and Menagerie in 1859. The former provided a procession through the town which was preceded by the "Musical Chariot" drawn by elephants. Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 3 March 1858, 3; 4 February 1859, 2.

³⁸Boucher, 15.

³⁹John Hope Franklin, A Southern Odyssey: Travelers in the Antebellum North (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 1.

⁴⁰Yerby, History of Greensboro, 18. French emigres and their descendants who were part of the "Vine and Olive Company" were the most important foreign contingent in early Greene County. Their "French Grant" was in two canebrake townships between Erie and Greensboro. Albert James Picket, History of Alabama, and Incidentally of Georgia and Mississippi, From the Earliest Period (Birmingham, AL: Birmingham Book and Magazine Co., 1962), 625-626; The Independent Observer, 9 June 1855, 2. They settled sections nineteen and twenty in the German Creek and Hollow Square Precincts. John Melish, "Map of Alabama Constructed from the Surveys in the General Land Office and Other Documents" (Philadelphia: 1819), Hoole.

fine wines, and Italian arias into the Canebrake.⁴¹ With such a refined society, elegant gatherings took place in Greene County homes. In June of 1850, Juliet Bestor Coleman wrote her sister about the party for 35 she had recently given in her house at Eutaw.

We had a splendid party all got up in a hurry. I set two tables with the corners to meet, besides a meat table. . . . [I had a] splendid lamp & 4 silver candlesticks, also . silver & best glass & china. . . . I took down the bed over the Parlour & they fiddled & danced till 2 o'clock, up stairs. My house was illuminated & looked perfectly splendid. . . . Mr. Coleman bought me a beautiful new white china table set, breakfast, dinner & supper.⁴² . . . I hear that no finer party has been given here.

When Sara Gould married Samuel Gowdy in 1851, the 174 'neighbors' invited for the occasion came to Eutaw from as far away as New Orleans. The lavish refreshments included:

1 keg currants, 200 lbs loaf sugar, 3 kegs grapes, 2 dozen pineapples, bananas, brandy, Madeira, lobsters, champagne [sic], 5 barrels of oysters, cooking wine, fancy kisses, common french kisses, crystalized [sic] fruit, rosewater, sugar toys, cordial drops, sugar plums, etc.⁴³

Christmas was another event Greene County residents spent at home.⁴⁴ A large concentration of family members gathered at the Samuel Strudwick plantation home to celebrate

⁴¹DuBose, 108.

⁴²Mary Morgan Ward Glass, ed. Connecticut Yankee in Early Alabama, Juliet Bestor Coleman, 1833-1850 (The National Society of Colonial Dames of America in the State of Alabama, 1980), 80.

⁴³Glass, Goodly Heritage, 124.

⁴⁴Henry Watson, Jr., Greensboro, AL, to [Julia Watson, East Windsor, CT], L, 28 December 1834. Watson Papers.

Christmas through the beginning of January.⁴⁵ Although they took place out of doors, such events as 'fish frys', barbecues, and the "romantic flummery"⁴⁶ of medieval tournaments relied on Greene County homes for appropriate backdrops.⁴⁷

At least some residences in Greene County also represented the mid-19th century American reassessment of the role of home in private and public life. Early writers on residential reform, such as Downing, viewed the home as more than shelter and work place.⁴⁸ In fact, those writers may well have led residents to make their choice of residential design according to 'universal symbolism' (i.e., grandeur as opposed to coziness) rather than expedience, fashion, or tradition.⁴⁹ Some Greene County residents went so far as to adopt the symbolic view of home as "a sacred enclave strengthened by feelings of loyalty, reverence, and

⁴⁵Neighbors, "Plantation Life," 51.

⁴⁶Furnas, The Americans, 409.

⁴⁷Dinner preceding the tournament was a barbecue feast. Afterwards, the participants appeared in costume, young ladies in hopes of being chosen the queen of love and beauty and young men of displaying their riding skills in knightly combat. J. Nicholene Bishop, "Our Settlement" (typed manuscript, n.d.), 192-193, Hoole.

⁴⁸Clark, American Family Home, 19.

⁴⁹See Gwendolyn Wright, Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 82-83.

dedication."⁵⁰ In 1854, Leonidas N. Walthall of Newbern was aware enough of the symbolism inherent in domestic arrangements that he instructed Richard Upjohn to create a house that would be suitable for a "good Christian family."⁵¹

Physical Characteristics of Residences

Since most of Greene County was settled in the 1820s and 1830s, many residents of the 1845 to 1860 era had experienced dramatic changes in the character of their residences. The "Reminiscences" of Eliza Gould Means Picton provides a typical history of the progression of Greene County dwellings. She recalled her parents' experience on their arrival in 1832 when "they lived in tents until time could be spared to build a one-room log cabin." By 1836, "another room was added to the cabin, with a hall between and sometime later, two 'shed' rooms were built at the back and a gallery added in the front." By the time Eliza was four years old in 1840, the family moved to their new home, Boligee Hill.

The house had a basement and two stories, four large rooms on each floor, a wide hall extending the length of the house on the first floor, with wide, double doors, back and front. There was a portico in front, reaching almost to the windows on each side, with four fluted

⁵⁰Clark, American Family Home, 29.

⁵¹Lane, Architecture of the Old South, 169. Surprisingly, Walthall specified the Italianate rather than the Gothic Revival style which was usually identified with Christianity. See Gwendolyn Wright, 83.

columns, a flight of steps extending entirely across.
At the back was a wide gallery.⁵²

In the space of less than 10 years, the Means family moved up from tents into a Greek Revival central hall, four-over-four room mansion.

The Means family's building program represents the prosperity of many Greene County residents who constructed substantial residences after the 1830s. The rich diversity of architectural forms and styles there undoubtedly derives from builders' individual interpretation of universal concerns for satisfying the sense of proper appearance, the need for durability, and the economic restrictions of materials, time, and effort.⁵³ Gamble has best systematized the classification of the vernacular forms and high styles of Alabama architecture.⁵⁴ Examples of all of his antebellum architectural classifications which apply to residences occurred in Greene County. The vernacular forms, most of them distinctively southern, are the Dogtrot House (servants' quarters at Thornhill, Forkland vicinity),⁵⁵ the 'I' House with Sheds (Richard G. Steele House, Eutaw),⁵⁶

⁵²Eliza Gould Means Picton, "Reminiscences" (typed transcription, 1931), 3-9, Hoole.

⁵³Upton, "Early Vernacular Architecture," 115.

⁵⁴Gamble, Alabama Catalog, 23-168.

⁵⁵Gamble, 24. This footnote and all others through footnote 58 refer to illustrations of the structures named.

⁵⁶Lancaster, 65.

the Tidewater-Type Cottage (Cedarwood, near Moundville),⁵⁷ the Creole Cottage (John W. Elliot House, Eutaw),⁵⁸ and the Spraddle-Roof House (Attoway R. Davis House, Eutaw).⁵⁹ Apparently, Greene County residential forms could have been of log construction. In 1854, the estate of Madison Johnston recorded the materials for new construction of log houses, including "1 set house logs 15'X30' 5.50" and "1 set small house logs 16' square 3.00."⁶⁰

The high styles identified by Gamble for antebellum Alabama residences parallel those prevalent in the United States as a whole. The high styles and their examples present in Greene County are Federal and Jeffersonian Neoclassicism (Noel-Ramsey House, Greensboro),⁶¹ Greek Revival Neoclassicism (Magnolia Hall, Greensboro),⁶² Gothic Revival (Wemyss House, Greensboro),⁶³ Italianate (Gideon Nelson House, Greensboro),⁶⁴ and Cottage Orn  (Chantilly,

⁵⁷Gamble, 243.

⁵⁸Lancaster, 128-129.

⁵⁹Ibid., 87.

⁶⁰"Inventory of the Estate of Madison Johnston," GCPCR O (14 February 1854): 364-365.

⁶¹Curb, Historic Hale County, n.p. This footnote and all others through footnote 64 refer to illustrations of the structures named.

⁶²Gamble, 60.

⁶³Ibid., 89.

⁶⁴Ibid., 100.

Greensboro).⁶⁵ Based on extant architectural examples, it might be observed that houses in the vicinity of Greensboro were more often in the fashionable styles of the 1850s while houses of the same date around Eutaw were in the older, more restrained Greek Revival style.

Most Greene County residences were the creation of anonymous builders and craftsmen, although local and nationally known architects were involved in some projects. Residents of the county had the opportunity to avail themselves of a local professional in 1857, when B. F. Parsons advertised his services as "Architect & Builder" in Greensboro.⁶⁶ In 1854, Leonidas N. Walthall of Newbern requested help from New York architect Richard Upjohn in the creation of an Italian Villa style house based on a design published by Downing. Walthall requested additional drawings and help in 1857 and in 1858 carpenters and workmen arrived from New York complete with sash, glass, hardware, and nails, to construct the dwelling.⁶⁷

Although the Greene County climate was generally temperate, residents paid careful attention to creating homes which provided maximum comfort, especially in the heat of summer. Nineteenth century architects and writers acknowledged the special spatial and climatic needs of

⁶⁵Ibid., 108.

⁶⁶Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 16 January 1857, 4.

⁶⁷Lane, Architecture of the Old South, 167-169.

southern residences.⁶⁸ Wheeler devoted an entire chapter of his 1851 Rural Homes to designs for southern living. He noted the need for shady retreat from the sun, for structural strength to withstand windstorms and tornados, and for maximum ventilation.

To provide ventilation for southern homes Wheeler advocated high ceilings, cross hallways, and tall windows and doors with screen coverings.⁶⁹ By the 1830s, there were a variety of textile and wire screening materials in use.⁷⁰ A remarkable Greene County example of screened windows remains in the George W. Shawver House in Eutaw where some second story windows appear to have original mid-19th century wire mesh screens.⁷¹ Wheeler also paid particular attention to the need for careful placement of the dining room near the detached, heat-producing kitchen common in the South, recommending use of a pantry as a vestibule to the eating space.⁷² Southern homes were also characterized by the careful design and orientation of piazzas and galleries

⁶⁸Godey's, apparently acknowledging its large southern readership, published examples of houses appropriate for the South. See Godey's, September 1851, 181; September 1860), 280. For other published designs for southern houses see Downing, 312-317.

⁶⁹Wheeler, 131-136.

⁷⁰Garrett, 201-202.

⁷¹Dr. Kimball Armayor, interview by author, Eutaw, AL, 10 April 1983.

⁷²Wheeler, 133-134.

to take advantage of prevailing summer breezes.⁷³ Homes had to be properly managed as well as correctly designed to produce the most comfortable environment. In August of 1848, Greensboro residents were advised:

TO KEEP A HOUSE COOL ALL DAY. - Open the windows and doors at five o'clock in the morning; keep them open two hours; then close them all - windows, doors, and window shades - and the house will remain cool during the hottest part of the day.⁷⁴

Existing historic Greene County houses attest to Wheeler's accurate assessment of customary climatic accommodation practices in southern residences.

Greene County homes were commonly outfitted with fireplaces and occasionally, with stoves. Describing one of the rare cold spells in Greensboro, Juliet Bestor Coleman revealed the failure of fireplaces to combat the cold. "Yesterday we had a few snow-flakes to scare us, the weather is quite cold today and last night froze water in the house."⁷⁵ Examination of both existing residences and mid-19th century descriptions reveals that it was common to have a fireplace in almost every room of a Greene County house. This too, may have been a southern characteristic since reference has been found to the absence of fireplaces in

⁷³Gwendolyn Wright, Building the Dream, 57; Bonner, "Plantation Architecture," 380; Lane, Architecture of the Old South, 169.

⁷⁴Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 12 August 1848, 3.

⁷⁵Glass, Connecticut Yankee, 32.

northern bed chambers.⁷⁶ Humidity was also a problem related to the use of fires for heating. "Everything is mouldy and musty, as you have seen yourself. It is with difficulty we can make a fire in the stove in the library."⁷⁷

The creation of shady piazzas and large window and door openings for climatic accommodation closely related southern homes and life to the out of doors. Consequently, Greene County residents shared the need felt by other prosperous American early Victorians to create exterior living spaces as well as proper landscape settings for their residences.⁷⁸ Professional help from a W. Courson for "ornamental work done on front grounds" was available in Greene County.⁷⁹ Venerable magnolias along with the remains of walks, plantings, and garden ornaments at houses such as Magnolia Grove in Greensboro provide witness to the landscaping of residences. A meticulous grounds plan prepared for Watson's Greensboro home shows both the site and species of each major

⁷⁶Garrett, 114.

⁷⁷Julia Watson, Greensboro, AL, to [Henry Watson, Jr., East Windsor, CT], AL, 8 September 1859. Watson Papers.

⁷⁸Advice on ornamental gardening was published in a local newspaper. See "Shaping Trees and Shrubs," Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 11 May 1855, 1.

⁷⁹Eutaw The Alabama Whig, 17 May 1855, 4.

planting in relation to drives, paths, and structures.⁸⁰ The plan combines a symmetrical front arrangement with an undulating rear layout in a manner similar to designs published in Vaux's Villas and Cottages.⁸¹

The arrangement of interior spaces was related to both climatic considerations and the exterior style of the residence. Throughout the late antebellum period, the most imposing Greene County residences had floor plans which were symmetrical at least at the primary entry. The distinctive, rudimentary southern house form, the dogtrot, in its most basic expression is comprised of two enclosed rooms with an open passage between them.⁸² Early use of these symmetric dogtrots apparently led to the acceptance of central hall plan houses. Central hall plans of the late antebellum period were closely related to the formal Neoclassical Federal and Greek Revival styles. These floor plans had a central hall or passage, usually containing a staircase, which opened to pairs of rooms on both floors of the building.⁸³ Occasionally, as at Rosemont, the centered front hall merged with a rear cross hall, forming a T-shaped

⁸⁰"Plat of Grounds and House in Greensboro-1857." Watson Papers. This is apparently the "Plan for New Front" for which Watson paid \$15.00. "House Cost and Repairs Account." Watson Papers.

⁸¹Vaux, 214, 230.

⁸²Wilson, Alabama Folk Houses, 30.

⁸³Gertrude Sipperly Fish, ed., The Story of Housing (New York: McMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1979), 54.

hall within a symmetric overall plan.⁸⁴ Sometimes these symmetric houses became asymmetric in plan toward the rear. Kirkwood in Eutaw has a rear ell along one side of an open extension of the center hall. In the former the ell contains a dining room and pantry, in the latter, bedrooms.⁸⁵

It was apparently very important for Greene County residents to have symmetric floor plans in their homes. Structures which were originally constructed without central halls were often enlarged to include them. Early two-room homes like the Attoway R. Davis House in Eutaw had only two rooms placed side by side. Both of these original rooms had exterior doors. This house was improved by adding a longitudinal passage and two additional rooms to create a symmetric central hall plan.⁸⁶ The elegant Chantilly in Greensboro began as an 'I' house which was made symmetric by adding a passage and wing to each side of the original structure.⁸⁷ The only residences which appear to have been asymmetric were those such as the Foster-Herndon House in Eutaw which had additions that were of different architectural styles⁸⁸ or were of a radical style, like the picturesque Italianate of the Gideon Nelson House in

⁸⁴Gamble, 235.

⁸⁵Lancaster, 156-157,

⁸⁶Ibid., 87.

⁸⁷Curb, Historic Hale County, n.p.

⁸⁸Lancaster, 135.

Greensboro.⁸⁹ It is possibly significant that of these two asymmetric plan structures, the first had the lesser 1830s 'I' wing removed from the 1840s Greek Revival wing after the Civil War⁹⁰ and the second house was completely demolished in the same era.⁹¹ Apparently, formal symmetry of entry facade and plan were considered desirable in Greene County residences even after 1860.

Late antebellum advertisements for the sale of residences in Greene County newspapers occasionally reveal the number of interior spaces along with contemporary 'real estate' terminology.⁹² In 1859, J. R. Dial offered an 800 acre farm for sale with housing for "40 to 50 negroes" and a dwelling described as " a good double loghouse [sic], with shed rooms on each side" which could have been used as an owner's or overseer's residence.⁹³ Log structures were sometimes larger, however; for example the "Dancey Place" had "a first rate hewed log house with five rooms, good brick chimneys, with four fireplaces."⁹⁴ A newly built dwelling

⁸⁹Gamble, 100.

⁹⁰Lancaster, 135.

⁹¹Gamble, 100.

⁹²Many of these advertisements represent the "Texas Fever" noted by the editor of the Alabama Beacon which caused so much property in Greensboro to be for sale. Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 25 August 1854, 2.

⁹³Ibid., 2 September 1859, 3.

⁹⁴Ibid., 27 September 1851, 3.

near Greensboro described as sufficient in size for a small family had "3 rooms above and 2 below, with a 12 feet passage and portico."⁹⁵

There were also larger and more imposing dwellings. A house in Eutaw offered "five rooms below stairs and an upstairs."⁹⁶ The 7 room Brodnax residence near Greensboro, was of similar size.⁹⁷ In 1852, Daniel Eddins described his Greensboro home as:

a large two story building, containing 9 rooms, with a fire place to each,--3 large passages, and a handsome portico in front; all finished off in the very best style. For convenience of arrangement, and elegance of finish, this dwelling is probably unsurpassed by any in the place.⁹⁸

The largest dwelling described in the sale notices was the new 11 room home of John Dillard about 2 miles west of Greensboro.⁹⁹ Some sense of the relative importance of these larger houses can be gained by comparison to the residence of successful Greensboro entrepreneur Henry Watson which contained 9 rooms with a piazza and under piazza.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵Ibid., 11 January 1850, 3.

⁹⁶Eutaw Independent Observer, 26 October 1860, 3.

⁹⁷Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 28 April 1854, 3.

⁹⁸Ibid., 23 July 1852, 4.

⁹⁹Ibid., 11 August 1854, 3.

¹⁰⁰These piazzas were the upper and lower levels of a two story porch. Henry Watson, Jr., Greensboro, AL, to [Julia Watson, East Windsor, CT], L, Greensboro March 23, 1845. Watson Papers. The Watson residence, which stood on Tuscaloosa Street in Greensboro, was destroyed by fire in the late 19th century. Lawrence Yeager, telephone interview by

Henry Watson also described the John Erwin residence in Greensboro, completed in 1844.

It is a large two story house, quite tasty, well finished, warm, neat, and comfortable, and is most beautifully furnished. There is a large parlor below of two rooms, with folding doors; and a sitting room and dining room below, the sitting room being also Mr. and Mrs. E's Bed Room. There are four bed rooms up stairs, all with fireplaces, and but one or two of them occupied by the family.¹⁰¹

Given the social and economic stature of both Erwin and Watson, it becomes clear that enormous houses of 20 rooms or so like Rosemount and Thornhill were remarkable even in their own time.¹⁰²

Although historic records and existing structures of the period under investigation provide insight into the size of antebellum houses, little information remains on what uses the rooms served. This may be the intentional result of the customary creation of uniform, anonymous, symmetric rooms with pairs of windows and centrally placed doors and fireplaces which permit flexibility of spatial use. Furthermore, these spaces lack the built-in storage that is often associated with the specific purpose of an interior space. Henry Watson's residence included a dining room, storeroom, pantry, library, and sitting room on the ground

author, Greensboro, AL, 16 June 1989.

¹⁰¹Henry Watson, Jr., Greensboro, AL, to [Julia Watson, East Windsor, CT], L, 23 August 1844. Watson Papers.

¹⁰²Ralph Hammond, Antebellum Mansions of Alabama, (New York: Bonanza Books, 1951), 104-105, 109-110.

floor; a parlor, hall, and three bedrooms upstairs; a bedroom and storeroom in the attic.¹⁰³ The Graham residence in Eutaw contained a parlor, sitting room, library, dining room, four chambers, a dressing room, and pantry.¹⁰⁴ A dining room, double parlor, passage, and six bedrooms made up another Eutaw home, that of Emma Herndon.¹⁰⁵ In at least the relatively large residences identified, it is apparent that the public functions of the parlor, sitting room, library, and dining room were customarily separated from the private activities of bedrooms.

The probate inventories reveal little information about the visual appearance of interior structural features and surfaces,¹⁰⁶ but other historical records provide some information on the nature and variety of interior embellishments available in Greene County. Even important houses like Magnolia Grove had wooden floors, but at least one residence, that of John Nelson in Greensboro, had marble

¹⁰³This is the only instance discovered in Greene County historical records of the separation of the parlor and the dining room on two different floors. "1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

¹⁰⁴"Inventory of the Estate of Alexander Graham," GCPCR M (8 November 1850): 1-5.

¹⁰⁵"Inventory of the Estate of Emma Herndon," GCPCR M (18 December 1846): 840-846.

¹⁰⁶One estate contained 3 wooden mantles worth \$1.00 each stored outside the residence. "Appraisal of the Estate of R[ichard] W. Garrett," GCPCR S (7 May 1859): 327-333.

floors on the lower story.¹⁰⁷ Marble was apparently more commonly used for mantles. In 1860, T. S. James & Co. of Mobile offered Greene County residents the opportunity to inspect and purchase "16 varieties of elegant materials and workmanship" in marble mantles.¹⁰⁸ Mantles bought in Mobile could be assembled and installed by area craftsmen like George Blackburn, who announced in addition to his skills in ornamental plastering and brickwork: "particular attention paid to the putting up of Marble Mantel [sic] Pieces."¹⁰⁹ The advertisement of George Herd in 1844 offering beautiful white, excellent quality marble from a Talladega, Alabama, quarry¹¹⁰ and that of A. Heard in 1860 offering "no Talladega marble, nothing but ITALIAN and Vermont Marble"¹¹¹ refer specifically to marble for funerary monuments but probably also reveal sources for marble used for interior fittings and furniture. The possession of marble interior surfaces must have been important enough for mid-19th century Greene County residents to make the use of imitation marble acceptable. At least two craftsmen offered their services for 'Ornamental Painting':

¹⁰⁷Yerby, 76.

¹⁰⁸Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 31 August 1860, 3.

¹⁰⁹Blackburn also stated that he was the only ornamental plasterer in the region of Demopolis, Alabama. Ibid., 4 December 1857, 3.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 19 October 1844, 3

¹¹¹Eutaw The Independent Observer, 26 October 1860, 3.

in 1845, R. Walton advertised "imitations of Wood, Marble, &c. &c. done in a superior manner"¹¹² and in 1855, John W. Simons, graining and marbling.¹¹³

Paint and wallpaper, sometimes imitative of wood, marble, or other materials, were also used for interior embellishment. In July of 1846, Watson wrote "... the halls above and below, [have] darkened green paper."¹¹⁴ In 1849 he recorded expenditures of \$20.75 for papering rooms and a hall, \$45.67 for painting rooms and a hall, and \$6.00 for white washing 5 ceilings and 1 room.¹¹⁵ In April of 1857, Watson paid Sanborn \$6.00 for painting the sitting room and \$6.00 for whitewashing the sitting room [ceiling?], dining room, and stairway.¹¹⁶ In addition to the decorating services of Walton and Simons mentioned above, Greene County residents could avail themselves of the skills of Robert J. Davidson, who advertised "sign, house, or ornamental painting, gilding, graining, glazing, paper hanging, &c. &c."¹¹⁷ in 1857.

¹¹²Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 3 May 1845, 3.

¹¹³Ibid., 29 June 1855, 3.

¹¹⁴Henry Watson, Jr., to [Julia Watson, East Windsor, CT], L, 7 July 1846. Watson Papers.

¹¹⁵"Family Expense Account." Watson Papers. Watson did not record if these prices included both materials and labor and to whom the payment was made.

¹¹⁶"House Cost and Repairs Account." Watson Papers.

¹¹⁷Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 12 June 1857, 3.

A great variety of wallpapers, some even with designs identified as appropriate for specific interior spaces, was available for installation in Greene County homes by the end of the antebellum period. In 1854, Wm. Strickland of Mobile offered a "stock of Wall, Scenery, Sidelight [?], Oak, Column, Panel'd [sic] Statuette, and other Papers, suitable for Halls, Parlors, Diningrooms [sic], Bedrooms, Ceilings, Bar Rooms, etc."¹¹⁸ In 1860, H. Kohnen, Book-Seller in Greensboro, advertised the arrival of \$1,000.00 worth of wallpaper "of the latest style, consisting of Parlor, Dining-Room, Bed-Room, and Passage Paper" priced from \$.10 to \$2.00 a roll.¹¹⁹ The same year, L. F. Haberkorn in Greensboro offered "paper hangings and decorations kept for sale and put in after the latest Paris Fashion"¹²⁰ and wallpaper described as "Fancy, Gold, and Fresco Parlor--Marble, Granite, and Oak for Halls and Dining Rooms" priced up to \$5.00 per roll.¹²¹

Furnishing Sources

The period 1845 through 1860 represents the high point of residential furnishing in antebellum Greene County. Residents there, among the most prosperous in the Alabama

¹¹⁸Ibid., 24 April 1854, 4.

¹¹⁹Ibid., 1 May 1860, 4.

¹²⁰Ibid., 20 March 1860, 4.

¹²¹Ibid., 11 May 1860, 3.

Black Belt, could afford to furnish their homes to satisfy their preferences. Many of the county's slave holding families included descendants of the earliest settlers from Virginia, Georgia, Tennessee, and the Carolinas. There is some evidence that they perpetuated furnishing customs and preserved pieces of ancestral furniture brought from those older southern states.¹²² Adjacent rivers supported regular steamboat service through Mobile which permitted the importation of furnishings from as far away as New York and Europe. This combination of factors may have enabled Greene County residents to establish residences fitted with furniture, floor coverings, window treatments, lighting equipment, and other furnishings of refinement and diversity.

The most important cabinet makers identified in Greene County resided in Greensboro. In March of 1824, William C. Scarff began to manufacture side boards, bureaus, dining tables, secretaries, card tables, wash stands, and high and low post bedsteads.¹²³ By 1825, Scarff added candle stands, lady's work stands, and pillar and claw work to his repertory, offering all his furniture forms in mahogany, cherry, and walnut.¹²⁴ By 1836, his business was so

¹²² Joseph Blodgett Stickney brought a mahogany dining table to Greene County from North Carolina early in the county's history. DuBose, 109.

¹²³ Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 21 February 1824, 3.

¹²⁴ He also wanted to purchase 3,000 feet of cherry and walnut plank of the best quality. Greensboro Greene County Patriot, 31 August 1825, 4.

successful that he advertised his immediate need for three or four good cabinetmakers.¹²⁵ In 1844 Scarff announced that he had "resumed his old business of CABINET MAKING AND TURNING, which had been temporarily discontinued till he could erect a more commodious building."¹²⁶ In 1847, Henry Watson purchased a book case for \$132.50 and a towel stand for \$2.50 from Scarff.¹²⁷ In spite of the length of his activity in Greene County, of the three cabinet makers there in 1850, he produced the lowest value of furniture.¹²⁸ However, at the age of 54 this Virginia native was the richest of the cabinet makers, owning \$2,800.00 worth of property.¹²⁹ As late as 1860, Scarff continued to claim:

The undersigned will make New Work, and Repair Old Furniture, of all discriptions [sic], in Better Style than any other man in the County, East of the Warrior River.¹³⁰

¹²⁵Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 18 May 1836, 4.

¹²⁶Ibid., 19 October 1844, 3.

¹²⁷"House Account." Watson Papers.

¹²⁸The three were Thomas McCullough (unknown location) who produced furniture at \$750.00; Baker Roberts (Greensboro), furniture valued at \$500.00; Wm. D. C. Scarff (Greensboro), furniture at \$400.00. Seventh Census, 1850, Manufacturing Schedule, Greene County. A native of South Carolina, McCullough was recorded as being 38 and residing with his wife, two children, and a bachelor mechanic. Ibid, Population Schedule. The Manufacturing Schedule for 1860 listed no cabinetmakers in Greene County. Eighth Census, 1860.

¹²⁹Seventh Census, 1850, Population Schedule.

¹³⁰Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 20 March 1860, 4.

Other Greensboro cabinet makers produced furniture locally from 1845 to 1860. In the mid-1840s, Baker Roberts was a partner with R. Connally in a furniture, cotton gin, and plough making and repairing business on Main Street where he promised to always keep on hand a supply of bedsteads.¹³¹ His furniture business apparently prospered, for at the age of 37 he was the second largest manufacturer in the county, producing furniture valued at \$500.00.¹³² Before migrating to Texas in 1851, Roberts sold his business to H. A. Sanborn. At that time Sanborn assured potential patrons that he would personally "transact" the cabinetry and upholstery work with the result that "no piece of Furniture shall be carried from the shop that is not executed in a workmanlike manner."¹³³ In 1854 Sanborn moved his shop into the Ice House where he promised to "coolly" conduct his work in house and sign painting along with furniture making.¹³⁴ By 1856, he had become the sole manager of the firm of Sanborn & Johnson which advertised coffins and undertaking services and only incidentally, cabinet making.¹³⁵ In 1854, the partnership of J. S. Buchanan and

¹³¹Ibid., 20 May 1843, 4; 27 January 1844, 3.

¹³²Seventh Census, 1850, Manufacturing Schedule, Greene County. He was a native of North Carolina. Ibid., Population Schedule.

¹³³Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 1 March 1851, 3.

¹³⁴Ibid., 7 July 1854, 4.

¹³⁵Ibid., 12 December 1856, 4; 4 June 1858, 4.

Robert Johnson also advertised that they practiced carpentry, undertaking, cabinet making, and gun smithing in Greensboro.¹³⁶

The county seat, Eutaw, also supported cabinet makers in the antebellum period. In 1840 J. B. Smyth established a cabinet making business there and in 1855 advertised that he was "still at his old stand, prepared to do all work in his line in the usual style and at reasonable prices."¹³⁷ Eutaw apparently appeared to be fertile territory for cabinet makers, for as late as 1860, J. P. Ragsdale commenced work in this trade, offering Eutaw residents: "Tables of all kinds made in the best and neatest manner, - - Also, Wardrobes, Bureaux [sic], Secretaries, &c."¹³⁸

Greene County furniture makers probably also had to compete with furniture manufacturers in other parts of Alabama. Neighboring towns such as Tuscaloosa had their own cabinet makers.¹³⁹ In the 1850s, Howard's Furniture Factory was established in Montgomery. It employed "expert

¹³⁶Ibid., 24 April 1854, 4.

¹³⁷The Eutaw Whig and Public Advertiser, 12 September 1840, 1; Eutaw The Alabama Whig, 17 May 1855, 4. In 1850, Smyth was recorded as a native of South Carolina and aged 57. Seventh Census, 1850, Population Schedule.

¹³⁸Eutaw Independent Observer, 26 October 1860, 3.

¹³⁹Tuscaloosa Independent Monitor, 8 July 1858, 2.

workmen from the North" who produced chairs, sofas, settees, wardrobes, bedsteads, book cases, and other items.¹⁴⁰

The role of cabinet makers in Greene County was possibly a combination of constructing custom orders and retailing ready-made furniture. In 1840, Joseph Smyth of Eutaw had "some articles of furniture on hand, which he will sell cheap."¹⁴¹ Scarff's new Greensboro premises, erected in 1844, contained a furniture "wareroom" upstairs where he kept on hand a good assortment of furniture.¹⁴² Also in Greensboro, H. A. Sanborn promised: "a large supply of ready made [sic] furniture will be kept on hand, such as Bedsteads, Safes, Wardrobes, Bureaus, etc."¹⁴³

Furniture repairing and refinishing were also important work for Greene County cabinet makers. In Eutaw, both Smyth and Ragsdale offered these services and in 1853, Van Doorn touted: "OLD FURNITURE, re-varnished and repaired neatly at low prices."¹⁴⁴ In Greensboro, Scarff also repaired furniture. In 1847 Henry Watson paid Scarff \$20.00 for the repair of a wardrobe, \$3.00 for the repair of a wash stand "injured," and \$1.50 for the varnishing and repair of a clock

¹⁴⁰Moore, History of Alabama, 410.

¹⁴¹Eutaw Whig and Public Advertiser, 12 September 1840, 1.

¹⁴²Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 19 October 1844, 3.

¹⁴³Ibid., 1 March 1851, 3.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., 7 October 1853, 4.

stand.¹⁴⁵ In 1848 Watson had Scarff repair a foot on a bureau and in 1854 and 1856, put new glass in a bookcase.¹⁴⁶

Given the ready availability of furnishings from craftsmen and dealers, it is not surprising that evidence indicates little home production of furnishings in Greene County. There exists a curious pine bureau at Kirkwood, in Eutaw, which is attributed to a slave craftsman from Rosemont Plantation west of the town.¹⁴⁷ Henry Watson recorded "1 Home Made Bureau 5.00" in his attic north room.¹⁴⁸ In some households at least, women engaged in making draperies, household linens, and needlework decorations.¹⁴⁹ However, even public encouragement of home production of furnishings seemed to have little result. Visiting the first Greensboro Agricultural Society Fair in 1851, Henry Watson recorded with some disappointment that "the Ladies Department was a

¹⁴⁵"House Account." Watson Papers.

¹⁴⁶Watson also recorded renting hearses from Scarff. "Family Expense Account." Watson Papers.

¹⁴⁷Roy Swayze, interview by author, Eutaw, AL, 17 October 1983.

¹⁴⁸"1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

¹⁴⁹Henry Watson, Jr., Greensboro, AL, to [Julia Watson, East Windsor, CT], L, 23 March 1845. Watson Papers.

failure 1 rug, 5 quilts and a counterpane, some ottomans and a few other things making all."¹⁵⁰

Much furniture used in the late antebellum South was undoubtedly locally constructed using hand construction techniques and locally available materials.¹⁵¹ But apparently, production of the types of residential furnishings considered desirable by residents required expert craftsmanship, technology, and/or materials not available in Greene County. The development of mechanized furniture production and improved methods of transportation generated a new component in the interior furnishings trade, the furniture dealer.¹⁵² In this role, Greene County merchants tried to compete with both Mobile and New York City furniture dealers. Although Charles A. Van Doorn in Eutaw advertised "Cabinet Making and Upholstering," the sophisticated utilitarian forms listed (e.g., extension tables, rosewood picture frames, and melodians) reveal that his stock was

¹⁵⁰Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 26 November 1850, 1; Henry Watson, Jr., Greensboro, to Julia Watson, East Windsor, CT, 27 November 1851. Watson Papers.

¹⁵¹A variety of wood species were available to local cabinet makers and carpenters. Robert Withers of Greensboro offered in 1848: "a good supply of logs . . . in addition to the ordinary kinds of lumber . . . cypress, poplar, curled maple, black walnut, curled sassafrass [sic] (from 1 to 2 feet wide) ashe [sic], hickory or oak." Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 6 May 1848, 3. A brief history of Withers' enterprises is found in Jeff Mansell, "South Hale Landing Served Black Warrior Traffic," The Tuscaloosa News, 10 November 1991, 10a.

¹⁵²Ray, 575.

comprised at least in part of imported factory pieces. He also promised to sell: "Pianos of every style by the best makers, at less than New York prices, \$200.00 and upward." He also offered to order spring mattresses from a sample in his store, and "furniture of any style."¹⁵³ In September of 1860, L. F. Haberkorn of Greensboro announced in an extensive advertisement that he was:

receiving a large and elegant stock of Goods in his line of business, selected by himself in the Eastern cities. To those who are in the habit of purchasing their Goods either at New York or Mobile, I would respectfully say, that they can be suited at this establishment in the Variety, Magnificence and Prices of Goods, and I most cordially invite them to come and examine my stock and prices before ordering from elsewhere.¹⁵⁴

His merchandise included wallpaper, window shades, curtain materials, upholstery goods, pictures and frames, and furniture:

Consisting, in part of Mahogany and Walnut Wardrobes, Bureaus, Wash-Stands, with and without marble tops; Centre [sic] and Sofa Tables, fine French and Southern Bedsteads, Rosewood Tete-a-tetes [sic], Easy and Rocking Chairs. Also, COTTAGE FURNITURE, Bedsteads, Lounges, Tables of all kinds, Wash-Stands, Toilet Tables, Looking-Glasses,¹⁵⁵ and a great variety of Rocking and other Chairs.

That New York furnishing wholesalers solicited Greene County business is recorded in a letter from the firm of Woodward and Dusenberg to Greensboro lawyer Henry Watson.

¹⁵³ Eutaw The Alabama Whig, 29 September 1853.

¹⁵⁴ Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 28 September 1860, 2.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

We infer that if our friends are willing to undertake the collection of a contested debt for 5 per cent, they will use some exertions to obtain orders from the good and responsible merchants for a like commission.¹⁵⁶

The firm also provided Watson with illustrated circulars and price lists of furniture, lighting fixtures, china, and window decorations.

Greene County residents also had the option of purchasing furnishings at local sales and auctions.¹⁵⁷ Newspapers anonymously offered such items as "a fine set of parlor furniture" and "a plain, neat wardrobe" for sale through the publications' offices.¹⁵⁸ In 1846, Henry Watson recorded the private purchase of a sofa for \$50.00 from a Mrs. Brand and two pictures for the same price from Mrs. Mary Peck.¹⁵⁹ He procured at least a wardrobe from the same Mr. Witherspoon from whom he bought his Greensboro home.¹⁶⁰ Watson also procured a sofa for \$11.00 at 'Fortune's Sale' in November of 1851.¹⁶¹ Auctions were both estate settlement sales (many records of which remain in

¹⁵⁶Woodward and Dusenbergh, New York, NY, to [Henry Watson, Jr., Greensboro, AL], 1 August 1849. Watson Papers.

¹⁵⁷This was a customary American practice at the time. Garrett, 262.

¹⁵⁸The Eutaw Whig, 13 December 1860, 4; Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 19 June 1857, 3.

¹⁵⁹"Furniture." Watson Papers.

¹⁶⁰Ibid.

¹⁶¹Ibid.

the Probate Court documents),¹⁶² and private sales such as that held by A. L. Pickens.¹⁶³ At the latter type, individuals offered 'Household and Kitchen Furniture' at auction for unspecified reasons, presumably to raise cash or to simply clear out old furnishings.

The relatively small local market, competition from outside furniture dealers, and the distance of Greene County from the centers of United States furniture manufacturing possibly kept local dealers from maintaining wide selections in their stocks. The large number of manufacturers in the major furniture-producing cities of Philadelphia,¹⁶⁴ Boston,¹⁶⁵ New York,¹⁶⁶ and Cincinnati¹⁶⁷ made such a variety of furnishings that the Greene County dealers were very likely unable to carry comprehensive, competitive inventories. Consequently, some southerners probably chose

¹⁶²For the public advertisement of one of these sales see "Administrator's Sale," Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 4 December 1857, 3.

¹⁶³Ibid., 29 November 1851, p 3; 26 October 1860, p 3.

¹⁶⁴Page Talbott. "Philadelphia Furniture Makers and Manufacturers," in Victorian Furniture, 87-101.

¹⁶⁵Jan M. Seidler, "A Tradition in Transition: The Boston Furniture Industry, 1840-1880," in Victorian Furniture, 67-83.

¹⁶⁶Clare Vincent, "John Henry Belter: Manufacturer of All Kinds of Fine Furniture," in Ian M. G. Quimby and Polly Anne Earl, eds., Technological Innovation and the Decorative Arts (Charlottesville, VA: The University Press of Virginia, 1984), 207-234.

¹⁶⁷Polly Anne Earl, "Craftsmen and Machines: The Nineteenth-Century Furniture Industry," *ibid.*, 307-329.

to obtain furnishings by traveling to or ordering from furniture dealers outside Greene County.¹⁶⁸

Furniture dealers in Mobile were important sources of furnishings for Greene County residences between 1845 and 1860.¹⁶⁹ On their honeymoon in Mobile in 1845, Henry Watson and his bride Sophia outfitted their entire home from the stocks of Mobile merchants. According to the purchase receipts, they acquired kitchen utensils from O. Mazange & Co., household linens from Henry & Stoddard, glass and china from Jas. Masterson, silver and lighting fixtures from A. Knapp, furniture and carpeting from B. Newhouse, and white counterpanes from Daniels and Brady.¹⁷⁰ This practice of visiting Mobile for outfitting a household was recorded in 1852. "Mr. Shackelford has bought a place six miles north of this on the Tuscaloosa Road and has gone to Mobile to buy some furniture to go to house keeping."¹⁷¹ Other extant receipts from Mobile dealers recording furniture purchases include those from B. Newhouse (1845),¹⁷² John Bowen

¹⁶⁸This was also true of other southern centers such as Memphis, TN. Ray, 242.

¹⁶⁹There have been no records found of furnishing acquisitions in New Orleans by probated deceased Greene County slave owners.

¹⁷⁰"Receipts." Watson Papers.

¹⁷¹Henry Watson, Jr., Greensboro, AL, to [Julia Watson, East Windsor, CT], L, 24 May 1852. Watson Papers.

¹⁷²John Erwin Papers, ADAH.

(1850), Wm. H. Kelly (1857), and J. Bowen & Gilman (1860).¹⁷³ The 1856 Greene County Directory contained advertisements from John Bowen, furniture and piano forte dealer, and Neally & DeLabar, dealers in furniture and piano fortes, who tried to increase Greene County patronage in their Mobile establishments.¹⁷⁴ In 1859, Wm. H. Kelly used a Greensboro newspaper to advertise the availability of everything "Kept in a FURNITURE STORE" in his Mobile premises.¹⁷⁵ An advertisement placed in 1858 by Francis Winter of Mobile offered cabinet and upholstery goods, looking glasses, cornices, window shades, carpets, matting, willow ware, and rattan chairs to Greene County residents as late as the summer of 1861.¹⁷⁶

Some Greene County residents acquired furnishings directly from sources outside the South. The Italianate Walthall residence near Newbern was furnished with carpet and furniture brought from New York in 1858.¹⁷⁷ In November of 1859, Henry Watson purchased various furnishing items including silverware, furniture, and pictures in New York which he shipped to Greensboro.¹⁷⁸ Occasionally, New York

¹⁷³Original receipts in the collection of the author.

¹⁷⁴Snedecor, 92-93.

¹⁷⁵Eutaw The Alabama Whig, 3 February 1859, 3.

¹⁷⁶Eutaw The Whig and Observer, 4 July 1861, 1.

¹⁷⁷Lane, Architecture of the Old South, 169.

¹⁷⁸"Furniture." Watson Papers.

furniture dealers even advertised directly in Greene County newspapers. In 1860, the firm of Degraff and Taylor, Number 87 Bowery in New York, offered:

ROSEWOOD, MAHOGANY & WALNUT PARLOR & CHAMBER FURNITURE. Also, Cane and Wood Seat work, all qualities; Hair, Husk and Spring Mattresses, a large stock; Enameled Chamber Furniture, in sets, from \$22 to \$100. Jenny Lind and Extension Bedsteads, 5 feet wide.¹⁷⁹

The current political condition was no doubt the only cause for their refusal to sell goods on time payment.

There is only a small amount of evidence of direct importation of furnishings into Greene County from Europe. Greensboro lawyer John Erwin, partner of Henry Watson, visited in Europe in 1857 and acquired art for his home. While in Florence, he purchased two original landscape paintings, a copy of a painting of "The Angel Refuses the Gift of Tobias," and a marble bust of himself.¹⁸⁰ Also in the late 1850s, Gideon Nelson built an Italianate mansion reputed to have cost \$100,000.00 in Greensboro. His house contained frescos painted by European craftsmen and imported European marble fittings.¹⁸¹

Acquisition of furnishings from sources outside of Greene County was facilitated by the Black Warrior and

¹⁷⁹Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 31 August 1860, 3. See also the advertisement of James H. Cooke, No. 100, Broadway, NY. Ibid., 18 May 1837, 3.

¹⁸⁰John Erwin Papers, ADAH.

¹⁸¹The Nelson house was dismantled in the late 19th century. Yerby, 76-77.

Tombigbee Rivers, major arteries of transportation and the preferred mode of travel.¹⁸² Plied by steamboats throughout the antebellum era,¹⁸³ these rivers allowed Greene County planters to ship their cotton to the world markets through Mobile and import plantation supplies and residential furnishings. Although the relatively constant depth of the Black Warrior reduced the number of fords that could obstruct steamboats, navigation required skill and determination to follow the tortuous, winding route.¹⁸⁴ The Tombigbee River, the western and southwestern boundary of Greene County, was wide and relatively straight but so shallow that steamboat traffic was hampered by the frequent fords.¹⁸⁵ On both rivers, use of larger steamboats was limited to the high water season in winter and spring.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸²Robert O. Mellow, "Steamboat Travel in Early Alabama," Alabama Heritage, Fall 1986, 3.

¹⁸³In 1821 the first steamboat on the Black Warrior River, the Cotton Plant, stopped at Erie and Springfield. Glass, Goodly Heritage, 14.

¹⁸⁴Snedecor, 69-70. There were only six Black Warrior crossings or fords linking east and west indicated on the 1858 Greene County Precinct Maps. The only ferry service indicated was Finley's Ferry on the Black Warrior. Greene County Precinct Maps: 1858, ADAH.

¹⁸⁵Snedecor, 70. In 1858 there were eight fords or crossings on the Tombigbee from Greene to Sumpter Counties. One of these was at Gainesville, in Sumpter County, an important river port and commercial center for portions of western Greene County. Greene County Precinct Maps: 1858, ADAH.

¹⁸⁶Mell A. Frazier, Early History of Steamboats in Alabama, Alabama Polytechnic Historical Studies, 3rd ser., 1, (Auburn, AL: 1907): 25.

The use of steamboats to import furnishings into Greene County is recorded in extant receipts. In January of 1853, Henry Watson purchased carpeting and hair cloth from B. Newhouse in Mobile which was shipped on the steamer Ambassador to Eastport on the Warrior.¹⁸⁷ The same merchant sold him various furnishing items in 1856 which were shipped two days later on the steamer Fairfield. Shipping was a major expense, as a bureau which cost \$14.00 carried a \$3.00 freight charge plus drayage from the river landing to Greensboro.¹⁸⁸ Because of the availability of river transport, most Greene County goods, including residential furnishings, traveled by steamboats linked with local draymen rather than railroad.¹⁸⁹

From early in the history of Greene County, inhabitants moved both people and goods by road. Dubose recalled how in 1830 his father, like other early planters, moved his family, goods, and slaves overland from South Carolina to the Canebrake region.¹⁹⁰ By the 1850s, Greene County roads

¹⁸⁷"Receipts." Watson Papers.

¹⁸⁸Ibid.

¹⁸⁹Railroad connections were available through Uniontown to the east and Quitman, Mississippi to the west. The Selma and Uniontown Railroad published cotton shipment rates to ports on the Alabama River in Greene County newspapers as early as September 1858. Eutaw The Alabama Whig, 3 February 1859, 3. By 1860 a few miles of the Selma and Uniontown Railroad was apparently under construction from Uniontown as far as Newbern. Augustus S. Mitchell, Jr., "County Map of Georgia and Alabama 1860," Hoole.

¹⁹⁰DuBose, 63-75.

included stage and post routes, county roads, and private roads which connected plantations with steamboat landings, towns, and mills.¹⁹¹

The landings along the Black Warrior and Tombigbee Rivers provided the essential link between road and river transportation.¹⁹² The cut glass and chinaware bought by Henry Watson from Kittell & Klingenberg in New York City in 1858 was shipped to him at Drake's Landing, near Greensboro. It might even be inferred that because the name Alabama does not appear on the receipt, the New York shipping system was familiar with this Black Warrior destination landing.¹⁹³ Landings not only permitted transfer of passengers, cotton, and goods between steamboats and Greene County residents, but also provided drayage service and rented wagons, carriages, teams, and horses for overland trips.¹⁹⁴ In March of 1845 when he received the household furnishings purchased in Mobile on his honeymoon, Henry Watson paid \$48.82 for freight from Mobile to the landing at Erie, \$25.37 for storage of the same at Erie, and \$15.60 for hauling to Greensboro.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹See "Precinct Maps of Greene County, 1858," ADAH.

¹⁹²These were often adjacent to ferries. The 1858 Greene County precinct maps show 8 crossings on the Tombigbee and 6 on the Black Warrior. "Precinct Maps of Greene County, 1858," ADAH.

¹⁹³"Receipts." Watson Papers.

¹⁹⁴Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 5 September 1856, 2; 7 October 1853, 4.

¹⁹⁵"Furniture." Watson Papers.

A Complete Residence

Perhaps the ideal home environment for a Greene County resident was described by Henry Watson in his 1866 advertisement in the Alabama Beacon.

FOR SALE MY DWELLING HOUSE AND LOT. This is the most desirable place in Greensboro. The House is large and arranged with a view to convenience and comfort. The Grounds are improved with shade and ornamental trees, roses and evergreens, and attached are a fine orchard of peach, pear, apple, and fig trees, well protected by hedges, & beautiful grass lots. Connected with the house is a brick kitchen and wash house, with servants' rooms above, negro houses, smoke house, hen houses, barn, sheds, carriage house, in fact every building and convenience that one could desire. The lot contains 24 ACRES, bounding upon two streets, is well fenced, and conveniently divided for cultivation, pasture, and pleasure grounds. The house is completely and elegantly furnished throughout, and if desired the furniture will be sold with it.¹⁹⁶

Summation

The homes of Greene County were distant from the centers of 19th century culture, but were not isolated. The society, wealth, literacy, and easily traveled rivers of Greene County provided residents with the opportunity to create and furnish residences according to personal preference in spite of geographic remoteness. Prosperity and an efficient transportation system enabled diversity in Greene County architectural style and furnishing selection in both town and country homes. The factors which permitted freedom of choice

¹⁹⁶Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 26 January 1866, 3.

in southern residential arrangements also insured that Greene County residents were influenced by the same mid-19th century forces that shaped the furnishing of homes in the rest of the United States.

CHAPTER V

FURNITURE

The term 'furniture' refers to those relatively large, moveable artifacts which in Greene County residences provided inhabitants with sitting places, reclining places, task-facilitating surfaces, and storing places. These utilitarian forms reveal how deceased slave owners solved problems of everyday life, facilitating and organizing activities within their houses.¹ Because of this, the forms are a record of their owners' needs, current and anticipated. The occurrence and attributes of utilitarian forms also reveal such owner characteristics as orderliness, enterprise, or ostentation² and provide a basis for comparison to other American early Victorians.

The data on furniture forms were examined to ascertain the nature and distribution of furniture throughout the decedent slave-owning population. Presented according to utilitarian form (seating, reclining, surface, and storage), the results were analyzed by inclusion in a residence, rather than estate since three estates recorded more than one

¹E. McClung Fleming, "Early American Decorative Arts as Social Documents," The Mississippi Valley Historical Review XLV (June 1958): 278.

²For discussion of the significance of the functions and physical characteristics of artifacts see, Fleming, "Artifact Study," 168-169.

furnished residence. All recorded furniture forms³ belonging to all decedents were examined according to selected physical⁴ and estate economic characteristics whenever the data were available.⁵ Because of the large number of forms recorded in inventories, this study presents the data on selected forms which were frequently recorded, specifically described, atypically mentioned, or traditionally identified as appropriate for furnishing antebellum Southern residences.

Although each analyzed furniture form occurred in the probate record of at least one decedent, the inconsistency of terms used to describe furniture by 19th century Greene County inventory takers prevented a comprehensive view of the occurrence of all but the most generically described furniture forms.⁶ That many of the precisely described forms appeared only once or twice in the analyzed estates suggests they were uncommon items. However, the terse furniture descriptions in most of the probate records were

³The author will consistently use furniture form names recorded in the probate records. Early- and mid-19th-century sources were used along with more recent references to help define the furniture form terms.

⁴The furniture form dependent variables correlated with the utilitarian forms in Chapter V are structural material, surface decoration, seat material, style, item value, item value related to on structural material.

⁵Estate economic dependent variables correlated with utilitarian furniture forms are slave number, total residential furnishings value, and aggregate property value.

⁶Use of the term generic with a utilitarian form name means that the form lacked more specific description.

probably the result of expediency rather than precision. Consequently, the statistical findings probably minimize the actual frequency of occurrence for some items.

The Greene County Probate Court Records are also taciturn on the subject of furniture styles, seldom mentioning any of the mid-19th century styles known to scholars. Presumably, just as in architecture, there were traditional forms and high styles in Greene County furniture. The few pieces of furniture described as plain, ordinary, or home-made were probably hand-crafted vernacular forms such as those identified for 19th century Georgia.⁷ Family heirlooms brought by settlers into Greene County were old by 1845 and probably examples of the restrained, elegant Federal style. The furniture acquired by deceased slave owners while residing in Greene County were probably in the American styles prevalent from 1820 to 1860. The furniture styles available preceding and during the period under consideration for furnishing Greene County residences were "The Empire Style: 1810-1830," "Victorian Classical: 1830-1850,"⁸ "Gothic and Elizabethan Styles: 1836-1870," and "The Rococo Style: 1850-1870."⁹ However, whatever the style, the

⁷Neat Pieces, 2.

⁸This style is also referred to as the American version of the "French Restauration Style." Elizabeth Stillinger, The Antiques Guide to Decorative Arts in America 1600-1875 (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1972), 345-346.

⁹Mayhew and Myers, Documentary History, vii.

general look of furniture of the early Victorian period has been described as "much the same, rounded and comfortable in form, in its way almost style-less."¹⁰ Judging from furniture remaining in houses such as Kirkwood in Eutaw, Greene County homes exhibited a mix of the pre-1860 styles. The variety of simultaneous furniture styles at this time may have been derived from a democratic search for self-expression by American early Victorians.¹¹

Seating Forms

Seating furniture serves the human requirement for relaxation without standing or reclining. In this role, it reveals the need for ease and stillness. Sitting subsequently encourages less rigorous occupations like conversation, reading, or small-scale tasks like sewing. Seating furniture was so important to Greene County decedents that various forms of seating were recorded in approximately 95% of decedents' residences.¹² Seating forms which were

¹⁰Jeremy Cooper, Victorian and Edwardian Decor: From the Gothic Revival to Art Nouveau (New York: Abbeville Press, 1987), 7.

¹¹Stillinger, 343.

¹²Because of inconsistency in recording the quantity of items in a residence (e.g., set as opposed to specific number), frequency of occurrence refers both to single forms and groups of items.

distinctive or occurred frequently in the data are examined below.¹³

Single Seat Forms

Crickets. Crickets were low wooden stools,¹⁴ commonly used as children's seats in American sitting rooms.¹⁵ Although only one pine cricket was listed in an 1846 inventory, its occurrence ties Greene County furnishing practice with the remainder of the United States. A piece not thought enough of to be valued, the cricket was part of a residence with total furnishings worth \$468.00.¹⁶ It was the property of a wealthy decedent¹⁷ who owned 53

¹³Seating forms mentioned only once or twice were revolving chair, sick chair, and folding chair.

¹⁴Oxford English Dictionary. Hereafter referred to as OED.

¹⁵Garrett, At Home, 71. The variable interior space referred to the room in which the furniture form was located.

¹⁶Furniture forms were correlated with the total value of residential furnishings held by the decedent who owned the residence in which the forms appeared. The number ranges of residential furnishings value used for this correlation appear in Appendix F.

¹⁷The economic classes established for Greene County decedent slave owners were: (1) lower middle class owning less than 10 slaves, furnishings worth up to \$100.00, and total estates up to \$5,000.00; (2) middle class owning 10 to 49 slaves, \$100.00 to \$300.00 in total furnishings, and total estates worth \$5,000.00 to \$20,000.00; (3) wealthy owning 50 or more slaves, total furnishings over \$300.00, and total estates worth more than \$20,000.00. When the combination of economic variables did not correspond exactly to the above groupings, the total value was used to identify the economic class. The lower middle class decedents correspond to Owsley's small and large farmers; the middle class decedents to his planter class; the wealthy class decedents to his

slaves¹⁸ and whose total estate was worth over \$25,000.00.¹⁹

Stools. Footstools were necessary furnishings in the mid-19th century, considered proper accompaniments for the rocking chairs popular in 19th century America.²⁰ Lida Bestor Robertson noted that her sister Jule was working on a footstool for the Gainesville Sewing Society in January of 1852.²¹ Her 'work' was quite possibly Berlin Work, a needlepoint technique popular in the 1850s.²² Stools were recorded in other upholstery materials as well; Watson owned 2 green plush-covered mahogany footstools, both in bedrooms and worth \$4.00 each.²³

It is not clear whether use of the term stool in 2 Greene County residential inventories referred to a footstool

great planters. Owsley, 7.

¹⁸Furniture forms were correlated with the number of slaves held by the decedent who owned the residence in which the forms appeared. The number ranges of slaves held used for this correlation appear in Appendix F.

¹⁹Furniture forms were correlated with the total value of the estate held by the decedent who occupied the residence in which the forms appeared. The number ranges of total estate value used for this correlation appear in Appendix F.

²⁰Thornton, Authentic Decor, 228.

²¹"A Simple Diary of the life of 1852 and the folk in Alabama." Lida Bestor Robertson Papers. ADAH.

²²Grier, 268.

²³"1866 Inventory." These were bought in 1858. "Furniture." Watson Papers.

or a higher stool for sitting. The occurrence in one inventory of a pair of "cane bottomed stools"²⁴ in a parlor (worth \$2.00 for the pair)²⁵ may refer to footstools since they were worth very little compared to the parlor stool (worth \$30.00) in another inventory. Decedents owning stools were wealthy, holding over \$600.00 worth of total furnishings, over 25 slaves, and total estate worth more than \$20,000.00.

Ottomans. Ottomans, cushioned backless seats, occurred in only 4, or 1%, of the decedents' residences.²⁶ They were always listed in pairs,²⁷ as in Watson's "Inventory."²⁸ One pair of parlor ottomans covered in damask was valued at \$10.00 and other pairs were valued similarly, from \$6.00 to \$10.00.²⁹ Ottomans were luxurious

²⁴Seat material refers to the textile construction, textile fiber, or other material used for covering a seating surface.

²⁵The total value of the residential furnishings was \$1,563.00. "Appraisal of the Estate of Alexander Graham," GCPCR M (8 November 1850): 1-5.

²⁶Loudon illustrated these, calling them "ottoman footstools." Loudon, 1060-1061.

²⁷The parlor, chamber, and dressing room of the Graham residence each contained a pair of ottomans. "Appraisal of the Estate of Alexander Graham," GCPCR M (8 November 1850): 1-5.

²⁸"1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

²⁹These values are considerably lower than the \$20.00 paid for a pair of ottomans by Watson in 1845. "Furniture." Watson Papers.

furniture, associated with owners of 40 or more slaves, total residential furnishings worth more than \$1,000.00, and generally, total estate worth over \$100,000.00.

Generic chairs. The great difference between stools and chairs is that chairs have backs.³⁰ The generic chairs analyzed were the most common seating form (92.9% of residences), appearing in greater numbers than any other furniture forms, and were owned by decedents in all economic ranges. The large number of chairs was due to the presence of sets, usually multiples of 4 or 6.³¹ In 1847, the residence of John Jones contained 12 Windsor and 12 split bottom chairs.³² Even more sets of chairs could occur in a residence like Watson's, which was initially furnished with 6 mahogany, 4 Cottage, 12 oak, 6 maple, and 6 cane seat maple chairs.³³ In 1851, Greene County residents had the opportunity to purchase 2 sets of chairs, "one dozen and a half Mahogany Chairs, one dozen Cane Seat Chairs," offered by

³⁰It was assumed that the term chair referred to a single seat with a back support, but no arms. The form generic chair incorporates the 8 appearances of 'setting chairs' which occurred in sets of 9 to 18.

³¹The appearance of the American practice of purchasing chairs in sets of multiples of 6 and 4 became noticeable in Connecticut inventories from the middle of the 18th century. Sweeny, "Furniture," 24.

³²"Appraisal of the Estate of John Jones," GCPCR K (17 July 1847): 356-364.

³³"Receipt of Furniture Purchased from B. Newhouse." Watson Papers.

A. Barnum.³⁴ The number of chairs in the sets probably represent the decedents' provision of adequate seating for their families (which averaged 7 members) as well as visitors. The chairs from these sets were probably used throughout residences, rather than as fixed sets. Watson's 4 Cottage chairs were recorded in the north front room (1) and the north back room (3).³⁵ In addition, these groups of moveable seating forms which record 19th century customs of marketing and acquisition may also represent Greene County decedents' encouragement of sociability by making plentiful seating available and by unifying sitters with matching chairs.

Just over 5% of generic chair occurrences in decedents' residences were identified as made from specific species of wood.³⁶ Of those, 54% were mahogany, 34% maple, 8% oak, and 4% walnut. Given the prominence accorded rosewood in American publications of the 1850s,³⁷ its absence from the probate records is surprising. Inventories of 4 decedents also reveal combinations of mahogany and maple chairs, inferring that this was an acceptable, if not desirable, mixture. The records of the Watson residence also reveal a

³⁴Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 6 December 1851, 3.

³⁵"1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

³⁶Structural material refers to the wood or other substance from which furniture was made.

³⁷"New Furniture," February 1850, 152-153; Alice B. Neal, "Furnishing," Godey's, November 1850, 301-302.

mixture of chair woods: mahogany, maple, oak, willow, rosewood.³⁸ Generally, chairs were inexpensive, over two-thirds (68%) of occurrences³⁹ worth \$6.00 or less.⁴⁰ Mahogany chairs had the highest average value per occurrence, \$27.85,⁴¹ when compared to that of maple chairs at \$10.13; walnut at \$15.00; oak at \$14.50.⁴² The 5 willow chairs, worth \$4.00, had cane seats and were located in a bed chamber.⁴³ The Watson residence also had willow chairs, the 4 on the piazza worth \$12.00.⁴⁴

Since the primary function of chairs was to provide a place to sit, the material of the seating surface was

³⁸Watson even bought mahogany and maple chairs at the same time from the same furniture dealer. "Furniture." Watson Papers.

³⁹Chairs were often recorded as sets or groups without the number being indicated. Examination of the value of the occurrences provides the opportunity to use a larger population for comparison.

⁴⁰The value of furniture forms is the average, minimum, and maximum value of form occurrences. The probate records frequently valued furniture in fractions of \$1.00. In this study, all values less than \$1.00 were made equal to \$1.00. When furniture value was a dollar amount and \$.49 or less, the value was rounded down to the nearest dollar; when \$.50 or more, rounded up to the nearest dollar.

⁴¹These values are per occurrence, not per chair. When both structural material and item value were recorded, these form dependent variables were correlated to identify average as well as minimum and maximum values.

⁴²The relatively high value of walnut chairs may be due to the fact that they were only mentioned once.

⁴³"Appraisal of the Estate of Col. Samuel Pickens," GCPCR P (9 November 1855): 677-690.

⁴⁴"1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

important for comfort, durability, and appearance. The seating most frequently identified (60 occurrences) was made of the sturdy woven wooden strips called split.⁴⁵ However, chairs with more fragile woven cane seats also appeared often⁴⁶ and were worth more than those with split, leather, grass, palmetto, wooden plank,⁴⁷ corn shuck, and reed seats.⁴⁸ Identification of seating material was apparently a convenient means for appraisers to distinguish groups of chairs. The Higginbotham residence contained 9 split seat chairs worth \$3.00, 1 set of cane seat chairs worth \$8.00, and 7 rush seat chairs worth \$14.00.⁴⁹ Likewise, the Pippen residence had 6 cane seat chairs at \$6.00, 6 stool seat chairs at \$3.60, 6 split seat chairs at \$3.36, and another 6 split sear chairs \$3.90.⁵⁰ With the exception of plank, seating materials probably provided resiliency for

⁴⁵In 97% of the occurrences, split seat referred to chairs.

⁴⁶These occurred 35 times. Of all recorded occurrences of cane seating, 90% were chairs.

⁴⁷Plank seat chairs were also referred to as stool chairs.

⁴⁸Grass, palmetto, plank, corn shuck, and reed seats each occurred once in the inventories. There were two occurrences of leather seats.

⁴⁹"Appraisal of the Estate of George G. Higginbotham," GCPCR S (11 July 1859): 454-455.

⁵⁰"Sale of the Estate of Bethena Pippen," GCPCR P (18 December 1854): 45-48.

comfort;⁵¹ all but plank and leather provided the air circulation desirable in a hot climate.

While most chairs in the inventory were identified as having seats of the materials mentioned above, some chairs in Greene County had far more luxurious seats. The single chair recorded with a hair seat had the high value of \$10.00 and was probably upholstered in haircloth.⁵² A set of 6 mahogany chairs, worth \$12.00, was recorded as having 'figured' seats, possibly referring to damask or needlework.⁵³ Another type of upholstery fabric was recorded in John Erwin's Greensboro home, which contained "Eight Plush Bottomed Chairs \$40.00."⁵⁴ It was not possible to determine whether the 6 walnut 'sofa bottom' chairs worth \$15.00 or the 6 'sofa bottom' chairs worth

⁵¹The lot of old chair cushions (no value recorded) in Watson's inventory may reveal a desire to soften even the resilient chair seats. "1866 Inventory," Watson Papers.

⁵²In 1852, Watson purchased 4 1/3 yards of 26" and 2 yards of 20" haircloth along with oil cloth, a rug, a mat, a whist broom, and a grass mat. Presumably the haircloth (which cost a total of \$10.66) was used for interior upholstery, but could also have been used for carriage upholstery. "Receipt of B. Newhouse & Co.," 16 January 1852. Watson Papers.

⁵³Both these textiles appear in Greene County records.

⁵⁴"Appraisal of the Estate of John Erwin," Hale County Probate Court Records 1 (8 September 1871): 504-508. Hereafter this document is referred to as "Erwin Appraisal." Although this document is dated 1871, Erwin's residence was built and furnished in the early 1840s and represents a Greene County furnished home of the period before 1860.

\$30.00 were spring or 'dead' upholstery seats.⁵⁵ But the 2 sets of 6 spring seat chairs worth \$24.00 and \$30.00 were rare appearances in Greene County⁵⁶ of an elegant upholstering technique which gradually came to be accepted by the American middle class after 1840.⁵⁷ Since some early spring seat chairs had a box framed construction,⁵⁸ it is possible that the set of "6 Wal[nut] Box Seat" chairs bought in Mobile for \$18.00 by Dr. W. Merriweather of Springfield were of spring construction.⁵⁹

The inventories made little mention of the styles of chairs.⁶⁰ The 'Cottage Style', described by Downing as "an Elizabethan or mixed style,"⁶¹ was recorded in only 1 inventory. This decoratively painted style was publicized by 19th century publications; the three 'Cottage Style' chairs, valued at \$2.00, were in the parlor of a residence with total

⁵⁵Dead seat upholstery refers to a padded seat without springs. Grier, Culture and Comfort, 119.

⁵⁶There are 4 additional occurrences of sets of chairs in multiples of 6 where the chairs are valued at \$2.50 or more each. This strongly suggests upholstered seats, if not spring seats.

⁵⁷Grier, 120.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹"Receipt of Furniture Purchased from Wm. H. Kelly," May 1, 1857, collection of the author.

⁶⁰Style refers to the visual appearance, condition, or country of origin of an artifact.

⁶¹Downing, 442.

furnishings worth almost \$2,000.00 in 1858.⁶² As early as 1845, Henry Watson paid \$10.00 for 4 the 'Cottage Style' chairs in his Greensboro home.⁶³ Ironically, these Greene County occurrences of Downing's "cheap"⁶⁴ furniture were associated with wealthy individuals.⁶⁵ Painted chairs⁶⁶ were generally assigned little or no value, like the set of 4 blue split seat chairs in the Chadwick residence.⁶⁷ However, the set of 12 black cane seat chairs worth \$6.00 may have been of the Hitchcock-Sheraton 'fancy chair' type.⁶⁸ A set of "18 Bird Pat[tern] Rush Chairs \$36.00"⁶⁹ used in Greensboro also suggests the Hitchcock type.⁷⁰ The set of

⁶²"Appraisal of the Estate of Robert H. McFadden," GCPCR R (21 December 1858): 1118-1123.

⁶³"Receipt of Furniture Purchased from B. Newhouse," 28 February 1845. Watson Papers.

⁶⁴Downing, 415-416.

⁶⁵McFadden was worth just over \$200,000.00 in 1858 and Watson, just over \$300,000.00 in 1859.

⁶⁶These were black in 3 residences; blue in 1; painted an unspecified color in 1. The variable surface treatment referred to the color or appearance of resinous substances such as paint and varnish used to embellish furniture surfaces.

⁶⁷"Inventory of the Estate of S[helly] W. Chadwick," GCPCR O (25 April 1854): 422-423.

⁶⁸Stillinger, 349-350.

⁶⁹"Receipt of Purchase from B. Newhouse, Mobile," 28 March 1845. John Erwin Papers, ADAH.

⁷⁰Gowans, Images of American Living, 298.

6 'crooked back' chairs worth \$3.00⁷¹ probably records the occurrence of vernacular, low ladder back chair forms with the backs angled backwards.⁷²

Windsor chairs. Windsor chairs are a style of chair rather than a discrete utilitarian form, but were analyzed separately because they were carefully specified in the records. These plank seat, spindle back forms commonly used for household seating in 18th and 19th century America⁷³ occurred in 4% of decedent residences. Windsor chairs in sets of 6 and 12 were usually worth \$1.00 each, however one set of 6 was valued at \$16.00. Windsor chairs were Greene County middle to wealthy decedent class furnishings with almost 90% of these chairs the property of owners of under 50 slaves,⁷⁴ total residential furnishings worth \$100.00 to \$200.00, and total estate valued under \$50,000.00.

Rocking chairs. Rocking chairs, popular⁷⁵ symbols of ease and sentiment for Americans,⁷⁶ were the most frequently identified, specifically described seating forms

⁷¹"Appraisal of the Estate of Mary Leatherwood," GCPCR S (4 November 1859): 722-724.

⁷²Neat Pieces, fig. 41, 84.

⁷³Patricia E. Kane, 300 Years of American Seating Furniture (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1976), 191.

⁷⁴One 12 chair set was owned by a holder of 154 slaves.

⁷⁵Thornton, Authentic Decor, 228.

⁷⁶Grier, 210.

in the Greene County inventories, occurring in 27% of the residences. The number of rocking chairs per residence of occurrence ranged from 1 to 9 and averaged 1.7. Rocking chairs were owned by members of all slave-owning ranges and all residential furnishing value ranges. However, they did not occur in very small total estate worth less than \$750.00.

The structural material was identified for 8% of rocking chairs; 66% of these mahogany and 17% maple. There was also a record of an iron rocking chair used with a maple rocker in the parlor of a decedent who owned 54 slaves.⁷⁷ Rocking chairs were more valuable than ordinary chairs, the average value being \$4.99 with a minimum of \$1.00 and a maximum of \$25.00. Most rockers were relatively inexpensive, 64% of them being worth \$4.00 or less. Mahogany rockers were the most valuable, averaging \$8.17. The only valued maple rocking chair was worth \$4.00 and occurred in the same estate as the iron one, worth \$10.00. Rosewood was again absent from the inventories, the only example being the 2 Irish [?] rosewood rockers with low arms Henry Watson purchased in New York for \$12.00 in 1859.⁷⁸

⁷⁷"Appraisal of the Estate of Thomas R. Borden," GCPCR Q (25 June 1856): 511-514. It is tantalizing to speculate that this iron rocking chair was one of the elegant 'S' curve design rockers illustrated in furniture history books. See Robert Bishop, Centuries and Styles of the American Chair 1640-1970 (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1972), fig. 630, 369.

⁷⁸"Furniture." Watson Papers.

Inventory reference to the visual appearance or style of rocking chairs was infrequent. Rocking chairs described as plain, 'rough made', and split seat were all valued at \$1.00 or less. The rocking chair (worth \$3.00) identified as 'Cottage' was the property of an owner of 12 slaves.⁷⁹ Cane seating was associated with expensive rockers (1 in mahogany at \$15.00),⁸⁰ as was mohair upholstery (1 at \$10.00) and plush (1 at \$18.00). Cane seating was apparently considered suitable for rocking chairs. In 1845, 2 of the 4 cane seat forms purchased by Henry Watson, Jr. for his Greensboro home were described as rocking chairs, the other 2 were 'Nurse Chairs',⁸¹ a type of rocker with low seats and arms.⁸²

Arm chairs. Arm chairs were associated with comfort, because of the support provided for the arms, as well as high domestic status for the regular occupant.⁸³ Godey's published a regular department known as "The Arm Chair" from which the editor, Mrs. Hale, frequently pronounced scolding

⁷⁹"Appraisal of the Estate of William R. Hamlett," GCPCR O (22 July 1854): 587-588.

⁸⁰Watson paid \$18.00 for 2 cane rockers in 1845. "Furniture." Watson Papers.

⁸¹Grier, 211.

⁸²"Furniture." Watson Papers.

⁸³Grier, 209.

messages to her readers.⁸⁴ Arm chairs were identified in 3% of the residences. In Greene County, they had an average value of \$7.25, a minimum of \$1.00, and a maximum of \$25.00. Possession of arm chairs was associated with considerable wealth, as 85% were owned by decedents holding 40 or more slaves, total furnishings worth more than \$150.00,⁸⁵ and total estate worth more than \$30,000.00.

Both material and interior location seem to have been related to the value of arm chairs. The single mahogany arm chair in a parlor was worth \$15.00,⁸⁶ an unusually high value since 70% of arm chairs were appraised at \$2.00 or less. They were recorded in 4 chambers, 2 parlors, and 1 sitting room. Since the parlor and sitting room arm chairs were worth over \$15.00 each and the chamber arm chairs only \$1.00 to \$2.00, it is apparent that the decedents used 'better' arm chairs in public than private rooms. The high value of armchairs in decedents' public rooms is corroborated by the records of Watson's Greensboro home. He had 2 walnut

⁸⁴Algernon Tassin, The Magazine in America (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1916), 104.

⁸⁵Half of the decedents owned total furnishings worth more than \$150.00.

⁸⁶"Appraisal of the Estate of Robert H. McFadden," GCPCR R (21 December 1858): 1118-1123.

lady's chairs⁸⁷ in the parlor bought in 1859 for \$20.00 each, 4 arm chairs in the hall bought the same year for \$8.50 each, and a mahogany arm chair in the sitting room bought in 1857 for \$30.00.⁸⁸ The \$28.00 mahogany shield top arm chair purchased in 1859 was also in his sitting room and the 4 oak burl top arm chairs bought for \$9.00 at the same time, the dining room.⁸⁹

Easy and lounge chairs. The only easy chair⁹⁰ and only lounge chair⁹¹ in the Greene County inventories were held by owners of more than 90 slaves, total furnishings worth a \$1,000.00 or more, and total estate worth \$100,000.00 or more. As was common in America, the easy chair was placed in a bed chamber.⁹² The lounge chair, worth \$5.00, and the

⁸⁷These ladies' chairs were probably the ladies' arm chairs which were part of parlor sets in the 1850s. Catalog of Furniture, George J. Henkels City Cabinet Warerooms, 173 Chestnut St. (Philadelphia: 1850). Cited in Grier, 203.

⁸⁸This was probably the mahogany "easy" chair bought in 1857. "Furniture;" "1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

⁸⁹The dining room arm chairs were apparently used with the 12 oak chairs in the same room. "Furniture;" "1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

⁹⁰An easy chair illustrated is an upholstered armchair with the spaces beneath the arms enclosed by the upholstery. "Cottage Furniture," Godey's, July 1852, 4. According to Garrett, 19th-century American easy chairs were also a type of wing chair with a deep soft seat cushion, sometimes with a "night convenience" concealed beneath. Garrett, 124.

⁹¹The lounge or lounging chair was apparently a type of armchair. See "New Furniture," Godey's, February 1850, 152.

⁹²Garrett, 70.

easy chair, worth \$30.00, had considerably greater value than most chairs, supporting Grier's assessment that such upholstered chairs were expensive and unusual in the 1850s.⁹³

Children's chairs. Greene County decedents also owned seating designed for the use of children. In the 4 occurrences of children's chairs and the 2 of high chairs the values were always low, \$1.00 to \$2.00 per chair. Not surprisingly, 1 of the high chairs and a set of 4 children's chairs occurred in dining rooms. However, they were not confined to the eating room as another set of 4 children's seats was in a bed chamber. Children's chairs appeared only in residences of the owners of 20 or more slaves while the high chairs, 1 with a plank seat, were associated with the owners of less than 20. Both chair types appeared in estates with total furnishings worth more than \$200.00 and total estate value under \$20,000.00 and over \$140,000.00. The dichotomy of wealth associated with forms possibly indicates ownership of high chairs by decedents with young families and children's chairs by more prosperous middle-aged parents and grandparents.⁹⁴ This inference may be supported by

⁹³Grier, 104.

⁹⁴The ages of only 4 of the decedents (21 and 49 for child's chair and 33 and 45 for high chair) owning these forms could be ascertained. No clear conclusions can be drawn from these data alone.

Watson's purchase in 1859 of "6 children's Arm Chairs" when his oldest child was about 12 years of age.⁹⁵

Multiple Seat Forms

Benches. Benches, long backless seats, were recorded in 5% of the residences. All the valued benches were \$2.00 or less each and described only as old or wooden. One occurrence of 2 benches was recorded with a table, implying use with it. These modest seating forms were associated with decedents who were part of the Greene County middle class;⁹⁶ holding fewer than 50 slaves, total furnishings worth more than \$50.00, and total estate of \$20,000.00 or less.

Sofas. Sofas⁹⁷ were among the most prestigious pieces of furniture in the Greene County home, occurring in 17% of decedents' residences. There was an average of 1.2 sofas per residence of occurrence. There were 2 sofas, including 1 pair, in 8 residences and 4 sofas, including 1 pair, in another. Although these multiple seat forms were owned by

⁹⁵"Family Expense Account." Watson bought a child's cradle and carriage in January 1847, indicating birth of his first child about that time. "Furniture." Watson Papers.

⁹⁶The single exception to this was the occurrence of a bench in the sitting room of an owner of 370 slaves.

⁹⁷These upholstered multiple seating forms became popular in America in the 1770s. Garrett, 43.

members of all slave holding ranges,⁹⁸ sofas did not appear in residences until the total value of furnishings was almost \$100.00 and the total value of the estate was more than \$1,000.00. Distribution of sofas within all economic ranges of the decedent population reveals that at least some decedents considered sofas necessary possessions and not luxury items reserved for the very rich.

By the middle of the 19th century in America, the sofa was the focal point of the parlor and sometimes the only piece of upholstered furniture owned by a family.⁹⁹ Mrs. Parkes identified sofas as "usually made of mahogany, enriched with carving, and covered with hair cloth, chints [sic], or silk."¹⁰⁰ Following American custom, sofas occurred most often in Greene County parlors (18 residences) and occasionally in sitting rooms (4), bedrooms (3), and dining room (1). In the Chadwick residence, there was a mahogany sofa worth \$25.00 without a recorded location and a sofa of unrecorded value in the dining room.¹⁰¹ In his Greensboro house, Watson had a sofa in his parlor, his front bedroom, and his sitting room.¹⁰² Whether the seats were

⁹⁸The number of sofas held by the ranges, from smallest to largest range, were: 5, 9, 9, 6, 7, 11, 6, 8, 7.

⁹⁹Grier, 219.

¹⁰⁰Mrs. Parkes, 270.

¹⁰¹"Appraisal of the Estate of S[helly] W. Chadwick," GCPCR O (25 April 1854): 422-423.

¹⁰²"1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

spring or dead upholstery, sofas projected images of comfort as well as economic and social power.¹⁰³ In 1851, Lida Bestor Robertson wrote, "took Madame D'Arbla [a novel?] went in the parlour and threw myself on the sofa, to read."¹⁰⁴ In the 1850s, Americans began to acquire sofas with other matched upholstered pieces. However, not a single Greene County document examined identified a matched set of 'Parlor Furniture' of the sort which would customarily have consisted of sofa, lady's and gentleman's arm chairs, and side chairs.¹⁰⁵

Even though the 3 mahogany sofas, worth \$20.00 to \$25.00 each, were undoubtedly more impressive than the pine sofa at \$8.00, the records provide little information on sofa appearance. Sofas averaged \$19.34 each with a minimum value of \$1.00 and a maximum of \$50.00. A sofa described as 'fine' was worth \$40.00 and the 2 sofas described as 'old' were worth \$5.00 each. One of the mahogany sofas had a straw seat and another mahogany sofa, in a parlor, had a cane seat. A sofa of unknown structural material had hair upholstery, presumably the woven horsehair used at the time.¹⁰⁶ Greene County upholstered sofas were probably like other American

¹⁰³Grier, 121-123.

¹⁰⁴"Simple Diary of an Alabama Girl in 1851 Revealing the Life and Customs and Literature of the Times," Lida Bestor Robertson Papers, ADAH.

¹⁰⁵Grier, 203.

¹⁰⁶"New Furniture," Godey's, February 1850, 152-153.

mid-19th century sofas, their stiff, unyielding cushions and wooden trim an ordeal to users.¹⁰⁷ Sofas with pillows, like that in the Stickney residence may reveal an attempt to remedy the problem.¹⁰⁸ The Watson family in Greensboro also felt a need for extra sofa cushions. In 1845, Watson purchased lasting¹⁰⁹ and sewing silk to make sofa pillows¹¹⁰ and the next year reported a refining detail: "We have some buttons on the sofa pillows. They look well and do well."¹¹¹

Settees. The settee, another form of multiple seating, is today defined as a light open form with arms and back which is sometimes upholstered.¹¹² As illustrated by Mrs. Parkes, it was a small version of a sofa¹¹³ and as defined in 1855 by Webster's Dictionary was "a long seat with a back

¹⁰⁷Garrett, 44-45.

¹⁰⁸"Appraisal of the Estate of Joseph B. Stickney," GCPCR J (24 October 1846): 759-762.

¹⁰⁹This was a shiny black wool and cotton blend used in 19th-century upholstery work as a look-alike for plain, black, power-loomed horsehair. Grier, 216.

¹¹⁰"Furniture." Watson Papers.

¹¹¹Henry Watson, Greensboro, AL, to [Julia Watson, New Windsor, CT], L, 18 October 1846. Watson Papers.

¹¹²Joseph Aronson, The Encyclopedia of Furniture, (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1965), 380.

¹¹³Mrs. Parkes, 270.

to it."¹¹⁴ In Greene County residences, settees apparently served roles similar to those of sofas¹¹⁵ and were recorded in 4% of decedent residences.¹¹⁶ Almost half (5) occurrences of settees were of pairs. Settees ranged in value from \$1.00 to \$30.00 and averaged \$11.17 each, but those in pairs were more valuable, \$20.00 to \$60.00 per pair. In 1845, John Erwin bought a cane settee from B. Newhouse for \$22.00,¹¹⁷ but the only cane settee in the inventories was worth just \$4.00. Half the settees were owned by the holders of less than 50 slaves and the rest by owners of 70 or more. Settees appeared in almost all furnishing and estate value ranges. From the mixture of middle class and wealthy decedents owning both high and low value settees it might be inferred that settees, available in a variety of qualities, were selected on the basis of place of use or personal preference rather than financial limitation.

¹¹⁴Chauncey A. Goodrich, Webster's Dictionary (Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam, 1855). Hereafter referred to as Webster's Dictionary.

¹¹⁵It is possible that the inventory-takers may have used the terms sofa, settee, and divan interchangeably.

¹¹⁶There was also a pair of cast iron settees worth \$10.00 used outside the house. "Appraisal of the Estate of Robert C. Randolph," GCPCR O (19 May 1854): 533-536.

¹¹⁷John Erwin Papers, ADAH.

Divans. The divans recorded in 1% of decedents' residences were pairs in all 4 occurrences.¹¹⁸ Two inventories recorded these upholstered multiple seating pieces in parlors, one of the pairs, in upholstered in plush, worth \$55.00.¹¹⁹ But all pairs of divans were valuable, the average being \$36.25. Divans were recorded in expensively outfitted residences with total furnishings worth more than \$200.00. However, since they were the property of decedents owning from 8 to 168 (8, 11, 37, and 168) slaves and total estate worth \$19,000.00 to \$200,000.00, it is likely that divans were owned by decedents who consciously chose to furnish their parlors with distinctive seating forms.

In some Greene County homes, pairs of divans apparently substituted for sofas in both utilitarian and symbolic roles. The upholstered furniture in John Erwin's parlor consisted of "One Sett [sic] (2) Divans 50.00, One Small Divan 15, One Arm

¹¹⁸This was a term sometimes used to describe a sofa. Webster's Dictionary. A divan is an upholstered couch without arms or back. The source illustrates a 'daybed' with arms but no back. See Aronson, 174. If a divan has either arms or back, then divan is very possibly the term describing the numerous heavy small upholstered sofas dating from the mid-19th century which have only backs, but no arms, and occur frequently in pairs.

¹¹⁹This was the most costly of divan pairs. "Appraisal of the Estate of S[helly] W. Chadwick," GCPCR O (25 April 1854): 422-423.

Chair 15.00, One Large Chair 15.00, Eight Plush Bottomed Chairs 40.00."¹²⁰

Tête-à-têtes. The last and most impressive Greene County seating forms examined were three occurrences of tête-à-têtes,¹²¹ specialized S-curved seating forms allowing the two occupants to face one another without significant physical contact.¹²² One of these was recorded in James Turnstall's second parlor.¹²³ The presence of these pieces illustrates decedents' awareness of contemporary 19th century fashions in furniture, modesty, and conspicuous consumption. They were costly, valued at \$24.00, \$40.00, and \$70.00 and not surprisingly belonged to decedents in top 10% of each of the correlated economic descriptor ranges.¹²⁴

¹²⁰"Erwin Appraisal."

¹²¹The data reported on tête-à-têtes are the combination of data on the forms recorded as tête-à-tête (2) and sociable (1).

¹²²Both are names for a form more commonly called tête-à-tête. OED. This is a small two-seat 19th-century sofa or love seat in which the two seats face in opposite directions, the back forming an S-curve. Aronson, 439.

¹²³"Appraisal of the Estate of James Turnstall," GCPCR R (28 April 1858): 748-752.

¹²⁴Tête-à-têtes belonged to holders of more than 25 slaves, residential furnishings worth over \$500.00, and estates worth over \$50,000.00.

Reclining Forms

Various bedsteads, couches, and lounges made up the reclining forms identified in the Greene County inventories.¹²⁵ These forms, particularly when combined with bedding and hangings, were important furniture items, among the most valuable in homes. Functionally, beds probably provided for all permutations and combinations of convalescence, relaxation, sleep, and procreation. At the same time, they were vehicles for the display of wealth and establishment of family hierarchy. Location of reclining forms within a residence revealed decedents' concepts of privacy, expediency, and comfort. Because of the definition of a residence (established in Chapter I), all inventories in this study included at least one reclining furniture form.

Generic Bedsteads

Generic bedsteads¹²⁶ with or without bedding occurred in the residences of decedents in all economic ranges, and were located in bed chambers in most occurrences. However, there were bedsteads recorded in 1 dining room, 2 sitting rooms, and 1 office. The generic bedsteads without bedding in 49% of the residences had an average value of \$9.91 and a value range from \$1.00 to \$91.00. Some understanding of the

¹²⁵In the inventories, bedstead identified a furniture form, while the term bed identified a bedding form.

¹²⁶Generic bedsteads excluded high post, low post, tester, half tester, and curtain bedsteads.

great variety of values can be gained from Watson's 1845 purchase of "1 Bedstead \$35.00, 1 8-square Post Bedstead \$40.00, 1 Common Bedstead \$13.00."¹²⁷

The wood from which the bedstead was made, and to a lesser degree the style and surface decoration, affected value. The average value for mahogany bedsteads was \$27.00; maple, \$24.00; poplar, \$10.00; cherry, \$6.00; walnut, \$5.00; pine, \$4.86; ash, \$3.00. The average value for bedsteads of unidentified material was \$8.80. Over 72% of these were valued at \$8.00 or less. Compared to the \$25.00 walnut bedstead bought by Dr. R. W. Garrett in 1860,¹²⁸ the remarkably low average for walnut forms may differentiate walnut vernacular pieces from fashionable 'store bought' ones. Bedsteads were most commonly recorded as made of pine (7), mahogany (6), maple (4) or curled maple (1) and only rarely of walnut (2), ash (2), cherry (1), and poplar (1). Three bedsteads were painted, 2 of them blue, and another varnished. The 3 'French'¹²⁹ bedsteads were valuable furniture, worth \$25.00, \$45.00, and \$70.00.

¹²⁷"Furniture." Watson Papers.

¹²⁸"Receipt of Furniture Purchased from J. Bowen & Gillman," February 26, 1860, collection of the author.

¹²⁹'French' is a confusing term. In mid-19th century it described both visual style and ornamentation as well as the practice of placing one long side of a bedstead against a wall. These bedsteads commonly had head and foot boards of equal height and were sometimes constructed with a curtain pole attached to one of the side rails. Downing, 431-432; Eliza Leslie, Miss Leslie's Lady's House-Book, (Philadelphia: A. Hart, 1853), 305; Mrs. Parkes, 292-293.

Information in the inventories also gives insight into the assembly of bedsteads. At least 6 were rope beds, recorded as being with 'bed cords'.¹³⁰ These were all inexpensive, worth less than \$4.00, even when made of maple or painted blue. There were also 2 bed screws, or wrenches, in the inventories. Because they were not part of estate inventories which identified rope beds, it is not possible to ascertain whether they were used to tighten the bolts holding the bed frame together¹³¹ or to adjust the slack of the cord supporting the bedding.¹³²

Bedding was sometimes listed separately and on rare occasions recorded as it was found on the bedstead. The most important reclining form in Alexander Graham's Eutaw residence consisted of "1 Highpost [sic] bedstead & 2 mattresses 50.00, 2 Pillows, 1 Bolster, 2 Sheets 1 Blanket & Cover Spread 7.00." Neither pillow nor bolster cases were recorded on any bed in the house, but "2 Bolster Slips .50" appeared later along with 5 quilts, 7 bedspreads, and 20 sheets.¹³³ Bedding forms and materials appear to have

¹³⁰The cords or ropes created a web which supported the bedding. In the 1830s, bed cords were frequently purchased in Foster Kirksey's store in Greensboro. "Account Book-1839-1893." Kirksey Papers, Hoole.

¹³¹Garrett, 207-208.

¹³²See the rope bed wrench in the Raleigh Tavern, Colonial Williamsburg, VA, observed by the author on 15 March 1985.

¹³³"Appraisal of the Estate of Alexander Graham," GCPCR M (8 November 1850): 1-5.

varied according to personal preference within a wide range of available items. The estate of James Gill included beds, straw beds, mattresses, pillows, bolsters, sheets, pillow 'slips', quilts,¹³⁴ blankets, counterpanes, 'double wove' counterpanes, and a 'double wove coverlid [sic]'.¹³⁵ The beds referred to were not bedsteads or the firm pads called mattresses, but large flat loosely stuffed pillows. According to the Alabama Beacon, Greene County residents:

long since abandoned the 'nice downy feather beds' and took to the MATTRESS, HAIR, STRAW, or a 'HARD BOARD' rather than suffer, smother, sweat and ¹³⁶sicken on feathers, especially in the summer season.

In spite of this pronouncement, feather beds regularly appeared in inventories from 1845 to 1860. They were valuable enough to make bedding which included a feather bed worth an average of \$35.00, almost 50% more than the average of \$24.00 for bedding without feather beds. Mattresses in the inventories were stuffed with moss, cotton, hair, straw, and corn shucks. In 1853, an appraiser recorded a leather mattress and in 1856, a spring mattress. The spring mattress was the most valuable mattress, worth \$50.00. Hair-stuffed were the next in value, followed by cotton and then the other materials. Watson bought a 'spring underbed' in 1858 for

¹³⁴The inventories do not record descriptions of quilts. However, in December of 1845 Watson paid \$5.25 for 28 yards of "calico for quilts." "Furniture." Watson Papers.

¹³⁵"Sale of the Estate of James Gill," GCPCR M (13 January 1851): 286-289.

¹³⁶Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 12 July 1851, 1.

\$22.00.¹³⁷ Spring mattresses were known in Greene County as early as 1851,¹³⁸ and by 1860 L. F. Haberkorn manufactured cotton and hair mattresses as well as spring mattresses in Greensboro.¹³⁹

When inventories included bedding with bedsteads (17.5% of residences), appraised value was increased significantly. While the average value of bedsteads without bedding was less than \$10.00, those with bedding were worth an average of \$22.28, worth from \$1.00 to \$200.00 per occurrence. Value of the bedding used may have been commensurate with the value of the wood used for the bedsteads, with less costly woods associated with less costly bedding. A cherry bedstead with bedding was worth \$60.00; 5 mahogany bedsteads, \$35.00 or more each; 4 maple, \$14.00 or more each; 2 pine, less than \$8.00 each. In spite of the fact that other painted furniture forms in Greene County decedents' residences were identified only with inexpensive pine as the structural wood,¹⁴⁰ a bedstead painted yellow and another painted red were rather valuable, worth \$25.00 and \$28.00 respectively.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the term 'bed furniture' referred not to the bedding for sleeping but to the sets of

¹³⁷"Furniture." Watson Papers.

¹³⁸Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 12 July 1851, 1.

¹³⁹Ibid., 11 May 1860, 3.

¹⁴⁰See the sections on tables and cupboards in this chapter for records of painted pine furniture.

hangings and covers which dressed bedsteads.¹⁴¹ This is probably what the 158 occurrences of 'bedsteads with furniture' encountered in 50% of Greene County decedents' residences describe.¹⁴² Bedsteads with furniture were common, distributed throughout the decedent population, occurring in all correlated economic value ranges. The average value of furnished beds was \$28.50, ranging from \$1.00 to \$200.00. That these were the costliest reclining forms reveals the effect of textiles on furniture value. Of the bedsteads with furniture, 6 were mahogany, 5 maple, and 2 pine. The 2 'French' bedsteads may well have been what are now called 'sleigh' bedsteads.¹⁴³ Relative values of these materials and styles can be seen in the inventory of the Turnstall residence near Greensboro where there were mahogany (\$60.00), maple (\$25.00), and 'French' (\$40.00) bedsteads with furniture.¹⁴⁴ The term 'common' was used to describe this form 3 times, in one estate to distinguish a bedstead

¹⁴¹Grier, 267.

¹⁴²The data reported on bedsteads with furniture are the combination of the data on the forms recorded as bedstead with furniture, bedstead with bedding and furniture, and bedstead with mattress and furniture.

¹⁴³Thomas H. Ormsbee, Field Guide to American Victorian Furniture (New York: Bonanza Books, 1952), 348-349.

¹⁴⁴"Appraisal of the Estate of James L. Turnstall," GCPCR R (28 April 1858): 748-752.

with furniture worth \$25.00 from a 'fine' one worth \$50.00.¹⁴⁵

The Greene County 'bed furniture' recorded in 4% of the decedents' residences was comprised of sets or 'stands' of bed curtains, bed 'valons', and foot valences or 'balances' along with an appropriate bed cover.¹⁴⁶ The 'furnished' bedstead belonging to John Meenerbreuker consisted of a bedstead, feather bed, curtains, and iron railings for curtains.¹⁴⁷ Although the inventories give few descriptions of the materials or design of bed hangings, Watson recorded his purchase of "21 1/2 yds curtain calico @ .18 3/4 for Bed, 3 yds border¹⁴⁸ for do [bed] .41, Rods .50" to make curtains for one of his new beds in 1845.¹⁴⁹ 'Furnished' bedsteads were apparently common, Watson's inventory revealing a set of curtains for the bed (worth

¹⁴⁵"Appraisal of the Estate of George H. Carnathan," GCPCR J (8 December 1845): 222-224.

¹⁴⁶The 'valons' may have hung from frames at the top of the bedstead while the foot valences surrounded the space between floor and bedding. This distinction is recorded in Garrett, 207.

¹⁴⁷"Appraisal and Sale of the Estate of John Meenerbrueker," GCPCR M (30 November 1850): 66-68. Although iron bedsteads were said to have been 'very general' in 1845, there were none indicated in the Greene County probate records. See Florence M. Montgomery, Textiles in America 1650-1870 (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, n.d.), 43.

¹⁴⁸Printed chintz borders were available in the mid-19th century. Ibid., 65.

¹⁴⁹"Furniture." This was probably the calico bed in Watson's garrett bedroom. "1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

\$11.00 per set) in each of the four bedrooms in the Greensboro house, along with extra valence.¹⁵⁰ Bedsteads were also equipped with mosquito bars and draped with netting in at least 3% of decedents' residences.¹⁵¹ As early as 1845, linen mosquito netting and bobinet for use with mosquito bars was available in Mobile.¹⁵²

Curtain Bedsteads

Like bedsteads with furniture, ownership of curtain bedsteads probably reveals concern for privacy,¹⁵³ as well as control of air flow, air quality, and temperature.¹⁵⁴ Since curtained bedsteads were generally used in America until well into the 19th century,¹⁵⁵ appearance of the term in only 2% of the residences suggests that this may have been an alternate description of bedsteads with furniture. Middle class and wealthy decedents owned curtain bedsteads along with less than 99 slaves, total furnishings worth \$150.00 to \$750.00, and total estate worth less than \$50,000.00.

¹⁵⁰"1866 Inventory." The valence may be the 16 yards of bed valence he bought in 1859. "Family Expense Account." Watson Papers.

¹⁵¹These were sometimes constructed to form a 'box' of netting around the bed. Garrett, 200.

¹⁵²The Mobile Register and Journal, 17 May 1845, 4.

¹⁵³Sweeney, "Furniture," 34.

¹⁵⁴Garrett, 114.

¹⁵⁵Ibid.

Worth considerably less (an average of \$11.78) than furnished bedsteads (\$28.50), curtain bedsteads may have been only the frames or, less likely, carrying only curtains without valences or matched covers. The value of curtain bedsteads ranged from \$2.00 to \$31.00. The 2 pine curtain bedsteads had an average value of \$10.50, the 2 cherry had an average of \$2.50, and the only maple bedstead had a value of \$8.00. The possibility of bedsteads with only limited drapery may suggest that Greene County decedents accepted the growing belief in the mid-19th century that it was healthier to sleep without bed curtains.¹⁵⁶

Tester Bedsteads

Tester bedsteads were mentioned in the inventories of 5 residences.¹⁵⁷ Tester bedsteads were associated with middle class decedents in Greene County, generally belonging to holders of less than 20 slaves, \$50.00 to \$250.00 worth of total furnishings, and total estate worth less than \$15,000.00. It may be inferred that the low value of tester bedsteads (ranging from \$3.00 to \$25.00 and averaging \$10.50) reveals that they had a canopy or tester but were probably

¹⁵⁶R. W. Symonds and B. B. Whineray, Victorian Furniture (London: Country Life Limited, 1965), 74-75.

¹⁵⁷One of these was a half tester bed appraised at \$6.00 which was owned by a holder of 30 slaves, residential furnishings worth \$250.00, and an estate worth \$12,000.00. This bed form with a short canopy and side curtains was developed to help provide sleepers with fresh air. Ibid. For an illustration see, Mrs. Parkes, Encyclopedia, 294.

without a set of curtains. Testers were commonly made of wood or textiles,¹⁵⁸ but could well have been made of decorated paper like those advertised by V. L. Benton of Marion in 1852¹⁵⁹ and Strickland and Company of Mobile in 1856.¹⁶⁰

High Post Bedsteads

High post bedsteads occurred in 5% of the residences. High post bedsteads appeared in all economic classes; among decedents who owned up to 100 slaves, total furnishings worth more than \$50.00, and total estate value less than \$100,000.00. However, over 55% of high post bedsteads occurred in a single total estate value range, \$20,000.00 to \$50,000.00. High post bedsteads ranged from \$2.00 to \$50.00 in value, and averaged \$19.10. A mahogany high post bedstead was worth \$30.00; a walnut, \$15.00; a cherry, \$12.00. The 3 maple bedsteads were worth \$4.00, \$7.00, and \$30.00. Those described as plain or old were worth very little, \$4.00 or less.

The high post bedstead and itemized bedding listed in Alexander Graham's inventory did not include any hangings or curtains; therefore it should not be assumed that high post

¹⁵⁸Aronson, 439.

¹⁵⁹Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 24 December 1852, 3.

¹⁶⁰Snedecor, a.

bedsteads in Greene County were curtain bedsteads.¹⁶¹ Possibly, these bedsteads represented traditional and vernacular American forms and styles rather than mid-19th century fashion.¹⁶² In the Forkland residence of Madison Johnston which contained 1 large (high) post maple bedstead, 1 small (low) post bedstead, 1 trundle bedstead, and 1 lounge,¹⁶³ the high post bedstead was the most impressive bedstead in the house.

High post bedsteads also represent the only regional American preference for furniture forms found in mid-19th century publications. Because of the need for mosquito bars and netting, high post draped bedsteads were recommended for use in the South. In the North, low post bedsteads or the French bedstead, placed with one long side along the wall, were popular.¹⁶⁴

Low Post Bedsteads

Low post bedsteads occurred in 7% of the residences.¹⁶⁵ They occurred in residences of decedents

¹⁶¹"Appraisal of the Estate of Alexander Graham," GCPCR M (8 November 1850): 1-5.

¹⁶²For an example see, Ormsbee, Victorian, 336.

¹⁶³"Appraisal of the Estate of Madison Johnston," GCPCR O (14 February 1854): 364-365.

¹⁶⁴"Bed Draperies" Godey's, December 1852, 382-383.

¹⁶⁵There were also 2 half post bedsteads which had an average value of \$15.50. They occurred in the estates of individuals owning less than 20 slaves, furniture worth more than \$150.00, and total estate value less than \$15,000.00.

who owned as many as 200 slaves, total furnishings worth more than \$50.00, and total estate worth at least \$125,000.00. Over 55% were part of estates with a total value of less than \$20,000.00. Low post bedsteads, which usually had headboards if not footboards as well,¹⁶⁶ averaged \$12.74, ranging from \$1.00 to \$35.00. The old and plain bedsteads were worth very little, \$2.00 or less. The 2 low post bedsteads made of maple were worth \$13.00 and \$7.00; 1 made of pine, \$3.00; 1 of walnut, \$3.00. Although owned by decedents in all but the highest economic range, low post bedsteads were lower to middle class forms. They were not recorded in the most valued wood, mahogany, and were often the second bedstead in a bedroom.¹⁶⁷

Cots

The light portable bedsteads called cots¹⁶⁸ occurred in 4% of the residences. Cots were owned by decedents in slave holding ranges from smallest to largest and in total furnishing and total estate value ranges above the lowest. They were inexpensive, averaging \$4.72, although they could

¹⁶⁶Ormsbee, Victorian, 340.

¹⁶⁷"Appraisal of the Estate of A[quilla] D. Hutton," GCPCR N (11 January 1853): 357-361; "Appraisal of the Estate of Col. Samuel Pickens," GCPCR P (9 November 1855): 677-690.

¹⁶⁸Aronson, 152.

be worth as much as \$15.00.¹⁶⁹ While one cot was recorded in a bed chamber, it is not evident from the records whether cots were customarily used or held in reserve for special occasions. However, regular use of at least 1 cot can be inferred from the inventory of William Hill's second residence, which contained "7 chairs 2 tables & Crockery 8.50, 2 Books, Bed & Cot 7.50."¹⁷⁰ Still another cot was draped with "foot vallets."¹⁷¹

Trundle Bedsteads

Usually, there was only one trundle or 'trunnel' bedstead in each of the 71 (22%) residences of in which they were recorded. Trundles were relatively inexpensive practical pieces worth an average of \$4.40 without bedding and \$10.86 with bedding. A single pine trundle bedstead with bedding was worth only \$2.00. Trundle bedsteads occurred in the residences of decedents in all slave holding, total furnishing value, and total estate value ranges except the lowest and highest.

Often recorded along with the most valuable bed, the short trundle bed on rollers, low enough to be kept beneath

¹⁶⁹The most expensive cots were probably appraised with their beds and bedding.

¹⁷⁰"Appraisal of the Estate of William W. Hill," GCPCR M (1 March 1851): 204-206.

¹⁷¹"Sale of the Estate of David Hitt," GCPCR R (5 September 1857): 424.

a full-sized bedstead,¹⁷² was apparently meant to be used by children until they reached a certain age or size or by servants who were on duty at night.¹⁷³ Although the form may have been valued for the opportunity it provided to stow away an unmade bed beneath the drapery of a larger bed or for the space-saving benefit of keeping two beds in the space of one when not in use, its appeal probably was that it allowed close proximate position of parents to children. When pulled from beneath the larger bedstead for use, the trundle bed and its occupant(s) would not necessarily have disturbed the privacy of a parental bed supplied with curtains, but would have been conveniently located beside the larger bed.

Cribs

Cribs for children also appeared in Greene County homes. They occurred in almost 9% of decedents' residences and were identified by location as being only in bed chambers. These bedsteads with enclosed sides¹⁷⁴ had relatively little value. Even one made of mahogany was worth only \$2.00. The average value of cribs (combining those with and without bedding) was \$3.29. Decedents who owned cribs also owned at least 6 slaves, \$50.00 worth of total furnishings, and total estate worth less than \$125,000.00.

¹⁷²Aronson, 444.

¹⁷³Gloag, Social History of Furniture, 117.

¹⁷⁴Aronson, 154.

Cradles

The third reclining form intended for children was the cradle.¹⁷⁵ Infant cradles, used for very young children, were identified in at least 3% of decedent estates.¹⁷⁶ The value of infant cradles was low, the average being \$2.50. The occurrence of a willow cradle, valued at \$2.00, reveals a type of material long used in America for this purpose.¹⁷⁷ Most occurred in residences of decedents holding fewer than 50 slaves, total furnishings valued more than \$50.00, and total estate worth less than \$50,000.00.¹⁷⁸

Couches

Couches were apparently narrow bedsteads of the type today called 'daybeds'.¹⁷⁹ Webster's Dictionary of 1855

¹⁷⁵These are a type of rectangular box mounted on rockers. Aronson, 153.

¹⁷⁶The data reported on cradles are only for the forms recorded as infant cradles. Another cradle form, the scythe cradle, was very common in decedent estate records. Because the author avoided analysis of the word cradle without the descriptor infant, the occurrences are possibly under-reported.

¹⁷⁷A wicker cradle was among the Plymouth colonists' goods on the Mayflower in 1620. Marshall B. Davidson, ed., The American Heritage History of Colonial Antiques (New York: American Heritage Publishing Co., Inc., 1967), 30.

¹⁷⁸One infant cradle appeared in the inventory of the holder of 222 slaves, in the highest 2% of slave owners.

¹⁷⁹Daybeds in America are true bed forms with both ends the same height and placed lengthwise to the wall. Aronson, 159.

defined couch as "a bed" and as "a seat of repose; a place for rest and ease, on which it is common to lie down undressed."¹⁸⁰ Recorded only in Greene County bedrooms and dressing rooms, couches may have been acceptable substitutes for bedsteads since the 1850 appraisal of a Eutaw estate listed 2 rooms fitted out with the furnishings of bedchambers except for couches in place of bedsteads. One of these was a couch frame recorded with "2 Single Matrasses [sic], 1 Single feather bed 10.00," and the other as "1 Couch & furniture ([red] Damask Cover) 5.00."¹⁸¹

Couches were recorded in 4% of decedents' residences. On the average, couches without bedding were worth \$6.00 and with bedding, \$18.50. Couches were recorded in the estates of decedents holding between 10 and 200 slaves, more than \$50.00 worth of total furnishings, and total estate worth between \$5,000.00 to \$100,000.00. They were middle to wealthy class forms, 46% of couches being associated with total estate worth between \$20,000.00 and \$50,000.00.

Lounges

The lounges which appear in Greene County inventories are quite likely a mixture of two types which existed in the mid-19th century. The first was a large simple stuffed pad

¹⁸⁰Webster's Dictionary.

¹⁸¹"Appraisal of the Estate of Alexander Graham," GCPCR M (8 November 1850): 1-5.

or bed with loose cushions for arm and back support.¹⁸² These are the type probably indicated by the definition of lounge as a place for lounging or reclining at ease.¹⁸³ These bed-like forms in the inventories, represented by the lounges and lounges with mattresses, covers,¹⁸⁴ or furniture were worth no more than \$5.00, occurring in 10% of the residences. This form appeared only among total furnishings worth less than \$400.00. These lounges appeared in bedrooms, parlors, and sitting rooms and were distributed throughout the slave ownership and total estate value ranges.

The second, rarer type of lounge was an exposed wood frame sofa with a back higher at one end than the other,¹⁸⁵ rather like a *méridienne*.¹⁸⁶ An illustration of one of these in Mrs. Parkes Encyclopedia is labeled a "couch sofa."¹⁸⁷ This was probably the form of lounge used in American drawing rooms which was mentioned by Fredrika

¹⁸²Grier, 264.

¹⁸³Webster's Dictionary.

¹⁸⁴One lounge had a black cover, another, a red one.

¹⁸⁵A lounge was a type of couch, often with one end high as a pillow. Aronson, 286. A lounge of this description, illustrated in Architecture of Country Houses, is called a cottage couch. Downing, 414. Another of these lounges is illustrated as a furnishing in a fashion plate. "The Dressing Room," Godey's, January 1851, 61.

¹⁸⁶Stillinger, 351. These are also referred to as 'Grecian Couches'. Thomas H. Ormsbee, Field Guide to Early American Furniture (New York: Bonanza Books, 1951), 350-351.

¹⁸⁷Mrs. Parkes, 270.

Bremer. "People sit on lounges, or on small sofas of all sorts, in pairs, conversing together."¹⁸⁸ This second type, which appeared in only 2% of the residences, was considerably more valuable than the first, worth \$10.00 to \$15.00. One of these with spring upholstery was appraised at \$15.00; one of walnut, \$10.00. The second type occurred in residences with more costly furnishings, worth more than \$300.00. These lounges also appeared in bedrooms, parlors, and sitting rooms and were distributed throughout the slave ownership and total estate value ranges.

Task Surface Forms

Task surface forms provided the stable surfaces upon which human activities such as dining, writing, and grooming took place.¹⁸⁹ Their presence indicated industriousness (secretaries and work tables), cleanliness (e.g., wash stands), orderliness (e.g., dressing tables and extension tables), conviviality (e.g., dining tables and side tables), and sociability (e.g., center tables and card tables). Their

¹⁸⁸ Fredrika Bremer, The Homes of the New World: Impressions of America, trans. Mary Howitt (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1854), II:117.

¹⁸⁹ All surface furniture forms identified in the probate records were used in the initial analysis. However, results on the form simply described as 'stand' are not included. Although rightly a surface form, the 17 occurrences of this form could not be interpreted as the utilitarian definition is too imprecise. Other forms mentioned but not examined were night table (1 occurrence), corner table (1), water stand (4).

locations within residences reveal where Greene County deceased slave owners found related activities necessary, convenient, and/or appropriate. Their physical attributes provided the opportunity to display wealth and knowledge of custom or fashion. Many of these forms also provided the function of storage as well as surface, but in all cases employment of the flat top surface was the primary utilitarian characteristic.

Tables

Generic tables. The generic table occurred most frequently of all surface forms, in 90% of the residences.¹⁹⁰ They appeared in every identified interior space. The generic table form was valued from \$1.00 to \$30.00 and averaged \$5.75 per occurrence. Generic tables with their 'cover', which apparently referred to whatever was on top of the table,¹⁹¹ were worth an average of only \$2.63. Tables are so versatile that they could have been used for dining, writing, or any other activity requiring a flat surface. Generic tables appeared in the residences of decedents in all slave owning, total furnishing value, and total estate value ranges.

¹⁹⁰The data reported on generic tables are the combination of the data on the forms recorded as table with cover, marble top table, and table without any additional utilitarian descriptors such as 'dining' or 'work'.

¹⁹¹The cover could include eating utensils as well as a textile cover.

Generic tables exhibited considerable variety in value and physical appearance. The more valuable tables included 1 made of papier-mâché worth \$30.00. The high value of this table may indicate local esteem accorded this popular mid-19th century material.¹⁹² Although no value was recorded for the 3 tables with marble tops, they were the property of wealthy decedents who owned a 100 slaves or more, total residential furnishings worth at least \$1,500.00, and total estate worth \$80,000.00 to \$112,000.00. Their association with wealthy decedents seems to support Ames' observation that marble on 19th century furniture represented a form of conspicuous consumption.¹⁹³ On the whole, mahogany tables (3.5% of all generic tables) were the most valuable, averaging \$28.00. All mahogany tables were worth \$5.00 or more and 75% of them, more than \$10.00. The only mahogany table with cover was also the most expensive, worth \$6.00. Cherry and walnut tables were also fairly valuable, cherry tables (1% of occurrences) being worth an average of \$5.67 and walnut tables (3.5%) \$4.34. However, no cherry or walnut tables were worth more than \$10.00.

Less valuable generic tables averaged under \$4.00. The 3 maple tables were worth an average of \$3.34 and the 2 poplar, \$1.00 each. Over 26% of all generic tables were

¹⁹²Aronson, 332. "It is at present very much employed in various ornamental works." Mrs. Parkes, 221.

¹⁹³Ames, "Hall Furnishings," 216.

pine. These were an average of \$2.05, with 98% worth \$4.00 or less. Only inexpensive pine tables worth under \$3.00 were identified as painted. Blue was a favored color (6 occurrences), followed by red (3), black (2), green (1), and yellow (1). Five more tables were painted unspecified colors. The inventory of William Meriwether (owner of 5 slaves) illustrates the kinds of surface forms that occurred along with painted tables in residences of decedents with small numbers of slaves: "Pine table yellow .75, Pine table black 1.50, . . . Slab & Glasses, Decanters &c 5.00, Pine table & lot crockery ware 5.00, [drop?] Leaf table knives & 4 candlesticks 6.00."¹⁹⁴ Generic tables described as rough-made (1), old (6), and plain (14) were worth less than \$2.00 each compared to a 'fine' table worth \$15.00.

Candle stands. These small pedestal or tripod tables designed to support light sources¹⁹⁵ appeared only slightly more often in chambers than parlors and in at least 10% of the residences with candle stands, in both parlors and chambers. However, candle stands did not appear in more than 1 chamber per residence. One residence contained 4 candle stands, each worth \$2.00: 2 in the parlor, 1 in the dining room, 1 in a chamber. The same residence also had a pair of lamp stands (\$4.00) in the dining room which probably played

¹⁹⁴"Appraisal of the Estate of William Meriwether," GCPCR R (16 November 1857): 243-244.

¹⁹⁵Aronson, 74.

the same role as candle stands. The chamber candle stand was in the room with the most expensive bed (\$54.00) in the residence.¹⁹⁶ Since candle stands in parlors were usually of equal or greater value (an average of \$3.50) than those in chambers (\$2.33), chamber candle stands may have been prized more for utility than appearance. In addition to providing surfaces to support burning light sources, candle stands also demonstrate conspicuous consumption through expenditure of money for the sole purpose of supporting a single light.¹⁹⁷

Candle stands occurred in 11% of the residences. This extravagance in the form of small tables is confirmed by the relatively high average value of \$3.45 and a range of \$1.00 to \$20.00 per occurrence. As with other furniture forms, values varied according to the structural material. A cherry candle stand was worth \$4.00; a pine stand, \$2.00; 2 mahogany candle stands, \$2.00 and \$7.00. Although they may have represented refinement in living arrangements, ownership of candle stands was not confined to the wealthiest decedents. They belonged to members of all slave owning ranges and holders of total residential furnishings worth as little as \$50.00 and total estate, as little as \$2,500.00.

¹⁹⁶"Appraisal of the Estate of Col. Samuel Pickens," GCPCR P (9 November 1855): 677-690.

¹⁹⁷Sweeney, "Furniture," 23.

Social Surfaces

Card tables. Card tables, the hinged-top forms¹⁹⁸ which are today so liberally sprinkled throughout historic southern houses, were unusual in Greene County; they were recorded in only 3% of the residences. Most card tables occurred in residences with total furnishing value of \$200.00 or more.¹⁹⁹ They were, however, held by decedents in slave owning ranges from lowest to highest and who total estate worth as little as \$500.00. Almost half the occurrences of card tables were pairs. The limited number of card tables may represent a strong societal bias against gambling demonstrated earlier in Greene County history.²⁰⁰ Expensive items, they averaged \$11.23 and ranged from \$3.00 to \$20.00 each. Extravagant because almost any table could easily substitute, they would have encouraged gregariousness while one or two tables of cards were played in pleasant passage of time. Usually designed to be placed against a wall, their presence also demonstrates continuation of an American custom of arranging furniture around the perimeter of a room until brought out into the space for use.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸Aronson, 75; Ormsbee, Early American, 167-168.

¹⁹⁹A card table worth \$6.00 occurred in one residence with \$49.00 worth of total furnishings.

²⁰⁰Greensboro had a notorious gambling den as late as 1836. The property was bought by the Methodists who erected their sanctuary on the site in 1840. Yerby, 30.

²⁰¹Garrett, 39.

Center tables. Center tables were another type of table that provided social focal points in mid-19th century American homes. Godey's, inaugurating a monthly editorial column called "Centre-Table Gossip," viewed them as:

suggestive of a pleasant coterie, of new books, and knitting, glancing crochet needles, well stored work baskets, and a free, social chat, full of pleasantries and grace, touching upon novelties, lingering over a choice sentiment,²⁰² and calling out the silver arrows of repartee.

They provided gathering places for the family circle,²⁰³ especially in homes without fireplaces.²⁰⁴ A 'large lamp' on the table, like that on the center table of Wiley Croom's home,²⁰⁵ added light to the security offered children gathered around the table with their mothers and fathers at night.²⁰⁶

Identified in 12% of decedents' residences, center tables²⁰⁷ were identified with parlors (40% of occurrences) or sitting rooms (12%). The low occurrence of these tables

²⁰²"Centre-Table Gossip," Godey's, May 1852, 412.

²⁰³Garrett, 59-60.

²⁰⁴Harvey Green and Mary Ellen Perry, The Light of the Home: An Intimate View of the Lives of Women in Victorian America (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 98.

²⁰⁵"Appraisal of the Estate of Wiley J. Croom," GCPCR L (30 October 1849): 695-704.

²⁰⁶Garrett, 76-77.

²⁰⁷The data reported on center table are the combination of the data on the forms recorded as center table and marble top center table.

may record the passing of their fashionableness so regretted by Godey's in 1852.²⁰⁸ However, they retained their place in wealthy Greene County homes even after 1860.²⁰⁹ They were expensive tables with a fairly high average value of \$17.00. Although valuable items, center tables were apparently highly desirable pieces of furniture occurring in homes belonging to all but the poorest deceased slave owners.²¹⁰

Distinctions in value were related more to material and design than location in interior space, although parlor center tables were as a rule worth more than \$20.00. A parlor mahogany center table with a marble top, worth \$40.00, was the most expensive belonging to a decedent while a plain center table was worth only \$3.00. The most fully described center table, an octagon mahogany table worth \$24.00, appeared in the sitting room of Watson's Greensboro home while the most expensive, worth \$75.00, was in his parlor.²¹¹

Six, or 15%, of the center tables were described as having marble tops. These were considerably more valuable than other center tables, ranging from \$12.00 to \$40.00 and

²⁰⁸"Centre-Table Gossip," Godey's, May 1852, 412.

²⁰⁹"1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

²¹⁰They appeared in all slave owning ranges, total furnishing ranges above \$25.00, and total estate value ranges above \$500.00.

²¹¹"1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

averaging \$27.00. All but one, that worth \$12.00, were specifically identified in the parlor. Although valuable marble top furniture forms probably served as expressions of conspicuous consumption, they were also valued for their functional properties.

Tables, &c., with marble tops, though the most costly at first, will be found, perhaps, cheapest in the end. They are easily kept clean, . . . they require no cloth to cover them, and there is no danger of their splitting or warping with the heat.²¹²

Marble top center tables were held by decedents across the slave owning ranges and total estate ranges above \$10,000.00. However, they occurred only in residences with valuable total furnishings worth more than \$400.00.

Work tables. The task surface forms identified as work tables or work stands served one of the functions of center tables, providing work surface and supply storage for various types of needlework.²¹³ The 19th century recognition of this form as a symbol of female industriousness is revealed in the use of the title, "Our Work Table," by Peterson for a regular feature providing designs for practical and ornamental needlework.²¹⁴ Also called lady's work tables

²¹²Leslie, Miss Leslie's Lady's House-Book, 192.

²¹³Downing, 422; Ormsbee, Early American, 168-169.

²¹⁴For the earliest identified appearance see, "Our Work Table," The Peterson Magazine, July 1851, 38.

in 19th century publications, they were intended to hold needle work and needle work supplies.²¹⁵

Work tables were recorded in 12% of Greene County decedents' residences, the same frequency as center tables.²¹⁶ Like center tables, work tables were associated with costly interior furnishings. Although appearing in all furnishing value ranges above \$25.00, 80% were identified with total furnishings worth more than \$200.00. They, however, appeared across a broader economic spectrum than center tables, found in all slave owning ranges and in total estate ranges above \$1,000.00.

Work tables were inexpensive furniture forms averaging \$4.07 and ranging \$1.00 to \$15.00 each. A lady's work table worth \$5.00 was beech, another of mahogany was only \$4.00, and one identified as plain, \$2.00. Over half of them were worth less than \$3.00. The most costly and elaborate work table found was in an 1845 receipt from B. Newhouse of Mobile: "1 Work Table Bag Drawer \$25.00."²¹⁷

The Greene County work tables were mainly located in bed chambers, appearing in parlors, dining rooms, and sitting rooms in less than half of occurrences. Among the 4 estates

²¹⁵Downing, 422.

²¹⁶The data reported on work tables are the combination of the data on the forms recorded as work table and work stand.

²¹⁷This is the only reference to a bag drawer work table in the examined Greene County records. John Erwin Papers, ADAH.

owning more than one work table, one contained these tables in a dining room and bedroom.²¹⁸ Likewise, in Watson's home, the only work stand, mahogany and worth \$21.00, was recorded in the bedroom containing the most costly bedstead and not in any of the more public rooms.²¹⁹ From their allocation in interior spaces, it can be inferred that among Greene County slave owning families needlework was not practiced in the formal, public parlor but in more private and informal portions of the house.

Work boxes. Work boxes,²²⁰ portable boxes similar in function and significance to work tables were recorded in only 3 residences, none of which contained work tables. Work boxes were associated with middle class and wealthy decedents who owned more than 20 slaves, more than \$350.00 worth of total furnishings, and total estate worth more than \$18,000.00.

The scarcity of work boxes in Greene County may be due to omission because of low value or possibly to an assumption on the part of probate officials that work boxes were the property of women and therefore not part of the estates belonging to men. However, 2 of the work boxes were the

²¹⁸"Appraisal of the Estate of Matthew Hobson," GCPCR M (5 March 1851): 235-240.

²¹⁹"1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

²²⁰Although these are rightly storage forms, they reveal more about Greene County life when examined along with work tables than with boxes or chests.

property of male decedents and 1 the property of a female. One work box was of costly papier-mâché,²²¹ but another box was valued at only \$2.00. In October of 1845, Watson bought a work box for \$4.00 and paid an additional \$1.53 for 1 pair of shears, 2 pair of scissors, 2 bodkins,²²² and 2 tapes of needles. Possibly to give Mrs. Watson a second receptacle to house her needlework and supplies, he bought a work basket for \$1.50 in 1847.²²³

Writing Surfaces

Generic desks. Specialized surface forms for writing appeared in only 28% of decedents' residences. Only 8% of these Greene County residences contained more than 1 writing surface form. The generic desk, which was probably a modest slant-top box on legs,²²⁴ occurred in 11% of the

²²¹Although not valued separately, the work box was part of a group of papier-mâché articles including a writing desk and perfume case, together worth \$25.00. "Sale of the Estate of Carolyn M. Goree," GCPCR R (24 April 1858): 691-692.

²²²A bodkin appropriate for a work box is a "needle-like instrument with a blunt knobbed point, having a large (as well as a small) eye, for drawing tape or cord through a hem, loops, etc." OED.

²²³"Furniture." Watson Papers.

²²⁴In a study of vernacular southern furniture, the term desk without other descriptive terms was applied only to illustrations of slant top writing forms. Neat Pieces, 150-151. This simple desk type is sometimes called a 'Schoolmaster's Desk'. Ormsbee, Early American, 262-263.

residences.²²⁵ Generic desks were inexpensive forms worth \$1.00 to \$12.00 and averaging only \$3.54. A single mahogany desk was worth \$5.00 and the only walnut desk, \$12.00. Five pine desks had an average of \$2.60. Decedents in all slave owning ranges, with total furnishings worth over \$25.00, and with total estate worth over \$1,000.00 owned desks. For use, desks could have been supplemented with ink stands²²⁶ and writing supplies available from local merchants.²²⁷ From the wide economic distribution, and to a lesser extent the low value, of generic desks it might be inferred that literacy existed in all economic levels of the decedent population. It might be further inferred that attention to business and social correspondence was considered important enough by decedents to require specially designed articles of furniture to conduct these activities.

Secretaries. Secretaries were the largest and most important writing forms possessed by the Greene County slave owning decedents. Secretaries, forms that combined a writing

²²⁵The data reported on generic desk are the combination of the data on the forms recorded as desk without any additional descriptor such as 'with bookcase'. These data possibly represent a mixture of secretary, writing table, and writing desk with other writing surfaces.

²²⁶Ink stands were recorded in 3 residences belonging to decedents with as many as 30 slaves, furnishings worth \$25.00 to \$400.00, and total property worth as much as \$15,000.00.

²²⁷J. A. Tallman's in Greensboro advertised: "Blank Books, Letter Paper, Commercial Note Paper, Envelops [sic], Visiting Cards, Ink, &c." Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 11 May 1855, 3.

surface with a bookcase,²²⁸ were uncommon, appearing in only 16% of the residences. Secretaries were recorded in residences of decedents in all slave owning ranges, usually owning total furnishings worth more than \$50.00,²²⁹ and with total estate worth at least \$1,000.00.

There was rarely more than 1 secretary per decedent residence, an average of only 1.1 per residence. Their presence in parlors (3) displayed the wealth and literacy of their owners and in chambers (5)²³⁰ and in dining rooms (2) recorded their role as places of solitary work. The occurrence of secretaries establishes literacy in 2 ways: first they provide the opportunity to produce documents by writing and second, the opportunity to read books housed in the bookcases.²³¹ Other writing forms were occasionally encountered in the same residence as a secretary,

²²⁸The data reported on secretaries are the combination of data on the forms recorded as secretary, secretary and bookcase, desk and bookcase, bookcase and desk, bureau with bookcase, and bureau with books. The author assumed that the association of the term bureau with either books or bookcase inferred that the bureau had a false drawer front concealing a desk. For examples of bureaus with bookcases see Ormsbee, Early American, 266-267; Ormsbee, Victorian, 234-237. It was not possible to ascertain if any of the secretaries in the inventories were of a rarer type without a bookcase, called a 'Drop-Front Secretary'. Ormsbee, Early American, 268-269.

²²⁹The exception was a secretary among furnishings worth less than \$25.00.

²³⁰About half of the occurrences of bureau with bookcase were recorded in bed chambers.

²³¹For similar findings see Sweeney, "Furniture," 29.

particularly in the homes of professionals.²³² The property of a Eutaw attorney included: "One Medicine Case & Desk 45.00, . . . Mahogany Secretary & Books 100.00, . . . One Common Pine Desk 2.00, One Large Pine Desk 5.00."²³³ A physician residing in the Mt. Hebron community owned 2 secretaries, one in the bed chamber and another in the dining room along with medical instruments.²³⁴

Secretaries in Greene County had a high average value of \$25.27. Those of mahogany were most valuable, averaging \$28.34, while a green painted pine secretary was worth only \$2.00. Since both elegant mahogany secretaries and the vernacular writing tables with bookcases on top,²³⁵ popularly called 'Plantation Desks' in Alabama,²³⁶ were both apparently described as secretaries in the records, their widely varied values are probably tied to their physical characteristics.

²³²Sweeney found that desks of any sort were associated with professionals in colonial Connecticut. Sweeney, "Furniture," 16.

²³³These were part of a very wealthy estate, property of a decedent owning over 227 slaves, residential furnishings worth about \$275.00, and a total estate worth almost \$143,000.00. "Appraisal of the Estate of Thomas H. Herndon," GCPCR M (26 April 1851): 355-361.

²³⁴"Appraisal of the Estate of A[quilla] D. Hutton," GCPCR N (4 January 1853): 356-361.

²³⁵Neat Pieces, 152-155.

²³⁶These are also called drop front table desks. Ormsbee, Victorian, 223-224.

Writing tables. The surface forms identified as writing tables were unusual, occurring in 2% of the residences.²³⁷ The only interior spaces associated by the probate records with these flat-topped desks²³⁸ were bed chambers. They averaged \$6.00 and ranged from \$3.00 to \$8.00 in value. One, made of walnut, was worth \$6.00. Writing tables were inexpensive forms associated with lower middle class decedents. All but one of the writing tables were owned by holders of less than 20 slaves, more than \$50.00 worth of total furnishings, and between \$1,000.00 and \$20,000.00 value of total estate.

Writing desks. There is evidence of the use of writing desks (a popular name is lap desk) early in Alabama history in the large writing desk used by Judge Henry Young Webb, member of the first State Supreme Court.²³⁹ Although the fact that these are portable boxes suggests that they might have been frequently carried about or used while riding in carriages, they could be quite large and heavy, requiring

²³⁷The data combine findings on the forms table desk and writing table.

²³⁸Aronson, 474.

²³⁹This writing desk in the Special Collections Library of the University of Alabama measures 22 inches by 12 inches and 9 inches in height. According to family tradition, it was carried with Judge Webb and reputedly was supported by a tree stump during court sessions. Hoole.

stable support.²⁴⁰ Writing desks²⁴¹ were recorded in 6% of the decedent residences²⁴² and in 80% of these, they were the only writing surface. Writing desks appeared in the residences of decedents in all slave owning ranges, total furnishing ranges over \$50.00, and total estate ranges above \$2,500.00.

Writing desks were fairly valuable, averaging \$5.65 and worth as much as \$15.00 apiece. The "Baize writing desk .90" bought by Watson in 1859 was an unusually inexpensive example of the form.²⁴³ The use of writing desks instead of larger forms was not necessarily associated with poor decedents. Carolyn Goree, who owned 97 slaves, had a mahogany writing desk (worth only \$1.00) but also had another of the costly papier-mâché (no value specified).²⁴⁴ John Locke, who

²⁴⁰Ormsbee, Early American, 263-264; Ormsbee, Victorian, 258.

²⁴¹Examination of an illustration of one of these published in Godey's reveals that they have a slanted surface concealing a storage compartment. Godey's, July 1853, 82.

²⁴²The data reported on writing desks are the combination of the data on the forms recorded as writing desk and portable desk.

²⁴³"Family Expense Account." Watson Papers.

²⁴⁴Although not valued separately, the writing desk was part of a group of papier-mâché articles worth \$25.00 which also included a work box and perfume case. "Sale of the Estate of Carolyn M. Goree," GCPCR R (24 April 1858): 691-692. Strickland and Company of Mobile advertised writing desks, portfolios, cabinets, albums, etc. made of papier-mâché. Snedecor, a.

owned 76 slaves, also had only a writing desk (worth \$10.00) on which to conduct his affairs.

Dining Surfaces

Dining tables. Various types of dining surface forms such as dining, folding, and extension tables were specified in half the decedent's residences. Occurring in 20% of the Greene County residences, dining tables of some form were recorded in residences belonging to decedents in all but the very lowest economic ranges.

In Greene County, dining tables (denoted simply with the descriptor 'dining') were occasionally (5% of estates) a set of 2 or more tables used together to make a larger table.²⁴⁵ A few sets of dining tables were described more fully. Two residences were identified as having pairs of half-round dining tables while another had a set of dining tables comprised of a folding table and a pair of half-round tables. Watson had a pair of mahogany dining tables in his Greensboro dining room, bought in 1845 for \$50.00.²⁴⁶

The only interior space identified for dining tables was the dining room. This appears logical until it is noted that many houses were not large enough to have separate formal dining rooms. It may be that simply the presence of a dining

²⁴⁵For a fuller description of appearance and use of dining tables in 19th-century America see Garrett, 80; Ormsbee, Victorian, 173-174.

²⁴⁶"Receipts." Watson Papers.

table was enough to designate a space as the dining room in Greene County.

The average value of dining tables was \$8.97 but sets were worth more, ranging from \$3.00 to \$40.00 and averaging \$14.46. The only set of 3 tables was worth \$24.00. One mahogany dining table was worth \$15.00, while 5 pine tables, one of them painted blue, were each worth \$3.00 or less.

Folding tables. The term folding table was probably applied to a variety of shapes and sizes of drop leaf tables. By the 19th century, use of large drop leaf tables with hinged legs which supported hinged leaves was well established in American dining rooms.²⁴⁷ Folding tables were usually recorded in Greene County dining rooms, but occasionally appeared in the parlor or chamber. Apparently, some may have been kept partially set for food service as one was appraised as "Leaf Table Knives & 4 candlesticks \$6.00."²⁴⁸

Folding tables occurred in 18% of Greene County residences.²⁴⁹ They were recorded in estates of decedents

²⁴⁷Susan Williams, Savory Suppers and Fashionable Feasts: Dining in Victorian America (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 61-62; Ormsbee, Early American, 165-167.

²⁴⁸"Appraisal of the Estate of William Meriwether," GPCR R (16 November 1857): 243-244.

²⁴⁹The data reported on folding tables are the combination of the data on the forms recorded as folding table, leaf table, folding leaf table, and folding dining table.

owning less than 70 slaves,²⁵⁰ total furnishings worth more than \$25.00, and total estate worth less than \$125,000.00. Folding tables had an average value of \$6.17. Recorded as made with the hardwoods popular for American dining tables,²⁵¹ cherry tables, the most numerous, were worth an average of \$6.00; mahogany, the most valuable, an average of \$12.50; walnut, the least valuable, an average of \$1.00.

Extension tables. Extension tables were the costliest and most prominent type of dining table in Greene County.²⁵² The term extension table described a large pedestal²⁵³ or multi-legged²⁵⁴ dining table which extended to permit the insertion of leaves to lengthen the top. In 1850, Godey's reported the advantages of the extension table as: "obvious to those who once were obliged

²⁵⁰An exception was in the 100-199 range.

²⁵¹Williams, 62.

²⁵²This form of extension table was developed about 1830. Williams, 61.

²⁵³Downing, 421. Godey's publishers described a mid-19th century example to their readers. "In this improvement, the mechanism is managed by a rope and small windlass concealed under the rim of the table, which also obviates the necessity of screws to fasten the different leaves together, as they may be tightened by a turn of the windlass. When entirely shut up, it has the appearance of a beautiful oval centre-table, with a heavy base." "New Furniture," Godey's, February 1850, 153.

²⁵⁴Downing, 419.

to place two square tables, sometimes of unequal height, side and side, if company was to be entertained."²⁵⁵

The 6 extension tables (2% of the residences) in the inventories were usually located in dining rooms.²⁵⁶ Although one extension table was in the possession of the owner of less than 10 slaves, these tables were apparently displays of wealth and knowledge of fashionable life style as well as acceptance of a useful furniture form. They were generally associated with wealthy decedents who owned more than 70 slaves, total furnishings worth more than \$400.00, and total estate worth more than \$50,000.00.²⁵⁷

Extension tables were expensive, valued from \$10.00 to \$80.00 and averaging \$27.50. The single mahogany extension table was worth \$25.00 while the two walnut tables were worth less, \$15.00 and \$20.00. Both Erwin, who had a mahogany extension table worth \$25.00,²⁵⁸ and Watson, who purchased a mahogany extension table for \$60.00 in April of 1856,²⁵⁹

²⁵⁵"New Furniture", 153.

²⁵⁶The only exception was a bed chamber or mixed purpose room containing among other things 1 extension table \$15.00, 1 bookcase \$5.00, 1 bedstead bed and cover \$30.00, 1 bureau \$10.00, 1 bowl with pitcher and stand \$2.00. This was part of a the estate of a wealthy decedent who owned 369 1/2 slaves were recorded. "Appraisal of the Estate of John Nelson," GCPCR P (15 May 1855): 192-211.

²⁵⁷One extension table was recorded for an estate with a total value between \$1,000.00 and \$2,500.00.

²⁵⁸"Erwin Appraisal."

²⁵⁹"Furniture." Watson Papers.

were leading Greene County residents who had these tables in their dining rooms.

Breakfast tables. Breakfast tables were recorded in only two of the probate inventories. However, they are important because they represent continued use of a popular late 18th century form, the Pembroke table.²⁶⁰ Breakfast tables were associated with the Greene County middle class slave owners, listed among the possessions of decedents holding fewer than 30 slaves and total estate worth less than \$12,000.00. They were however, identified only among total furnishings worth more than \$300.00.

One of the occurrences of breakfast tables was of a pair, worth \$8.00, and the other a single mahogany table, worth \$10.00. Because the mahogany table was recorded in a dining room along with a walnut extension table, it might be inferred that the role of the breakfast table was service of the morning meal, refreshments, or a meal with only one or two diners rather than a meal for a large group of people.

Tea tables. Some mid-19th century sources illustrate both tea and breakfast tables as small drop leaf forms.²⁶¹ Consequently, it may be that the Greene County inventory takers used the terms tea and breakfast tables

²⁶⁰Garrett, 65.

²⁶¹These tables could have four legs, pedestals, or trestles for support. For illustrations see Downing, 421, 438.

interchangeably, referring to use in the particular household rather than discrete utilitarian forms. Although tea drinking remained an important social custom in America until well into the 19th century,²⁶² the paucity of tea tables (only 2.5% of the residences) in Greene County suggests the practice may have been too hot for the climate or, more likely, not generally fashionable. They however played a social role, since all tea tables were recorded in interior spaces were in either parlors or sitting rooms. They were worth only slightly less than breakfast tables, an average of \$7.56, and like breakfast tables, were associated only with total residential furnishings worth more than \$300.00. Tea tables were middle and wealthy class forms, belonging to owners of 10 or more slaves and total estate valued up to \$500,000.00.

It was not uncommon for tea tables to occur in sets. The 3 occurrences of sets of 4 and 1 occurrence of a set of 6 tea tables were worth from \$8.00 to \$20.00 per set. These were probably similar to the "Sett [sic] Rosewood Quartette Tables \$16.00"²⁶³ and the "Sett [sic] Mahogany Quartette Tables \$20.00"²⁶⁴ recorded in the Greensboro parlors belonging to Erwin and Watson. Not all tea tables were in

²⁶²Rodris Roth, "Tea-Drinking in Eighteenth-Century America: Its Etiquette and Equipage," in St. George, Material Life in America, 444.

²⁶³"Erwin Appraisal."

²⁶⁴"1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

sets, as the residence of John Nelson contained "1 Round tea table & cover \$2.50."²⁶⁵

Side tables. Unlike tea and breakfast table, side tables were used along walls to facilitate food service. They provided necessary resting places for laden dishes in the servant-serviced Greene County dining rooms far removed from kitchens. As a rule, in the 5% of the residences containing side tables,²⁶⁶ they were found in dining rooms. In the residence of Col. Pickens there was a side table in the dining room (worth \$5.00), but there was also a pair of marble top side tables (worth \$50.00) in the parlor.²⁶⁷ On the whole, side tables were rather valuable, averaging \$9.00. The 2 side tables made of mahogany were valued at \$10.00 and \$12.00 each. Side tables were middle to wealthy class furniture, appearing in residences of decedents who owned less than 100 slaves, total furnishings worth more than \$25.00, and total estate worth less than \$125,000.00.

Slabs. Slabs, peculiarly southern forms of side tables by the mid-19th century, were associated with food service.

²⁶⁵"Appraisal of the Estate of John Nelson," GCPCR P (15 May 1855): 192-211.

²⁶⁶The data examined combined the data on side table and wall table.

²⁶⁷The latter are presumably the table type now popularly called pier or 'Petticoat' tables. For examples of this type of table see, Classical America 1815-1845 (Newark, NJ: The Newark Museum Association, 1963), 63, 72.

They could be tables without drawers and doors or they could have one or both of these. "Slabs were tall, long-legged, shallow-cased sideboards or tables, some standing as high as 50 inches."²⁶⁸ However, in 18th and early 19th century America, any side table with a marble top had been referred to as a slab.²⁶⁹ Insight into their service in Greene County dining rooms is gained from an appraisal recording together a "Slab & Glasses, Decanters &c. \$5.00."²⁷⁰ They were also known as distinctive forms in Greene County, one inventory making careful distinction between side and slab tables: "small side Pine table 1.00, 1 Pine Slab 4.00."²⁷¹

Slabs occurred in over 9% of the decedents' residences.²⁷² They were inexpensive forms, worth an average of only \$2.94. Considering the usual high value of marble-topped furniture, slabs with marble tops were surprisingly inexpensive, worth only \$4.00 each. Slabs occurred in residences belonging mainly to lower middle and middle class decedents, owners of less than 50 slaves

²⁶⁸Neat Pieces, 93.

²⁶⁹Garrett, 87.

²⁷⁰"Appraisal of the Estate of William Meriwether," GCPCR R (16 November 1857): 243-244.

²⁷¹"Appraisal of the Estate of Ransome Mitchell," GCPCR K (6 December 1847): 590-593.

²⁷²The data reported on slabs are the combination of the data on the forms recorded as slab and slab table. Some of these slabs may be examples of the southern kitchen form called the biscuit table, which had a marble top. For an illustration of a biscuit table see Neat Pieces, 125.

(holders of less than 10 owning half the slabs), usually (67%) with total furnishings worth less than \$200.00, and total estate worth less than \$50,000.00.

Grooming Surfaces

Dressing tables. Dressing tables²⁷³ appeared in 7.5% of the residences,²⁷⁴ and were located in bedrooms or dressing rooms. The scarcity of this form (none were recorded in Watson's home)²⁷⁵ may have been due the replacement of its function by the bureau with mirror which had come into fashion by 1840.²⁷⁶ Occasional mention in the inventories to the form as being with 'cover' probably refers to the American practice of elaborately draping the table and possibly explains the appearance of inexpensive pine as the only identified wood.²⁷⁷ Dressing tables had an average value of \$3.06, those identified as pine worth slightly more, \$4.34. The decedents who owned dressing tables held fewer than 100 slaves, total furnishings worth

²⁷³See Ormsbee, Victorian, 185.

²⁷⁴The data reported on dressing tables are the combination of the data on the forms recorded as dressing table, dressing table with glass, dressing table with glass and cover, toilet table, toilet table with cover.

²⁷⁵"1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

²⁷⁶Ormsbee, Victorian, 138-155; Aronson, 175; Garrett, 130.

²⁷⁷Garrett, 129.

more than \$50.00, and total estate worth less than \$75,000.00.

Wash stands. Wash stands were far more common than dressing tables, appearing in 40% of the residences. Functioning primarily as supports for washing vessels and almost half (47%) recorded with 'bowl and pitcher' or 'fittings', wash stands represent an American interest in personal cleanliness that emerged in the mid-18th century.²⁷⁸ Relatively inexpensive, the average wash stand was worth \$3.52. There were 2 mahogany wash stands, one worth \$5.00 and another with a marble top worth \$20.00; 1 maple, worth \$1.00; 1 pine painted red, no value recorded; 1 painted red, worth \$6.00; 1 painted green, \$1.00. Wash stands were recorded for members of all the slave owning ranges, all total furnishing value ranges above \$25.00, and all total estate value ranges above \$1,000.00. Wash stands with marble tops (worth an average of \$16.34) were associated with wealthy decedents who owned more than 30 slaves, total furnishings worth more than \$200.00, and total estate worth more than \$30,000.00.

Wash stands were only part of the equipment considered necessary for personal hygiene in Greene County. In one residence the wash stand assemblage was recorded as: "Wash

²⁷⁸Ibid., 130.

stand 2 bowls & pitcher tub & soap dish \$10.00."²⁷⁹ At least 10% of the decedents' residences contained wash bowls with pitchers, a third of these with 2 or more sets. Another 2.5% of residences recorded wash bowls without pitchers. In Watson's south back room, the wash stand was supplied with a towel stand, toilet set, slop bucket, and foot tub.²⁸⁰ A final hygienic requirement associated with wash stands and their fittings was represented by the "4 Chambers \$2.50" in the primary bedroom of Alexander Graham.²⁸¹ Almost 5% of decedents' inventories contained chambers or chamber pots.

Storage Forms

All storage furniture forms identified in the probate records were used in the initial analysis.²⁸² These items were designed to hold small possessions within enclosures or on open supports and appeared less frequently than seating, reclining, and surface furniture forms in the estates of decedents. The majority of storage furniture items were recorded in estates owning total residential furnishings worth more than \$150.00, the upper 50% of estates. Sometimes

²⁷⁹"Appraisal of the Estate of Col. Samuel Pickens," GPCPR P (9 November 1855): 677-690.

²⁸⁰"1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

²⁸¹"Appraisal of the Estate of Alexander Graham," GPCPR M (8 November 1850): 1-5.

²⁸²No report has been made on the data for the form box, a term so imprecise that it could represent anything from a lady's work box to a packing box.

quite large pieces, storage forms provided opportunity for display of wealth in terms of the cost and style of an item as well as the articles displayed on the surface or contained within.²⁸³ Possession of storage furnishings can also be seen as representative of thrift (e.g., chests to preserve textiles), need for security (e.g., locked containers for sugar or silver), orderliness (e.g., bureaus with drawers for organization), and convenience (e.g., food safes in dining rooms rather than kitchens).

Enclosed Storage

Chests. The term chest referred to a storage box with a hinged lid.²⁸⁴ Recorded in 23% of the residences, they were recorded only in bed chambers where they supplemented or substituted for the textile storage role of bureaus.²⁸⁵ Chests were recognizable as middle and wealthy class possessions associated with decedents in slave owning ranges below 100, in residences of all furnishing value ranges, and total estate value ranges below \$75,000.00. Blue was a popular color for chests, recorded for 3 of the 4 identified as painted.²⁸⁶ Individually, chests were worth \$1.00 to as

²⁸³Sweeney, "Furniture," 16.

²⁸⁴Aronson, 110.

²⁸⁵"Appraisal of the Estate of A[quilla] D. Hutton," GCPCR N (11 January 1853): 357-361.

²⁸⁶The color for the fourth chest was unspecified.

much as \$35.00, but averaged only \$3.96. Chests made of pine (8) had an average value of \$1.38; of mahogany (1), \$1.00; of walnut (1), \$1.00; unspecified wood (2), \$1.50; of iron (2), \$27.50; iron bound (1), \$1.00.²⁸⁷

Trunks. Trunks were also boxes, usually with shaped rather than flat tops, intended to protect possessions while traveling but also used for residential storage.²⁸⁸ Given the scarcity of bureaus, wardrobes, and presses, trunks were probably used like chests for regular storage, since all 11 occurrences identified in interiors were in bed chambers. The appraisal of A. D. Hutton's estate indicates the dual role of trunks, recording 1 carriage trunk, 3 old trunks, and 4 trunks together with bedsteads, bedding, a map, and a table in a chamber.²⁸⁹

Trunks belonged to decedents in all ranges of each of the comparative economic descriptors and were fairly common, recorded in 42% of the residences. Trunks ranged widely in value from less than \$.50 to \$30.00 and had an average of \$3.42. Variance in trunk values was affected primarily by the external covering: 2 covered with hair (\$1.00 average), 8 with leather (\$5.50 average), 5 with seal skin (\$2.20

²⁸⁷Iron and iron bound chests may well have been used to secure money, papers, and other valuables.

²⁸⁸OED. Careful distinction between trunks and chests may not have been made by inventory takers.

²⁸⁹"Appraisal of the Estate of A[quilla] D. Hutton," GCPCR N (11 January 1853): 357-361.

average), 1 with tin (\$5.00). Additionally, 4 trunks were described as iron bound (\$4.00 average), 1 made of pine (\$5.00), and another as of unspecified wood (\$1.00). Some trunks were colored: black, russet, and one red leather.²⁹⁰

Bureaus. Another storage form associated primarily with textiles, bureaus²⁹¹ were chests of drawers, usually with adjustable mirrors attached.²⁹² Bureaus appeared in 49% of the residences, but only 7% of these contained bureaus specifically described as with glass or mirror. Bureaus were identified in residences of members of all slave owning ranges, all total furnishing value ranges, and within total estate value ranges beneath \$150,000.00.²⁹³ The average value of a bureau was \$15.48, with individual values ranging

²⁹⁰The red leather trunk belonged to Meenarbreuker. "Appraisal of the Estate of John Meenarbreuker," GCPCR M (30 November 1850): 66-68. Although the material of the other trunks was unknown, the color possibly referred to covering material rather than paint.

²⁹¹The data reported on bureau are the combination of the data on the forms recorded as bureau (168 occurrences), dressing bureau (3), and bureau with glass (29).

²⁹²Ormsbee, Victorian, 132-133; Aronson, 64; Neat Pieces, 6.

²⁹³One 1 bureau was reported in an estate worth less than \$1,000.00.

from \$1.00 to \$75.00.²⁹⁴ The 14 mahogany bureaus were worth an average of \$18.00; 1 pine bureau, \$4.00; 2 walnut bureaus, \$5.50; 3 marble top bureaus, \$33.34.²⁹⁵ The average value for bureaus identified as having a glass, or mirror, was higher, \$17.30. The most costly bureau, worth \$75.00, was a 'bureau with glass'.

Even though bureaus were valuable pieces, they may have been prized more for their usefulness in organizing garments and other possessions than for public display of wealth. Commonly recorded in bedrooms, they appeared occasionally in sitting rooms and dining rooms but not parlors. They were not, however, customarily provided for each bed chamber, as there was an average of only 1.6 bureaus per residence for those containing bureaus. There were 2 bureaus in 27 residences; 3, in 4; 4, in 1.

Wardrobes. Wardrobes, portable closets used for the hanging storage of clothing,²⁹⁶ were fairly valuable pieces of furniture found in 24% of the decedents' residences. Wardrobes were identified only in bedrooms and dressing rooms. Worth from \$1.00 to \$60.00, they had an average value

²⁹⁴Records of prices paid at the time for bureaus suggest a higher average value of \$28.00. Watson, "Receipt of Furniture Purchased from B. Newhouse," February 28, 1845. Watson Papers; "Receipt of Furniture Purchased from John Bowen" February 2, 1850, collection of the author.

²⁹⁵The 3 marble top bureaus were worth \$25.00, \$30.00, and \$45.00.

²⁹⁶Webster's Dictionary. See also Aronson, 457.

very similar to that of bureaus, \$15.82. Mahogany wardrobes were the most valuable, averaging \$38.00; pine ones were far less costly, averaging only \$8.50. Oak, a wood not recorded in the probate records, was the material for Watson's wardrobe that cost him \$25.25 in 1854.²⁹⁷ Given the wide range of values of wardrobes, it is not surprising that they were identified in residences of members of all slave owning ranges, among total furnishings worth no more than \$25.00, and in total estates valued less than \$250,000.00. Wardrobes suggest not only a desire for organization of clothing but also one for neatness in appearance which resulted from hanging clothing rather than folding it in a drawer or chest. Apparently the function, if not the status, of wardrobes was so desirable that forms were produced in materials and designs that could be afforded by almost all decedents.

Only half as numerous as bureaus, wardrobes occurred with the same frequency, 1.6 per residence in which they were recorded. There were 2 wardrobes in 12 residences; 3, in 1; 4 in 1. A Eutaw home contained the most wardrobes, 4: 1 mahogany worth \$59.00 in a chamber, 1 maple worth \$15.00 in a dressing room, 1 white of no value in another chamber, 1 stained of no value in still another chamber.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁷"Furniture." Watson Papers.

²⁹⁸"Appraisal of the Estate of Alexander Graham," GCPCR M (8 November 1850): 1-5.

Presses. The terms 'press' and 'clothes press' in the inventories probably referred to what is often called a 'linen press', a tall cabinet with doors and shelves for quantity folded textile storage.²⁹⁹ A well-stocked and organized press was a symbol of female wealth, thrift, skilled household management, and industriousness, especially if containing home produced textiles.³⁰⁰ Just 10% of Greene County residences were identified as containing these presses,³⁰¹ and they were regularly located in bed chambers. The form press had an average value of \$5.28, a minimum of \$1.00, and a maximum of \$20.00.³⁰² The 3 pine presses were an average of \$4.00; 1 walnut press was \$15.00; 2 old painted presses, \$3.00 each; and 1 painted red, \$2.00. This inexpensive furniture form regularly appeared in tersely worded middle and wealthy class inventories. In all but 3 instances, presses were identified in residences of decedents owning less than 75 slaves and total estate worth under

²⁹⁹Neat Pieces, 6, 147; Downing, 418. Although unlikely given the existence of the southern vernacular linen press in the form of a cabinet, it is possible that some of these presses were screw presses used to fold and crease textiles. See Aronson, 344.

³⁰⁰Garrett, 127, 166.

³⁰¹The data reported on press are the combination of the data on the forms recorded as press and clothes press. Only 4 of these were clothes presses.

³⁰²Only 2 presses were worth more than \$10.00. The clothes presses were not more valuable than generic presses.

\$50,000.00. Only 1 press was recorded in a residence with total furnishings worth less than \$50.00.

China presses. China presses were very rare in Greene County.³⁰³ Their scarcity was probably due to their high cost and use of sideboards or special pantries for glass and ceramic wares.³⁰⁴ The 6 occurrences are discernable through their location in dining rooms or adjacency to glass and china in the inventories. China presses were owned by decedents who owned 2 or more slaves, residential furnishings worth more than \$60.00, and total estates worth more than \$1,800.00. Five of the china presses (2 worth \$4.00, \$5.00,³⁰⁵ \$14.00, and \$15.00) were probably simple cabinets used to store dining wares. However, the sixth, along with its contents, was valued at \$100.00.³⁰⁶ This figure compares remarkably with the "1 Mahog [sic] China Press 100.00" bought by Erwin in 1845 from B. Newhouse.³⁰⁷ The famous glazed rosewood bow-front cabinet custom-made for the

³⁰³It has not been possible to ascertain whether or not any of the Greene County china presses were vitrines, with glass panels.

³⁰⁴Like Watson, some decedents probably used sideboards or adjacent pantries for storage of food service items. "1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

³⁰⁵This press immediately precedes "Crockery & Glassware 10.00" in the inventory. "Appraisal of the Estate of Larkin Chiles," GCPCR O (10 December 1853): 142-143.

³⁰⁶"Appraisal of the Estate of Col. Samuel Pickens," GCPCR P (9 November 1855): 677-690.

³⁰⁷John Erwin Papers, ADAH.

silver epergne at Gaineswood in Demopolis is another example of this rare form in the region.³⁰⁸ The Pickens, Erwin, and Gaineswood examples all belonged to very wealthy individuals who apparently wished to display prized possessions. Fine china presses seem to have been great symbols of wealth: lesser examples seem to have been china presses by use rather than form.

Cupboards. The cupboard was an enclosed storage form similar to the press in appearance and function. These cabinets could be short, tall, or made for corners³⁰⁹ and could have wood panel doors for security or glazing in parts of doors for display of the contents.³¹⁰ Like presses, they could have been used to store either textiles, crockery, or a combination of goods.³¹¹ Occurring in 25% of the residences,³¹² cupboards, like presses, were located in dining rooms and bedrooms. Far more common than presses, cupboards were owned by decedents in all ranges below 200

³⁰⁸Demopolis is across the Black Warrior from the Forkland area of Greene County. Winston Smith and Gwyn Collins Turner, "History in towns Demopolis, Alabama," The Magazine Antiques, February 1980, 410-413.

³⁰⁹There were only 2 corner cupboards recorded in the inventories.

³¹⁰Ormsbee, Early American, 326-327; Neat Pieces, 112-116.

³¹¹Both forms occurred in the some residences.

³¹²The data reported on cupboard are the combination of the data on the forms recorded as cupboard and cupboard with contents.

slaves, all total furnishing value ranges, and all total estate ranges below \$125,000.00. One cupboard, valued at \$7.00, was identified as pine painted black, and a blue cupboard, at \$2.00. Only 10% of the cupboards were worth more than \$10.00. The average value of cupboards appraised with their contents was \$9.12, slightly more than those without contents recorded (\$6.80).

Safes. Unlike cupboards and presses, safes were designed for food storage with perforated exterior surfaces to allow air circulation.³¹³ These were not, however, used exclusively for food storage since the appraisal of the Borden residence listed one "lot Crockery in Safe 9.00."³¹⁴ They were recorded in 37% of the decedents' residences.³¹⁵ Safes had about the same value as the presses and cupboards used for storage in Greene County homes, but were more common and appeared in all but the very lowest economic ranges. Safes averaged \$10.70, ranging from \$1.00 to \$50.00. Appraisers frequently identified safes by the perforated

³¹³Neat Pieces, 108-111.

³¹⁴"Appraisal of the Estate of Thomas R. Borden," GCPCR Q (25 June 1856): 511-514.

³¹⁵The data reported on safe are the combination of the data on the forms recorded as safe and meat safe (1). These data do not include data on iron safes. The 5 iron safes, presumed to be used for the security of valuables were costly, worth an average of \$33.00. An iron strong box in another inventory was worth \$35.00. Watson had an iron safe worth \$60.00 in his library. "1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

material used to enclose the shelving. The 3 cloth covered safes averaged \$9.67; the 17 tin, \$7.12; the 5 wire, \$5.40. One Britannia³¹⁶ enclosed safe had no recorded value. What kind of cloth was used is revealed in the inventory of Watson's store room, which contained "1 1/2 yds musquito [sic] netting for Safe .15"³¹⁷ The 2 pine safes each had a value of \$2.00 and the 1 walnut safe, \$50.00,³¹⁸ a painted safe, \$2.00, and a blue safe, \$3.00.

Sideboards. American mid-19th century sideboards were large, low cupboards for service of food on the top and storage of food consumption apparatus below.³¹⁹ Like china presses with glazed doors, sideboards provided opportunities for a display of wealth in the public part of the house through expenditure for a large impressive piece of furniture and exhibition of prized possessions on the top. They also could provide organized, secure storage for valuables like silver or linens and expendables like candles. Almost always located in Greene County dining rooms, one sideboard was recorded in a sitting room and another in a parlor. Thomas Borden's inventory records one "lot Crockery in Sideboard

³¹⁶Britannia is a white metal, an alloy of tin. OED.

³¹⁷"1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

³¹⁸There was no instance in the probate inventories where a safe was identified by both a wood species and a perforated material.

³¹⁹Aronson, 390-391; Ormsbee, Early American, 316-317; Victorian, 270-273.

12.00."³²⁰ Samuel Picken's sideboard was recorded with 'furniture', but is followed by a list of items (some of them silver) for which no other storage was provided in the room.³²¹ Likewise, Watson listed numerous cut glass, china, and silver plated items in his dining room with only the sideboard to provide storage.³²²

Sideboards occurred in 36% of the residences analyzed.³²³ Among the most valuable of residential furnishings, sideboards occurred regularly in inventories for decedents in ranges from lowest to highest in each of the correlated economic descriptors. Inventories of the residences with 2 sideboards (8), reveal some meaningful distinctions of material and location. A marble top sideboard worth \$20.00 occurred in the same dining room with a \$3.00 sideboard, probably in reality a side table or even hunt board.³²⁴ In another residence, a sideboard worth \$50.00 was located in the parlor and one worth \$10.00 in the

³²⁰"Appraisal of the Estate of Thomas R. Borden," GCPCR Q (25 June 1856): 511-514.

³²¹These included tea, table, dessert, and salt spoons; a large ladle; butter, dessert, and regular knives; forks and desert forks; nut crackers; a set of casters; a bread basket; 9 waiters [trays]. "Appraisal of the Estate of Col. Samuel Pickens," GCPCR P (9 November 1855): 677-690.

³²²"1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

³²³The data reported on sideboards are the combination of the data recorded on the forms sideboard, sideboard with furniture or contents, and sideboard with mirror.

³²⁴Ormsbee, Early American, 316-317; Victorian, 283-284.

dining room. Sideboards were valued from \$1.00 to \$75.00 and averaged \$19.35. Mahogany pieces were the most valuable, with the 6 mahogany sideboards each worth \$25.00 or more, averaging \$27.20, while the 2 walnut averaged \$7.50. No value was recorded for the only sideboard identified as pine. One of two sideboards with mirrors was worth \$15.00 and the one of mahogany, \$25.00. Similarly, the 2 marble top sideboards were worth \$15.00 and \$20.00 and the 1 made of mahogany, \$25.00.

Knife boxes, liquor cases, and sugar chests. There were a few Greene County records of small, specialized storage forms associated with food service and storage. The 3 occurrences of knife boxes (without assigned values) suggest that these are not the formal 18th century enclosed cases but rather open knife or cutlery trays.³²⁵ The knife box bought by Watson in 1845 may have been one of these as it cost \$.75 and was purchased with wooden ware like tubs, trays, and pails.³²⁶ Knife boxes were recorded for lower to middle class decedents owning less than 30 slaves, total furnishings less than \$400.00, and total estate worth less than \$20,000.00.

³²⁵ Aronson, 279.

³²⁶ "Furniture." Watson Papers.

Liquor cases³²⁷ appeared in 1% of the residences and were worth \$2.00 to \$5.00 apiece, averaging \$3.67. They appear to have been associated with wealthier decedents than knife boxes: owners of less than 70 slaves, total furnishings worth between \$400.00 and \$1,000.00, and total estate worth less than \$50,000.00.

Sugar chests³²⁸ were slightly more evident, appearing in just over 1% of the residences and recorded in 1 dining room. These were larger than knife boxes and liquor cases and consequently worth more, ranging from \$2.00 to \$10.00 and averaging \$6.25. Sugar chests were the property of still wealthier decedents who owned as many as 188 slaves, total furnishings worth \$700.00 to \$1,200.00, and total estate worth as much as \$120,000.00.

Open Storage Forms

Bookcases. Although bookcases could have had glass doors, the shelves would nevertheless appear open, displaying the books inside. Bookcases organized published materials,

³²⁷A distinctively Southern form, the liquor case is also referred to as a liquor chest or stand. Chests on legs described as a liquor stands are illustrated in Neat Pieces, 93, 123.

³²⁸The sugar chest on legs is another peculiarly Southern furniture form. The probate records did not indicate whether these sugar chests were the distinctive form or simply chests used for sugar storage. Neat Pieces, 93, 126; Ormsbee, Victorian, 282-283.

allowing exhibition of professional 'tools',³²⁹ or the breadth and depth of the owner's literary inclinations. Within Greene County homes, bookcases appeared most frequently in bed chambers (8) and in the public rooms as well: parlors (4), sitting rooms (4), library (1), dining room (1). In Watson's home, a three-door bookcase was in the hall and two cases were in the library.³³⁰ Even though there were more bookcases in bedrooms, cases in the parlor, sitting room, and dining room were more valuable and resultingly more important, averaging \$50.00 as opposed to \$15.00 for chambers.

Their occurrence in 20% of decedents' residences³³¹ reveals a sizeable percentage of Greene County decedents with the wealth and literacy (or at least the desire for the appearance of literacy) to require specialized furniture to hold and organize a quantity of books. Bookcases were worth from \$1.00 to \$200.00 and averaged \$27.19. Those identified as including books were worth only an average of \$37.53. Bookcases were distributed throughout the decedent population, recorded in all slave owning ranges, total

³²⁹See the estate of attorney A. Graham for an office containing an office desk, 2 sets of book shelves, and a private library worth \$250.00. "Appraisal of the Estate of Alexander Graham," GCPCR M (8 November 1850): 1-5.

³³⁰"1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

³³¹The data reported on bookcases are the combination of data recorded on the forms bookcase, bookshelves, bookcase with library (books), and bookcase with stand. Almost 25% of occurrences of bookcase were of bookcases with libraries.

furnishing ranges above \$25.00, and total estate ranges above \$1,000.00.

Étagères. Other multi-shelved open display forms in Greene County residences were the whatnots or étagères. These forms were newly fashionable in the 1850s.³³² The étagère was to become the symbol of the Victorian parlor, a miniature museum, "a domestic manifestation of the nineteenth-century urge to collect and classify the exotic and curious."³³³ Not only were these open shelves and their contents a means to display wealth and knowledge of fashion, but no part of the assemblage of displayed treasures was insignificant, "for Victorian theorists postulated that each and every possession was imbued with the ability to elucidate the unique character of its owner."³³⁴

The form appeared in residences only twice, in both instances in parlors.³³⁵ The étagère was worth \$12.00, the whatnot, given no value. Since the 2 estates containing the form were recorded in 1858 and 1859, perhaps a time lag derived from the geographic distance of Greene County from the centers of mid-19th century furnishing fashion made the parlor étagère a rare furniture form among the wealthy

³³² Stillinger, 402-403.

³³³ Green and Perry, The Light of the Home, 96-97.

³³⁴ Garrett, 56-57.

³³⁵ The data are the combination of étagère and whatnot.

population. The form appeared too infrequently to make meaningful economic correlations. However, from the great economic difference³³⁶ between the two estates in which it occurred, it may be inferred that ownership of the fashionable étagère was not limited to the wealthiest households.

Hat racks. Hat racks or stands were other typical early Victorian furniture forms which appeared in the Greene County records.³³⁷ Their occurrence probably reveals decedents with predilections for neatness, who desired convenient temporary storage of hats, coats, umbrellas and canes away from the regular patterns of household activities.³³⁸ The occurrence of hat stands also reveals the symbolic importance of the wearing and display of hats, especially the "stove-pipe" hat, by men.³³⁹ Recorded equally in Greene County passages and sitting rooms, they were apparently intentionally located in rooms with adjacent exterior doors.

³³⁶The étagère in the first estate belonged to a decedent owning 168 slaves, \$2,000.00 in furnishings, and \$200,000.00 in property. The whatnot in the second estate belonged to a decedent owning 12 slaves, \$600.00 in furnishings, \$15,000.00 in property.

³³⁷It has been pointed out that the combination of umbrella holder, hat pegs, mirror, and a table-like surface in these hall stands were 19th-century innovations. Ames, "Hall Furnishings," 214. This furniture form is dated as early as 1850. Ormsbee, Victorian, 321-322.

³³⁸Ames, "Hall Furnishings," 215.

³³⁹Ibid.

Ames has pointed out that they served both symbolic and functional purposes in the ceremonies of front halls³⁴⁰ and probably served similar purposes in more informal rooms in Greene County. In 1859 Henry Watson paid \$45.00 for a walnut hall stand (hat rack) for his upstairs hall associated with his parlor,³⁴¹ but in his dining room, which was adjacent to his sitting room and opened to the piazza on the ground level directly below the upstairs hall, he had a less valuable mahogany hat rack, worth \$20.00.³⁴²

Hat stands or hat racks occurred in 8 residences. Like the hat racks in the American homes studied by Ames,³⁴³ hat racks in Greene County were the property of middle and wealthy class decedents. That is, decedents who owned more than 20 slaves, total furnishings worth at least \$300.00, and total estate worth at least \$15,000.00. The \$25.00 paid B. Newhouse in 1845³⁴⁴ indicates that Erwin bought a fine hat stand, since the average for decedents' was \$10.86; the range, from \$5.00 to \$20.00. A mahogany hat rack was worth \$18.00 and one bronzed [metal], \$10.00.

³⁴⁰Ibid., 218.

³⁴¹Costly hat stands were symbols of social differentiation prominently displayed in the primary entrance of a residence. Ames, "Meaning in Artifacts," 216-217.

³⁴²"Furniture;" "1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

³⁴³Ames, "Hall Furnishings," 216.

³⁴⁴John Erwin Papers, ADAH.

Towel racks. Only one towel rack was recorded, but it is important as it again demonstrates a desire for neatness and cleanliness in well-furnished Greene County homes. Made of an unknown material, it was worth \$1.00. Some image of this stand might be gained through price comparison with the 2 mahogany double towel stands purchased by Watson in 1859 for \$4.00 and the \$2.50 towel stand he bought from the local cabinet maker, Scarff, in 1845.³⁴⁵ The towel rack appeared in the residence of an owner of 40 to 49 slaves, total residential furnishings worth more than \$1,000.00, and a total estate worth under \$50,000.00.

Summation

The furniture belonging to Greene County decedent slave owners recorded the activities, social practices, and social messages expedited, modified, and encouraged by those forms. Their furniture revealed that they, like other American early Victorians, prized organization, repose, and security for their possessions. Chairs, trunks, bureaus, sideboards, safes, and cupboards all occurred so frequently that they could be considered common. The Greene County decedents also owned sofas, bedsteads and bedding, trundle beds, desks, bookcases, folding dining tables, side tables, and wash stands like other mid-19th century Americans. Upholstery fabrics (horsehair, plush, and damask) used at the time in

³⁴⁵"Furniture." Watson Papers.

America as well as the woods for making furniture (walnut, maple, oak, pine, mahogany) appeared in the inventories.

Furniture forms varied from high to low values. Large size and/or the incorporation of textiles in the form of bedding or upholstery were characteristics of high value furniture. Beds, secretaries, wardrobes, bureaus, extension tables, and sofas were usually costly items. Mahogany as a structural material and marble tops were usually associated with high value furniture. Small pieces of furniture (e.g., individual chairs and slabs) were inexpensive. Pine and painted furniture also tended to have low value. Costly furniture forms also tended to be located in public spaces (e.g., parlors and dining rooms) which less costly pieces were in family or private rooms (e.g., sitting rooms and bedrooms).

Although the decedents were probably aware of the symbolic possibilities of the home and its furnishings, there appeared to be little concern with the stylistic appearance or unity of furniture design in the form of matching parlor, bedroom, or dining room sets. However, the style names mentioned (e.g., Windsor, Cottage) were recognizable in American published materials.

Certain furniture forms were associated with the amount of wealth held by the Greene County decedents. The rich most often owned extension dining tables, ottomans, easy chairs, tête-à-têtes, marble top center tables, tea tables, china

presses, hat racks, and towel stands. Decedents with middle level wealth were associated with armchairs, curtain and high post bedsteads, couches, chests, and presses. Tester bedsteads, slabs, benches, and low post bedsteads were usually the property of the least wealthy deceased slave owners. The occurrences of settees, pairs of divans, cots, lounges, candle stands, wardrobes, knife boxes, liquor chests, and étagères were so scattered among the decedents that they might be better ascribed to the idiosyncrasy of individuals rather than correlated to their wealth.

The Greene County records of decedents' furniture revealed some of their expressions of sociability. Decedents had enough delight in and care for children to provide special seats and bedsteads for them. They also owned the center tables which were considered the focal point for family life in the period. The presence of card tables, dining tables with sets of chairs in multiples of six, and sets of chairs in parlors all reveal additional provision for social intercourse in Greene County homes.

The inventory contents also hint at a role of women. The presence of work boxes and work tables reveals women's production of the needlework so prized and so expected from them in the 19th century.

The ownership and use of some furniture forms and materials by decedents appear conservative, even old-fashioned compared with mid-19th century publications. Forms

like presses and dressing tables were out of fashion by the 1850s. More importantly, the high-status early Victorian rosewood was absent from the probate inventories, mahogany being the wood preferred by wealthy deceased Greene County slave owners.

Some distinctive regional southern forms were found in the records of decedents' residences. Sugar chests were only rarely identified. Slabs, however, were very common. The absence of tea tables may also be a regional characteristic. Some records were made of mosquito netting for bedsteads; however such mosquito protection was necessary throughout most of the United States at the time.

The utilitarian forms, characteristics, and intrinsic messages of the furniture owned by Greene County decedents produce a record of discernable patterns of residential furnishing practices in the middle of the 19th century.

CHAPTER VI

NON-FURNITURE FURNISHINGS

It is important to examine furnishings other than furniture in order to better understand the appearance and roles of the residences belonging to deceased Greene County slave owners. These items of function and delight facilitated use of architectural features (e.g., fireplace tools and window treatments), management of life (e.g., clocks and lamps), and gratification of the human spirit (e.g., art, printed materials, and musical instruments). Results of the analysis of the data on 'non-furniture forms' are presented in the following arrangement of categories: fireplace and heating equipment, lighting equipment, floor coverings, textile furnishings, art, looking glasses, clocks, amusements, printed materials, and miscellaneous forms.

Many non-furniture furnishings were elusive, mentioned only infrequently in the probate inventories of Greene County decedent slave owners. Occurrences of large and valuable items like pianos with their accessories, carpets, stoves, and sewing machines probably record true distribution within the decedent population. Practical pieces such as fireplace tools were also regularly recorded. But other furnishings, usually of small value or size and more ephemeral than furniture, were recorded less often. Smaller items such as photographs, chess boards, books, and vases found in human

habitations were probably included in the collective terms 'miscellaneous' or 'trumpery';¹ insuring the anonymity of individual forms.²

Fireplace and Heating Equipment

Fireplace and heating equipment was frequently encountered in the Greene County inventories. The fireplaces, often one in each room of a house, required equipment to regulate their efficiency, safety, and comfort. But fireplaces were also important focal points for the sociable gathering of inhabitants in cool weather and the decorative arrangement of furnishings around the mantelpiece.³ Fireplaces were not the only heating source in use, however, for a small number of residences contained stoves.

Fireplace Equipment

Andirons. The andirons, andirons with shovels and tongs, and fire dogs used to situate and control burning materials in fireplaces were recorded in 65% of the Greene

¹Trumpery means trifles. OED.

²Henry Watson's detailed records reveal small forms like sea shells, card stands, and china boxes. "1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

³Grier, 280.

County decedents' residences.⁴ Sets of andirons were very common, as would be expected where fireplaces were a primary source of heat.⁵ They occurred in all interior spaces except passages, in all slave owning ranges, in all total furnishings value ranges, and in total estate value ranges worth above \$500.00. Fireplace tools were so common that inventories done on a room-by-room basis could be identified by the occurrence of the fireplace tools. Pairs of andirons without other fireplace tools were the most common fireplace and heating forms, recorded in 36% of residences, and were most frequently identified as made of brass (8% of all andirons). Pairs of andirons were worth between \$1.00 and \$15.00 but averaged only \$2.31. Brass andirons were the most valuable and ranged from \$3.00 to \$10.00, averaging \$4.80; brass top andirons, \$1.00 to \$2.00, averaging \$1.50; iron andirons,⁶ \$1.00 value.

Andirons with shovel and tongs. Andirons with shovel and tongs, the full set of fireplace tools, occurred less often than pairs of andirons, in only 17% of residences,⁷

⁴Because in over 61% of the residences andirons, andirons with shovel and tongs, and firedogs were identified as pairs or sets, the author assumed that all references to these forms described a pair.

⁵See Roche, 134.

⁶There was only 1 set of iron andirons.

⁷The data reported on shovel and tongs are the combination of the data on the forms recorded as andirons with shovel and tongs, andirons with shovel, and andirons

occasionally in the same residence with pairs of andirons. Fireplace sets indicated slightly higher economic ranking than andirons alone for decedents. Although they appeared in all slave owning ranges, total residential furnishings were worth more than \$26.00 and total estate value was more than \$1,000.00 before shovels, tongs, and pokers occurred. For these, identification of structural material did not always correspond with higher value. All andirons with shovel and tongs were worth \$1.00 to \$30.00 per set, averaging \$10.77; identified as brass, \$3.00 to \$15.00, averaging \$9.60. Apparently, not all 'sets' of fire tools in Greene County homes were matched. Henry Watson's south back room fireplace had a pair of iron andirons and a set of brass shovel and tongs.⁸

Fire dogs. Use of the term fire dogs, or dog irons, in the Greene County inventories infers a 19th century Alabama distinction between coarser firedogs and finer andirons.⁹ Pairs of fire dogs were identified in 12% of residences, rarely in the same residences as andirons. These were inexpensive compared to andirons, ranging \$1.00 to \$3.00 and averaging \$1.70 per pair. Fire dogs were associated with

with tongs.

⁸"1866 Inventory." Watson.

⁹Dog irons were identified as iron castings along with pots, ovens, and skillets in an advertisement of Witherspoon and Reynolds of Mobile. Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 12 December 1856, 4.

lower to middle class decedents who owned less than 30 slaves (68% of occurrences), more than \$25.00 worth of total furnishings, and total estate less than \$20,000.00 (86%).

Shovels with tongs and pokers. Shovels with tongs and pokers were sometimes recorded without andirons. In 16% of the residences, shovels with tongs were neither matched with andirons nor were they part of a set. These were recorded in all interior spaces except passages. Sometimes identified as made from brass or iron, they were worth between \$1.00 and \$5.00 and averaged \$2.00 per set. They belonged to decedents in slave ownership ranges from lowest to highest, all total furnishing ranges, and all total estate value ranges below \$150,000.00.

Pokers alone were very unusual, occurring in only 2% of residences. Although identified as brass and located in parlors, no value was recorded for any of them. They belonged to decedents with fewer than 70 slaves, total furnishings worth more than \$300.00, and estates with total value less than \$60,000.00.

Tool stands. Fireplace tool stands were recorded in only one residence, belonging to a decedent with a total estate worth more than \$200,000.00. These two stands, in the parlor and bed chamber, lead one to assume than no provision was commonly made for the placement of the poker, shovel, and tongs when not in use. However, the inventory of Watson's

Greensboro house reveals that at least some Greene County slave owners had fireplace jamb hooks to keep the tools in a convenient, upright position.¹⁰ His sitting room fireplace was furnished with a pair of jamb hooks, a pair of brass andirons, and a pair of brass shovel and tongs, the total worth \$11.75.¹¹

Fireplace fenders. Fenders were recorded in 10% of decedents' residences. They were worth twice as much as the average set of andirons, appraised for \$1.00 to \$15.00, averaging \$4.86. Those identified as made of brass (13% of occurrences) were worth more, an average of \$8.00, and those that were brass-rimmed (2%) less, an average of \$3.60. Relatively costly fireplace equipment, they were mainly associated with middle class and wealthy decedents. They were the property of wealthy decedents in total estate value ranges above \$100,000.00. Although they were held by decedents in all slave owning ranges, 60% were associated with owners of more than 30 slaves. Likewise, they appeared in all total furnishing ranges above \$50.00 but 48% were associated with total furnishings worth more than \$750.00.

¹⁰A few inventories referred to jamb hooks or fireplace hooks but they could not be conclusively linked with fireplace tools.

¹¹"1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

Fenders were used to control the hazard of open fires where ever there were fireplaces.¹² In the form of wire folding screens, they were advertised as nursery fenders by Storter and Cunningham of Eutaw in 1860.¹³ Fenders were recorded in the parlor of 8 Greene County decedents' residences, the sitting room of 1, the bedroom of 7, and the dining room of 2. Five residences belonging to decedents with total estate worth over \$100,000.00 had more than one fender, usually in the parlor and two or more bedrooms.¹⁴

Fire screens. Fire screens were intended to control the comfort of those sitting near the fire or conceal the fireplace opening when not in use.¹⁵ These screens were unusual in Greene County, occurring in only 2% of the decedents' residences. Inexpensive forms worth only \$1.00 or less, fire screens were associated with the lower middle to middle class. They were recorded only in residences of decedents owning less than 50 slaves, of more than \$150.00 worth of total furnishings, and of total estate worth less than \$50,000.00.

¹²The fender was "a utensil employed to hinder burning coals from rolling on to the floor." Webster's Dictionary.

¹³The Eutaw Whig, 12 December 1860, 1.

¹⁴Only 1 estate with a total value of less than \$100,000.00 had fenders. It was worth \$50,000.00 and had fenders in the parlor, dining room, and 2 bedrooms.

¹⁵Garrett, 190.

In Greene County, fire screens were typically associated with the dining room, the library, and the bed chamber. Even so, the residence of Frederick Peck contained 4 fire screens:¹⁶ 1 worth \$.25 in the dining room and 3 gathered together in an undesignated location worth \$1.50.¹⁷ Given their low value, they probably did not have elegant wooden frames with textile panels¹⁸ but rather printed paper screens like those advertised in 1856 by Strickland and Company of Mobile¹⁹ or simple panels of needlework or painted paper like those recommended for home manufacture in Peterson's magazine.²⁰

Bellows and hearth brushes. Both bellows and hearth brushes appeared rarely among fireplace equipment, each occurring in only 1% of residences. One of these, the residence of Joseph Stickney in Greensboro, was unusually well equipped with fireplace tools, containing 6 pairs of andirons, 6 pairs of shovels and tongs, 2 fenders, 2 hearth

¹⁶Two other residences each contained 2 fire screens.

¹⁷"Appraisal of the Estate of Frederick Peck," GCPCR J (25 April 1846): 562-564.

¹⁸Aronson, 366.

¹⁹Snedecor, B. Paper fire screens were also advertised in Greene County by V. L. Benton of Marion in neighboring Perry County. Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 24 December 1852, 3.

²⁰The Peterson Ladies' Magazine, July 1859, 70.

brushes, and 2 bellows.²¹ Both bellows and hearth brushes were worth only \$1.00 or less each, but were associated with expensively furnished homes. They occurred randomly among the decedents, belonging to owners of less than 175 slaves, total furnishings worth more than \$300.00, and total estate value of less than \$125,000.00.

Stoves

Heating stoves. Because some residences in Greene County contained stoves for heating as well as cooking, occurrences of heating stoves were analyzed as part of the interior environment.²² By the middle of the 19th century, stoves had become fairly common in America, to the dismay of some early Victorian Americans who complained of the closeness of the air and disagreeable smell.²³ Some 20th century historians view the impact of the stove differently, crediting it with the movement of the family social circle from the fireplace to the center table²⁴ and the appearance of the fashion for exotic house plants which could not

²¹"Appraisal of the Estate of Joseph B. Stickney," GCPCR J (24 October 1846): 759-762.

²²The furnishings of Henry Watson's Greensboro residence included a stove in the dining room and a stove in the library. "Furniture." Watson Papers.

²³Furnas, The Americans, 427.

²⁴Ibid., 429.

survive winter with the uneven heating of a fireplace.²⁵

Perhaps the mild southern climate²⁶ kept stoves rare in Greene County, since they occurred in only 2.5% of residences. Stoves with their pipes and fittings were fairly costly, ranging from \$2.00 to \$76.00 and averaging \$14.20. In April of 1861, James A. Watson purchased a "Dining Room Stove 22.00" from Shorter & Cunningham of Eutaw.²⁷ Henry Watson's library stove with accessories was worth \$29.95: the stove, \$10.00; the pipe, \$15.00; the coal hod, \$1.35; the ash hod, \$1.10; the shovel and tongs, \$2.50.²⁸ Even though expensive, stoves appeared in decedents' estates in slave owning ranges from lowest to highest, in total furnishing value ranges above \$150.00, and in total estate value ranges below \$250,000.00.

The casting process used to make stoves permitted fanciful ornamentation; those recorded in a parlor or a dining room were probably appropriately adorned. In 1858, Watson wrote a letter of thanks for the gift of a stove which he set up in his library: "it is a beautiful one and quite

²⁵Garrett, 71.

²⁶Watson wrote in February of 1858: "We have had a warm winter, so much so that wood and coal have not been in great requite. At our office we are but half through with our first load of wood. Flowers are in bloom and have been all winter." Henry Watson, Jr., Greensboro, to [M. L. Filley, Troy, NY], L, 17 February 1858. Watson Papers.

²⁷"Day Book." Shorter & Cunningham Business Records, Hoole.

²⁸"1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

ornamental and if we have cold weather will be very pleasant and useful."²⁹ Watson must have had a second stove, as he purchased stove pipe for the dining room in 1859.³⁰ The same year, an advertisement by Storter and Cunningham in Eutaw revealed still another interior space used for stoves when they offered "A LARGE assortment of PARLOR and BED-ROOM STOVES, for coal or wood, which we will sell low on reasonable terms."³¹

Foot stoves. Even though foot stoves could have been bought in Greene County,³² they appeared in only 1 estate. Like work boxes, the rarity of foot stoves in inventories may have been due to their being the property of women. In America, they were traditionally associated with women³³ and the 1 occurrence of a foot stove was in the Eutaw residence of Nancy Foster.³⁴ Her estate had 10 slaves, furnishings worth over \$1,000.00, and total property worth \$17,000.00.

²⁹Henry Watson, Jr., Greensboro, to [M. L. Filley, Troy, NY], L, 17 February 1858. Watson Papers.

³⁰"Furniture." Watson Papers.

³¹Eutaw The Alabama Whig, 3 February 1859, 4.

³²They were offered for sale in Eutaw by W. R. Gully and Co. Eutaw The Alabama Whig, 17 May 1855, 4.

³³Garrett, 190-191.

³⁴"Sale of the Estate of Nancy Foster," GCPCR R (12 October 1857): 273-276.

Lighting Equipment

There were two general types of lighting equipment in Greene County: lamps, for burning fluid fuel (usually oils), and candle holders, for burning solid fuels. Lanterns, designed with enclosures to protect flames, could have burned either fluids or solids. Lighting equipment also included the variety of fuels and tools used with light-producing forms. In a few residences (5),³⁵ tin reflectors were used to maximize the light from a lamp or candle.³⁶ Most lighting equipment was recorded in estates of decedents (just under 50%) who owned less than 100 slaves, but who had residential furnishings worth more than \$50.00 and total estate worth more than \$2,500.00. Noting these low, but significant levels of wealth, it might be inferred that only the poorest decedents had to rely on pine splints or torches,³⁷ on candles or oil without specialized holders, or on fireplaces alone for artificial light.³⁸

The occurrence of lighting equipment in less than half of the decedents' residences probably accurately records a general lack of artificial light. As late as the middle of

³⁵Reflectors when valued were worth \$1.00 or less and belonged to estates with 1 to 46 slaves, total furnishings worth \$90.00 to \$681.00, and total estate value of less than \$40,000.00.

³⁶See Garrett, 152-153.

³⁷Ibid., 145.

³⁸Ibid., 149.

the 19th century, candles were used sparingly and there was seldom more than one light source in a room.³⁹ Although scarce, lighting forms were distributed throughout some Greene County homes. Erwin's Greensboro home contained only 1 student lamp with 2 glass shades, a pair of bronze candelabra, and 6 silver plated candlesticks.⁴⁰ In Eutaw, Graham's house had a passage lamp in the parlor, 2 candlesticks and a lamp in the dining room, and 28 sperm⁴¹ candles in the pantry, but no lighting forms in the 5 bedrooms.⁴² What must have been one of the best lighted houses in the county, Watson's in Greensboro, contained a bronzed solar lamp and set of bronzed girandoles in the parlor, a hall lamp in the hall, 2 brass candlesticks in the north front bedroom, a candle stand and lamp mat but no light source in another bedroom, no lighting in another bedroom, 1 lard lamp in the dining room, 1 lard lamp in the sitting room, no lighting in the library, a candle stand but no lighting equipment in a garrett bedroom, and 1 lard lamp and 4 small lamps in the third store room.⁴³

³⁹Garrett, 150.

⁴⁰"Erwin Appraisal."

⁴¹Sperm meant spermaceti, produced from whales. OED.

⁴²"Appraisal of the Estate of Alexander Graham," GCPCR M (8 November 1850): 1-5.

⁴³"1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

Lamps

Generic lamps. The data reported on generic lamps are the combination of the data on all lamp forms which were not recorded as astral, solar, lard, globe, center table, mantle, or passage lamps. Generic lamps (including 6 pairs) were identified in 13% of residences. Lamp ownership was not restricted to any particular economic level, as they were in the estates of decedents in all slave holding ranges, all total furnishing value ranges, and in total estate value ranges from lowest to highest. However, 85% of lamps occurred with furnishings worth more than \$200.00, the upper half of the total furnishing value ranges.

Occurrences of lamps were worth \$1.00 to \$20.00 with an average value of \$3.92. The only brass lamp was worth \$4.00. Although Britannia and tin lamps in the inventories had no recorded values, the pair of Britannia lamps bought in 1856 by Watson cost him \$1.25 in New York.⁴⁴ Glass lamps (22% of the occurrences) ranged from \$1.00 to \$6.00, an average of \$3.00.

The cost of lamps, the cost and availability of oil, the smoke and smell of burning oil, and the labor of maintaining lamps were all factors which kept lamps scarce in American homes.⁴⁵ There was a minimum of 1, a maximum of 6, and an

⁴⁴"Furniture." Watson Papers.

⁴⁵Garrett, 144-145.

average of only 1.9 lamps per Greene County residence in which lamps were recorded. Lamps occurred most frequently in dining rooms (7 residences), but less often in passages (4), parlors (3), and chambers (3). This dispersal appears to be contrary to the customary American practice of keeping lamps in the kitchen.⁴⁶ It is possible that in southern homes the dining room substituted for the detached kitchen as the repository for lighting supplies.

Argand and astral lamps. There were a variety of 19th century lamps devised to overcome the various problems of lighting with a flame.⁴⁷ The pair of mantle lamps in Wiley Croom's parlor were probably argand type lamps,⁴⁸ which appeared regularly in this location in mid-19th century American interior views.⁴⁹ Astral lamps were more common, found in a parlor and 2 dining rooms and occurring in just over 1% of residences. At least 1 occurrence of these astral lamps was identified as a pair. The Turnstall residence near Greensboro, had an astral lamp worth \$3.00 in the dining

⁴⁶Ibid., 149.

⁴⁷For an excellent description of the various 19th-century lamps see, Thornton, Authentic Decor, 228-229. For an extensive mid-19th-century source on lamp types see, Mrs. Parkes, 177-193.

⁴⁸"Appraisal of the Estate of Wiley J. Croom," GCPCR L (30 October 1849): 695-704.

⁴⁹See Garrett, 144, 147.

room.⁵⁰ These ranged in value from \$2.00 to \$5.00, and averaged \$3.80. Astral lamps cannot be given any clear economic correlation. They appeared among decedents who owned less than 100 slaves, total furnishings worth more than \$300.00, and total estate worth under \$125,000.00.

Solar lamps. Solar lamps were also rare, the only pair in the inventories, worth \$4.00, were the property of the owner of 17 slaves, \$111.00 worth of total furnishings, and a total estate value of \$9,300.00. However, these were not necessarily associated with the lower economic class, since wealthy Henry Watson had a bronzed solar lamp in the parlor of his Greensboro home.⁵¹ It seems likely that the choice of lamp types was not related to wealth but rather to preferences for fuel type, burning mechanisms, shadows cast, and smoke generation. Even with the variety of lamps in the inventories, it appears that they were so uncommon in Greene County that residents would have been very hard pressed to match the dazzling 1848 party in Mobile where there were 30 solar lamps and 60 candles lighting one house.⁵²

Center table lamps. Some lamps were identified by location or physical characteristic rather than type of fuel

⁵⁰"Appraisal of the Estate of James L. Turnstall," GCPCR R (28 April 1858): 748-752.

⁵¹"1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

⁵²Garrett, 158.

or burning mechanism. The center table lamps in 2% of residences reveal not only the location of the lamp but also one role of center tables. Of these lamps, 80% were, like the 'large lamp' on Wiley Croom's center table,⁵³ in the parlor. They had no values recorded, yet they must have been valuable or high status items for they appeared only among decedents owning 30 or more slaves, total furnishings worth more than \$500.00, and total estate value up to \$200,000.00.

Globe Lamps. Globe lamps, identified by their spherical glass shades,⁵⁴ appeared in 2.5% of residences and were associated with the dining room and parlor. Spherical glass shade lamps are illustrated in the brochure of Dietz, Brother, & Co. of New York sent to Watson in Greensboro. They were described as "Parlor Lamps" of the carcel, solar, French pressure, and phosgene types costing from \$1.75 to \$25.00 per pair.⁵⁵ Ranging from \$1.00 to \$10.00, globe lamps averaged \$4.29 each. Except for a pair of glass globe lamps,⁵⁶ they were associated with decedents having the

⁵³"Appraisal of the Estate of Wiley J. Croom," GCPCR L (30 October 1849): 695-704.

⁵⁴In her Encyclopedia, the English authority Mrs. Parkes illustrated very few lighting forms with round shades, apparently preferring the 'baluster' shape.

⁵⁵Watson Papers.

⁵⁶These were worth \$2.00, owned by a decedent with 3 slaves, \$93.00 in total furnishings, and \$5,400.00 in total estate value.

same economic characteristics as the owners of center table lamps.

Passage lamps. Passage and suspended lamps were hanging lanterns⁵⁷ which occurred in just 1% of Greene County residences.⁵⁸ One was recorded in a passage, another in a sitting room, and still another in a parlor. The hall lamp in the parlor of Graham's house in Eutaw was the only lighting form listed in the room.⁵⁹ Watson's home had a hall lamp in the hall upstairs, bought for \$10.00 in 1856.⁶⁰ Associated with wealthy deceased slave owners, passage lamps were worth \$1.00 to \$10.00 and averaged \$5.34. All occurred in residences of decedents owning 40 to 174 slaves, total furnishings in the highest value range of over \$1,000.00, and total estate worth over \$50,000.00.

Lard lamps. Recorded in only 1% of the residences, lamps specially designed to burn rendered animal fat⁶¹ or lard oil were still acceptable enough in the 1850s for C. A.

⁵⁷For illustrations see Mrs. Parkes, 193.

⁵⁸The data reported on passage lamps are the combination of the data on the forms recorded as suspended lamp (1) and hall or passage lamp (3).

⁵⁹"Appraisal of the Estate of Alexander Graham," GCPCR M (8 November 1850): 1-5.

⁶⁰This may have been a replacement for an lamp already in the house, for in 1848 he purchased a lamp cord, pulleys, and tassels in New York. "1866 Inventory;" "Furniture." Watson Papers.

⁶¹Garrett, 145.

Sheldon to advertise the arrival of a large supply.⁶² They were mainly associated with the lower and middle class decedents, recorded only for estates with less than 50 slaves, total furnishings worth less than \$100.00, and total estate value less than \$50,000.00. Most of the occurrences were of pairs, at least one of these in tin. Values ranged from \$2.00 to \$6.00 and averaged \$3.25 per pair. Watson had 3 of these potentially smelly oil lamps in his elegant home, keeping them in the dining room, sitting room, and third store room.⁶³ At least these lard, or tallow, lamps were kept away from the best rooms, as in other American homes.⁶⁴

Candle Holders

Candlesticks. The other major forms of lighting relying on fats, oils, or wax were candlesticks, the most commonly recorded Greene County lighting forms, occurring in 29% of the residences.⁶⁵ Candlesticks occurred frequently in all slave holding ranges, all total furnishing value ranges, and

⁶²Alabama Beacon, Greensboro, 18 January 1851, 3. Some of these lard lamps were probably the rather primitive type called 'betty lamps' and 'slot' or 'slut' lamps. Charles L. Woodside, "Further Light on the Betty Lamp," in Lighting in America (New York: Main Street/Universe Books, 1975), 35-36.

⁶³"1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

⁶⁴Furnas, The Americans, 429.

⁶⁵There were 46 occurrences of candlestick which were identified as pairs.

across all total estate value ranges. However, 73% of candlesticks occurred with total furnishings worth more than \$200.00, the upper half of the furnishing value ranges.

Candlesticks varied greatly in price and materials. They were worth from \$1.00 to \$20.00 per occurrence and averaged \$2.78. Candlesticks made of brass (15% of candlesticks) ranged from \$1.00 to \$4.00 and averaged \$1.89;⁶⁶ of britannia (1.5%), \$1.00 to \$3.00 and averaged \$2.00. Silver candlesticks (4%) were the most valuable ranging from \$4.00 to \$20.00 per occurrence⁶⁷ and averaging \$2.07 per stick. China was the material identified for 1.5% of the occurrences of candlesticks and glass of 1.5%. The only appraised occurrence of a pair of china candlesticks was valued at \$5.00; of a pair of glass, \$1.00. Tin candlesticks made up 1.5% of candlesticks and there were 2 records of silver plated sticks,⁶⁸ but no values were recorded for any of these. Although not mentioned in the probate inventories, 'Japanned Ware' candlesticks were sold in Eutaw by W. R. Gully & Co.⁶⁹

⁶⁶Henry Watson paid \$.75 for a pair of brass candlesticks in 1845. "Furniture." Watson Papers.

⁶⁷These were pairs and a set of eight.

⁶⁸For the analysis of lighting forms, surface treatment referred to silver plating. Watson bought a pair of silver plated candlesticks in 1845 for \$7.00. "Furniture." Watson Papers.

⁶⁹Eutaw The Alabama Whig, 17 May 1855, 4.

Within the residences recorded with candlesticks, the average number was not high, only 3.2 per residence with a minimum of 1, and a maximum of 16. They were most often recorded in dining rooms (13 residences), followed by parlors (6), bedrooms (2), sitting room (1), and hall (1). From their frequent appearance in dining rooms, it appears that there was where candles were stored and candlesticks maintained. From this, it also might be inferred that dining rooms were the spaces most often used after dark before retiring for the night to the bedroom. Parlor candlesticks were always in even numbers, there being 1 pair in china, 3 pairs in silver, and a set of 8 in silver. An old photograph of the interior of Kirkwood in Eutaw shows a large, possibly silver, candlestick in the middle of the marble topped center table, revealing what may have been a customary practice in homes without lamps.⁷⁰

The small number of candlesticks in bedrooms was probably due to the need to keep sticks in a place from which they could be carried to the bedroom when retiring for the night. But the potentially dangerous combination of bed furnishings and open flames must have been an equally important consideration in determining the location of candlesticks. A calmly recorded fire at Hill of Howth

⁷⁰The faded photograph has no date, but was originally published in 1936. Burkhardt and Burkhardt, Alabama Antebellum Architecture, 56.

Plantation near Boligee in 1853 was probably started by a candle.

About 7PM as we were all assembled in the parlor, screams were heard in the front bed room [sic] where Mrs. Friend had just gone to look after her children. When we rushed to the room, everything appeared to be in a blaze--but it turned out that only the bed hanging had caught fire and on being immediately torn down, it spread no further. Some of us got our fingers a little scortched [sic]--but no serious damage was done.⁷¹

Branched candlesticks. There was only one occurrence of branched candlesticks (candelabra) in the Greene County inventories.⁷² This pair of branched candelabra in the parlor of Matthew Hobson was very valuable, appraised at \$15.00.⁷³ Hobson was wealthy, the owner of 188 slaves, total residential furnishings worth \$1,260.00, and a total estate value of \$120,000.00. However, Hobson's candelabra were not unique in Greene County, for Erwin owned a bronze pair worth \$10.00.⁷⁴

Candle holders with prisms. Decorative candle holders ornamented with glass prisms⁷⁵ were unusual in Greene

⁷¹William P. Gould, "Diary," 9 December 1853, Hoole.

⁷²For examples see Mrs. Parkes, Encyclopedia, 174.

⁷³"Appraisal of the Estate of Matthew Hobson," GPCR M (5 March 1851): 235-240.

⁷⁴"Erwin Appraisal."

⁷⁵A price list from Dietz, Brother, & Co. of New York sent to Henry Watson in 1849 describes and illustrates prism-draped three-piece sets of girandoles, made up of one three-branch and two single candlesticks. Designs included 'Sultan', 'Sultana', 'Romeo & Juliet', and 'King Philip' with

County and when recorded were associated with middle class and wealthy decedents. Girandoles, candle holders with prisms, were also identified in probate inventories as mantle girandoles. They appeared as pairs or sets in the parlors and sitting rooms of 1% of decedents' residences. Girandoles were expensive ornaments, valued from \$5.00 to \$10.00 and averaging \$8.34 per set. Correlated with residences containing total furnishings worth more than \$750.00, they occurred in estates of decedents holding less than 70 slaves and total estate value below \$50,000.00. Apparently many fine Greene County homes were without these, although Watson saw fit to pay \$12.00 for a set of four-light bronzed dog girandoles at A. Knapp's of Mobile in 1845.⁷⁶ Fitted with prisms, girandoles added desired sparkle to interiors both from the flames of their candles and the flickering light of the fireplaces which they usually embellished. They also reinforced the ceremonial aspect of the public hearth of the parlor, appealing to the early Victorians' involvement with domestic symbolism.⁷⁷

prices from \$7.00 to \$25.00 per set. Watson Papers. See also Harry L. Rinker, ed., Warman's Antiques and Their Prices (Radnor, PA: Wallace-Homestead Book Company, 1991), 267-268.

⁷⁶Watson referred to these several times, but only as a set, never revealing the exact number. "Furniture." Watson Papers.

⁷⁷Garrett, 158-160.

Chandeliers. Chandeliers, hanging candle holders with prisms, were even rarer than girandoles, a pair recorded in only 1 Greene County estate. The Newbern residence contained a variety of lighting forms: the 2 chandeliers, 1 globe lamp, 5 brass candlesticks, and 2 tin candlesticks.⁷⁸ The chandeliers were appraised at \$8.00 for the pair and belonged to a decedent holding 30 slaves, \$189.00 in total furnishings, and a total estate worth \$30,000.00.

Snuffers. A great liability of candles was that they required attention in the form of trimming or snuffing to insure a steady flame.⁷⁹ Given the large number of candlesticks and the importance of snuffers in managing the light from candles it is surprising that they occurred in only 4% of Greene County decedents' residences.⁸⁰ Worth very little, \$1.00 or less, they were identified only in silver and silver plate. Snuffers occurred in most slave owning and total value ranges, but only in residences with total furnishings worth more than \$150.00. Watson's detailed household records make no mention of a snuffer, but Erwin's appraisal recorded two.⁸¹ From this, it might be inferred

⁷⁸"Appraisal of the Estate of John T. Jackson," GCPCR R (12 December 1857): 323-324.

⁷⁹Garrett, 143.

⁸⁰The data reported on snuffers are the combination of the data on the forms recorded as snuffer and snuffer with tray.

⁸¹"Erwin Appraisal."

that Greene County decedents used little candle light, were little concerned with its quality, or contrived to snuff candles with whatever instrument was at hand when the candle 'guttered'.

Lanterns

Lanterns were cases which shielded lamp or candle flames from rain or gusts of wind with sheets of glass, pierced metal, or some other substance like horn that permitted passage of light.⁸² Lanterns were recorded in just over 5% of residences.⁸³ Associated with lower to middle class decedents, lanterns were identified as belonging to decedents in all slave owning ranges under 100, in all total furnishings value ranges over \$25.00, and total estate value ranges between \$2,500.00 and \$75,000.00.⁸⁴ No lanterns were recorded with a location within a house, and the records gave absolutely no indication that lanterns were kept outside front doors, either singly or in pairs, or even kept inside adjacent to exterior doors. Of the lanterns identified by

⁸²OED.

⁸³The inventories make no mention of pairs or sets of lanterns.

⁸⁴It is possible that lanterns belonging to wealthier decedents existed, but were kept in house only by the less wealthy. This study did not examine tools and equipment located away from residences (e.g., the contents of barns).

material in Greene County, half were tin and half glass.⁸⁵ They were inexpensive, a group of 5 worth only \$1.00.

Floor Coverings

Important for utilitarian, aesthetic, and social reasons, the floor coverings identified in Greene County inventories were of four types: textile carpet (e.g., Axminster, ingrain), oil cloth, straw matting, or animal hide. They added warmth and softness to spaces by covering cracks in hard floors or by providing thick textures for warming feet in sheep skins or buffalo hides. They also protected floors from the passage of people and the practice of rearranging tables and chairs for activities such as dining.

But carpets were among the most expensive furnishings in decedent slave owners' estates and must have been esteemed for roles beyond those of utility. It is highly likely that interior embellishment was one of these roles, since it was customary in American decorative schemes from 1830 to 1860 for a strongly patterned carpet to provide the color and variety in a room.⁸⁶ And accordingly, in the only antebellum Alabama Black Belt interior scene located, the scroll-patterned carpet performed this ornamental role in

⁸⁵Tin lanterns were available from Sugg's in Greensboro. Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 22 March 1851, 3.

⁸⁶For illustrations see Garrett, 54, 55, 59, 61.

1850 in Trimble Family parlor in Wetumpka, Alabama.⁸⁷ The figured Brussels, Axminster, ingrain, and oil cloth floor coverings of the period surely served this function in Greene County interiors as well. But ownership of new and fashionable carpet must have also played an important role in the social status of the owner. As early as 1832 in Greensboro, Sarah Gayle, wife of Alabama Governor John Gayle, entered in her journal:

Saunders and Harrison have very good carpeting, and I had it upon the counter to have one measured, but unluckily, he discovered he had mistaken the price and I reluctantly gave up the plan of covering my parlor with the new carpet it so much needs. He says, if he is obliged to⁸⁸ fall in the price, I shall be the first purchaser.

Although floor coverings were apparently highly desirable, the number and function of rooms with them varied from residence to residence. Wiley Croom's home is a good example of how the treatment of floors could differ from room to room: the floor in one bedroom (room 1) had no covering; the dining room (room 2), no covering; a bedroom (room 3), no covering; a bedroom (room 4), a hearth rug; the parlor (room 5), a carpet and 2 rugs; passage 1, oil cloth 'carpet' on the floor and 1 on the stairs; a bedroom (room 6), no covering;

⁸⁷Wetumpka is north of Montgomery, AL. Alabama Portraits Prior to 1870, 351.

⁸⁸"Journal of Sarah Gayle, 1828-1834," 4 December 1832, typed transcription, Hoole.

passage 2, carpet; a bedroom (room 7), a carpet; and a bedroom (room 8), a carpet.⁸⁹

Carpet

The most commonly identified form of floor covering was carpet, appearing in 23% of residences.⁹⁰ There was an average of 2.2 carpeted rooms per residence containing carpet, making carpets more common than bureaus or secretaries. Distribution of carpets was remarkably uniform throughout all slave owning ranges. But even though carpets began to appear when the total furnishings value was more than \$50.00, 66% were associated with total furnishings worth more than \$500.00, and 70% with total estate worth more than \$20,000.00.

The number of carpets per residence was as follows: 1 carpet in 36 residences, 2 in 16, 3 in 11, 4 in 4, 5 in 4, 6 in 1, 7 in 1, 8 in 2. This rather large number of carpets was probably due in part to the importance of strongly figured carpets in American interior decoration at the time. Inventory references to carpet were seldom as descriptive as the advertisements of merchants like John Bowen of Mobile, who offered velvet, Brussels, tapestry, 3-ply [ingrain], and

⁸⁹"Appraisal of the Estate of Wiley J. Croom," GCPCR L (30 October 1849): 695-704.

⁹⁰The data reported on carpet are the combination of the data on the forms recorded as carpet and carpet with rug. Carpet alone appeared in 36% of residences. This does not include the oil and straw carpets discussed below.

ingrains.⁹¹ At least one Eutaw residence in 1850 contained a Wilton carpet.

It presents the most beautiful variety of flowers & colours [sic] I ever saw, presenting a large vase of all kinds of blossoms, on a white ground, then the most beautiful wreaths of roses & buds, vines, etc, on a dark wine coloured [sic] ground. It is tufted & nearly an inch thick, & is called a Wilton carpet.⁹²

The domestic (1) and rag (5) carpets⁹³ in the probate records were probably home-made, like Sarah Gayle's dining room project in 1832:

I have a most dangerous fit of industry upon me, just at this time, which threatens to destroy not only all the old clothes and blankets, which I have, but all of my neighbors' also. Some eighteen months, or two years ago, I commenced the mighty job of making a carpet--a rag carpet, without being at all aware of the difficulties of the task. It is the most unseemly object imaginable, but if I can make out to have it finished, it will answer the double end of preventing the purchase of a better but more costly one.⁹⁴

Neither rag nor domestic carpets were highly regarded; they were valued at less than \$5.00 and identified only in chambers. On the whole, carpets were appraised from \$1.00 to

⁹¹Snedecor, 93. These descriptors are for the variable textile, referring to the weave and resulting appearance of the forms analyzed. For a description of the sources, manufacturing techniques, and general appearance see Thornton, Authentic Decor, 228. The wide variety of carpeting available was certainly due in part to the development of American carpet mills and their competition with British manufacture. See Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 26 September 1846, 2.

⁹²Glass, Connecticut Yankee, 68-69.

⁹³The data reported on rag carpets are the combination of the data on rough-made and rag carpets.

⁹⁴"Journal of Sarah Gayle, 1828-1834," 4 December 1832, typed transcription, Hoole.

\$130.00 each and had an average value of \$13.75. They were more valuable (\$20.00) when made of wool. An Axminster carpet at \$76.00 was the most valuable identified type, followed by ingrain at \$20.00, scotch at \$12.00, and Brussels (in a parlor) at \$10.00.⁹⁵ Carpets were among the costliest furnishings, worth on the average only slightly less than bureaus and wardrobes.

It was apparently acceptable, and possibly even desirable, to mix different types of carpet within a residence. In 1853, David Borden's home had "1 Straw Matting Carpet 15.00, 1 Wool Carpet 30.00, 3 Rag Carpets 12.00, 1 Hearth rug 5.00."⁹⁶ In 1845, Watson bought a combination of floor coverings that included a "Super Brussels Carpet," "Best Cheniel [sic] Rug," "Super Ingrain Carpet," "Best Tufted Rug," ingrain carpet, ingrain rug, Venetian carpet, and oil cloth.⁹⁷ The "1866 Inventory" of his fully carpeted residence provides insight into the correlation of carpet type and room use as well as diversity within a home: Brussels carpet in parlor, oil cloth carpet in hall, unidentified carpet in north front room, 3-ply ingrain carpet

⁹⁵The relative value of different types of carpet may be better understood by noting the prices paid by Watson in 1845 for various grades of carpet: super brussels \$2.00 a yard; super ingrain, \$1.00; ingrain, \$.80, Axminster, \$.80. "Furniture." Watson Papers.

⁹⁶"Appraisal of the Estate of David W. Borden," GCPCR O (24 September 1853): 32.

⁹⁷"Receipt of Furniture Purchased from B. Newhouse." Watson Papers.

in north back room, stair carpet (for the garrett stairs) in north back room,⁹⁸ 3-ply ingrain carpet in south back room, 3-ply ingrain carpet in dining room, stair carpet (14 yards) in dining room (which was open to the interior staircase), 3-ply ingrain carpet in sitting room, 3-ply ingrain carpet in library, drugget carpet and rug in north attic room.⁹⁹ His pantry room, adjacent to the dining room, and the back entry way had oil cloths on the floor.¹⁰⁰

The carpets used by Greene County residents were fabricated from yardage either by the vendors or by the purchasers.¹⁰¹ In 1845, Watson paid B. Newhouse an additional \$10.00 to make up his \$111.50 worth of "Super Brussels" carpeting in Mobile.¹⁰² He also bought 8 pieces of carpet binding which were probably intended for the yardage of ingrain and Venetian carpet bought at the same time.¹⁰³ Who made up the carpets in his new home was revealed in a letter to his Mother. "Sophia [his bride] and

⁹⁸"Furniture." Watson Papers.

⁹⁹"1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

¹⁰⁰"Furniture." Watson Papers.

¹⁰¹Eutaw The Alabama Whig, 7 June 1855, 3; 13 December 1860, 4.

¹⁰²Other residents of the Black Belt had their carpets made up before shipment to their homes. E. K. Carlisle of Marion, in neighboring Perry County had Alexander Stewart in New York make up 1 velvet, 2 ingrain, and 3, 3-ply carpets in 1860. E. K. Carlisle Papers, ADAH.

¹⁰³"Furniture." Watson Papers.

her sister, mother and aunt, a servant of her mother, of another aunt and of my own all at work on the carpets soon finished them."¹⁰⁴ The 100 yards of carpet lining located in his garrett store room may also reveal the fabrication of carpets in homes as well as the use of carpet backing for strengthening and stabilizing the carpets.¹⁰⁵ The probate records of Harry Herndon of Greene County suggest that he may have intended to make up his own carpets from yardage. In addition to 2 carpets, he owned considerable yardage of varying value (and presumably type) for making more: 3 bolts carpeting (23 yards) worth \$18.45, 1 bolt carpeting (41 yards) worth \$14.14, and 1 bolt carpeting (41 yards) worth \$10.66.¹⁰⁶ The appearance of carpet yardage probably reveals the practice of fitting carpeting to the perimeter of a room and then tacking it down to keep it from bunching up when furniture (especially in parlors and dining rooms) was moved about.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴Henry Watson, Jr., to [Julia Watson, East Windsor, CT], L, 23 March 1845. Watson Papers.

¹⁰⁵"1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

¹⁰⁶"Sale of the Estate of Harry T. Herndon," GCPCR Q (31 December 1855): 84-86.

¹⁰⁷See Garrett, 39.

Oil Cloth Floor Coverings

Like other floor covering types, oil cloths of various patterns were available in Mobile.¹⁰⁸ In mid-19th century America, these durable, thick canvas cloths decorated with oil-based paints¹⁰⁹ were considered suitable for halls and vestibules.¹¹⁰ In the 10 Greene County residences containing oil cloth floor coverings, they were recorded in parlors, sitting rooms, dining rooms,¹¹¹ and passages. All passage carpets (5) were identified as oil cloth, including an oil cloth stair carpet in a passage. Watson's Greensboro house also had a hall oil cloth carpet, worth \$60.50.¹¹² Oil cloths recorded in Greene County were expensive, ranging in value from \$4.00 to \$50.00 and averaging \$31.80. Of these, 71% belonged to decedents owning more than 50 slaves, and all occurred with total furnishings worth more than \$750.00 and in total estate worth more than \$47,000.00.

Historical records related to Greene County also give some idea of the appearance of oil cloths. Watson gave an indication of oil cloth designs known in Greene County when he wrote:

¹⁰⁸Snedecor, 93.

¹⁰⁹Thornton, Authentic Decor, 228.

¹¹⁰Garrett, 33-34.

¹¹¹One estate had oil cloths in the sitting and dining rooms and textile carpets with rugs in two bedrooms.

¹¹²"1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

in the house the only change to mention, is the putting of a strip of carpet (of a dark color & some white of a floor cloth pattern that is in squares) from door to door in the dining room.¹¹³

Oil cloths were available in a variety of widths (24, 18, 12, and 6 foot widths in Mobile) and could be purchased to fit the size of a room.¹¹⁴ Godey's related in 1855:

the best English oil-cloth is the most economical in the end, though its first cost is nearly double an equally showy American manufacture. The importer will cut it any desired width or length, so that the floor is covered by a single piece.¹¹⁵

Carpets with Rugs

Carpets and rugs were frequently recorded together. Used on top of sometimes matching carpets, the rugs rested in front of fireplaces to protect carpet from soot and hot cinders.¹¹⁶ The specific combination of carpet with rug occurred in 7% of Greene County residences¹¹⁷ and was identified in parlors, sitting rooms, dining rooms, and bedrooms. Carpets with rugs ranged from \$1.00 to \$125.00 and averaged \$21.62, but were worth more in wool (\$18.00), than in cotton (\$1.00). Ownership of a carpet and rug 'set' was an indication of middle to wealthy class standing. Over 50%

¹¹³Henry Watson, Jr., to [Julia Watson, East Windsor, CT], L, 7 July 1846. Watson Papers.

¹¹⁴Snedecor, 93.

¹¹⁵"House Furnishing," Godey's, March 1850, 285.

¹¹⁶Garrett, 194.

¹¹⁷All occurrences of carpet with rug are assumed to refer to a hearth rug used with a carpet.

of the carpets with rugs belonged to decedents with more than 50 slaves, 74% with total furnishings worth more than \$500.00, and 78% with total estate worth more than \$20,000.00.

Rugs

The rugs recorded with carpets were hearth rugs. But rugs,¹¹⁸ some of them hearth rugs (8), were also recorded without carpets. Hearth rugs and door mats helped keep houses clean. Occasionally, hearth rugs were the only floor covering in a room, as in one of the bedrooms in Wiley Croom's Greensboro house.¹¹⁹ Rugs occurred alone in 6% of the residences. Some were identified as chenille, carpet, or animal skin. They had an average value of \$3.21 and varied from \$1.00 to \$10.00 each.¹²⁰ The 2 door rugs bought by Watson cost \$2.00 each.¹²¹ Rugs identified as buffalo hide appeared in a parlor and a dining room and were worth an average of \$3.50; those of sheep skin, in a parlor, worth \$2.00 each. Rugs occurred in all slave ownership ranges,

¹¹⁸The data reported on rugs are the combination of the data on the forms recorded as rug and hearth rug.

¹¹⁹"Appraisal of the Estate of Wiley J. Croom," GCPCR L (30 October 1849): 695-704.

¹²⁰The most expensive examples were probably chenille. In 1845, Watson paid \$14.00 for a chenille rug. "Furniture." Watson Papers.

¹²¹These may have been manilla or grass, like the mats he purchased in 1845. "Furniture." Watson Papers.

although 71% appeared among total furnishings worth more than \$500.00 and 68% in total estate worth more than \$20,000.00.

Stair Carpets

Stair carpets were mentioned in only 1% of residences. In 1845, Henry Watson bought 12 yards of Venetian carpet¹²² for \$9.60 and 18 flat brass stair rods¹²³ for \$9.00 from B. Newhouse.¹²⁴ The stair carpet with brass rods recorded in the inventories was valued at \$7.00, while the oil cloth stair covering was worth \$20.00.¹²⁵ Stair carpets were identified only with the middle class and wealthy decedents, owners of more than 40 slaves, total furnishings worth more than \$1,000.00, and total estate more than \$20,000.00.

Straw Floor Coverings

It was still customary in mid-19th century American homes to take up carpeting in the summer and replace it with straw matting.¹²⁶ In Greene County, though there is little evidence of the practice, at least 1 inventory indicated a

¹²²Venetian carpet "consists mainly of a heavy weft-shoot, and is a weighty but soft material. In small diced patterns alone does it look well." "The Carpet and Its History," Godey's, March 1857, 233.

¹²³Godey's noted in 1855 that "flat stair-rods, from one to three inches in width, of brass or silver plate, are still used." "House Furnishing," Godey's, March 1855, 285.

¹²⁴"Furniture." Watson Papers.

¹²⁵Watson paid \$1.50 per yard for floor oil cloth in 1845. "Furniture." Watson Papers.

¹²⁶Garrett, 208-209.

seasonal change in floor coverings, that of Thomas Borden. In June of 1856, the floors of his Newbern residence were furnished with "1 Straw Carpet in Parlor 5.50" and an "Oil Carpet on Passage Floor 20.00." With some rooms identified, and the inventory taken in such a way as to suggest other rooms by constellations of furnishings, it was deduced that the "2 common Carpets (old) 6.00, 2 Carpets 30.00" grouped with hair for mattresses and trunks, were packed away in a store room for the summer.¹²⁷ A second inventory, that of Frederick Peck, records matting worth \$7.00 in the parlor and 2 carpets in a space not identified.¹²⁸ Although the inventory was taken in April, it too, may show changing of floor coverings with the seasons. Of the Greene County decedents' residences that contained matting,¹²⁹ 90% (9) also contained carpet. But, this cannot be taken as absolute proof of seasonal exchanges of floor coverings, since Alexander Graham's parlor contained 36 yards of matting along with a parlor carpet, hearth rug, and 2 foot mats.¹³⁰ This juxtaposition of floor coverings may reveal the mid-19th century practice of laying a carpet over straw matting in the

¹²⁷"Appraisal of the Estate of Thomas R. Borden," GCPCR Q (25 June 1856): 511-517.

¹²⁸"Appraisal of the Estate of Frederick Peck," GCPCR J (25 April 1846): 562-564.

¹²⁹One of these was described as a straw carpet.

¹³⁰"Appraisal of the Estate of Alexander Graham," GCPCR M (8 November 1850): 1-5.

cooler months rather than taking up and storing the carpet.¹³¹ Another inventory recorded matting in a bed chamber and a carpet in the parlor. Perhaps the warmth of the southern climate encouraged the permanent carpeting of rooms with straw matting and is an example of another American practice, that of leaving matting down the year round.¹³²

Straw floor coverings were recorded in 10 (3%) of the decedents' residences. Associated with expensive furnishings, straw matting could be worth as much as some carpeting, with occurrences valued from \$1.00 to \$14.00, and averaging \$7.25. There was apparently some variety in the appearance of matting, for in 1845 Daniels and Brady of Mobile offered both white and colored floor matting.¹³³ Matting was recorded for decedents throughout all slave owning ranges, in total furnishing ranges above \$100.00 (70% with furnishings over \$500.00), and total estate ranges over \$1,000.00.

Crumb Cloths

At one time considered an essential dining room floor covering in America, the crumb cloth appeared in only 2

¹³¹Garrett, 195.

¹³²Ibid.

¹³³The Mobile Register and Journal, 17 May 1845, 1.

Greene County inventories.¹³⁴ Its purpose was disclosed by Miss Leslie: "in an eating-room, the carpet should be protected from crumbs and grease-droppings [sic] by a large woollen cloth kept for the purpose, and spread under the table and the chairs that surround it."¹³⁵ The fiber of the crumb cloths, valued at \$1.00 each, was not recorded. But in 1845, when Watson bought household furniture in Mobile, including a pair of dining tables, he purchased a linen crumb cloth for \$3.50.¹³⁶ In Greene County, crumb cloths were associated with decedents who owned more than 10 slaves, residential furnishings worth more than \$700.00, and total estate worth more than \$10,000.00.

Watson's "1866 Inventory," made after the acquisition of his extension dining table (which would have been left standing in the center of the room), is lacking a crumb cloth and may reveal the reason for the scarcity or even demise of this floor covering in the adoption of the new table form. However, crumb cloths were still advertised for sale in Eutaw by John Hunter as late as 1860.¹³⁷ These large, durable pieces of cloth must have been useful around households, for

¹³⁴The data reported on crumb cloth are the combination of the data on the forms crumb cloth (1) and table rug (1). For use of the term table rug for crumb cloth see Catherine Esther Beecher, Letters to Persons Who Are Engaged in Domestic Service (New York: Leavitt & Trow, 1842), 214.

¹³⁵Leslie, 176.

¹³⁶"Furnishing." Watson Papers.

¹³⁷The Eutaw Whig, 13 December 1860, 3.

William Gould in northwestern Greene County described a slave's efforts to protect the garden from a late frost in April of 1858 by "covering the vegetables with old quilts-new domestic, crumb cloths and everything else she could lay her hands on."¹³⁸

Textile Furnishings

The textile furnishings analyzed here are window treatments and decorative protective covers for furniture.¹³⁹ These forms were seldom recorded, perhaps due to the ephemeral nature of textiles, the low value of most textile forms, or that window treatments, like mantle pieces, were attached to the structure of the house. These decorative textiles can represent status in the form of expenditure on imported materials, engagement in fashionable decoration, and industriousness on the part of female occupants.

Window Treatments

Window curtains. By the mid-19th century, window drapery was used in American homes to control temperature, privacy, and view of desirable or disagreeable scenery. Curtains also controlled light for aesthetic effect,

¹³⁸William P. Gould, "Diary," 26 April 1858, Hoole.

¹³⁹This excludes the bedding and table linens sometimes recorded in probate records. Piano covers are discussed along with pianos.

activities in the space, and preservation of interior furnishings.¹⁴⁰ Window curtains appeared in 52 (16%) Greene County residences.¹⁴¹ Window curtains were less common than carpeting, occurring only in 1.6 rooms per residence as compared to 2.2 for carpet. Also, it was unusual for more than 1 room to have window treatments: 33 residences had 1 room with window curtains; 10 with 2; 5 with 3; 3 with 4; 1 with 6. Window curtains were recorded for decedents in all slave holding ranges, all total furnishing value ranges above \$50.00, and most total estate value ranges above \$500.00.

Window curtains were most frequently recorded in Greene County bed chambers (10 residences) and less often in parlors (6), sitting rooms (2), and dining rooms (2). This distribution within residences apparently continues the 18th century American custom of using window curtains most frequently in rooms with costly textiles in the form of beds.¹⁴² In bedrooms, curtains provided opportunity, along

¹⁴⁰Grier, 237.

¹⁴¹Occurrence of window curtains in a residence refers to the presence of and not the number of curtains. The data reported on window curtains are the combination of the data on the forms recorded as curtain, window curtain, and window curtain with furniture. The inventories differentiated between 'stand' or 'set' of curtains for a bed and 'window curtains'. Curtains that were described by number (e.g., 4 curtains) were assumed to be window curtains. Doorway curtains, portières, did not occur in the inventories, probably because they were not fashionable until later in the 19th century. Grier, 248.

¹⁴²Garrett, 120.

with bed furniture, for display of wealth in the form of textiles as well as a degree of privacy.

Greene County occurrences of window curtains ranged from \$1.00 to \$50.00 per room and averaged \$7.25 per room. curtains with 'fixtures' were worth more, \$10.46 per room. No drapery treatment of a single window was valued at more than \$7.00. If the probate appraisals of curtains show fair market values, then local drapery treatments fell far short of the extravagant drapery costing \$15.00, \$30.00, and even \$150.00 per window which appeared elsewhere in America during the 1850s.¹⁴³

The majority of Greene County window curtains, worth \$2.00 or less per pair, were probably simply executed home-made treatments.¹⁴⁴ Very likely, they were textile panels tacked directly to the upper frame of the window opening and which may or may not have had a valence.¹⁴⁵ Sheer muslin curtains were still used in the mid-19th century¹⁴⁶ and 3 pair of muslin and a pair of white domestic curtains are recorded in Greene County. They were probably white, as were all curtains in bed chambers identified by color.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³Grier, 237-238.

¹⁴⁴Grier, 277.

¹⁴⁵Montgomery, Textiles in America, 51.

¹⁴⁶Grier, 243.

¹⁴⁷There were 2 occurrences of window curtains described as red worth less than a \$1.00 per pair but no location was given. The color of 2 occurrences of domestic curtains could

Fully dressed windows of the 1850s like those illustrated in Godey's¹⁴⁸ were complex, costly affairs probably recorded in Greene County by the most highly valued curtains in the inventories. The "5 window curtains--frames &c 40.00"¹⁴⁹ and "1 pr curtains & hangings \$3.00"¹⁵⁰ recorded in the inventories, could have been comprised of as many as 4 layers. A typical treatment would have consisted of shades or blinds nearest the wall which were overlaid with under draperies of muslin, lawn, scrim,¹⁵¹ grenadine,¹⁵² net, or lace. The next layer was the over drapery which hung at the sides of the window frame, usually a pair of curtain panels.¹⁵³ At the top of the window would be a valence or lambrequin, possibly crowned with a decorative cornice.¹⁵⁴

Although no mention was made of lace curtains in the inventories, machine-made lace began to be imported from

not be ascertained.

¹⁴⁸For examples see Godey's, February 1852, 173; July 1853, 97; September 1855, 289.

¹⁴⁹"Appraisal of the Estate of Col. Samuel Pickens," GCPCR P (9 November 1855): 677-690.

¹⁵⁰"Appraisal of the Estate of Frederick Peck," GCPCR J (25 April 1846): 562-564.

¹⁵¹Scrim is a kind of thin canvas. OED.

¹⁵²Grenadine was a light-weight, open-weave silk or silk and wool blend textile. Montgomery, 248.

¹⁵³Grier, 239-240.

¹⁵⁴Ibid.

England in the 1850s¹⁵⁵ and the lace curtains which came to suggest femininity in the 19th century parlor¹⁵⁶ were available in Alabama. In 1856, Alex. Johnstone & Co. of Mobile advertised lace and muslin curtains¹⁵⁷ and in 1860, N. W. Lovell and Company of Eutaw, dealers in dry goods, advertised lace and damask window curtains.¹⁵⁸

The infrequent occurrence of curtains in the probate records suggests that decedents may have controlled interior lighting and thermal comfort with the blinds or shutters common on buildings of the time rather than window curtains. In doing this, they chose, like many other mid-19th century Americans, not to purchase curtains.¹⁵⁹ The choice may also, at least in part, reveal the 1850s consciousness of the importance of the window as a frame for landscape which should not be obstructed by elaborate drapery.¹⁶⁰

As in other parts of the United States, there may have been some changing of window coverings in Greene County

¹⁵⁵Ibid., 239.

¹⁵⁶Ibid., 246.

¹⁵⁷Snedecor, 97.

¹⁵⁸Eutaw Independent Observer, 26 October 1860, 3. Mr. E. K. Carlisle of Marion, in neighboring Black Belt Perry County, purchased 6 lace curtains with loops and hooks from Alex. T. Steward & Co. of New York in 1860. E. K. Carlisle Papers, ADAH.

¹⁵⁹Grier, 237. Watson's meticulous records make no mention of window curtains. However, his house had blinds. "House Cost & Repairs Account." Watson Papers.

¹⁶⁰Grier, 245.

according to the seasons.¹⁶¹ Taken in January, the appraisal of A. Hutton makes careful distinction between the "3 Winter Curtains & Shades" in the parlor and the sets of 'winder' curtains in the bed chambers.¹⁶²

Curtain hardware. Curtain hardware consisting of metal cornices, curtain rings, brass 'curtain bands' to hold back drapery, and 'curtain pins' or 'tie backs' was an expensive component of elaborate mid-19th century window treatments.¹⁶³ By 1856, Greene County residents could embellish their windows by patronizing Alex. Johnstone & Co. of Mobile, who advertised "Cornishes [sic] and Fixings" along with window shades and curtains.¹⁶⁴ Decorative hardware was used only slightly more often in parlors (5) than bedrooms (4). Curtain hardware was costly even in 1836, when Kirksey's Greensboro store sold "2 Gilt Curtain Pins 2.25" on July 10 and "1 doz curtain Pins 4.00" on September 1.¹⁶⁵

Window curtain hardware was specified in at least 4% of the decedents' residences,¹⁶⁶ 6% if one includes the

¹⁶¹Garrett, 207.

¹⁶²"Appraisal of the Estate of A[quilla] D. Hutton," GPCPR N (11 January 1853): 357-361.

¹⁶³See Grier, 240.

¹⁶⁴Snedecor, 97.

¹⁶⁵"Day Book." Kirksey Papers, Hoole.

¹⁶⁶The data reported on curtain hardware are the combination of the data on the forms recorded as window curtains with furniture (7 occurrences), window knobs (1),

occurrences of window curtains with 'fixtures'. Curtain hardware was probably scant because its value was high; inventory values ranged from \$2.00 to \$15.00 and averaged \$7.00. Curtain rods with tips were valued at \$2.00 per room in the inventories,¹⁶⁷ but window cornices could be worth considerably more, \$15.00 for a set in a parlor. Generally, curtain hardware was associated with wealthy decedents owning more than 50 slaves, more than \$500.00 in total furnishings,¹⁶⁸ and total estate worth over \$10,000.00.

Window shades. Window shades, or paper curtains, occurred in 3% of the Greene County decedents' residences.¹⁶⁹ Occurrences of window shades, usually sets, recorded in the inventories were valued from \$3.00 to \$14.00 per room and averaged \$8.50, more than curtains (\$7.25). Individual shades in the inventoried residences were worth an average of \$1.55 each, in line with 1850s advertised prices of sixty cents to several dollars for factory made shades.¹⁷⁰ Inexpensive items, window shades appeared in

window rods with tips (1), curtain bands (1), window cornice (2), and window rods with bands and curtains (3).

¹⁶⁷These could have been rods with loose curtain rings or draw rods operated with attached cords, a type of drapery hardware invented in late 18th century France. Montgomery, 56-57.

¹⁶⁸The curtain hardware in the lowest total furnishing value range was described as 'window knobs'.

¹⁶⁹The term paper curtains occurred in 2 inventories.

¹⁷⁰Grier, 241.

residences associated with most slave ownership ranges below 100, in residences containing more than \$300.00 in total furnishings, and total estate worth more than \$1,000.00.

Paper window shades, printed or painted with decoration,¹⁷¹ were usually (75% of occurrences) recorded in parlors. Only 1 occurrence of window shades was in a dining room. In 2 residences parlor shades were recorded as used with curtains; in 2 others, as the only parlor window treatment. In 2 residences, there were curtains in other rooms but only shades in a parlor and a dining room. In another 2, window shades were the only recorded window treatment.¹⁷²

By owning window shades, Greene County decedents showed that they used window treatments available and acceptable in the mid-19th century. In 1850, a writer for Godey's declared the acceptability of window shades. "We enjoy the honest sincerity which still lives in the shadow of wall-paper curtains and deprecate the extravagant transparency of embroidered lace ditto."¹⁷³ In 1852, V. L. Benton of Marion advertised "a splendid lot of Window Shades, the finest specimens of Landscape and Oil Paintings, all of which

¹⁷¹Ibid., 240-241.

¹⁷²The occurrence of shades without curtains should be understood as a result of individual choice and not of economic limitation, since one of these residences was in an estate worth a total of \$50,000.00 and the other, \$112,000.00.

¹⁷³"New Furniture," 152.

he offers to sell on the most reasonable terms."¹⁷⁴ Decorative window shades were also available from Wm. Strickland in Mobile, who advertised in 1856: "Paper and Linen Window Curtains, of every Quality and price, embracing the latest and richest styles."¹⁷⁵ The same could probably have been said about the window shades offered by Alex. Johnstone & Co., also of Mobile.¹⁷⁶ By March of 1860, L. F. Haberkorn in Greensboro offered "Paper Hangings and Decorations kept for sale and put in after the latest Paris Fashion. Wall-Paper, Window Shades."¹⁷⁷

Furniture Coverings

Table covers. Parlor and center tables in mid-19th century America were prized as much for their textile coverings and collections of books, lamps, and bibelots as for their material and construction.¹⁷⁸ Existence in Greene County of table covers as recognizable forms rather than just any sort of material which happened to be on tables is confirmed by an advertisement of Hubbard and Ellis of Eutaw offering 'table covers' for sale.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁴Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 24 December 1852, 3.

¹⁷⁵Ibid., 24 April 1854, 4.

¹⁷⁶Snedecor, 97.

¹⁷⁷Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 20 March 1860, 4.

¹⁷⁸Garrett, 56.

¹⁷⁹Eutaw The Alabama Whig, 7 June 1855, 3.

Table covers were identified in at least 3% of dwellings belonging to probated decedents, over half of them the residences of females. Table covers were recorded in parlors, sitting rooms, dining rooms, and bed chambers.¹⁸⁰ Table covers varied from \$1.00 to \$4.00 each and averaged \$3.00. All recorded table covers belonged to decedents owning less than 70 slaves, all but 1 were among total furnishings worth more than \$150.00, and all appeared in estates worth more than a total of \$500.00.

Greene County records provide slight clues to the appearance of table covers: 2 were identified as oil cloth¹⁸¹ and another, as fringed. In 1859, Watson bought 2 colored damask table covers for \$18.00.¹⁸² Watson's damask table covers were kept in the dining room along with an oil cloth table cover for the extension table and another oil cloth cover for a side table. He also had oil cloth covers for the center table and tea table in his sitting room.¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰The table covers in bedrooms may have been toilet table covers.

¹⁸¹One of these was in a parlor.

¹⁸²Watson carefully distinguished between table covers and table cloths. "Furniture". Watson Papers.

¹⁸³Watson purchased oil cloth binding at the same time as the oil cloth to make the sideboard cover. "1866 Inventory;" "Family Expense Account." Watson Papers.

Lamp mats. Lamp mats were prominent features in American mid-19th century parlors.¹⁸⁴ In the mid-19th century, lamp mats were advocated by publications such as Godey's to protect the surfaces of tables from lamp oil and candle drippings. The prominent location of lamp mats provided opportunities for ladies to display their industriousness and talents in the making of ornamental mats. Obliginglly, Godey's published designs for lady's-work lamp mats in beadwork, crochet, and patchwork.¹⁸⁵ Ready-made lamp mats were available from merchants. Henry Watson, Jr. bought one for \$1.00 in 1845, presumably to use under a solar lamp purchased at the same time.¹⁸⁶

There was only 1 lamp mat recorded in the Greene County inventories. The value of the lamp mat in the inventories was not recorded. It was the property of a decedent who owned 40 slaves, more than \$1,500.00 in total furnishings, and a total estate worth \$47,000.00.

¹⁸⁴For illustrations of lamp mats used in 19th-century interiors see, Garrett, 54, 147, 151.

¹⁸⁵"Candle-Lamp Mat," Godey's, August 1852, 93; "Crochet Lamp-Mat.--Corals and Shells," June 1855, 548; "Lamp Stand in Patchwork," April 1857, 355.

¹⁸⁶"Receipt of Purchase from A. Knapp," 28 February 1845. Watson Papers.

Art

The art work recorded in Greene County residences belonging to deceased slave owners was mainly two-dimensional, in the form of paintings, prints, and maps. Art works served as household decorations, embellishing rooms and offering aesthetic satisfaction. Declaring paintings and drawings "some of the most desirable ornaments of our apartments," Mrs. Parkes instructed her readers:

Oil pictures demand gilt frames; drawings do very well in frames of various elegant woods. The hanging of pictures properly requires judgement, and much depends upon the direction of the light that comes on them.¹⁸⁷

In the mid-19th century, the subjects of drawings and paintings often served didactic purposes, disseminating and supporting religious and moral standards through depiction of abstract ideals and beliefs.¹⁸⁸ Other works of art important at the time were the family portraits and photographs which were not only keepsakes of loved ones but also reminders of social position. Portraits of statesmen and maps of the nation, state, and county reveal patriotism and pride along with interest in history, politics, and economics. Finally, art in the form of paintings, especially

¹⁸⁷Mrs. Parkes, 285.

¹⁸⁸Robert Bishop and Patricia Coblenz, The World of Antiques, Art, and Architecture in Victorian America (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979), 396.

landscapes, provided opportunity for display of wealth and knowledge of fashionable status symbols.¹⁸⁹

Art work was uncommon, appearing in only 20% of Greene County decedents' residences.¹⁹⁰ However, art work belonged to decedents who owned as few as 1 slave, total furnishings worth more than \$100.00, and total estate worth more than \$2,500.00. A few Greene County homes contained a number of pieces of art. Robert Randolph had 3 landscapes in the parlor and a portrait of J. C. Calhoun, 4 paintings, and 2 engravings in the dining room.¹⁹¹ Other estates with multiple art works included that of Nancy Mobley with 6 paintings;¹⁹² Aquilla D. Hutton, 8 pictures;¹⁹³ John T. Jackson, 7 pictures;¹⁹⁴ Jonathan Harris, 9 pictures;¹⁹⁵

¹⁸⁹Ibid.

¹⁹⁰The data reported on art work are the combination of the data on the forms identified as portrait, painting, picture, map, and sculpture.

¹⁹¹"Appraisal of the Estate of Robert C. Randolph," GCPCR O (19 May 1854): 533-536.

¹⁹²"Appraisal of the Estate of Nancy Mobley," GCPCR S (5 July 1859): 485-486.

¹⁹³"Appraisal of the Estate of A[quilla] D. Hutton," GCPCR N (11 January 1853): 357-361.

¹⁹⁴"Appraisal of the Estate of John T. Jackson," GCPCR R (12 December 1857): 323-324.

¹⁹⁵"Appraisal of the Estate of Jonathan Harris," GCPCR Q (1 May 1857): 863-864.

Samuel Chambers, 5 portraits.¹⁹⁶ By 1860, Henry Watson owned at least 8 paintings and 13 prints.¹⁹⁷

Portraits

In Greene County, like the rest of America, portraits were important art forms.¹⁹⁸ Portraits by John Meenarbreuker and Nicola Marschall remain in the area as treasured family heirlooms.¹⁹⁹ In 1853, both Marschall and T. J. Jackson advertised their services as portrait artists in Greene County on the same page of the Alabama Beacon.²⁰⁰ Given their cultural prominence, the appearance of portraits in only 8, or 2.5%, of residences²⁰¹ is puzzling. Portraits were recorded for decedents who owned as few as 5 slaves, but residences with at least \$200.00 worth of total furnishings and total estate worth at least \$25,000.00.²⁰²

¹⁹⁶"Appraisal of the Estate of Samuel Chambers," GCPCR Q (10 May 1856): 114-117.

¹⁹⁷"Furniture." Watson Papers.

¹⁹⁸Bishop and Coblentz, 395.

¹⁹⁹Meenarbreuker resided in Eutaw and Marschall, in Marion. Alabama Portraits Prior to 1870, 403.

²⁰⁰Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 7 October 1853, 3

²⁰¹The data reported on portraits are on all portraits except those in the possession of the painter Meenarbreuker. Some portraits belonging to decedents could have been his work. Whether the portraits belonging to the decedents were paintings, prints, or early forms of photographs was not recorded.

²⁰²This does not include the estate of the deceased artist, John Meenarbreuker, whose property is discussed separately.

The value of portraits was low, appraised from \$1.00 to \$10.00 and averaging \$2.92 per residence.²⁰³ The portrait of J. C. Calhoun in Robert Randolph's dining room was probably a painting since it was valued at \$10.00.²⁰⁴ But the 5 portraits of presidents in gilt frames valued at \$2.50 for the group belonging to Walter Ross²⁰⁵ and the 4 portraits in frames valued at \$2.00 for the group belonging to Peter Hamilton²⁰⁶ were probably prints. The low appraisal value, rarity of occurrence, and identification of only portraits of statesmen may reveal that Greene County probate appraisers ignored family portraits, regarding them as too personal²⁰⁷ or as the property of family members other than decedents.

Painter John Meenarbreuker's appraisal records the possessions of the only identified Greene County decedent engaged in producing furnishings. An active painter of

²⁰³An unfinished portrait in the estate of John Meenerbrueker was appraised at \$1.00. "Appraisal of the Estate of John Meenerbrueker," GCPCR M (30 November 1850): 66-68.

²⁰⁴"Appraisal of the Estate of Robert C. Randolph," GCPCR O (19 May 1854): 533-536.

²⁰⁵"Appraisal of the Estate of Walter R. Ross," GCPCR M (20 December 1850): 75-76.

²⁰⁶"Appraisal of the Estate of Peter Hamilton," GCPCR L (26 September 1850): 1070-1072.

²⁰⁷Sweeney found that portraits in 17th and 18th century Connecticut were sometimes omitted from inventories for this reason. Sweeney, "Furniture," 11.

portraits in the Eutaw area from 1845 to 1850,²⁰⁸ his estate included paints, palettes, 13 frames with canvasses, and studio 'props'. His unfinished painting of the Conversion of Paul (\$25.00) and a female portrait (\$1.00) together with 3 sheets of landscapes (\$.50), 17 pictures (\$4.25), 24 landscapes by Huissmans (\$3.00), a book of engravings (\$2.00), 10 Indian paintings (\$2.40), Rip Van Winkle drawings (\$1.00), and 7 engravings (\$1.50) made up one of the largest collections of art in Greene County.²⁰⁹ Meenarbreuker owned one male slave valued at \$900.00 and the remainder of his total estate, worth \$1,556.54, was made up of his clothing, furniture, and professional equipment.²¹⁰

Photographs

Photographs provided another form of pictorial record of loved ones available to Greene County residents. Although photographs were not identified in the inventories, they, like portraits, may have been avoided because of sentimental considerations. In May of 1855, S. T. Blessing warned residents that he would remain only one week more in Greensboro and that "Now is the Best Time To have

²⁰⁸At least 9 portraits by him have been identified. Alabama Portraits Prior to 1870, 403.

²⁰⁹"Appraisal of the Estate of John Meenarbreuker," GCPCR M (30 November 1850): 66-68. These works of art are not included in any of the subsequent analyses since they were the holdings of an artist rather than representative of a furnished residence.

²¹⁰His total residential furnishings were worth \$196.28.

DAGUERREOTYPES taken, while the skin is free from the effects of the tanning sun."²¹¹ In January of 1858, Mobile photographer Jas. H. Wiley "fitted up rooms" in Greensboro to be used as an "Ambrotype & Photograph Gallery."²¹²

Patronizing New York photographers in 1859, Watson bought 2 oil photographs (\$130.00), 3 india ink photographs (\$30.00), and 12 plain photographs (\$5.00).²¹³

Paintings

Paintings were expensive, atypical possessions among Greene County decedents. Recorded in 7 (2%) of the residences,²¹⁴ occurrences of paintings²¹⁵ ranged from \$3.00 to \$150.00 and averaged \$44.59. Over half of the paintings in the inventories belonged to owners of more than 50 slaves; the remainder among owners of less than 10. They were associated only with total residential furnishings worth

²¹¹Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 11 May 1855, 3. This was a popular French invention, using a chemically coated copper plate. See Furnas, The Americans, 590-591.

²¹²Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 4 June 1858, 4. Ambrotypes were cheaper and more durable than daguerreotypes. For mid-19th-century types of photographs see Bishop and Coblentz, 398.

²¹³These were portraits of his parents. "Furniture." The same year he paid \$3.00 for an unspecified number of ambrotypes. "Family Expense Account." Watson Papers.

²¹⁴The data reported on painting are the combination of the data on the forms recorded as painting and landscape painting, excluding the inventory of the artist Meenerbreuker.

²¹⁵Occurrences include single and groups of paintings.

more than \$750.00 and in total estate worth over \$25,000.00.

Robert Randolph had 3 landscape paintings worth a total of \$150.00 in his parlor and at least 4 paintings of unidentified subjects worth a total of \$10.00 in his dining room.²¹⁶ Individual paintings recorded in the inventories were costly, worth an average of \$11.65 each. The appraisers may not have been familiar with painting values, for their figures seem undervalued compared to the average of \$44.68 paid by Watson in New York for his 8 paintings,²¹⁷ the \$25.00 value of Meenarbreuker's unfinished Conversion of St. Paul, and the average of \$96.67 for the 3 paintings purchased by John Erwin in Italy.²¹⁸ Greene County residents could have also produced their own paintings, taking advantage of Mr. Jaquith's offer of lessons in "Landscape Drawing and Monochromatic Painting" in 1846.²¹⁹

Paintings in Greene County residences were a mixture of landscape and narrative paintings. The subjects of Watson's paintings bought in New York in 1848 were Woman Taken in Adultery and 2 landscapes by Powers and in 1859, Artist's Dream, Duck Shooting, Aurora, Wife of Apollo Bitter Etc., and

²¹⁶"Appraisal of the Estate of Robert C. Randolph," GCPCR O (19 May 1854): 533-536.

²¹⁷"Furniture." Watson Papers.

²¹⁸"European Travel Diaries." Erwin Papers, ADAH.

²¹⁹Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 14 March 1846, 3.

Hermit Falls Niagara.²²⁰ These subjects reveal topics of the sort produced by American early Victorian painters whose work would have been available in New York.²²¹ In July of 1858, Erwin's Italian acquisitions were 2 'original' landscapes and a copy of The Angel Refuses the Gift of Tobias.²²² By the middle of the 19th century, landscape paintings had become status symbols in America,²²³ and those belonging to Randolph, Watson, and Erwin probably endowed prestige on their owners.

Pictures

By the middle of the 19th century, engravings of paintings, political events, disasters, and nostalgic subjects (e.g., American Homestead--Spring) had become important elements in American homes, published and distributed by such firms as Currier and Ives²²⁴ and such periodicals as Godey's. Prints, like the "Declaration of Independence, neatly printed on sattin [sic]" available from the publisher of the Greene County Gazette²²⁵ or the "FINE

²²⁰"Furniture." Watson Papers.

²²¹For illustrations of these types of subjects see Alan Gowans, "Painting and Sculpture," The Arts in America: The Nineteenth Century (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), 210-221.

²²²"European Travel Diaries." Erwin Papers, ADAH.

²²³Bishop and Coblentz, 396.

²²⁴Furnas, The Americans, 576.

²²⁵Erie Greene County Gazette, 5 July 1830, 3.

ENGRAVINGS" offered for sale by John B. Clark in Eutaw²²⁶ reveal local availability of these art forms.

Pictures, which were most likely engravings or some other sort of print, appeared in 9 or 3% of decedents' residences.²²⁷ Pictures varied from \$1.00 to \$20.00, averaging \$3.29 per occurrence. Two engravings, valued at \$5.00, were in Robert Randolph's dining room and another, worth \$20.00 in his parlor.²²⁸ Another residence contained a total of 6 unvalued engravings and still another residence, 1 framed picture worth \$3.00 in the parlor. All recorded pictures belonged to decedents owning less than 100 slaves, total furnishings worth more than \$100.00, and over half (57%) to decedents with total estate worth between \$50,000.00 to \$75,000.00.

Henry Watson's records reveal the subjects of pictures in his Greene County home. His framed prints cost from \$2.38 to \$17.00 and had an average value of \$6.38. Those bought in New York in 1848 included Portrait of Youth, First Friend, Sale of Pet Lamb, My Own Mamma, and Head of Child. Also in 1848 he acquired 3 pictures in East Windsor, CT. titled Holy Family, Bridges, and Storm in Mediterranean. At the same

²²⁶Eutaw The Alabama Whig, 17 May 1855, 3.

²²⁷The analysis results for picture are the combination of the data for picture (9 occurrences), framed picture (2), and engraving (2). They do not include the possessions of Meenerbreuker.

²²⁸"Appraisal of the Estate of Robert C. Randolph," GCPCR O (19 May 1854): 533-536.

time he also acquired 2 hunting prints.²²⁹ Judging from their titles, Watson's taste in pictures ran parallel to the American preference for visual story telling,²³⁰ which expressed some ideal or virtue.²³¹

Maps

Maps were by far the most common art form in Greene County decedents' residences, occurring in 45 (14%).²³² Recorded in all slave owning ranges, in total furnishing ranges above \$50.00, and total estate value ranges above \$2,500.00, maps were the most egalitarian art form in Greene County. At least 9 decedents owned copies of Snedecor's Map of Greene County published in 1856.²³³ William Ferrell displayed his copy of Snedecor's map in a bedroom²³⁴ but 2 other decedents kept their Greene County maps in sitting rooms. Maps occurred in bed chambers (5 residences), sitting rooms (3), passages (2), and 1 library (3 maps). Although probably hung on walls, it is possible that some of these

²²⁹"Furniture." Watson Papers.

²³⁰This was labeled extraneous symbolism by Gowans. Gowans, 202-203.

²³¹Bishop and Coblentz, 396.

²³²The data reported on map are the combination of the data on the forms recorded as map, U.S. map, Alabama map, Texas map, and Greene County map.

²³³All estates identifying Greene County maps were probated in 1856 or later.

²³⁴"Appraisal of the Estate of William A. Ferrell," GCPCR S (15 August 1859): 548-557.

maps were kept folded or rolled. Ownership of maps, like the "1 US & Presidents Map 5.50" in the estate of West Melton,²³⁵ the 13 United States maps, and the Texas map probably reveals political and economic interests as well as intellectual curiosity. Maps were worth \$1.00 to \$10.00, averaging \$3.65; Greene County maps were worth more, averaging \$4.38.

Sculpture

The single art work identified as statuary in the inventories was located outside of a residence and listed with a pair of iron settees. That sculpture, worth \$500.00, belonged to Robert C. Randolph, a wealthy decedent who owned 169 slaves, total residential furnishings worth more than \$1,000.00, and a total estate worth over \$125,000.00.²³⁶ Other sculptures in Greene County were also the property of wealthy slave owners: Watson bought 2 busts in East Windsor, CT, in 1848;²³⁷ Erwin owned a marble portrait bust

²³⁵"Appraisal of the Estate of West A. Melton," GCPCR J (25 August 1846): 659-661.

²³⁶"Appraisal of the Estate of Robert C. Randolph," GCPCR O (19 May 1854): 533-536.

²³⁷"Furniture." At least one of these was in his library in Greensboro. "1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

commissioned in Florence, Italy, in 1859,²³⁸ 5 marble busts, and a marble statue entitled Innocence.²³⁹

Looking Glasses

Generic Looking Glasses

Recorded in just over 50% of Greene County decedents' residences, there was an average of 1.7 looking glasses per residence containing them. They ranged in value from \$.05 to \$50.00, averaging \$3.10. Looking glasses were common among decedents, recorded in estates in slave owning ranges from lowest to highest, total residential furnishing ranges above \$50.00, and total estate ranges above \$100.00.

The frequency and cheapness of looking glasses in Greene County were probably due to new processes for silvering the backs of the mirrors developed in the early 1840s.²⁴⁰ Their regular occurrence in bed chambers reveals their employment as grooming aids. But they appeared almost as often in parlors, displaying wealth and social status²⁴¹ as well as the 19th century taste for play of light and reflection across furnishings.²⁴² Looking glass frames in

²³⁸"European Travel Diaries." Erwin Papers, ADAH. This bust still stands today in the hall of his home in Greensboro, Glencairn. Curb, Historic Hale County, n.p.

²³⁹"Erwin Appraisal."

²⁴⁰Symonds and Whineray, Victorian Furniture, 77-78.

²⁴¹Ames, "Hall Furnishings," 215.

²⁴²Garrett, 46.

Greene County were made of materials as varied as gilt and ordinary pine.

Dressing Glasses

The dressing glasses, looking glasses with drawers, and toilet glasses that appeared in 4% of the residences were small portable forms, usually an adjustable mirror in a frame with a bank of drawers below, which could have been placed on a table or flat-topped bureau.²⁴³ They were inexpensive, worth only \$1.00 to \$3.00, averaging \$1.84. Dressing glasses were associated with lower middle class decedents, occurring only with the ownership of less than 55 slaves, with total furnishings worth at least \$25.00, and total estate worth no more than \$25,000.00. The obvious utility of these forms in grooming apparently caused Greene County appraisers to delete any reference to their location within houses, although they should have been in bed chambers. By mid-19th century the form was becoming old-fashioned²⁴⁴ and its scarcity in the Greene County inventories was probably due to the mid-19th century popularity of dressing bureaus with attached looking glasses.

²⁴³Aronson, 304.

²⁴⁴They were associated with American late 18th and early 19th century furniture styles. Ormsbee, Early American, 399-400.

Decorative Looking Glasses

Three terms were used in the Greene County probate inventories to describe important types of looking glasses which functioned primarily as decorative status symbols: mantle glass, mirror, pier glass. Decorative mirror frames of the period were typically embellished with "raised decoration of flower and fruit motifs with foliage and scrolls and pierced cresting."²⁴⁵ Such large looking glasses were costly, but provided the significant interplay of light and reflection desirable in mid-19th century American interiors. Combined with firelight, flickering candles or lamps, sparkling prisms on girandoles, gilt curtain hardware and picture frames, the sheen of plush upholstery, and polished wooden furniture surfaces parlor looking glasses provided the shimmering, etherial effect of a magical world.²⁴⁶

Mantle glasses. Use of mantle glasses above fireplace openings was so common in the middle of the 19th century that it became a symbol of interior decoration of the period.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵Ormsbee, Victorian, 373.

²⁴⁶Garrett, 46. An outstanding example of 19th-century Alabama indulgence in the fantasy of a reflecting world is the mirrored ballroom of Gaineswood in Demopolis, across the Black Warrior from the Forkland district of Greene County. Smith and Turner, "History in towns Demopolis, Alabama," 410-413.

²⁴⁷Charlotte Gere, Nineteenth Century Decoration: The Art of the Interior (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1989), 222.

Mantle glasses, also called 'overmantle mirrors', were often horizontal and intended to be placed above the fireplace mantle.²⁴⁸ These were identified in 3% of Greene County residences, occurring in 3 bed chambers, a parlor, and a dining room.²⁴⁹ Valued from \$2.00 to \$50.00²⁵⁰ and averaging \$11.45 per occurrence, mantle glasses were costly enough to appear in residences of decedents owning at least 10 slaves,²⁵¹ at least \$200.00 worth of total furnishings, and total estate worth more than \$7,500.00.

Mirrors. Mirrors, 3 of which had gilt frames, appeared in 7% of decedents' residences. They were of comparable value to mantle glasses, worth an average of \$10.81 and were most often located in parlors.²⁵² Mirrors occurred in value ranges from lowest to highest in the three economic descriptors.

Pier mirrors. Pairs of mirrored pier furniture used in the spaces between windows appeared in only 2 inventories. The first, that of Wiley Croom's Greensboro home, contained

²⁴⁸Symonds and Whineray, 77-78.

²⁴⁹The parlor and dining room were in the same residence. Another residence had a pair of mantle glasses.

²⁵⁰The great range of price may be due to inventory takers identifying any looking glass hanging over a mantle as a mantle glass rather than describing a specific form.

²⁵¹Over 75% were owned by the holders of 30 or more.

²⁵²They appeared in 4 parlors, 2 bedrooms, and 1 dining room.

a pair of pier glasses, tall mirrors with small shelves at the base (usually marble),²⁵³ complete with glass ornaments in the parlor.²⁵⁴ The second recorded a pair of pier tables, probably scrolled bracket tables with mirrors between the rear supports,²⁵⁵ in the parlor of Robert Randolph's home.²⁵⁶ The pair of glasses was worth \$100.00 and the tables, \$50.00. Both sets of pier fixtures were among residential furnishings valued at more than \$1,000.00. Costly items, the pier tables belonged to an owner of 169 slaves and a total estate worth \$115,000.00 and the pier glasses to an owner of 89 slaves and a total estate worth \$80,000.00.

Clocks

Generic Clocks

Clocks were necessary for the regulation of life in American homes;²⁵⁷ they were used to control the time of family gatherings, the preparation of food, and the

²⁵³Ormsbee, Victorian, 381-382.

²⁵⁴The ornaments were possibly standing on the shelves in front of the mirrors rather than a part of their construction. "Appraisal of the Estate of Wiley J. Croom," GCPCR L (30 October 1849): 695-704.

²⁵⁵For examples of this type of pier table see Classical America 1815-1845, 63, 73.

²⁵⁶"Appraisal of the Estate of Robert C. Randolph," GCPCR O (19 May 1854): 533-536.

²⁵⁷Garrett, 97.

establishment of sleeping and waking patterns. Clocks of the inexpensive sort made by the Terry family of Connecticut were very common in 19th century America²⁵⁸ and were undoubtedly the sort that occurred in most of the 67% of residences containing clocks that belonged to probated decedents.²⁵⁹ Clocks were not characteristic of any particular economic group, appearing across all the correlated economic ranges. All clocks but one (at \$100.00) were worth \$1.00 to \$35.00 each, averaging \$7.64. Described as adequate for the management of cooking by Mrs. Parkes,²⁶⁰ clocks with wooden mechanisms (8% of clocks) were the least valuable in the Greene County inventories, worth an average of \$4.00.²⁶¹ Clocks identified as brass (2%) and unspecified metal (23%) were worth more, an average of \$7.00 for brass and \$10.84 for metal.²⁶² With an average of \$7.50, 8-day clocks were more

²⁵⁸See Harvey Green, "The Ironies of Style: Complexities and Contradictions in American Decorative Arts, 1850-1900," in Nineteenth Century (The Victorian Society in America, 1982), 20; Edgar G. Miller, Jr., American Antique Furniture, (New York: Dover Publications, 1966), 2:963.

²⁵⁹The data reported on clocks are the combination of the data on the forms recorded as clock, 1-day clock, 8-day clock, and mantle clock. Clocks were recorded in 62% of residences, 1-day clocks, .3%, 8-day clocks, 4%, and mantle clocks, 1%.

²⁶⁰Mrs. Parkes, 842.

²⁶¹These structural materials probably refer to the materials used to make the clock works rather than the case.

²⁶²Metal clock movements were not commonly available until after 1839. Douglas H. Shaffer, Clocks (Smithsonian Institution, 1980), 47.

valuable than the sole 1-day clock worth \$5.00.²⁶³ These 8-day clocks, recorded in 4% of residences,²⁶⁴ were associated with slightly wealthier decedents than clocks in general.²⁶⁵

Clocks were not uncommon in Greene County, 774 recorded in the county tax records for 1849.²⁶⁶ Although clocks were relatively common in the inventories, there was an average of only 1.1 clock per residence containing clocks. They were usually recorded in bed chambers (10 residences) and dining rooms (9), but also appeared in parlors (4) and sitting rooms (3). In one of the few residences with 2 clocks, they were located in the parlor and dining room; in another, the parlor and sitting room. Parlor clocks were the most valuable (\$25.00 average), followed by those in the sitting room (\$10.75), dining room (\$9.50),²⁶⁷ and bed chamber (\$4.80).

Some idea of the appearance of clocks in Greene County residences can be surmised from the historical records. C.

²⁶³The 8-day clocks would have had metal works, 1-day clocks, wooden works. Miller, 963.

²⁶⁴One was located in a sitting room.

²⁶⁵The 8-day clocks were recorded in slave owning ranges from lowest to highest, in total furnishing value ranges above \$100.00, in total estate ranges above \$7,500.00.

²⁶⁶"Greene County--Its Taxable Property." Watson Papers.

²⁶⁷This figure excludes a \$100.00 dining room clock. However, including it would produce an average of \$19.25, still below the value of parlor clocks.

A. Sugg of Greensboro offered "COTTAGE CLOCKS, Guaranteed to keep good time--price Four Dollars"²⁶⁸ which were probably what are now called 'Beehive' and 'Steeple' clocks.²⁶⁹ An 'English' clock in Robert McFadden's dining room worth \$100.00²⁷⁰ may have been a rare Greene County example of a tall case clock.²⁷¹ The 'French' ebony and bronze clock, valued at \$25.00, was a parlor furnishing, in the company of plush and figured seat upholstery, Brussels carpet, mantel girandoles, window shades, and a marble top center table.²⁷² Clocks and their accessories were probably more varied than the inventories suggest: Watson's garrett store room contained "1 suspension clock 3.00."²⁷³ In March of 1847, Watson paid Greensboro cabinet maker W. D. C. Scarff

²⁶⁸Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 18 October 1851, 4.

²⁶⁹Shaffer, Clocks, 52-53.

²⁷⁰The same residence in Greensboro had a \$10.00 clock in the sitting room. "Appraisal of the Estate of Robert H. McFadden," GCPCR R (21 December 1858): 1118-1123.

²⁷¹Sometimes today called a 'Grandfather' clock. The high value of this clock is the basis for the inference of the clock's form. There is no mention in the inventories of a tall case or floor clock, but it is difficult to accept that there were none in Greene County.

²⁷²The clock was probably a mantle clock. "Appraisal of the Estate of S. W. Chadwick," GCPCR O (25 April 1854): 422-423.

²⁷³This was possibly a 'Trapeze Suspension' clock, which has the pendulum suspended from a U-shaped cord or wire that swings like a trapeze. Shaffer, Clocks, 123.

\$1.50 for the repair and varnishing of a clock stand that was probably the base for the suspension clock.²⁷⁴

Mantle Clocks

Clocks specifically identified as mantle clocks²⁷⁵ occurred in at least 1% of residences.²⁷⁶ Worth from \$1.00 to \$15.00 and averaging \$6.50 apiece, they were associated with more costly surroundings and wealthier decedents than most clocks. The \$15.00 mantle clock was used in Robert Randolph's parlor with pier tables, a marble top center table, landscape paintings, a set of tea tables, and a variety of upholstered seating forms.²⁷⁷ Mantle clocks were associated with middle class decedents who owned 20 to 40 slaves, total furnishings worth more than \$200.00, and total estate worth more than \$10,000.00.

Amusements

Greene County amusement forms included gaming equipment and musical instruments. Other diversions existed that did not appear in the inventories, like the promise of recreation

²⁷⁴"Furnishing." Watson Papers.

²⁷⁵It is not clear whether the form mantle clock had a distinctive appearance or whether it referred simply to any clock which had been placed on a mantle.

²⁷⁶One mantle clock was recorded in a parlor, another in a bedroom.

²⁷⁷"Appraisal of the Estate of Robert C. Randolph," GCPCR O (19 May 1854): 533-536.

in Stollenwerck's offer of "several new patterns of Stereoscopes, and several hundred Pictures, consisting of Foreign Scenes, Statuary, Ghosts, &c. to which he particularly invites the attention of the Ladies."²⁷⁸ Various Greene County records also reveal the keeping of pets.²⁷⁹ Such diversions provided residents with the opportunity for both individual and social satisfaction. Amusement forms are rare in the inventories, in part probably due to the almost prohibitive cost of pianos and melodians. However, their scarcity may also reveal the lack of widespread 'culture' in the South discerned by Olmsted.²⁸⁰

Gaming Equipment

Gaming equipment was recorded in 2.5% of residences,²⁸¹ located in the dining room, sitting room, and library. Backgammon sets averaged \$3.00 while chess sets were worth more, an average of \$7.50. Gaming equipment was associated with wealthy decedents with well-furnished houses. The majority of gaming equipment (80%) belonged to owners of

²⁷⁸Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 2 September 1859, 4.

²⁷⁹There were also 2 squirrel cages and a 'bee palace' which indicated the keeping of pets. In May of 1861, the records of Shorter & Cunningham in Eutaw registered the repair of a bird cage and a squirrel cage in their tinsmith shop. "Day Book." Shorter & Cunningham Business Records, Hoole.

²⁸⁰Olmsted, Cotton Kingdom, 560-561.

²⁸¹The data reported on gaming equipment are the combination of the data on the forms recorded as backgammon board, chess board, chessmen, and whist table.

more than 40 slaves.²⁸² All gaming equipment was associated with total furnishings worth more than \$200.00 and total estate worth between \$12,500.00 and \$150,000.00.²⁸³

As useful for pleasant social diversion as for 'sinful' gambling, the game boards, counters, and cards suitable for card and center tables in Greene County homes appeared occasionally in historic documents. Decks of playing cards were carefully enumerated for taxation.²⁸⁴ In 1836, Kirksey's store provided gaming equipment for Greensboro purchasers: a backgammon board on May 18 (\$2.75), a backgammon board on August 12 for presentation to Major Andrews (\$4.50), a pack of cards on August 26 (\$1.50), a deck of cards on September 23 (\$1.50).²⁸⁵ In 1845, Watson bought a chess board for \$.65 and in 1854, a backgammon board for \$5.00, dice cups for \$.75, and a set of ivory checkers for \$3.00.²⁸⁶ Osborn & Hatch of Greensboro offered chess

²⁸²All chess equipment and 83% of backgammon equipment was recorded in residences of decedents owning 70 or more slaves.

²⁸³A whist table was the only gaming form to fall below these economic ranges.

²⁸⁴County taxes were paid on 155 decks of playing cards in 1849. "Greene County--Its Taxable Property." Watson Papers.

²⁸⁵"Day Book." Kirksey Papers, Hoole.

²⁸⁶"Furniture." Watson Papers.

boards, backgammon boards, and chess men to interested buyers in 1857.²⁸⁷

Music Boxes

Only 1 music box was recorded, and appraised at \$4.00. Located in the parlor of a decedent owning more than 200 slaves, more than \$1,000.00 in total furnishings, and a total estate worth almost \$200,000.00 it would have been a cylinder music box.²⁸⁸ The uniqueness of the music box, along with the apparent indifference in the inventories to the variety of sophisticated clocks available in mid-19th century America and Europe, reveals a possible disinterest in sophisticated, delicate engineering in rural, agricultural Greene County.

Melodians

A type of small organ,²⁸⁹ the melodian that was an alternative to the piano so popular in American parlors occurred in 1% of Greene County decedents' residences. These 3 melodians ranged from \$30.00 to \$100.00, averaging \$68.34. Fairly costly items, they were located in parlors and probably considered lower middle class substitutes for pianos. They belonged to deceased slave owners who held 12,

²⁸⁷Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 4 December 1857, 4.

²⁸⁸These were invented in Switzerland about 1825. Disk music boxes were a German invention of the 1860s. Rinker, Warman's, 363.

²⁸⁹Ormsbee, Victorian, 385-386.

12, and 91 slaves, more than \$150.00 in total furnishings, and total estate worth between \$10,000.00 and \$100,000.00.

Pianos

The pianos,²⁹⁰ or piano fortes, of such importance in American early Victorian homes²⁹¹ occurred in just over 7% of decedents' residences. Three of these were recorded with stools, another 6 were in houses with piano stools, and another 3 were identified as having covers. All the pianos, stools, and covers were located in parlors. Pianos were valuable, worth up to \$350.00 and averaging \$256.00 each.²⁹² Costly as they were, pianos were recorded among decedents in all slave holding ranges, although 70% were among holders of 40 or more. Similarly, 70% occurred with total furnishings worth more than \$400.00, and total estate worth more than \$20,000.00.

Some idea of the appearance and the supporting furnishings used with pianos can be made from Greene County historic records. Judging from the advertisement of Gowdey and Elliott in Eutaw pianos could be purchased with related furnishings: "To arrive-direct from the Manufactory, one of

²⁹⁰These would have been either square or spinet pianos. Ormsbee, Victorian, 386-389.

²⁹¹Furnas, The Americans, 586.

²⁹²Philadelphia piano forte manufacturer E. N. Scheer advertised piano prices from \$250.00 to \$1,000.00, dependent on size and style of finish. Alabama Beacon, Greensboro, 22 November 1851, 3.

Chickering's latest improved seven Octavo Pianos. Rosewood case. Stool to match, and an elegant French cover--to match."²⁹³ Greene County newspaper advertisements also recorded the availability of mahogany, black walnut, and crotch mahogany pianos.²⁹⁴ Although not recorded in the inventories, another form, the music rack or 'Canterbury',²⁹⁵ like the one bought by Erwin for \$3.00 in 1845, was an occasional adjunct to pianos in the mid-19th century.²⁹⁶

Even though they were uncommon, the importance and prevalence of pianos is revealed in Greene County historical documents. In 1834 Juliet Bestor Coleman, a native of Connecticut, wrote from Greensboro:

The trustees wanted me to teach musick [sic]--& were not a little surprised that I did not understand it.--every girl here thrumbs the piano who is knee-high to a grasshopper. I have often been mortified in answering people who asked me to play.²⁹⁷

Apparently, Greene County residents understood well the importance placed on knowledge of the piano as part of the polite accomplishments of a young lady.²⁹⁸ The importance

²⁹³Eutaw The Alabama Whig, 29 September 1853, 4.

²⁹⁴Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 7 October 1853, 4; 3 January 1846, 4.

²⁹⁵Ormsbee, Victorian, 389-390.

²⁹⁶"Receipt of B. Newhouse." Erwin Papers, ADAH.

²⁹⁷Glass, Connecticut Yankee, 33-34.

²⁹⁸Garrett, 52.

of pianos is further attested to by the regular advertisements of Green County dealers like J. Seligman & Bros. in Greensboro,²⁹⁹ Gowdey & Elliott in Eutaw,³⁰⁰ and J. T. Davis in Greensboro³⁰¹ as well as the Mobile dealer J. H. Snow.³⁰² Piano teachers were also in demand and Charles H. Forster of Greensboro³⁰³ and Charles H. Braune of Eutaw³⁰⁴ obligingly offered their services to ambitious young ladies. Perhaps as a stimulus to the music business in Greene County, the "Mesopotamia Waltz Mazurka" was published in New York in 1855 complete with a lithograph of the Mesopotamia Female Seminary in Eutaw on the cover.³⁰⁵

Accomplished performances required pianos in at least some degree of tune and both A. H. Affleck³⁰⁶ and John W. Smith³⁰⁷ of Greensboro and Charles H. Braune of Eutaw³⁰⁸

²⁹⁹Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 3 May 1845, 3.

³⁰⁰Eutaw The Alabama Whig, 29 September 1853, 4.

³⁰¹Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 7 October 1853, 4.

³⁰²Eutaw The Alabama Whig, 11 June 1857, 4.

³⁰³Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 7 March 1846, 3.

³⁰⁴He was probably a brother to the Eutaw silver smith and jeweler, Gustav Braune. Eutaw The Alabama Whig, 11 June 1857, 1.

³⁰⁵It was composed by Anne B. Hatfield, daughter of the principal. Lancaster, 56-57.

³⁰⁶Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 5 September 1856, 4.

³⁰⁷Greensboro The Alabama Republican, 18 January 1848, 3.

advertised their services as tuners. There is further evidence that some Greene County slave owners took advantage of the opportunity to keep their instruments at least nominally in tune.

Mr. Linsel at work tuning the Piano. He says it is in perfect order this evening. I paid him \$10. which includes work done on the Piano last year.--At the request of Mrs. Means I paid him also \$5. for work done on her piano, as she knew he was coming here and could not make the change to pay him, herself.³⁰⁹

Piano Covers

The existence of piano covers as distinctive forms rather than just any sort of covering which happened to be on pianos is confirmed by an advertisement for their sale by Hubbard and Ellis of Eutaw.³¹⁰ They were unusual, recorded in only 1% of residences. The only piano cover valued was worth \$10.00 and is comparable in price with the \$13.00 Watson paid for one in Mobile in 1845.³¹¹ Piano covers were costly embellishments on expensive items and consequently were associated with the middle and wealthy classes, decedents who owned than 30 slaves,³¹² total

³⁰⁸ Apparently pianos were thought to need tuning twice a year as he offered to tune pianos \$8.00 if paid by the year and \$5.00 per job. Eutaw The Alabama Whig, 3 February 1859, 4.

³⁰⁹ William P. Gould, "Diary," 25 October 1856, Hoole.

³¹⁰ Eutaw The Alabama Whig, 7 June 1855, 3.

³¹¹ "Furniture". Watson Papers.

³¹² All pianos with covers were recorded for owners of 40 or more slaves.

furnishings worth more than \$500.00, and total estate worth more than \$20,000.00.³¹³

Other Musical Instruments

Small, portable musical instruments like the 1 accordion, 1 guitar, 2 flutes, 2 trumpets, and 4 violins or fiddles were present but scarce in the Greene County inventories, occurring in just 2.5% of residences. Decedents owning less than 20 slaves were associated with 90% of musical instruments. They occurred in residences with total furnishings worth over \$150.00 and total estate value ranges above \$1,000.00. While a violin and the guitar were in the same estate, none of the smaller instruments occurred in a residence with a piano or a melodian, revealing that these were alternate means of making music rather than ensemble support for pianos. These small forms could have been bought in Greensboro from Russell's Book Store where there were guitars, banjos, and violins³¹⁴ as well as from Rainey & Prescott, who advertised music boxes, guitars, banjos, violins, flutes, fifes, flageolets, and accordions.³¹⁵ Lessons in the violin, flute, clarinet, and guitar as well as vocal music were available in Greensboro from Michael

³¹³Half the piano covers were in estates with total value over \$175,000.00.

³¹⁴Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 11 May 1860, 3.

³¹⁵Ibid., 11 May 1860, 3.

Hoeffner as early as 1847.³¹⁶ Musical instruments were valuable, the guitar worth \$25.00, a tin trumpet, \$24.00, and violins, an average of \$8.67.

Printed Materials

The presence of books and other printed materials reveals not only a level of literacy that facilitated their use, but also a mode of thinking that asked questions of or sought entertainment from written sources. Public records show that Greene County residents were literate, but the public support, distribution, and identity of printed materials reveals some of the quality of literacy.³¹⁷ Greene County decedents did not need to own books to benefit from reading. By 1860, the county had 60 libraries of miscellaneous content, 25 law libraries, 2 literary libraries, and 20 private libraries which together contained about 25,000 volumes.³¹⁸ Nonetheless, ownership of printed materials appeared in slave holding and total value ranges from lowest to highest.³¹⁹

³¹⁶Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 19 June 1847, 3.

³¹⁷The issue of the quality of southern literacy was discussed by Olmsted. Olmsted, The Cotton Kingdom, 558-560.

³¹⁸These 107 libraries were the property of schools, churches, and private individuals. State of Alabama, Social Census, 1860.

³¹⁹Printed materials occurred only after furnishing value reached \$25.00.

Newspapers, Magazines, and Pamphlets

Printed materials such as newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets which tied readers to the thinking of their contemporaries appeared rarely in the inventories.³²⁰ However, other historical records contributed more information on those ephemeral materials read and supported by Greene County residents. From 1824 through 1860, residents patronized several newspapers, as many as three at once in the early 1850s.³²¹ Some subscribed to such magazines as the London Quarterly Review, Edinburgh Review, Foreign Quarterly, and Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine.³²² Popular mid-19th century American periodicals also appeared in Greene County. In 1855, the editor of the Alabama Beacon noted the arrival of Godey's Lady's Book and promoted it as

³²⁰There was 1 occurrence of magazines and there were 2 of pamphlets.

³²¹These are listed by place of publication and with available dates. Erie: Erie Gazette n.d., Greene County Gazette 1830-1832. Eutaw: Alabama Whig 1853-1861, Democrat 1851, Eutaw Whig and Advertiser 1847, Eutaw Whig and Public Advertiser 1840-1843, Greene County Gazette 1830-1839, Independent Observer 1855-1861. Greensboro: Alabama Beacon 1841-1911, Alabama Miscellaneous Herald 1826, Alabama Republican 1829, Alabama [Greene County] Sentinel 1834-1836, Alabama Spectator and Miscellaneous Recorder 1829, Beacon of Liberty 1835-1839, Halcyon 1823-1824, Greene County Patriot 1825, Republican and Alabama Beacon 1835-1840. Ellison, A Check List of Alabama Imprints 1807-1870, 6, 8; "Newspaper Project County Listing" (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama, 1984).

³²²"1841 Subscription Receipt." Watson Papers. A newspaper advertisement for the Quarterly, the Edinburgh, and Blackwood's appeared in 1860. Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 20 March 1860.

a "very popular and, to the ladies; almost indispensable work" and The Peterson Ladies' Magazine as "interesting and well-conducted."³²³ An 1857 advertisement for another American publication, T. S. Arthur's Home Magazine, appeared in the same newspaper.³²⁴ In May of the next year, Daniel Smith, who lived near Mt. Hebron, recorded in his diary that he had just read the June issue of Harper's Magazine.³²⁵ Finally in what was probably more a show of 'boosterism' than literacy, residents financed the publication of Snedecor's 1856 Directory and Map of Greene County by providing prior subscriptions for over 300 copies before printing.³²⁶

Bibles

Bibles were recorded in less than 5% of residences.³²⁷ This seems a very small number, given the strength and number of churches in Greene County. Perhaps inventory takers viewed Bibles with such respect that they were automatically considered to be property of the heirs. The importance given to the family Bible is evident in Watson's expenditure of

³²³Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 18 June 1855, 2.

³²⁴Ibid., 4 December 1857, 3.

³²⁵From the timing of his reading of the June issue, it might be inferred that delivery of magazines to Greene County was quite efficient. "Diary of Daniel W. W. Smith, 1856-1858," 22 May 1858. Smith Papers, Hoole.

³²⁶Snedecor, 3.

³²⁷The data reported on Bibles are the combination of the data on the forms recorded as Bible, Testament, and family Bible.

\$24.00 for his ornamental or family Bible in 1848.³²⁸ No Bibles in the inventories were this valuable, ranging from \$1.00 to \$8.00 and averaging \$3.04. However, perhaps only the poorer estates required evaluation and sale of Bibles, since 94% of Bibles in inventories belonged to holders of less than 30 slaves and total estate worth under \$17,500.00. Bibles were associated only with total furnishings worth more than \$25.00.

Books

Books occurred in almost 20% of residences,³²⁹ novels were specifically identified in 4 or 1%.³³⁰ Occurrences of books were priced by set, bookcase, or arbitrary combination at sales and could not be individually valued, however the total value of books per residence ranged from \$1.00 to \$250.00 and averaged \$16.06. Books appeared throughout the decedent population in slave owning ranges under 200, total furnishing ranges above \$25.00, and total estate ranges below \$125,000.00.

Beside the obvious location of the library (1 residence), books were recorded in decedents' parlors (5),

³²⁸"Furniture." Watson Papers.

³²⁹The data reported on occurrences of books are the combination of the data on the forms recorded as books, library of books, groups of books by title, bureau with books, and bookcase with books.

³³⁰Novels appeared in the residences of the holders of 10 to 40 slaves and total estates worth \$15,000.00 to \$50,000.00.

sitting room (1), dining rooms (4), and bedroom (1). Watson's papers reveal where some select books were used in his home. "On the parlor center table we have 'Catlins [sic] North American Indians' full of plates in the place of 'Kidders [sic] Brazil' which Sophia [his wife] had put there."³³¹ A few decedents owned more than one collection of books. Alexander Graham had a private library worth \$250.00³³² in addition to a large law library.³³³

The books owned by Greene County decedents had titles representing a wide range of reading interests. In 1858, the estate of John Jackson contained Washington's Writings worth \$14.00, Plutarch's Lives worth \$2.00, and novels worth \$1.32.³³⁴ The estate of William Ferrell contained such varied titles as: Webster's Dictionary, 10 volumes of Franklin's Works, 26 volumes of Cooper's Works, 2 volumes of Cotton's Atlas of the World, 12 volumes of Ames Encyclopedia, 3 volumes of National Portrait Gallery, Expedition to Russia,

³³¹Henry Watson, Jr., to [Julia Watson, East Windsor, CT], L, 7 July 1846. Watson Papers.

³³²"Appraisal of the Estate of Alexander Graham," GCPCR M (8 November 1850): 1-5.

³³³Legal, religious, and medical professional libraries were not included in the data analysis since it could not be ascertained whether or not they constituted part of the furnishings of a residence or part of an office outside the residence.

³³⁴"Sale of the Estate of John T. Jackson," GCPCR R (12 December 1857): 323-324.

Heman's Poems, and 2 volumes of Scottish Chiefs.³³⁵ Other books included a copy of Shakespeare's works,³³⁶ 3 volumes of Bunyan's Works,³³⁷ and a set of Scott's Waverly Novels.³³⁸

Works of reference, travel, and fiction like those recorded in the inventories might have been purchased at Kohnen's Book Store in Greensboro.³³⁹ In 1860, Kohnen's offered Recollections of the Mediterranean & the East, a lecture presented to the Greensboro Lyceum by the Rev. J. M. Bannister.³⁴⁰ In 1851, the Waverly Book-Store in Tuscaloosa solicited orders from a distance and reminded readers "in the surrounding counties, that it contains now, and will continue to contain, one of the best assorted stocks of books in the State of Alabama."³⁴¹ Not surprisingly,

³³⁵"Sale of the Estate of William A. Ferrell," GCPCR S (4 February 1860): 932-935.

³³⁶"Sale of the Estate of D[avid] R. Chiles," GCPCR R (5 December 1857): 297-298.

³³⁷"Sale of the Estate of Edward Mayes," GCPCR L (15 August 1848): 150-153.

³³⁸These sold for the high price of \$4.00. "Sale of the Estate of Richard Croom," GCPCR L (30 October 1849): 695-704.

³³⁹The store advertised biographies, travel books, and Bibles. Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 1 June 1855, 3.

³⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 20 March 1860, 4.

³⁴¹*Ibid.*, 18 October 1851, 3.

New York book dealers like E. Walker also competed with local sources for Greene County business.³⁴²

Miscellaneous Forms

The miscellaneous forms are items representing a variety of human needs and interests. Scientific instruments reveal an inquiring mind; fly brushes and spittoons, desire for sanitation; mantle ornaments, vases, and flower pots, delight in embellishment of the home; sewing machines, desire for efficiency and release from the tedious task of sewing. Appearance of these forms indicates a degree of Greene County conformity with American customs and new inventions of the time.

Scientific Instruments

The term scientific instruments was used to analyze data for thermometer (8 occurrences), telescope (1), and microscope (2) which, except for thermometers, probably represent educational devices for children or teachers. Scientific instruments occurred in 3% of decedents' residences, worth \$1.00 to \$5.00 and averaging \$2.54. Scientific instruments belonged to Greene County decedents across all slave ownership and total estate value ranges, including the highest and lowest. However, most (60%) were

³⁴²Ibid., 17 January 1846, 3.

associated with total furnishings worth more than \$500.00.³⁴³

Occurrence of these scientific devices indicates questioning minds interested in the surrounding world. But the frequency of thermometers reveals more prosaic minds, those of farmers concerned with temperatures affecting their agricultural ventures. For some planters this was so important that they kept diaries in which records of temperature and other weather conditions made up most of the entries.³⁴⁴ Revealing similar interests in his pursuit of an acceptable thermometer, Watson paid \$.75 for one in 1845, \$2.00 for another in 1854, and \$7.75 for still another in 1859.³⁴⁵ His purchase in May 1856 of a pair of globes [geographic and astronomic?] for \$20.00, a camera obscura for \$12.00, and a microscope for \$15.00 was probably for his children's edification.³⁴⁶

Sanitary Devices

Fly brushes. Fly brushes were in 2.5% of decedents' residences, valued from \$1.00 to \$5.00 and with an average of \$2.34. They appeared twice in dining rooms and once in a

³⁴³All of the scientific instruments associated with total furnishings worth more than \$500.00 were thermometers.

³⁴⁴See William P. Gould, "Diaries," Hoole.

³⁴⁵"Furniture." Watson Papers.

³⁴⁶Ibid.

parlor. Fly brushes occurred throughout the slave ownership ranges, although 58% belonged to the holders of less than 10 slaves. They were recorded in estates with total furnishings worth over \$150.00 and total value over \$2,500.00. At Hill of Howth Plantation, the fly brush that blinded William Gould at the dining table must have been held in the hands of a servant rather than mounted on the ceiling.³⁴⁷ These, and probably the 2 occurrences of peacock feathers, reveal means of coping with the flies that plagued American life before the common use of screens in windows.³⁴⁸

Spittoons. Spittoons were recorded in 5% of residences.³⁴⁹ They were relatively inexpensive, worth \$1.00 to \$4.00 with an average of \$1.56 per occurrence. Spittoons were not, however, the prerogative of finicky 'rich folk', since they occurred in slave owning ranges under 200, in total furnishing value ranges over \$50.00, and in total estate value ranges between \$1,000.00 and \$250,000.00.

Spittoons were associated with some wealthy decedents who may have tried to cope with a common, disagreeable habit. The well-furnished home of Alexander Graham also had spittoons in public rooms, a crockery pair in the parlor and

³⁴⁷William P. Gould, "Diary," 4 May 1854, Hoole.

³⁴⁸For a discussion of how 19th-century Americans dealt with flies see Garrett, 202-205.

³⁴⁹In 5 occurrences, spittoons were recorded in pairs.

a tin pair in the sitting room.³⁵⁰ Watson's elegant home contained a pair of bronzed spittoons in the upstairs hall, an earthen spittoon in the north front (best) bedroom, two brass spittoons in the dining room, and still another in his third store room. That there were none in the library, his office, suggests that he did not indulge in spitting.³⁵¹ Perhaps Watson hoped his collection of spittoons would appear hospitable but discourage visitors from spitting on the floor.

Ornamental Objects

Mantle ornaments. Mantle ornaments were diverse forms such as flower pots and the "1 Toy Glass Dog on Mantle" (\$.10) in Watson's South Back Room³⁵² selected to add interest and delight to interior spaces. The pair of mantle ornaments worth \$2.00 and described as 'chandelier' and another pair described as 'glass' were both in parlors and possibly girandoles. They may however, have been glass vases with prisms, called lustres,³⁵³ which contributed the sparkle so desired by 19th century Americans in their interiors. In September of 1836, John Foy purchased, for a

³⁵⁰His total furnishings were worth over \$1,500.00. "Appraisal of the Estate of Alexander Graham," GCPCR M (8 November 1850): 1-5.

³⁵¹"1866 Inventory." Watson.

³⁵²"1866 Inventory." Watson.

³⁵³Rinker, Warman's, 267-268.

"Lady," another type of mantle ornament: "1 pr Chimney ornaments/Flower Pots 5.00" from Kirksey's store in Greensboro.³⁵⁴ The pair of glass flower pots in a decedent's sitting room may well have also been mantle ornaments,³⁵⁵ possibly even of the lacy glass type produced by the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company.³⁵⁶ Probably beautiful objects in themselves, these flower pots may also reveal the beginnings of the interest in indoor plants exhibited by Americans in the second half of the 19th century.³⁵⁷

Recorded in only 11 residences (3%), mantle ornaments were frequently identified as pairs and located in parlors (3 residences) and a sitting room (1). Worth no more than \$2.00 per pair, items described as mantle ornaments had little value. But flower pots were worth more, an average of \$6.00 per pair. Both mantle ornaments and flower pots were recorded for decedents who owned more than 10 slaves, more than \$300.00 in total furnishings, and total estate worth more than \$12,500.00.

³⁵⁴"Day Book." Kirksey Papers, Hoole.

³⁵⁵This pair was the most expensive occurrence of flower pots, worth \$10.00.

³⁵⁶Ruth Webb Lee, Sandwich Glass (Wellesley Hills, MA: Lee Publications, 1966), frontispiece.

³⁵⁷Garrett, 73.

Flower vases. Flower vases were very likely used as mantle ornaments in Greene County decedents' residences and were associated with wealthier decedents who owned more than 20 slaves, \$300.00 in total furnishings, and \$20,000.00 in total estate. In the sitting rooms and parlors in 5 residences (2%), they were usually identified as pairs. Flower vases were rather valuable, averaging \$7.25 per pair.

Although none of the decedents' residences had more than 1 pair of flower vases, the "1866 Inventory" of Watson's Greensboro house contained "2 Small Blue Vases" (\$.50) and "1 Shoe Vase" (\$.25) in the south back room, "1 Flower Vase" (\$.75) and "2 Flower Vases" (\$3.00) in the parlor, and "1 pr. flower vases" (\$1.25) in the sitting room.³⁵⁸ A single flower vase and another pair were identified as 'glass',³⁵⁹ but the others could have been like the "Rich Gilt China Vases" advertised by Matthew Pellegrini in 1860.³⁶⁰ The presence of single vases of little value, like those in Watson's parlor probably reveals the American practice in the 1830s and 1840s of displaying small tight bouquets of mixed

³⁵⁸"1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

³⁵⁹These could have been American pressed glass of the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company type. See Lee, 481-486.

³⁶⁰Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 20 March 1860, 4.

flowers.³⁶¹ Larger vases could be used singly on center tables,³⁶² or in pairs on mantles.³⁶³

Sewing Machines

It was not until after 1853 that sewing machines were produced in such numbers that many Americans could acquire them.³⁶⁴ The wealthy slave owners of Greene County were apparently viewed as good potential customers by the manufacturers of these new labor saving devices, for as early as 1857 Singer machines³⁶⁵ were advertised in the Alabama Beacon.³⁶⁶ In 1858, the Grover and Baker³⁶⁷ as well as Empire³⁶⁸ brands appeared in a Greensboro newspaper.³⁶⁹ In 1859, Quaker City sewing machines³⁷⁰ were offered in

³⁶¹For illustrations of these see, Garrett, 55; Peterson, American Interiors, plate 71.

³⁶²See Peterson, American Interiors, plate 73.

³⁶³See *ibid.*, plates 91, 93.

³⁶⁴Grace Rogers Cooper, The Invention of the Sewing Machine (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1968), 24.

³⁶⁵Singer machines began to be made in 1851. Cooper, 73.

³⁶⁶Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 19 June 1857, 3.

³⁶⁷Grover and Baker sewing machines were made from 1851 to 1875. Cooper, 69.

³⁶⁸Empire sewing machines were made from circa 1860 to 1870. Cooper, 68.

³⁶⁹Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 4 June 1858, 3.

³⁷⁰Quaker City Machines were made from 1859 to circa 1861. Cooper, 72.

Eutaw for only \$35.00.³⁷¹ Those Greene County residents who could afford them apparently bought sewing machines as soon as they were available, one appearing in an inventory as early as 1858.

Sewing machines were, however, rare items, occurring in only 4 (1%) of residences. Sewing machines were recorded twice in bedrooms and once in a sitting room in the inventories.³⁷² Their appraised values of \$75.00 to \$120.00 (\$98.75 average) are in line with the mid-19th century price of \$125.00 for a machine complete with stand.³⁷³ Watson may have bought one of the Quaker City machines, since he paid \$35.00 for a sewing machine in 1858.³⁷⁴ These expensive sewing machines were the property of wealthy decedents who owned more than 70 slaves, total furnishings worth more than \$470.00, and total estate worth more than \$78,000.00. Because of their cost and utility, ownership of a sewing machine must have carried considerable status in Greene County.

³⁷¹Eutaw The Alabama Whig, 3 February 1859, 3.

³⁷²Watson kept his sewing machine in a bedroom. "1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

³⁷³This was the price of a complete Wheeler, Wilson & Co. machine in 1853. Cooper, 28.

³⁷⁴"Furniture." Watson Papers.

Summation

Perhaps more than furniture, non-furniture furnishings reveal the thinking and behavior of Greene County decedents. Analysis of the furnishings in the probate records reveals that Greene County early Victorian interiors were not cluttered. This is characteristic of American interiors of the 1830s and 1840s, where highly figured carpets set the character of the room for restrained drapery, upholstery, and massive furniture. But the scarcity of purely decorative forms like girandoles and vases suggests that homes were perhaps still considered more as 'machines for living' than places for spiritual refreshment and socio-economic display.

American furnishing practices are revealed in the apparent seasonal change of carpet and drapery in some homes, the variety and types of floor coverings and lighting equipment used, and even the ways they seem to have displayed flowers. Greene County decedents also owned the spittoons, clocks, looking glasses, didactic art work, family and political portraits, and stoves which were part of the homes of other Americans of the period.

In spite of all the detail in the probate records, it is difficult to detect the role of women through the furnishings. Foot stoves were commonly associated with women in the period. Most table covers were recorded in the inventories of female decedents. And, women took part in the creation of bedding, curtains, and floor coverings. But the

subjects of art works recorded in Greene County homes infer a masculine taste which may represent limited female input into the purchase of all furnishings.

Furnishing forms which were costly, represented new technology, or required expendable substances (e.g., lamp oil or candles) for use were associated with wealthy decedents. Lamps of all sorts, branched candlesticks, girandoles, chandeliers, and hanging or passage lamps were usually property of the rich. Pianos, melodians, and music boxes were also owned by the wealthy. Although popular, most carpets, rugs, straw matting, and oil cloths were associated with wealth. The same was true for paintings, sculpture, fancy mantle clocks, pier glasses, and mirrors. Finally, the costly new inventions, sewing machines, were owned only by rich decedents.

Given the wealth of Greene County decedents, their homes showed surprisingly little concern for simple management of comfort. Candlesticks were far from abundant and snuffers to control the steadiness of candle light were almost totally absent. The lack of lamp mats suggests, at best, an indifference to the protection of the tops of furniture on which lamps and candlesticks were places. Only a third of the decedents had any sort of decorative, protective, or comfort-enhancing floor covering recorded in their homes. Most decedents owned the minimum equipment for their

fireplaces (e.g., andirons) but not the pokers, shovels, tongs, and fenders used to manage fires.

So many of the refinements of American early and mid-19th century home life are missing from decedents' inventories that Olmsted's assumption of a general lack of culture in the South might be substantiated. Decorative objects like girandoles, flower vases, and art work were very rare. Aside from pianos, musical instruments were also scarce. The absence of crumb cloths, used to protect the dining room floor, suggests an indifference to the condition and appearance of the home. Although at least 20% owned books of various types and some cared enough to own thermometers and have their daughters taught music, they may have cared more for the appearance of these things than the meaning.

On the whole, the decedents appear to have been pragmatic planters, buying useful things like thermometers and sewing machines. Their favorite form of art work was the utilitarian map. Perhaps most of the decedents had been too cautious, unsophisticated, or economically insecure to indulge in the grandest, most elegant furnishings available in the 1850s.

CHAPTER VII

INTERIOR SPACES

This chapter presents results of the analysis of the Greene County probate inventory data on the occurrence and nature of interior spaces within decedents' residences. The probate records reveal interior furnishings for discrete function interior spaces¹ in residences (e.g., parlors) as well as minimum subsistence (e.g., furnishings in dowers) and small dwellings. Some discrete function interior spaces with itemized contents were identified frequently enough in the inventories to permit observation of some furnishing conventions practiced in those spaces.²

The discrete function spaces selected for analysis were the passage, parlor, sitting room, dining room, and bedroom. These were the spaces most frequently identified in the probate records as well as in mid-19th century American publications. Interior spaces recorded only once in the inventories and not analyzed are the office, library, and dressing room. Because kitchens in Greene County residences were not commonly housed within residential structures, they

¹These were the utilitarian form dependent variable interior space.

²In interpreting these data, it was necessary to remember that occasionally the interior space assemblages may have been augmented by the gathering together of 'sets' of furnishings (especially chairs and lighting forms) for the convenience of inventory takers.

were not included in this study. These interior spaces were correlated with utilitarian forms, other utilitarian form dependent variables, and estate economic dependent variables.

Insights into Greene County interior furnishing practices are based on discernable patterns of occurrence and characteristics of furniture and other non-furniture furnishings. These patterns of occurrence permit identification of assemblages, or what Ames has called 'horizontal constellations',³ of furnishings within interior spaces which reveal Greene County furnishing practices. Identification of furnishing assemblages also permit comparison of Greene County practices⁴ with those identified in American mid-19th century publications.⁵

In Greene County inventories, some discrete interior spaces with itemized furnishings were recorded more frequently than others. The probate records identified the

³Ames, "Hall Furnishings," 209.

⁴Comparison of the practices of the wealthy deceased slave owners with those presented in the publications should be valid, since these publications were addressed to the tastes and needs of wealthy and middle class Americans. See Furnas, 559.

⁵These publications were Godey's Lady's Book, January 1845-June 1854; Godey's Book and Magazine, July 1854-December 1860; The Peterson Magazine, January 1845-December 1860; Andrew Jackson Downing, The Architecture of Country Houses, (D. Appleton and Company 1850; repr., New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1969; Eliza Leslie, Miss Leslie's Lady's House-Book, (Philadelphia: A. Hart, 1853); Calvert Vaux, Villas and Cottages, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1857; repr., New York: DaCapo Press, 1968); Gervase Wheeler, Rural Homes, (New York: Charles Scribner, 1851). The above are hereafter referred to as American publications.

passage in 5 (1.5%) residences, the parlor in 34 (10.5%), the sitting room in 10 (3.3%), the dining room in 28 (8.6%), and the presence of at least 1 bedroom in 29 (8.9%). There were 28 residences with at least 2 identified bedrooms; 21, at least 3; 11, at least 4; 6, at least 5; 5, at least 6. The appearances of parlors, dining rooms, and bedrooms provided the greatest amount of information on furnishing. Over .2% of all recorded utilitarian forms in the inventories were identified with passages; 4.0%, with parlors; 1.1%, with sitting rooms; 2.8%, with dining rooms; 9.1%, with bedrooms. Of all furnishing items, 2.7% were recorded for a space identified as the first bedroom; 2.7% for the second; 1.7% for the third; .9% for the fourth; .5% for the fifth; .3%, for the sixth.

Interior furnishing historians have recognized that the quantity, utility, and appearance of furnishings in interior spaces at various times in history were governed by plans or conventions based on special requirements.⁶ Although most assemblages of interior furnishings were probably accumulated haphazardly,⁷ the assemblages were governed by conventions based first on provision for subsistence, and second (as Ray has pointed out), by social customs, cultural environment,

⁶Peter Thornton, Seventeenth-Century Interior Decoration in England, France and Holland (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), vii.

⁷See George Savage, A Concise History of Interior Decoration (New York: Grosset & Dunlap Publishers, 1966), 7.

and the changes of fashion.⁸ Ames established the identity of the assemblage of moveable furnishings in an interior as a 'horizontal constellation' of artifacts serving as an index "of the attitudes, values, and patterns of behavior of a relatively limited duration."⁹

Examination of the constellations of recorded forms within interior spaces reveal the utilitarian function, social function, and physical appearance of these spaces in Greene County. The furnishing assemblages analyzed were comprised of utilitarian forms identified in the interior spaces, but only those which would have been regularly visible (i.e., items kept in sight, not stored inside drawers or cabinets). Some conclusions about patterns of furnishing practice were based on forms consistently recorded (e.g., furniture forms and some large furnishings like carpets) in discrete interior spaces.

Since Ray has identified the furnished house as an artifact of society with an identifiable purpose or 'agenda',¹⁰ the same should be true of the assemblage of furnishings in a discrete interior space. Furnishing assemblages should be viewed as landscapes of artifacts

⁸Ray, 734.

⁹Ames, "Hall Furnishings," 209.

¹⁰Ray, 23.

conveying societal metaphors¹¹ (e.g., a dining table and 12 chairs in a dining room represents provision for group eating). Examination of interior furnishing constellations, like all 'goods', reveals both the requirements of subsistence and of established social relationships.¹² From a functionalist viewpoint, furnishings reveal the activities and supporting equipment expected for the utilization of an interior space¹³ (e.g., the occurrence of a dining table in a dining room). However, examination of interior constellations can also reveal unanticipated activities¹⁴ within discrete interior spaces (e.g., sofas in dining rooms).

The revelations of social behavior derived from furnishing constellations are dependent on the assumption of determinist architectural theory "that the social behavior of building users is influenced, even determined, by the physical environment in which the behavior occurs."¹⁵ Ames has pointed out that material culture reveals both social and psychological realities of the past and provides "insights

¹¹St. George, "Introduction," Material Life in America, 7.

¹²Douglas and Isherwood, The World of Goods, 60.

¹³Alan Lipman, "The Architectural Belief System and Social Behavior," in Designing for Human Behavior: Architecture and the Behavioral Sciences, 23.

¹⁴An Inventory of the Contents of the Governor's Palace Taken after the Death of Lord Botetourt, 4.

¹⁵See Lipman, 23.

into the processes of cognition and communication."¹⁶

Grier observed:

People furnishing a room not only made a set of selections based on the constraints of economics and the dimensions of interior space; they also made selections based on an understanding of what that room was supposed to include and signify.¹⁷

Thornton's statement that at any point in time a "certain degree of density in the arrangement of the furniture is regarded as generally acceptable at that moment"¹⁸ provides an example of such understanding of furnishing proprieties. But the furnishing constellations carried symbolic messages as well, recording the conscious or unconscious aspirations of the inhabitants¹⁹ as well as memorializing events in cultural²⁰ and/or personal history.

Upton recognized that the inhabitants of houses convey a "visual 'image' of their lives in the arrangement of their activities within space and against an architectural backdrop."²¹ Visitors to houses found:

spaces organized in a way that they could easily comprehend. A variety of signals--the contents of

¹⁶Ames, "Hall Furnishings," 208.

¹⁷Grier, 13.

¹⁸Thornton, Authentic Decor, 8.

¹⁹Grier, 12.

²⁰Ibid., 15.

²¹Upton, "Early Vernacular Architecture in Southeastern Virginia," 126.

rooms, their location and size--suggested to them a name for each one.²²

Even though discrete interior spaces were established by location and furnishing constellations, 18th and 19th century Americans exercised some flexibility in the sequence of these spaces without altering their identity.²³ By the middle of the 19th century, there was "general agreement on the kinds of rooms and their functions."²⁴ At the same time, the identity and role of interior spaces became increasingly specialized and led to an established sequence of spaces according to degrees of privacy.

The usual layout consisted, on the first floor, of a front porch and an entrance hall and stairs, a front parlor or drawing room for the entertainment of guests, a family room (sitting room), a dining room, and often a bedroom for 'age and sickness'. . . . If the family had some wealth, the house would also have a library, often with a side door leading to the garden. On the second floor would usually be three or four bedrooms, a nursery, and a bath.²⁵

The relationships of identified horizontal constellations of furnishings with discrete interior spaces was well understood in mid-19th century America, when Downing wrote:

²²Ibid., 117.

²³See Garrett, 265.

²⁴Clark, American Family Home, 1800-1960, xiii.

²⁵Clifford E. Clark, Jr., "Domestic Architecture as an Index to Social History: The Romantic Revival and the Cult of Domesticity in America," in Material Life in America, 542.

Furniture in "good keeping" . . . befits the uses for which it and the apartment in which it is placed are intended. Thus, the furniture of the hall, however correct, would not be in good keeping with the dining-room, nor the furniture of the dining-room in keeping with the library.²⁶

The significance of the components of furnishing constellations for discrete interior spaces were so recognizable in the mid-19th century that Mark Twain had Huckleberry Finn characterize the Grangerford's parlor in Mississippi by remarking: "There warn't no bed in the parlor, not a sign of a bed; but heaps of parlors in towns has beds in them."²⁷

The Passage

Passage was the term usually used in Greene County probate records to describe hallways, the interior space providing transition to the outside world and between other rooms. In structures of more than one story passages were often also the location of staircases to other levels. Gervase Wheeler recommended that Southern houses "have wide and spacious halls,--spacious only, however, where ventilation can be served."²⁸ Greene County residences

²⁶Downing, 408.

²⁷Mark Twain, Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1885), 723, quoted in Garrett, 52.

²⁸Wheeler, Rural Homes, 134.

commonly had those wide passages associated with the Southern need to temper a hot climate.²⁹

Passages and their furnishings served both functional and symbolic roles for 19th century Americans. Passages were either narrow places for movement through space or wider spaces used for living.³⁰ The large passage of southern residences was especially suited for use as a sitting room, a practice common in many American 18th and 19th century homes.³¹ It was a place where apparel and accessories for out-of-doors were kept ready for convenient use, where appearance could be checked in mirrors before leaving or upon entering the residence, and where visitors or servants could wait without disturbing life within the other rooms of the house.³² The passage was also a statement of social station and privilege which provided shelter from the elements and welcome for family and friends.³³ As early as the 1850s, American Victorians used the highly visible artifacts in their passages as symbols in the social competition characteristic of their era.³⁴

²⁹See Gamble, The Alabama Catalog, 16.

³⁰See Ames, "Hall Furnishings," 212.

³¹Garrett, 38.

³²Green and Perry, The Light of the Home, 95.

³³Ames, "Hall Furnishings," 221.

³⁴*Ibid.*

Occurrence

In the Greene County probate records, passages were identified in 9 inventories, 1 of these containing 2 passages.³⁵ Passages were recorded in the homes of wealthy decedents who owned more than 20 slaves,³⁶ total residential furnishings worth more than \$200.00,³⁷ and total estates worth more than \$75,000.00.³⁸

Furniture and Furnishings

Furnishing forms identified in the passage by the Greene County Probate Court Records suggest that the space was sparsely furnished. Chair (1 passage with a set of 12), table (1), and hat rack (2) were the only furniture forms recorded. The furnishing forms were lamp (4 passages), passage lamp (1), candlestick (1), map (2), painting (2 in 1 passage), and carpet (5). Four of the five carpets identified were oil cloth, as was a stair

³⁵The term passage represents the data identified in the inventories as passage, hall, and foyer. Frequency was identified as the occurrence and number of interior spaces.

³⁶Interior spaces were correlated with the number of slaves held by the decedent who occupied the residence in which the spaces were recorded.

³⁷Interior spaces were correlated with the total value of residential furnishings held by the decedent who occupied the residence in which the spaces were recorded.

³⁸Interior spaces were correlated with the total value of the estate held by the decedent who occupied the residence in which the spaces were recorded.

carpet.³⁹ American publications suggested a greater variety of forms for furnishing a passage. They recommended the bench, settee, and chair as seating forms; the table and folding table as surface forms; the wall bracket, cabinet, hat rack, and umbrella rack as storage forms.⁴⁰

Passage Constellations

Greene County residences contained a limited range and small quantity of furnishing forms in the passage. The most extensively furnished passage in the county was recorded in the 1855 inventory of Col. Samuel Pickens' (owner of 174 slaves) mansion house at his plantation called 'Umbria'. It contained 1 hat rack, 1 passage lamp, and 2 maps.⁴¹

Henry Watson's records, which are not probate records, reveal at least 1 Greene County passage which was more elaborately furnished. His hall and piazza, reached by a story-high flight of stairs from the ground, was furnished with more variety. These spaces contained 4 arm chairs, oil cloth carpet, 2 door rugs, a three-door bookcase, a hall lamp, a walnut hat stand, a pair of bronzed spittoons,

³⁹The variable textile identified the construction and resulting appearance of carpets.

⁴⁰There were no reclining forms recommended for passages. American publications.

⁴¹"Appraisal of the Estate of Col. Samuel Pickens," GCPCR P (9 November 1855): 677-690.

a silver-plated bell pull, a pair of foot scrapers, a manilla door mat, 4 willow chairs on the piazza, and a hobby horse.⁴²

Antebellum American publications presented far more information on passage furnishings than the Greene County documents. The furnishing constellation recommended in 1850 by Godey's is as scanty as that of Greene County passages.

A set of hall furniture, comprising a hat-stand, chairs, and folding table, of finely sawed and highly polished oak The stand is furnished with a small oval mirror, receptacle for umbrellas, etc., etc. The halls of houses in the country generally receive little attention, being considered, or most often described, simply as a 'passage'.⁴³

In contrast, Gervase Wheeler suggested that the passage of a country house should have:

. . . a settle, either of heavy wood, with carved claw and high back, or one of the light, easy bamboo seats, the Berrians delight in presenting in such variety of form and size; a chair or two, of comfortable form, and of lightness such as may be carried out upon the veranda, when an extra seat is wanted; Indian matting upon the floor, an iron hat and umbrella-stand, a bracket or two for flower-vases, a folding bracket-table against the wall for occasional use, a thermometer and a weather-glass, with perhaps a cabinet of dried grasses, or other little museum curiosities, will be all that can be needed to render that portion⁴⁴ of house home-like, characteristic, and comfortable.

⁴²"1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

⁴³"New Furniture," Godey's, February 1850, 152.

⁴⁴Messrs. Berrian, on Broadway in New York, produced rattan and cane furniture. Wheeler, 191-192, 196-197.

The activities implied by the furnishings in Wheeler's description reveal that the passage probably played a more varied role in life in a country residence than suggested by Godey's and the probate records.

The passage furnishings in the homes of probated decedents had much in common with those of their northern contemporaries. Passages in decedents' residences, like those of other 19th century Americans, were predominately floored with oil cloth.⁴⁵ But, the Greene County records reveal the distinctive presence of lighting equipment, perhaps kept ready for lighting night time arrivals and departures. In Greene County, it also appears that passages were considered appropriate places for the display of art forms. However, neither the inventories nor the American publications record the tea tables and storage presses Garrett reported in American passages.⁴⁶

The Parlor

The parlor, according to Webster's Dictionary in 1855, was "the room in a house which the family usually occupy, and where they receive common visitors, as distinguished from a drawing-room set apart for the reception of company."⁴⁷ Similarly in 1851, it was defined as "the

⁴⁵Garrett, 34.

⁴⁶Ibid., 38.

⁴⁷Webster's Dictionary.

room appropriated to the common meeting and intercourse of the family."⁴⁸ These 19th century definitions differ from that provided by 20th century scholars like Wright, who identified the parlor as the place "where the family entertained visitors" as opposed to the sitting room which "was for more intimate family gatherings in the evenings."⁴⁹ Some Americans reminiscing about 19th century parlors pictured it as a place that was visited, but not lived in.⁵⁰ But in 19th century Greene County and American documents, the mid-19th century American parlor appears to have had two incarnations; a family sanctuary in some homes but a place of public display in others.

In antebellum America, parlors provided opportunities for the display of wealth and social position to visitors. In a time when human companionship provided a major form of entertainment, parlor furnishings were a means for organizing both social hierarchy and activity in the space. Center tables were central islands in a "frozen formality"⁵¹ established by the rigid social caste system

⁴⁸Charles Richardson, A New Dictionary of the English Language (Philadelphia: E. H. Butler & Co., 1851).

⁴⁹Gwendolyn Wright, Building the Dream, 77.

⁵⁰See Garrett, 60.

⁵¹Ibid., 59-60.

of the sofa, gentleman's chair, and lady's chair.⁵² These forms were surrounded by small, armless, intentionally uncomfortable parlor chairs.⁵³ As uninviting as formal parlor furniture may have been, it served the purpose of seating guests before and after dinner, and was capable of arrangement for special events like card playing or musical entertainments.⁵⁴ Merchants and taste-makers encouraged these parlor conventions by publishing reports on parlor furnishing practices and fashions for those who desired and could afford them.⁵⁵

Some American authors advocated that the primary role of parlors should be to provide comfortable places for living and working.⁵⁶ Handlin found that some Victorians regarded the parlor as the center of family life which in turn focused on the center table as the symbol of the family circle.⁵⁷ Periodicals like Godey's and The Peterson Magazine advised women to make their parlors

⁵²Green and Perry, 97-98.

⁵³Grier, 105.

⁵⁴See Symonds and Whineray, 72.

⁵⁵"Parlor Furnishing," Godey's, April 1855, 381.

⁵⁶See Alice B. Neal, "Furnishing-Or Two Ways of Commencing Life," Godey's, November 1850, 302 ff.

⁵⁷David P. Handlin, The American Home: Architecture and Society, 1815-1915 (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), 19.

places for the production and display of their own handwork.

A pleasant summer parlor, with its fluttering muslin curtains and vases of fresh flowers, never seems to us quite comfortable without its basket of needlework on some window seat or sofa corner. We are old-fashioned enough to like the white work ladies used to employ themselves about.⁵⁸

The white work, or undergarments, could be worked on in the parlor without danger to propriety, for no gentlemen would ever ask a lady to describe what she was stitching.⁵⁹ Apparently, the industriousness of women resulted in a proliferation of handwork doilies, tidies, and antimacassars. Those furniture covers were common enough by 1855 for Fanny Smith to turn her wrath on tidies.

Unfortunately these public nuisances have degenerated into the exact reverse of the name fashion has falsely appropriated to them, as may be seen by the untidy litter they cause in almost every room we chance to enter.⁶⁰

Her solution to the problem was not, however, to eradicate tidies, but to see to it the they were made in matching sets to fit precisely the pieces of furniture for which they were intended.⁶¹

⁵⁸"Parlor-work" Godey's, June 1853, 571.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Fanny Smith, "Sets of Ornamental Covering," The Peterson Magazine, March 1855, 245.

⁶¹Ibid.

Occurrence

Parlors were recorded in the residences of 34 Greene County decedents.⁶² The interior space parlor was not associated only with the wealthy, for it was recorded for decedents in all slave owning ranges, with total furnishings worth more than \$50.00, and with total estates worth more than \$75,000.00.

Furniture

Greene County Probate Court records indicate that parlors were furnished with a great variety of furniture forms. Seating furniture forms identified for the parlor were stool (3 parlors, 1 with a pair), ottoman (3, each occurrence of pairs), chair (37, including 13 sets of 6 generic chairs, 9 sets of 12, 1 set each of 18 and 24, and 5 parlors with 2 occurrences each), rocking chair (13, 4 with pairs), arm chair (2), sofa (19, 1 with a pair), settee (2, both with pairs), and divan (2, both with pairs). The only parlor reclining form, lounge (1 recorded as black), was recorded in 3 parlors. The surface furniture forms were table (6 parlors, including 3 pairs and 1 set of 4 tables), candle stand (6), card table (4, 2 with pairs), center table (17), pair of pier tables (1), work table (2), tea table (2, a set of 4 and a set of 6), folding table (1), and side table (a pair in 1). The

⁶²The term parlor represents the data for the parlor and drawing room.

storage forms were bookcase (2 parlors), secretary (2), sideboard (1), and whatnot (2).

The physical characteristics⁶³ of Greene County parlor furniture reveal some decided preferences. Maple was recorded as the wood used for the chair and rocking chair forms. However, mahogany was far more common, identified for 8 occurrences of chair, 3 of rocking chair, 1 of arm chair, 2 of sofa, 1 of candle stand, 1 of bookcase, and 1 of center table with marble top. Marble tops occurred in parlors on 1 table, 5 center tables, and a pair of side tables. A mahogany center table with marble top valued at \$40.00 was the most expensive center table recorded. Although the inventories make no mention of the color of the marble furniture tops, Godey's in 1855 reported: "the most elegant [marble tops] being of yellow of Sienna marble, which is twice the cost of an ordinary white slab."⁶⁴ In 1850, the Coleman residence was newly adorned with "a very superb Egyptian [sic] marble slab center table" which with other furniture "much surpasses any in Eutaw."⁶⁵ The only iron rocking chair identified in the inventories may have been prized as a novelty

⁶³These are the utilitarian form dependent variables structural material, seating material, textile, surface treatment, and style.

⁶⁴"New Furniture," Godey's, 152-153.

⁶⁵Glass, Connecticut Yankee, 69.

appropriate for the parlor, rather than an established convention for the use of iron furniture.

In 1855, standard utilitarian furniture forms for the parlor in American periodicals were described by Godey's.

Parlor furniture usually comes in sets or suites, as is the general term, all or any piece of which can be purchased separately, consisting of sofa or square tables, sofa, lounge, chairs, cabinet of mahogany, black walnut, or rose-wood, covered by hair-cloth, satin-laine, plush, or brocatelle, according to price. Mantle and pier mirrors, pictures, bronze, alabaster, China, and Parian figures, groups, and vases are considered decorations.⁶⁶

Mid-19th century American publications presented a large variety of parlor furniture forms. In addition to those forms recorded in Greene County inventoried parlors, they identified easy chairs, reclining chairs, work chairs,⁶⁷ foot benches, sofa tables, plant stands, work basket stands, armoires, bureaus, cabinets, and hanging whatnots.⁶⁸ Wright has noted that by 1840 the bookshelf was an important piece of American parlor furniture, associated with increased literacy among women and found in most parlors.⁶⁹

⁶⁶"Parlor Furnishing," Godey's, April 1855, 381.

⁶⁷These had drawers beneath the seats for needlework storage and were described as "parlor chair[s], with a work bag under the seat." "Cottage Furniture," Godey's, March 1852, 162.

⁶⁸American publications.

⁶⁹Gwendolyn Wright, 78.

Comparison of furniture woods recorded in the parlors of Greene County decedents with woods mentioned in American publications revealed a preference for mahogany. Rosewood and black walnut were presented as appropriate for parlor furniture in the publications.⁷⁰ No rosewood furniture was identified in the inventories. Rather, mahogany was the most frequently identified and most costly wood. Some rosewood furniture was recorded in Greene County for in 1859, Watson purchased 2 low arm rosewood rocking chairs in New York for \$12.00.⁷¹ This esteem for mahogany was probably not a Greene County idiosyncrasy. In 1860, Godey's had a fictitious businessman bring home "six mahogany and hair-cloth [chairs], with a sofa to match . . . he thought it reflected credit on his business standing to have mahogany furniture in his parlor."⁷²

Probate records provided only terse descriptions of the seat materials⁷³ used on Greene County parlor seating forms. Parlor chairs were identified as having cane, reed, split, stool, sofa, or figured seats. The upholstery textile plush was recorded for the forms divan and rocking chair and damask for ottomans. However, greater insight

⁷⁰"New Furniture", 152-153.

⁷¹"Furniture." Watson Papers.

⁷²Alice B. Haven, "Mrs. Bowen's Parlor and Spare Bedroom," Godey's, January 1860, 137.

⁷³Seat material referred to the substance or fiber used to create or decoratively cover seating surfaces.

into the textiles and woods used for American upholstered parlor furniture during the period is available from an 1855 passage in Godey's.

The sofas and ordinary chairs are covered with satin damask, crimson and black, and deeply tufted, or knotted The frames are of rosewood Frames of the same shape, and covered with velvet, plush or hair-cloth, may be procured. Mahogany is the established accompaniment of hair-cloth, however. The lounging, or arm-chair, has a richly embroidered covering of plain damask; the bouquets are life-like in color and execution, rivaling the far-famed labors of our grandmothers. Indeed, this kind of needlework is once more the fashion.⁷⁴

Non-furniture Furnishings

Numerous non-furniture forms were also recorded in Greene County parlors. Fireplace and heating equipment forms were andirons (pairs in 4 parlors), andirons with shovels and tongs (12), stove with shovel and tongs (1), fenders (9), bellows (1). Lighting forms were lamp (5 parlors, 1 with a pair), astral lamp (1, with a pair), center table lamp (4), lard lamp (1, with a pair), candlestick (6, including 5 pairs and a set of 8), branched candlesticks (1, a pair), girandole set (1), snuffer (3, 2 with trays also), and pair of candle shades (1). Floor coverings were carpet (11 parlors), carpet with rug (10), matting (3), and rug (6, 3 with pairs). Textile furnishing forms were table cover (2 parlors), piano cover (1, without a piano), window curtain (9, including 2 sets of 3 window

⁷⁴"New Furniture," Godey's, 152-153.

curtains, 4 of 4, 2 of 5, 1 of 6, and 1 of 8), window shades (4, including 2 sets of 3, 1 of 7, and 1 of 8; the 2 sets of 3 and the set of 8 used with window curtains), and window curtain hardware (2). The art forms in the parlor were painting (3 in 1 parlor) and picture (2 parlors, 1 had 2, another 8). The looking glass forms were looking glass (5 parlors, 2 with pairs), mantle glass (2), mirror (4), and pair of pier glasses (1, not in the same parlor as the pair of pier tables). Clocks were not common parlor furnishings, 3 parlors had clocks and another, a mantle clock. The parlor amusement forms were music box (1 parlor), melodian (1), and piano (13, including 4 pianos with stools and 2 with covers). Books were the printed materials recorded in 6 parlors. Miscellaneous forms were thermometer (2 parlors), fly brush (1), spittoon (6, including 4 with pairs of spittoons and 1 with a group of 6), pair of mantle ornaments (1), pair of flower vases (1), and pairs of flower pots (2).

The textiles, metal, and ceramics recorded as structural materials for Greene County non-furniture furnishings reveal substances considered appropriate for the 'best room' in the house. Floor covering forms were 1 sheepskin rug, 1 straw carpet, 1 Brussels carpet, and 1 chenille hearth rug. One parlor table cover was oil cloth. A clock was recorded as ebony with bronze, 1 as unspecified

wood, and 1 as unspecified metal.⁷⁵ Brass was used for andirons, andirons with shovel and tongs, and fenders. Silver was used for 2 pairs of candlesticks and 1 snuffer while another pair of candlesticks was silver plated. Ceramics appeared as a pair of china candlesticks and a pair of crockery spittoons.

Visual Characteristics of Parlors

Descriptions of the style, or visual appearance, of parlors were so limited as to provide little information on the style of the space. The form chair was described as cottage and fine and a mahogany and bronze clock as French. However, since the residents of Greene County had access to publications which described and illustrated furnishings and a transportation system available for importation of furnishings from American centers of furniture manufacture, the ornamental style of furnishings available for Greene County parlors can be obtained from mid-19th century American publications. An 1855 passage in Godey's described rosewood sofas and chairs for the parlor as "delicately carved, and of the highest polish. One of the Prettiest patterns, represents clusters of small and large roses, every petal being distinct."⁷⁶ In the same article, plain black walnut whatnots were described as

⁷⁵The terms wood and metal probably refer to the works of the clock and not the case.

⁷⁶"New Furniture," Godey's, 152-153.

having "beaded carving around the edges."⁷⁷ Grier found that upholstered furniture was "the most important element in setting the tone of the room"⁷⁸ and that brown, green, maroon, and red were popular colors from the 1850s onward.⁷⁹ Carpets also added to the visual complexity of elegant parlors with designs "where fruit and flowers lie crushed and tangled in wild, though graceful confusion, in colors that vie with nature's own bright tints."⁸⁰

Parlor Constellations

The probate inventories recorded a number of parlors by constellation, or itemized list of forms. An example of an elaborately furnished parlor is in the 1846 inventory of what was apparently a double parlor in the Eutaw mansion house of Thomas Herndon (owner of 222 slaves). It contained 12 mahogany chairs (3 broken), 1 piano forte with stool and cover, 2 sofas, 2 large mirrors, 1 center table with lamp, 2 ottomans, 2 small tables, 2 fenders, 2 sets of andirons with shovel and tongs, carpets and rugs, curtains and hardware, 2 candle shades, 2 flower stands, and 1 music

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Grier, 100.

⁷⁹Ibid., 255.

⁸⁰Alice B. Neal, "Employment of Women in Cities," Godey's, September 1852, 275.

box.⁸¹ The 1859 inventory of the parlor in the Hollow Square Precinct residence of William Ferrell (owner of 12 slaves) recorded a similar assemblage of sofa, chairs, center table, fireplace equipment, and window treatments. His parlor contained 1 sofa, 2 rocking chairs, 7 parlor chairs, 1 center table, 1 corner whatnot, 1 table, 1 parlor glass, 2 candlesticks with tray and snuffer, 1 set of andirons with shovel and tongs, 1 spittoon, 3 window curtains with shades, and 1 carpet with rug.⁸² However, some Greene County parlors were as simply furnished as that of Mary Bizzell (owner of 4 slaves) in Clinton which contained 1 black lounge, 6 stool chairs, 1 mahogany rocking chair, 1 globe lamp, 1 fluid lamp, 1 pair of andirons, 1 wood clock, 2 pair of window curtains, 1 old walnut table, and 6 books.⁸³

Mid-19th century American women's publications frequently provided information on a variety of parlor assemblages. Very luxurious furnishings were recommended for a drawing room, the most formal version of a parlor. Drawing rooms contained rosewood sofas and chairs; boudoir, square, and grand pianos; sofa and center tables; étagère

⁸¹"Inventory of the Estate of Thomas H. Herndon," GCPCR J (18 December 1846): 840-846.

⁸²"Inventory of the Estate of William A. Ferrell," GCPCR S (15 August 1859): 548-557.

⁸³"Inventory of the Estate of Mary Bizzell," GCPCR R (11 September 1857): 60-62.

or whatnot for "elegantly bound books, and bijouterie of all descriptions."⁸⁴ However, many parlors were probably better represented by the following recommendation in Godey's.

Let it be furnished so that it may be enjoyed as a family-room and used at least every Sabbath, or every day after the various occupations of the day are ended . . . and let the husband⁸⁵ feel that the chairs or sofa are for his comfort.

Both drawing rooms and comfortable parlors were contrasted with the parlors of honest country folk who still "viewed chairs, a bureau, a looking-glass, and a table the essentials of parlor furniture: and a sofa or centre-table luxuries."⁸⁶

Both formal and informal Greene County parlors were very like other American parlors. They contained the customary center tables, sofas, sets of chairs, and work tables. Although only red and green were identified as upholstery colors, both of these are among the colors popular in mid-19th century American parlors. Only three parlors in the inventories had the pairs of looking glasses so admired in American interiors. The few book holding forms (in 4 parlors) suggests that Greene County parlors may have been considered formal reception rooms rather than comfortable family gathering spaces that would have

⁸⁴"New Furniture," Godey's, 152-153.

⁸⁵"Show-Rooms," Godey's, August 1853, 134-135.

⁸⁶"New Furniture," Godey's, 152.

encouraged reading. While rosewood was the most highly regarded wood for parlor furniture in the American publications, mahogany was the most frequently identified and highly valued wood in decedent's parlors. The sets of chairs in multiples of six typical in America from the 17th century⁸⁷ were apparently common in Greene County, occurring in 24 of the decedents' parlors. But, the records of Greene County parlors lacked evidence of the sets or 'suites' of parlor seating furniture beyond sets of chairs. The relatively common occurrence of rocking chairs in Greene County parlors may reveal a local preference. According to Eliza Leslie in 1853:

The practice of swaying backwards and forwards in a parlour rocking-chair, is considered obsolete in genteel society; and justly so; as it is a most ungraceful recreation, particularly for a lady, (to say nothing of its tendency to cause dizziness in the head,) and very annoying⁸⁸ to spectators, who may happen to be a little nervous.

The Sitting Room

The sitting room was a common but imprecisely defined interior space described in mid-19th century American literature. In large houses it was sometimes a separate space, possibly called a second parlor, living room, or family room. In smaller homes it was often also the library or parlor. In some cases, it doubled as a dining

⁸⁷Garrett, 40.

⁸⁸Leslie, 194.

room or even a bedroom. Henry Watson reported that the downstairs sitting room was also the master bedroom in Glencairn, Greensboro home of John Erwin.⁸⁹ In all instances, the sitting room was required to be a comfortable, informal place.

In American homes with sitting rooms, these rather than parlors were the center of family life. The furnishings were not necessarily matched or of high fashion, but were selected for use rather than display. The space was convenient, informal, and frequently used.⁹⁰ Some American Victorians sought the supportive and restorative functions⁹¹ of their homes through use of their sitting rooms. Late in December of 1860, it was there that the Watson family of Greensboro found refuge from the impending secession of the State of Alabama.

We have always a fire in the sitting room all day and that it is always comfortable. At night we have the centre table and the lard lamp and good fire, and in the big easy and well cushioned chairs we sit before the fire⁹² every night till 10 or 11 o'clock reading.

⁸⁹Henry Watson, Jr., Greensboro, AL, to [Julia Watson, New Haven, CT], L, 23 August 1844. Watson Papers.

⁹⁰See Garrett, 61-62.

⁹¹Clark, The American Family Home, 29.

⁹²Henry Watson, Greensboro, AL, to [Julia Watson, East Windsor, CT], L, 28 December 1860. Watson Papers.

Occurrence

Sitting rooms⁹³ were recorded in 10 residences belonging to Greene County decedents. This included 9 spaces identified as sitting rooms and 1 as a family room. The sitting room was recorded for decedents who owned 10 or more slaves, however 47% of sitting rooms were recorded for owners of 100 or more. Decedents who owned sitting rooms were wealthy, possessing total furnishings worth more than \$500.00 and total estates worth more than \$75,000.00.

Furniture and Non-furniture Furnishings

Greene County sitting rooms contained a large variety of furniture forms. Seating forms included bench (1 sitting room), ottoman (a pair in 1), chair (6, including 1 set of 6 and 4 sets of 12), rocking chair (2, a group of 2 and a group of 4), pair of arm chairs (1), sofa (5), pair of tête-a-têtes (1), and pair of settees (1). Reclining forms were bedstead (2 sitting rooms) and lounge (2). Surface forms were table (9 sitting rooms), center table (3), work table (1), writing desk (1), set of 4 tea tables (1), and wash stand (3). Storage furniture forms were bookcase (4 sitting rooms), secretary (1), bureau (3), sideboard (1), and hat rack (2).

Antebellum American publications identified a far smaller number of furniture forms for sitting rooms than

⁹³The term sitting room represents the data identified in the inventories as sitting room and family room.

did the Greene County inventories. The publications did, however, add the forms which were not found in the Greene County inventories: foot stool, work chair, cabinet, and corner cabinet.⁹⁴

Looking glasses were the only type of non-furniture furnishings absent from sitting rooms. Fireplace and heating forms were pairs of andirons (2 sitting rooms), andirons with shovel and tongs (4), and fender (1). The lighting forms were passage lamp (1 sitting room) and candlestick (2, a pair and a set of 8). Floor covering forms were carpet (1 sitting room), carpet with rug (2), matting (1), and rug (2). The textile furnishings forms were table cover (1 sitting room) and window curtain (2, a set of 2 and one of 8). The only art form, map, occurred in the form of an unidentified subject and a Greene County map in the same sitting room. There were clocks (2 sitting rooms) and an 8-day clock (1). The amusement forms were gaming equipment (1 sitting room, a chess board), piano with stool (1), and musical instrument (1, a violin). The books in 1 sitting room were the only printed materials recorded. The miscellaneous forms were scientific equipment (a thermometer in 1 sitting room), spittoon (2, 1 a pair), pair of flower vases (1), pair of flower pots (1), and sewing machine (1).

⁹⁴American publications.

According to the inventories, the structural materials used for sitting room furniture and furnishings in Greene County residences were not as valuable as those characterizing parlor furnishings. The metal forms were brass andirons, brass fender, and 'bronzed' hat rack. Glass was used for a pair of flower pots and papier-mâché for a table. Mahogany was the wood used for 2 tables, 1 work table, 1 wash stand, and 1 hat rack. Pine was used for 1 table and 1 center table. Walnut was the wood used for a set of 6 chairs and oak for a set of 12. Sofa bottom and split seat chairs occurred once each in sitting rooms, as did split and cane seat rocking chairs.

Sitting Room Constellations

The Greene County Probate Records provide good insight into the assemblage of forms in sitting rooms. The sitting room inventoried in 1850 in the Eutaw residence of Alexander Graham (owner of 40 slaves) included 1 sofa, a set of 4 tea tables, 6 sofa bottom walnut chairs, 2 split bottom rocking chairs, matting and hearth rug, a pair of brass andirons, a pair of common andirons with shovel and tongs, a pine center table with cover, 2 tin spittoons, 1 8-day clock, 1 cane bottom rocking chair, and various glass and ceramic items.⁹⁵ The family room in the Greensboro residence of Dr. James L. Turnstall (owner of 89 slaves),

⁹⁵"Appraisal of the Estate of Alexander Graham," GPCPR M (8 November 1850): 1-5.

inventoried in 1858, contained 1 old piano and stool, 1 bookcase with books, 1 sofa, 1 bureau, 1 table with cover, 1 carpet with rug, 12 'dinner room' chairs, 4 pair of candlesticks, and 1 pair of andirons with shovel and tongs.⁹⁶

While frequently mentioned, the sitting room was seldom described in detail by mid-19th century publications. In 1850, Godey's offered its readers an example of the forms and activities appropriate for the informal sitting room.

A beautiful three ply, wool colors, and green [tapestry carpet] Mahogany chairs with cane seats, and one octagon centre-table. I₉₇ like a centre-table, it is so cheerful in the winter.

The room also contained a work stand and piano, but lacked a sofa.⁹⁸

The furnishing constellations in Greene County sitting rooms were apparently very like those in the rest of the United States. Furnished with comfortable chairs, sofas, and center tables, they encouraged informal family gatherings. Probated decedents had small decorative items like vases and flower pots which were probably selected to brighten life for the inhabitants rather than visitors. As

⁹⁶This residence also had a double parlor and dining room. "Appraisal of the Estate of Dr. James L. Turnstall," GPCR R (28 April 1858): 748-752.

⁹⁷Alice B. Neal, "Furnishing-Or Two Ways of Commencing Life," Godey's, November 1850, 303.

⁹⁸Ibid.

befitted an everyday living room, mahogany furniture was mixed with the less costly pine and walnut⁹⁹ and the seats were comfortable sofa bottoms. The lounging and reclining forms associated with American sitting rooms¹⁰⁰ also appeared in Greene County.

The Dining Room

As the name indicates, this interior space was fitted out to facilitate the consumption of food. In antebellum American homes, the dining room sometimes also contained furnishings suited for the activities of the sitting room or parlor.¹⁰¹ Since Greene County dining rooms were, according to Southern practice, in residences served by detached kitchens, the space could be comfortably furnished as a sitting room. This distance from the kitchen probably encouraged use of this room for the family gatherings associated with family life in the kitchen in other parts of America.¹⁰² Use of the distant kitchen, although expedited by an abundance of servants, necessitated specialized dining room furniture for the presentation of

⁹⁹See Garrett, 61.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 69.

¹⁰¹For a similar practice in England see Symonds and Whineray, 68.

¹⁰²See Garrett, 95.

food and the storage of food service items.¹⁰³ William Gould recorded an incident which reveals some of the perils encountered with servants in Greene County dining rooms.

Linda waited on table - I have tried both her and Dabo as dining room servants during my bachelorship. - One watches the transition of every morsel from the plate to the mouth - the other goes to sleep and blinds me with the fly brush¹⁰⁴ - of the two annoyances, I greatly prefer the latter.

A happier occasion in the same room occurred in December of 1856, when oysters brought from Eutaw were roasted in the dining room fireplace and "pronounced delicious by everyone."¹⁰⁵

Simply the ownership of a specialized room for dining was a symbol of economic success for 19th century Americans.¹⁰⁶ It may have been the most important room in American homes, for it was the scene of the public and mannered rituals of eating¹⁰⁷ which were governed by both formality and schedule.¹⁰⁸ By the second quarter of the 19th century, dining rooms in American homes had also acquired an educational role, providing opportunities for the woman of the family to "nurture taste, civility, and

¹⁰³Wheeler, 133-134.

¹⁰⁴Gould Papers, Hoole.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

¹⁰⁶Garrett, 78.

¹⁰⁷Green and Perry, 100.

¹⁰⁸Williams, 5.

Christian ideals in her husband and children" through the social rituals of dining.¹⁰⁹ But even though the dining room provided an opportunity for women to intervene in the lives of their families, the space was characterized as sober, substantial, and masculine as opposed to feminine in the formal parlor or drawing room.¹¹⁰

Occurrence

Dining rooms were identified in 28 Greene County decedents' residences. The dining room was associated with decedents across all slave owning ranges but who were wealthy by the other economic standards, owning total residential furnishings worth more than \$200.00 and total estates worth more than \$75,000.00.

Furniture

Dining room furniture forms in Greene County provided a comfortable, accommodating eating environment. The space contained the seating forms bench (1 dining room, a pair with a table), chair (22, including 9 with sets of 12, 3 of 11, and 4 of 10), rocking chair (3, 1 a group of 2), a group of 4 children's chairs (1), high chair (1 had 2 high chairs), and sofa (2). The reclining form bedstead occurred in 2 dining rooms. The surface forms were table (9 dining rooms), candle stand (2), work table (2), desk (1), dining

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 52.

¹¹⁰ Garrett, 79.

table (11, 2 contained pairs of dining tables), breakfast table (1), folding table (3, 1 with a pair), extension table (4), side table (3), and slab (4). Dining room storage forms were bookcase (1 dining room), secretary (3), bureau (2), sugar chest (1), safe (10), cupboard (2), press (1), and sideboard (16).

According to the descriptions in the inventories, materials and appearance of Greene County dining room furniture varied from elegant to plain. The woods identified for furniture forms were beech for a work table; cherry for 2 tables; mahogany for 1 occurrence each of chair, table, breakfast table, dining table, extension table, and marble top sideboard; maple for 2 occurrences of chair and 1 of table; pine for 4 occurrences of table; walnut for 1 occurrence each of table, extension table, and safe. Three safes were described as tin. There were 2 sideboards recorded as having marble tops, including the 1 mahogany. The color blue was recorded for 1 occurrence of chair, 1 of table, and 1 of safe. There was 1 occurrence each of cane seat chair, split seat chair, stool bottom chair, and plank seat high chair.

In mid-19th century American publications, dining rooms were most strikingly characterized by the inclusion of a sofa and the absence of a permanent central table.¹¹¹ In addition to the dining room forms recorded

¹¹¹For an illustration see Downing, opposite 379.

in the probate inventories, American publications identified the forms arm chair, fire screen chair, and dessert tables.¹¹² Although sideboards were common in Greene County dining rooms, they were not specifically recorded as whatnot sideboards, moving sideboards on rollers, or the pedestal sideboards published in the American publications. The plate warmer was a furnishing form mentioned in the publications which occurred in one Greene County residence, but was not recorded in a dining room.

Non-furniture Furnishings

Greene County dining rooms contained examples from all the non-furniture furnishing form groups examined. The fireplace and heating forms recorded in the dining room were pairs of andirons (3 dining rooms), andirons with shovel and tongs (3), fender (2), fire screen (1), and stove (1).¹¹³ The lighting forms were lamp (8 dining rooms, 3 with pairs), astral lamp (2), candlestick (13, including 7 with pairs and 3 with sets of 4), and snuffer (3). The floor covering forms were carpet (5 dining rooms), carpet with rug (3), matting (1), and rug (1). The textile furnishings forms were table cover (2 dining rooms, 1 with a table rug), window curtain (2, sets of 2 and 4),

¹¹²American publications.

¹¹³At one time Henry Watson had a stove in his dining room. "Furniture." Watson Papers.

and window shade (1 with a set of 4). The art forms were painting (1 dining room with 4), picture (1, with 2), and portrait (1, with 1). The looking glass forms were looking glass (2 dining rooms), mantle glass (1), and mirror (1). Clocks occurred in 10 dining rooms. Chess board, only the amusement form in dining rooms, occurred once. There were 3 dining rooms containing printed materials in the form of books. The miscellaneous form fly brush occurred in 2 residences and plate warmer in 1.

A diversity of materials was recorded for the non-furniture dining room furnishings. Floor coverings were 1 buffalo hide rug, 2 oil cloth carpets, and 1 cotton carpet with rug. Although not mentioned in the probate data, rag carpets were at least at one time acceptable in Greensboro dining rooms. In 1832 Sarah Gayle wrote of the rag rug she was making:

It is the most unseemly object imaginable, but if I can make out to have it finished, it will answer the double end of preventing the purchase of a better but more costly one, and save William the necessity of scrubbing the dining room floor."¹¹⁴

Brass was the metal recorded for 1 occurrence of andirons, 1 of clock, 3 of candlesticks, and 1 of a pair of lamps. Another pair of candlesticks was silver-plated. One lamp was made of Britannia and another of glass.

¹¹⁴"Journal of Sarah Gayle, 1828-1834," Hoole.

Dining Room Constellations

In addition to furnishings appropriate for food service, typical Greene County dining rooms also contained forms such as bookcases, rocking chairs, and bedsteads. Furniture forms not directly related to dining were recorded in both elegant and modest spaces. In 1858, the dining room inventory of the Greensboro residence of Robert McFadden (owner of 168 slaves) identified 1 dining room stove, 12 chairs, 4 children's chairs, 1 sideboard, 1 extension table, 1 mahogany table, 1 bookcase, 1 library and atlas, 1 English clock, 1 oil cloth carpet, snuffers with tray and 2 pair of candlesticks, a set of wire table covers, 1 pair of brass candlesticks, 2 lamps, 1 safe, a dinner set of china, silver and ivory flatware, glassware, and various serving pieces.¹¹⁵ The dining room of Mary Bizzell (owner of 4 slaves) in Clinton, inventoried in 1857, included flatware, glassware, china, crockery, linens, 1 stool rocking chair, 2 glass lamps, 1 britannia lamp, 1 brass clock, 1 set of andirons with shovel and tongs, 1 slab and bottles, 1 desk, 2 pair of window curtains, 1 looking glass, 1 bedstead, 1 small pine table, 1 dining table, 1 blue safe, 1 water bucket, 1 fly brush, 1 old shot gun, and 1 old cotton carpet with hearth rug.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵"Appraisal of the Estate of Robert H. McFadden," GCPCR R (21 December 1858): 1118-1123.

¹¹⁶"Appraisal of the Estate of Mary Bizzell," GCPCR R (11 September 1857): 60-62.

Antebellum American publications presented a fairly uniform series of dining room form assemblages reminiscent of the Greene County interiors. An article in Godey's recommended that: "A dining room should, in every case, be furnished simply. A table, chairs, side-tables, and perhaps, a few pictures upon the walls, are sufficient."¹¹⁷ More elegant dining room furnishings for a town house were also described by the same magazine.

Oak is the wood usually employed in furnishing a dining room; the chairs and sofa covered with green worsted damask or moreau, . . . a sideboard of the same; it is sometimes used for the display of handsome glass or silver. A dining room carpet should be Brussels or ingrain; . . . Prints or pictures upon the wall; ¹¹⁸Holland shades or folding blinds at the windows.

Although textile upholstered seating was recommended for some homes, in the 1850s cane seat chairs were also advocated for dining rooms as they could be easily cleaned with a cloth or washed with soap and water.¹¹⁹ At least one author felt the need to address the requirements of lighting a dining room. In 1853, Sarah Hale wrote: "for a small party, a single lamp in the center is sufficient; but for a larger number, the room should be lighted with lamps hung over the table."¹²⁰

¹¹⁷"New Furniture," Godey's, 153.

¹¹⁸"House Furnishing," Godey's (March 1855), 286.

¹¹⁹Williams, 63.

¹²⁰Sarah Josepha Hale, The New Household Receipt-Book (New York: H. Long & Brother, 1853), 211.

Although not from the group of American publications, the following list of furniture and furnishings from the auction catalog of the contents of a New York home in 1853 helps to further understand American dining room furnishing practice. The dining room contained yards of ingrain carpet, a black walnut extension table, a mahogany sofa upholstered in haircloth, 6 black walnut cane seat chairs, 2 black walnut cane seat rockers (1 a sewing rocker), a mahogany desk, an airtight stove, a spittoon, a gas pendant (hanging lamp), a cherry tea table, a worsted table cover, yards of drugget [a crumb cloth?], and an oil cloth, along with china, glass, and silver.¹²¹

Like other American dining rooms, those belonging to the probated Greene County decedents were furnished primarily with sets of chairs, specially designed and designated tables for dining, and the large storage forms called sideboards. The use of such materials as cane and split for dining room chairs infers compliance with American practice of the time. Inclusion of a sugar chest in one Greene County dining room reenforces, but only slightly, the argument for southern distinctness in furnishing practice. Only a small number of Greene County dining rooms apparently served as sitting as well as eating

¹²¹Catalogue of Genteel Household Furniture, for Sale at Auction, by Henry H. Leeds & Co., on Friday, April 29, 1853 (New York: 1853), Strong Museum Library, Rochester, NY.

rooms, containing sofas (2 dining rooms), rocking chairs (3), and reclining forms (2). Sarah Gayle of Greensboro was not alone in her desire for a rag rug in the dining room. In 1861, Katherine Bragdon of Rochester, New York also attempted to have a rag rug woven for her dining room floor.¹²²

The Bedroom

The room used for sleeping, dressing, and grooming was frequently identified as the bedroom in Greene County records. The term chamber was used occasionally in the inventories, but in only one instance to describe the room occupied by the mistress of a house.¹²³ Commonly, the probate records used the term room, listing the bed and related forms beneath it. However, in their writings, both Lida Bestor Robertson and Henry Watson used the term bedroom.¹²⁴ But Watson also used the term bed chamber in

¹²²See Williams, 59-60.

¹²³This was in the Eutaw residence of Emma Herndon. "Appraisal of the Estate of Emma Herndon," GCPCR J (18 December 1846): 840-846. For a discussion of the nature and significance of the chamber as the domain of the southern woman see Jean Gordon and Jan McArthur, "Living Patterns in Antebellum Rural America as Depicted by Nineteenth-Century Women Writers," Winterthur Portfolio 19 (Summer/Autumn 1984): 185.

¹²⁴Robertson, "Simple Diary," ADAH; Henry Watson, Jr., Greensboro, to [Julia Watson, New Haven, CT], L, 23 August 1844. Watson Papers.

describing his home in 1844.¹²⁵ It is therefore apparent that the terms chamber and bedroom were both in use in mid-19th century Greene County to describe the same discrete space.

The appearance of bedrooms as a discrete spaces within residences indicates a general desire for display of wealth, hygienic practices, and privacy for sleeping and/or grooming. Use of the curtained bedsteads within bedrooms reveals an even greater concern with privacy.¹²⁶ This concern for privacy might also be seen in the occurrence of candle stands which provided the opportunity for inhabitants to withdraw from family society to nurse an invalid, dress, sew, or read. Bedrooms, like parlors, displayed family hierarchies through the quantity, value, and utilitarian form of the furnishings arrayed within them. Even in the mid-19th century, the total value of the furnishings in the best bedroom could rival the value of the parlor furnishings.¹²⁷ The costliness of bedroom furnishings, especially bedding and bed hangings, was another form of conspicuous consumption which showed that "sleep was a luxury."¹²⁸ Some Greene County bedrooms

¹²⁵Henry Watson, Jr., Greensboro, to [Julia Watson, New Haven, CT], L, 1 August 1844. Watson Papers.

¹²⁶See Sweeny, "Furniture," 31.

¹²⁷See Garrett, 109.

¹²⁸Ibid., 139.

probably also represented the ideal of mid-19th century Americans, a bedroom that was "clean, spacious, lofty, unencumbered with unnecessary furniture and, most important, well aired."¹²⁹ Bedrooms represented ideas about personal grooming and cleanliness with bureaus, wash stands, and toilet sets.¹³⁰

Occurrence

There was at least 1 identified bedroom¹³¹ recorded in 29 (8.9%) residences in the inventories.¹³² Of these, there were 28 (8.6% of residences) identified with at least 2 bedrooms; 21 (6.5%), at least 3; 11 (3.4%), at least 4; 6 (1.9%), at least 5; 5 (1.5%), at least 6. Of all furnishing items, 2.7% were recorded for the first identified bedroom; 2.7% for the second; 1.7% for the third; .9% for the fourth; .5% for the fifth; .3% for the sixth. Bedrooms identified as discrete spaces were associated with decedents across all slave owning ranges. These decedents were wealthy, owning estates with total

¹²⁹Ibid., 118.

¹³⁰Ibid., 131.

¹³¹The term bedroom represents the data identified in the inventories as bedroom, chamber, and discernable but unnamed rooms contained bedroom furniture.

¹³²The first bedroom was consistently identified by the researcher as the bedroom with the greatest quantity of utilitarian forms.

value of more than \$75,000.00, but who sometimes held total residential furnishings worth as little as \$150.00.

Furniture

Furniture located in Greene County bedrooms represented all four of the major utilitarian form groups. Seating furniture forms identified in the bedroom were bench (1 bedroom), a pair of ottomans (1), chair (11, including groups of 3 in 2 bedrooms, 4 in 2, 6 in 3, 7 in 1, and 10 in 1), rocking chair (4, 1 with a pair), arm chair (2), and sofa (1). Reclining furniture forms were bedstead (26 bedrooms, with 2 bedstead in 2 and 3 in 1), high post bedstead (1), low post bedstead (1), curtain bedstead (1), trundle bedstead (1), lounge (5), couch (1), crib (2), and cot (1). Surface furniture forms were table (9 bedrooms), candle stand (5), writing desk (2, in 2 different bedrooms in the same residence), folding table (1), dressing table (3), and wash stand (16). The storage furniture forms recorded in the bedroom were bookcase (2 bedrooms), secretary (2), bureau (16), chest (1), trunk (3), cupboard (2), press (1), wardrobe (6), and clothes rack (1).

The furniture in Greene County bedrooms varied greatly in materials and appearance, some forms being impressive in material and value and others more ordinary. In identified bedrooms, mahogany was used for 2 rocking chairs, 5 bedsteads, 1 candle stand, 1 wash stand, 1 marble top wash

stand, 1 secretary, 4 bureaus, and 2 wardrobes. There were 2 bureaus and a mahogany wash stand with marble tops. Cherry was recorded for 1 bedstead and 1 table. Maple occurred once for chair and three times for bedstead. However, much furniture was made of less esteemed materials. Pine was recorded for 1 curtain bedstead, 4 tables, 1 dressing table, 1 secretary, and 1 wardrobe. Walnut was the wood for 1 high post bedstead, 1 lounge, 1 wash stand, and 1 secretary. One trunk was made of unspecified wood and another, bound in iron. One wash stand was painted red; 1 occurrence of chair, black; 1 wardrobe, white. Another wardrobe was identified as stained. A lounge had a red covering. There were 2 occurrences of chair cane seat, 2 of chair with split seat, and 1 of rocking chair with cane seat.

Variety within bedroom furniture was further revealed by analysis of the style descriptors applied to them in the inventories. The term French was applied to 3 bedsteads and 'fine' to 2 bureaus and 2 wardrobes. On the other hand, the terms 'plain' or 'ordinary' were used to describe 1 occurrence of chair, 1 pair of ottomans, 1 bedstead, 1 table, 1 bookcase, 1 bureau, and 1 wardrobe. 'Old' was used for 1 carpet, 2 occurrences of chair, 2 bedsteads, 1 secretary, 1 bureau, and 1 trunk.

American publications identified a variety of forms in addition to the furniture recorded in the Greene County

inventories which served the sleeping, dressing, and grooming activities of the bedroom. These were the tent bedstead, footstool, settee, night stand, shaving stand, cabinet (which might be equated with the press), shelves, wash sink, and cheval glass.¹³³

Non-furniture Furnishings

Examples of all types of non-furniture furnishings except amusements were recorded in Greene County bedrooms. The fireplace and heating forms were pairs of andirons (7 bedrooms), andirons with shovel and tongs (5), shovel with tongs (1), fender (2), and fireplace screen (1). The lighting forms were a pair of lamps in 1 bedroom and snuffers with tray in another. The floor covering forms were carpet (7 bedrooms), carpet with rug (4), and matting (1). The textile furnishings were table cover (2 bedrooms) and window curtain (9, including 2 sets of 2, 3 of 3, 3 of 4, and 1 of six. The art form, map, occurred in 1 bedroom. The looking glass forms were looking glass (10 bedrooms, 1 with 2 looking glasses), mantle glass (1), and mirror (1). However, the number of occurrences of looking glasses as separate forms does not reveal all appearances of looking glasses in bedrooms because 4 bureaus and 2 dressing tables had a 'glasses'. Clocks appeared in 4 bedrooms. Printed materials in the form of books were recorded in 1 bedroom.

¹³³ American publications.

The miscellaneous form spittoon occurred in 1 bedroom and sewing machine in 2.

The bedroom non-furniture furnishings exhibited a variety of physical characteristics. One set of window curtains was white, another set, domestic. One carpet was rag but another, wool. A looking glass was gilt. Brass was used for andirons with shovel and tongs, 2 fenders, fender rims, and clocks. Other andirons were made of iron. One pair of lamps was glass.

Bedroom Constellations

Records from Greene County provided insight into the variety of bedroom furnishing assemblages. Impressive bedrooms were represented by a room in the Eutaw home of Alexander Graham (owner of 40 slaves). His 1850 inventory recorded 2 arm chairs, 1 bureau with looking glass and marble slab, 4 chambers, 1 carpet, 1 mahogany rocking chair, 1 mahogany candle stand, 1 high post bedstead and bedding (comprised of 2 mattresses, 2 pillows, 1 bolster, 2 sheets, 1 blanket, and 1 cover spread), 1 wash stand with bowl and pitcher and soap bowl, 1 work table and chair, 1 brass rim fender, and 1 set of brass top andirons with shovel and tongs.¹³⁴ Dr. Perrin's 'beautiful' bedroom in Forkland was described in the diary of Lida Bestor Robertson.

¹³⁴"Appraisal of the Estate of Alexander Graham," GPCR M (8 November 1850): 1-5.

The bed stead [sic] was of massive mahogany, reaching to the top of the room. The washstand of mahogany, with a marble slab, & the bureau of mahogany with a large looking glass, & the top of the bureau was marble[,] chairs etc. corresponded.¹³⁵

Although not the most costly furnished bedroom in the residence, "Room No 5" at the plantation of Col. Samuel Pickens (owner of 174 slaves) contained what might have represented the ideally furnished bedroom. According to the 1855 inventory, it contained 1 bedstead and furniture, 1 trundle bed and furniture, 1 wardrobe, 1 bureau and mirror, 1 wash stand, 1 small tub, 1 fender, 1 pair of andirons with shovel and tongs, 4 cane bottom chairs, 1 cane bottom rocking chair, 1 pair of candlesticks, and 1 carpet with rug.¹³⁶ However, simply furnished bedrooms also appeared in the houses of the wealthy. The "Lodging Room" in the Eutaw residence of Thomas Herndon (owner of 222 slaves) contained only 1 bedstead with mattress, 1 crib with furniture, 1 wash stand, 1 table, 1 carpet, 1 pair of andirons, 1 bucket, 1 clothes horse, and flat irons.¹³⁷ Although chairs and rocking chairs were far more common

¹³⁵Robertson, "Simple Diary," ADAH. This was probably Dr. George C. Perrin, whose estate was probated in 1854, but whose inventory was not detailed enough to permit identification of the above mentioned furnishings. See "Appraisal of the Estate of Dr. George C. Perrin," GCPCR O (1 March 1854): 440-441.

¹³⁶The residence contained 5 bedrooms. "Appraisal of the Estate of Col. Samuel Pickens," GCPCR P (9 November 1855): 677-690.

¹³⁷"Appraisal of the Estate of Thomas H. Herndon," GCPCR J (18 December 1846): 840-846.

seating forms in bedrooms than sofas, sofas were located there occasionally. In addition to the single example in the probate records, there was a sofa in Watson's north front room along with the most expensive bed and bedding in the residence.¹³⁸

Antebellum American publications presented careful descriptions of the customary assemblage of furnishings in the bedroom. In "The Unexpected Visitor," a room was furnished for a visit from Aunt Fanny through the exercise of thrift and ingenuity. Using paint, boxes, barrels, and inexpensive textiles, the hosts produced furnishings which included a painted floor rug, curtains, roller curtains, chairs, a toilet table, a small table, a bedstead, a bureau, ottomans, and a wash stand with simulated marble top and space below for a refuse bucket.¹³⁹ Assemblages of the same forms appeared in illustrations of the Cottage style chamber sets first made in the 1850s.¹⁴⁰ In 1855, Godey's reported that:

A suit of chamber-furniture is generally considered to be dressing-table or bureau (which includes the mirror), chairs, small round or square table, bedstead and washstand, toilet set of china or ~~stone~~ stone ware, the last including slop jar and foot-bath.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸"1866 Inventory." Watson Papers.

¹³⁹"The Unexpected Visitor" Godey's, January 1859, 13-17.

¹⁴⁰Downing, 443.

¹⁴¹"Chamber Furnishing," Godey's, June 1855, 572.

"Mrs. Bowen's Parlor and Spare-Bedroom" began with a partial description of another bedroom.

. . . the room looked as tidy and inhospitable as spare bedrooms usually do. The white half-curtains, with their borders of knitted fringe, were drawn together, the empty pitcher on the wash-stand was covered by a fringed towel, and tissue paper protected the gilt frame of the mirror.¹⁴²

By introducing a settee, a rocking chair, a stove, an old-fashioned light [candle?] stand beside the rocker, a footstool, an heirloom bureau, a gilt china vase, and a liberal amount of chintz, Mrs. Bowen produced a practical and cheerful environment for an invalid family member.¹⁴³ In "Bed-Room Furniture for Invalids," Peterson's Magazine advocated the use of sofas, ottomans, bed-steps (contrived to provide added service as night conveniences), and easy chairs as appropriate supplements for the sleeping, surface and storage forms customarily found in bedrooms.¹⁴⁴

Bedrooms, as a commonly owned space, were probably the most egalitarian of interior spaces in mid-19th century America, reflecting the economic and social characteristics of their owners. Greene County bedrooms, like those of other Americans could be displays of costly furnishings, or

¹⁴²Haven, "Mrs. Bowen's Parlor and Spare-Bedroom," 136-138.

¹⁴³Following this triumph of pragmatism, Mrs. Bowen converted her parlor into a family sitting room, scandalizing her neighbors. Ibid.

¹⁴⁴H. J. Vernon, "Bed-Room Furniture for Invalids," The Peterson Magazine, May 1858, 392-393.

simple functional spaces, or anything in between. The absence of art work in Greene County bedrooms appears to be in line with American practice, since these spaces were private and not a place for display of the inhabitants' cultural refinement.¹⁴⁵ The easy chair or arm chair considered by some scholars to have been an important component in the bedroom furnishing constellation¹⁴⁶ is very rare in Greene County bedrooms.

Multi-Function Interior Spaces

In multi-function interior spaces, furnishing constellations reveal the subsistence role of interior furnishings. Greene County examples of this type of interior space probably represent 19th century American continuation of residential spatial utilization practices observed by Demos in early New England.

The function of given rooms was never fixed or predetermined, [so] that any particular space might be used in several different ways, either successively or even simultaneously. With small houses, and large families there was really no alternative.¹⁴⁷

Societal statements through furnishing constellations related to style, material, and arrangement were probably restricted by economic circumstances, spatial limitations, and the small quantity of furnishings. These spaces appear

¹⁴⁵Green and Perry, 102.

¹⁴⁶Garrett, 124.

¹⁴⁷Demos, A Little Commonwealth, 33.

to have been associated with small-sized residences and old-fashioned life styles revealed by some inventories and the subsistence furnishing constellations of dower allotments.

The content of dowers represented what was legally considered necessary for the survival of the widow and minor heirs of a male decedent. Residential furnishings were minimal and the spinning wheel, 2 beds and furniture, dining table, 3 chairs, pot, oven, 2 water vessels, pair of cotton cards, and churn allotted to the widow of Stephen Ellis¹⁴⁸ is typical of the nature and quantity of furnishings included in other dowers in the Greene County Probate Court Records. Husbands who wanted to insure that their wives lived more comfortably than the minimum level of the dower specified what they considered appropriate minimal furnishings in their wills.

To my said wife, two beds, bedstead, and the covering and furniture thereto, to be made complete, one Bureau, Cupboard, and all of my chairs and looking glasses, and tables, and Kitchen furniture.¹⁴⁹

The minimum furnishings needed for a residence are also recorded in the inventories of what were apparently overseers' residences owned by Edwin Whitehead. The furnishings of the overseer's house at the 'Carr

¹⁴⁸"Appraisal of the Estate of Stephen Ellis," GCPCR J (5 January 1847): 886-887.

¹⁴⁹"Will of James Borden," GCPCR (29 November 1854): Bundle 1255.

Plantation' were 1 bedstead and bedding (\$5.00), 2 tables with 4 chairs etc. (\$10.00), and 3 additional chairs (\$5.00)¹⁵⁰ and the overseer's furnishings at the 'Bigbee Place' were 1 bedstead and mattress (\$11.50), 1 bedstead and mattress (\$4.50), 5 chairs with a table (\$3.00), 1 pot and andirons etc. (which were not found), 1 set of tin plates (\$2.12), and 2 pots (\$2.25).¹⁵¹

An example of a small residence furnished by a decedent for his own family is that of Jimmi McCrackin (owner of 1 slave). As her dower, his widow was allotted 6 knives and forks, 6 cups and saucers, 6 plates, 2 beds and furniture, 1 table, 1 pot, 1 oven, 2 water vessels, 3 chairs, and 1 churn in addition to farm tools, livestock, and textile production equipment. The remainder of his household furnishings included 1 bedstead and furniture, 2 small trunks, 1 table, 4 chairs, and 1 hair skin trunk. This meager list of furnishings served the needs of McCrackin, his wife, and their 3 minor children.¹⁵² The residence of James Bizzell (owner of 8 slaves) had even

¹⁵⁰The residential furnishings were worth a total of \$25.00. "Appraisal of the Estate of Edwin Whitehead," GCPCR R (17 November 1857): 311.

¹⁵¹The residential furnishings were worth a total of \$23.37. "Sale of the Estate of Edwin Whitehead," GCPCR R (17 November 1857): 311.

¹⁵²The residential furnishing were worth a total of \$32.75. "Appraisal of the Estate of Jimmi McCrackin;" "Dower Inventory of the Estate of Jimmi McCrackin," GCPCR K (18 December 1847): 644-645.

fewer furnishings: 3 beds and furniture, 2 bedsteads, 1 trunk, 1 table, 3 chairs, and kitchen furniture.¹⁵³ The residence of wealthier Robert H. Phillips (owner of 13 slaves) also represents minimally furnished Greene County homes, containing only a sideboard, 3 beds, 6 chairs, a table, a safe, andirons with shovel and tongs, and cooking utensils in kitchen.¹⁵⁴

Summation

The discrete interior spaces in Greene County were functionally and socially defined by their furniture and furnishings; they revealed where one may be public and where one should be private. The discrete spaces were identified for wealthy probated decedents who owned residences large enough to accommodate the desire for segregation of subsistence and social activities. The interior spaces in the residences of Greene County slave-owning decedents were very much like those of other early Victorian Americans as represented in American periodicals.

Although very much like passages in other American homes, Greene County passages reveal a provision for artificial lighting absent in the American publications.

¹⁵³The residential furnishings were worth a total of \$79.30. "Appraisal of the Estate of James Bizzell," GCPCR K (2 April 1847): 119.

¹⁵⁴The residential furnishings were worth a total of \$51.50. "Appraisal of the Estate of Robert H. Phillips," GCPCR P (2 February 1855): 88.

Greene County parlors were apparently more conservative than those described in American publications. The decedents' parlor furnishing practices included costly, but conservative mahogany furniture rather than the more fashionable and extravagant rosewood. Their parlors also contained the rocking chairs deemed unfashionable by mid-19th century American authors. But decedents apparently gave great social significance to the ownership of parlors, since this non-subsistence space was recorded in more residences than even the highly utilitarian bedroom. Greene County parlors were also both the formal and informal types identified in American publications.

Greene County sitting rooms were apparently even more varied in their use than those in American publications, doubling as dining rooms and even master bedrooms in some Greene County homes.

Due to their distance from the kitchen, dining rooms in decedents' residences were perhaps better suited for the multi-purpose uses applied to dining rooms by mid-19th century Americans. Greene County dining room utilitarian forms and physical characteristics of forms were consistent with published American forms and characteristics.

The furnishing of bedrooms apparently varied according to the social and economic status of the decedent, just as in the rest of America. Aside from the regular occurrence of the various forms of curtained bedsteads which were

going out of fashion in most of mid-19th century America, the utilitarian forms and non-furniture forms in Greene County bedrooms also represented American furnishing practice.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The data in the Greene County Probate Court records on the residential furnishings belonging to deceased slave owners revealed information on furnishing occurrences, furnishing characteristics, furnishing locations, and psychological and social values. The records provided sufficient information on furniture, non-furniture furnishings, and furnishing constellations in interior spaces to achieve some understanding of the physical character of interiors in Greene County residences. When correlated with economic data from the probate and census records, the furnishing data from the probate inventories provided a meaningful picture of the dispersal of furnishings among the Greene County decedents. The comparison of the inventory data with American early Victorian published materials and recent furniture history research permitted identification of southern regional characteristics as well as the development of insights into the values held by the decedents.

The method used for the analysis of residential furnishing data in the Greene County probate inventories produced useful, recognizable patterns of residential furnishing characteristics. As in similar studies, probate information on furnishing practices "provided a framework

within which logical assumptions could be made."¹ Conclusions about the utilitarian and social esteem of furnishings held by decedents were based on patterns of occurrence, physical characteristics, item value, and interior location.²

The examination of patterns of furnishing occurrence and variation resulted in the discovery of the minds which created them³ and revealed the characteristics of the assemblies of furnishing forms which constituted furnished Greene County homes. Correlation of utilitarian forms with item value, physical characteristics, interior space, and decedent wealth produced some significant findings.

The data on residential furnishing practices in individual inventories was found to be valid for the purpose of this study. First, furnishing occurrence patterns were found to be similar throughout the inventories. Second, the terminology used to describe the furniture in the inventories was found to be consistent with American mid-19th century terminology. Third, the interior spaces identified in the probate records were the same as those found in mid-19th century printed materials.

¹For similar findings see Brightman, "Colonial Window Hangings," 592.

²For similar findings see Ames, "Hall Furnishings."

³For similar findings see Glassie, "Meaningful Things," 81.

The assumption made to define a residence by establishing the number and types of utilitarian furniture forms was borne out by the probate data. Decedents who owned only a small number of forms (e.g., a bed and a trunk) tended to own no kitchen implements or other items which suggested the maintenance of a residence.

Population

Social Characteristics

In terms of social characteristics, the decedent population failed to represent the living population in that it was older, disproportionately male, and contained larger families. Like other slave owners in Greene County, the decedents were all white. While both political beliefs and literacy could not be quantified for this analysis, it is likely that the decedents, being propertied, embraced a cautious political course that supported commercial ventures and were at least as literate as the living population.

Economic Characteristics

The decedent population more closely represented the living population in economic than social characteristics. Because they owned slaves, the decedents can be said to represent 80% of the households in Greene County at the time. This gives a strong degree of validity to the findings on furnishing practices as representative of the living population. The validity of the decedents' representation of

the living population is further strengthened by the great similarity of per capita total wealth for the two groups.⁴

There were two important differences between the decedent and living populations. First, members of the decedent population owned larger numbers of slaves. Second, there was a higher percentage of land owners among the decedents than the living.

The great wealth of Greene County residents prevents them from representing geographic regions outside the Black Belt. Both the decedent and living populations were far richer than most Americans at the time. The Greene County average per capita total wealth was about three times the average per capita for the United States in 1860.

The greater value of the furnishings owned by the probated population than the living implies that the residences of decedents were better furnished. Further, even though occurrences of expensive furnishing items and/or constellations were usually owned by members of the wealthy class, the value of total wealth and the total value of residential furnishing were not always directly correlated.

⁴The per capita average for living families was \$26,726.00 and for decedents, \$27,977.00.

Physical and Cultural Environments

Greene County was a prosperous region of commercial agriculture due to the occurrence of the extremely fertile prairie land known as the Black Belt in part of the county and two navigable rivers. The river transportation system permitted the dissemination of ideas from other parts of the United States about the options for variety in architectural design, furniture, and interior furnishing arrangements.

The towns in Greene County, especially Greensboro and Eutaw, were centers of lively social activity. Their societies required architectural settings with appropriate functional and symbolic interior furnishings.

Furnishings were acquired from a variety of sources. A few local furniture makers and dealers were able to continue business throughout the period under study. Their work, however, appeared to be primarily the repairing and refinishing of existing furniture. Records of the acquisition of costly furnishings indicate that these were often bought outside of the county, frequently in Mobile. There were at least a few residents who brought furnishings into the county from as far away as New York and Europe.

American influence on Greene County taste in architecture is seen in the residences constructed in the antebellum period. The architectural styles are those found in the rest of Alabama, the South, and the United States.

Residences were, however, often given a common southern modification, the detached kitchen.

Furnishings

Furniture

Findings on the furniture data reveal that few deceased slave owners resided in homes which were filled with fashionable, costly furniture. The furniture belonging to most of the decedents appears to have been very modest. Given the value of their other property, it would seem that expensive furniture (e.g., with marble tops) would be owned by many decedents. But few owned any large pieces of furniture other than bureaus and sideboards and even fewer, furniture made of costly materials. Most decedents, however, did own a number of different utilitarian furniture forms.

Furniture and wealth. The costly furniture belonging to decedents was usually the property of wealthy class decedents. Some, however, was in the possession of members of the lower middle and middle classes. Several factors were related to the occurrence of valuable or highly specialized furniture forms: the amount of wealth held by the decedent; the total value of the furnishings in a residence; personal preference of the decedent; other circumstances such as inheritance. As in Grier's study,⁵ it was found that

⁵For similar findings see Grier, 143.

proliferation of utilitarian forms and increased quantity of furniture⁶ were associated with levels of prosperity. Occurrences of large numbers of forms and/or valuable forms belonging to poorer decedents⁷ were usually the property of widows.

There were discernable correlations between some utilitarian forms and some structural materials with the decedent economic classes. The richest Greene County decedents owned secretaries, china presses, extension dining tables, and bedsteads with costly bedding. Their best furniture was made of mahogany and would have been more likely to have had marble tops.

Furniture materials. Structural materials, usually wood species, were the descriptors most frequently applied to furniture forms. The recording of materials was related to value, rarity, status, or the desire to differentiate forms in a residence with a large quantity of furniture. It was also found that furniture with identified materials had a higher average value than that without identified materials.

The absence of rosewood as a furniture material from the Greene County inventories is significant. It was promoted in the American publications as the premier furniture wood of

⁶For similar findings see Sweeney, "Furniture," 25.

⁷These would have owned less than 10 slaves. However, the ownership of this number of slaves still made Greene County decedents wealthier than most citizens of the United States at the time.

the 1850s. This absence may be related to a time lag of fashion, the problems of shipping furniture into Greene County,⁸ an aesthetic preference on the part of decedents, or the fact that the homes of decedents were furnished before rosewood came into fashion. The high cost of rosewood furniture may have been beyond the threshold of expenditure established by decedents' frugality. Southern planters are also known to have been short of cash and therefore may have bought old stock on hand from furniture dealers who worked within the factor system. The absence of rosewood may, however, simply reveal a preference in Greene County for mahogany furniture.

Furniture finishes. The frequent absence of color/finish descriptions of furniture in the inventories may not accurately represent the amount of colored or painted furniture in homes. However, the scarcity of color/finish descriptors may reveal that the appraisers either did not prize painted furniture or that painted furniture was very common, and consequently unremarkable.

Furniture style. Greene County furniture was almost never identified by style. The practice of stylistic designation of furniture may have been unfamiliar to Greene County inventory takers, since they chose to identify

⁸For the effect of transportation problems on the distribution of furnishings see Winkler and Moss, Victorian Interior Decoration, 2-3.

furniture by material, condition, or manufacturing technique rather than style. However, the Greene County population may simply not have been conscious of the style names of furniture or may not have considered it a recognizable distinguishing characteristic of furniture. Furniture descriptions in the inventories focus on functional and social use rather than aesthetic considerations. Given the variety of furniture styles of the time, this focus may represent an American characteristic.⁹ Even the variety of woods used simultaneously for residential furniture¹⁰ suggests an emphasis on the individual qualities of materials rather than a concern for a unified fashionable aesthetic.

Southern characteristics. Evidence on the furniture in the homes of deceased Greene County slave owners seems to confirm Dodd's assessment: "Altogether the people of the lower South were not unlike those of other sections [of the United States]."¹¹ Comparison with the American periodicals of the period reveals great similarity in the variety, quantity, and physical characteristics of furniture

⁹This lack of consciousness of style is also evident in mid-19th century publications. Although Downing made suggestions about stylistic compatibility and propriety, these had a symbolic rather than aesthetic purpose. Periodicals like Godey's addressed the management of social conduct through furnishings and the availability of furnishings rather than aesthetic compatibility.

¹⁰This was also true in the United States at the time. See Stillinger, Antiques Guide, 350, 404.

¹¹See Dodd, The Cotton Kingdom, 95.

held by Greene County decedents and other Americans. Also like other United States citizens, most deceased slave owners held a quantity and variety of residential furniture forms which exceeded their minimum needs for existence.¹²

Within the parameters of this study,¹³ it was difficult to identify residential furnishing practices that distinguished Greene County homes from those of the rest of the United States. Historical records which relate the conditions of cleanliness, furnishing, and efficiency of southern households are contradictory.¹⁴ Some 20th century assumptions about the furnishing of antebellum Southern interiors could not be substantiated. Many historic southern homes are today furnished with numerous card tables, a form rare in Greene County. The pier, or 'petticoat', table with a mirror below the top, was recognizable in only one estate. The slabs identified as southern forms in other research were relatively common, but sugar chests were rare. The use of wash stands in dining rooms has been reported as a southern

¹²For similar findings see Williams, Savory Suppers, 8.

¹³Please note that the distinctive detached southern kitchen was not a part of this study.

¹⁴See Garrett 181-182.

practice.¹⁵ However, no wash stands were specifically recorded in Greene County dining rooms.¹⁶

Non-furniture Furnishings

The findings on non-furniture furnishings were more revealing than those on furniture. Because of the frequent absence of non-furniture furnishings from the homes of the decedents (particularly the members of the lower middle and middle classes), a rather general lack of refinement in living conditions in Greene County may be inferred.

The occurrence of non-furniture furnishings was usually associated with wealthy class decedents. Forms associated with wealthy decedents included sets of andirons with shovel and tongs, carpets with rugs, mirrors rather than looking glasses, musical instruments, paintings, and ornamental objects. Ownership of these forms were apparently social statements rather than pragmatic ones (e.g., clocks and sewing machines).

The data on lighting forms are particularly revealing of life in Greene County. Lamps were the property of wealthy decedents while candlesticks belonged to members of all three economic classes. The diversity of lamp types in the probate

¹⁵For the practice dish washing in southern dining rooms see Gordon and McArthur, "Living Patterns in Antebellum Rural America," 187.

¹⁶Erwin's dining room contained a water stand which may have been a wash stand. This may however have been a receptacle for drinking water. "Erwin Inventory."

inventories probably reveals a lack of general agreement or satisfaction with any particular source of artificial light within the decedent population. Whatever the reason, life after sunset was lived in darkness as there were only 1.9 lamps and 3.2 candlesticks per residence.¹⁷

Sewing machines were acquired by wealthy Greene County decedents shortly after they began to be produced commercially. This reveals an awareness and acceptance of new products and technology by members of the population. It also reveals a willingness to allocate economic and transportation resources to bring them into the county.

Cultural level. The lack of pianos, works of art, and books in the inventories of deceased Greene County slave owners reveals a low degree of culture, 'breeding' as Olmsted described it,¹⁸ as defined by the 19th century. Although uncommon, they occurred frequently enough to indicate an interest in such things among wealthy decedents. However, the inhabitants of Greene County were members of what was almost a frontier society, the county having been first settled in only 1819. Consequently, they had not yet had the

¹⁷These averages refer only to residences which were recorded as containing lamps or candlesticks.

¹⁸See Olmsted, The Cotton Kingdom, 553.

opportunity to establish the cultural foundation of the older parts of the United States to which they were compared.¹⁹

Interior Spaces

Identified interior spaces were usually associated with the wealthy decedent class, indicating that only the wealthy had residences large enough to contain discrete function interior spaces which required identification by utilitarian name. Multi-purpose interior spaces, especially multi-purpose dining rooms, were associated with the middle class decedents who probably could not afford the luxury of discrete function dining rooms, parlors, and bedrooms.

The occurrences of identified interior spaces also reveal accepted Greene County utilitarian room function. The functional names reveal the desire for provision of private (e.g., bedrooms) as well as public (e.g., parlors) spaces.

Identified interior spaces served social as well as utilitarian roles. Filled with self-conscious constellations of furnishings (i.e., sofas, sets of chairs, and center tables), parlors in Greene County represent a 19th century need for a public arena for display of wealth, knowledge, and

¹⁹This was probably true for other relatively new settlements in America as well. For example, musical instruments and paintings were uncommon throughout the 17th century in New England. See Gloria Main, "Probate Records as Sources," 93.

status.²⁰ From the frequent occurrence of parlors as opposed to the scarcity of sitting rooms it may be inferred that the symbolic display inherent in parlors was more highly prized than the utility of sitting rooms. The occurrences of discrete spaces for eating, used only a limited number of times a day, reveals adoption of the United States practice of display of wealth in the form of a dining room. However, in the homes of wealthy Greene County decedents, the presence of sofas and rocking chairs in dining rooms reveals that interior space was too costly to allow a room to be reserved solely for eating.

Distinctive furnishing constellations were associated with interior spaces. Parlors contained sofas, center tables, sets of chairs, and rocking chairs; dining rooms, sets of chairs, dining tables, sideboards, and slabs; bedrooms, bedsteads and furniture for clothing storage (most commonly chests and bureaus or chests of drawers), grooming, and personal hygiene.

The selection of furnishings for interior spaces was apparently based on both social and utilitarian considerations. The consistent correlation of some costly furnishings with specific interior spaces (e.g., beds with bedding in bedrooms and sofas in parlors) reveals an understanding among the decedents of social conventions for

²⁰For similar findings on American 19th century parlors see Grier, 287.

furniture placement current in mid-19th century America. placement of other costly forms (e.g., secretaries in both bedrooms and parlors) reveals that some forms were located according to utilitarian rather than a desire for display.

Values Represented in Furnishings

Psychological and Social Values

The residential furnishings and interiors belonging to the Greene County decedents reveal expression of American early Victorian values. These values refer to decedents' perception of furnishing utilitarian appropriateness, affordability, and social symbolic meaning. A desire for order²¹ was demonstrated by the identification of discrete function interior spaces (e.g., sitting rooms) and the use of specialized function furnishing forms (e.g., bureaus). A preference for neatness and order in Greene County was recorded by Lida Bestor Robertson in 1856.

I arose early this morning and made preparation for Mr. Robertson, adjusted the furniture in my room in the most pleasant way conceivable, had furniture rubbed, house scoured and at twelve o'clock every thing [sic] was in the most perfect order throughout the house, for I know too well a gentleman loves to come home & find his wife and house neat.²²

Evidence from the probate inventories points to other rituals of neatness such as the seasonal exchange (and presumable

²¹For the American early Victorian desire for order see Howe, Victorian America, 18-19.

²²Lida Bestor Robertson, "Diaries," 28 April 1856. ADAH.

cleaning) of floor and window coverings. The 19th century appreciation of nature is revealed through the interior display of flowers, which may be inferred from the occurrence of flower pots and vases in the Greene County inventories. The apparent lack of concern with aesthetic style and stylistic unity may represent a 19th century value of independence, as an "expression of people sure enough of their own taste to eschew eclectic imitations with neither fear nor ostentation."²³ Patriotism was revealed in the form of the titles of books and the subject of portraits and maps.

As early as the 1830s, the most highly regarded American homes were those which were furnished frugally and planned so as to make the parlor a "domestic altar" of virtues, the center of a Christian home.²⁴ Antebellum southerners expressed strong views about this moral role of the home. "Home is the temple of affection, the school of morality, and the nursery of religion."²⁵ These sentiments appeared in Greene County residences through such furnishing practices as the selection of didactic and moralizing works of art, frugality in the ownership of mahogany rather than rosewood furniture, and provision for gathering places for the family.

²³See Gowans, Images, 323.

²⁴See Handlin, The American Home, 12.

²⁵George Fitzhugh, "Make Home Attractive," Debow's Review, 26 January 1859, 633.

Still another early Victorian value expressed was a desire for symbolic display through interior furnishings.²⁶ The limited number of china presses or cabinets indicates that few Greene County decedents chose to spend a large amount of money for a china cabinet in order to display small precious items behind glass. Ownership of these costly objects records an exercise of power through both their presence and the exhibition of their contents.²⁷ Ownership of other costly forms were related to economic class within Greene County.²⁸ The valuable secretaries, bureaus, sofas, pianos, carpets, lamps, and mantel ornaments were usually the property of wealthy individuals and were probably prized as much for their symbolic and decorative roles as their utilitarian purposes. The occurrence of portraits, too, reveals a concern for the expression of status through the possession of symbolic furnishings.²⁹

²⁶See Cooper, Victorian and Edwardian Decor, 15.

²⁷See Douglas and Isherwood, The World of Goods, 89.

²⁸"All objects are created in and for a social context and that context always has a class dimension to it." Ames, "Furniture Study: Moving into the Mainstream," in Victorian Furniture, 13.

²⁹See Ray, 763.

Conservative Furnishing Practices

The presence of restrained and conservative furnishings in the homes of Greene County decedents is probably partially explained by "the deep retention of familiar ways"³⁰ which characterized the acquisition and use of furnishings in America. It may also be linked to the same cautiousness that Greene County residents displayed in political matters. The conservatism evident from the records of furnishings may have also been an intentional aesthetic choice, for in 1852 Charles Peabody expressed the southern sentiment: "[Give us] not . . . a gew gaw palace or a ginger bread cottage, but a substantial, comfortable home."³¹ This may have been a standard for most middle class Americans at the time, remembering the description of Abraham Lincoln's Springfield, Illinois, parlor as "simply and plainly fitted up, but . not without indications of taste and refinement."³² As early as 1838, American women were advised: "Simplicity of taste, extending both to dress, and manner of living, is particularly fitting in the daughters of the republic."³³

³⁰See St. George, Material Life, 261.

³¹See Charles A. Peabody, Soil of the South, II (1852), 253, quoted in Bonner, "Plantation Architecture," 377.

³²See "Front Parlor in Abraham Lincoln's House, Springfield, Ill.-Sketched by Our Special Artist," engraving in Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, 1860, quoted and reproduced in Grier, 94.

³³Lydia Sigourney, Letters to Mothers (Hartford, CT: by the author, 1838), 157, quoted in Grier, 92.

In 1851, Greensboro readers were given the secrets of a good home. "It is not the glitter of tinsel ornaments that can make a happy home, but a combination of things needful and necessary, blending the useful with the beautiful."³⁴ The furnishing of many mid-19th century parlors "emphasized modest consumption and self-control,"³⁵ values which would have appealed especially to the conservative Presbyterians near Eutaw.³⁶

Compared to the homes of wealthy northerners, the homes of the wealthy Greene County residents were not furnished extravagantly. In 1856, northern industrialist Samuel Colt anticipated the expenditure of just over \$11,000.00 to furnish his 12 room home, Armsmear, in Hartford, Connecticut.³⁷ The total 1860 purchase cost of the furnishings in Watson's Greensboro home, 8 rooms plus kitchen and furnishings in outbuildings, was less than half of Colt's, only \$5,061.00.³⁸ The average \$271.88 total value of residential furnishings belonging to Greene County decedents reveals the general low value of furnishings.

³⁴Reprinted from Soil of the South. Greensboro Alabama Beacon, 6 December 1851, 1.

³⁵See Grier, 95-96.

³⁶See Glass, Goodly Heritage, 23-30.

³⁷Phillip M. Johnston, "Dialogues Between Designer and Client: Furnishings Proposed by Leon Marcotte to Samuel Colt in the 1850s," Winterthur Portfolio 19, no. 4 (Winter 1984), 260.

³⁸"Recapitulation of Wealth." Watson Papers.

The apparent severity of interior furnishing in Greene County homes may be attributed to a variety of influences. The 'stripped-down' look associated with the Biedermeier furnishing taste was fashionable in America from 1820 to 1840.³⁹ 'Old-fashioned' by the period under study (1845-1860), this taste is evident in Greene County parlors in the apparent importance of the figured carpet contrasted with a limited number of other furnishings.⁴⁰

Their rural location was probably another conservative influence on Greene County decedents in the furnishing of their homes. Grier pointed out that "rural people were the bastion of true comfort,"⁴¹ with the inference that they chose comfort over fashion in their furnishing selection. Howe also pointed out a "cultural conservatism" of rural Victorian America.⁴² Given this conservatism and desire for comfort, it is not surprising that rocking chairs, although not fashionable according to American publications, occurred frequently in Greene County decedents' parlors.

Part of the appearance of conservatism in Greene County interiors is probably due to the fact that they represent a time before the great 19th century changes in American homes.

³⁹Charlotte Gere, Nineteenth-Century Decoration: The Art of the Interior (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1989), 181.

⁴⁰For this practice in America see Gere, 206.

⁴¹Grier, 101.

⁴²See Howe, Victorian America, 11.

The residences of Greene County decedents were like those of other Americans in the 1850s in their relative aesthetic simplicity of interior furnishing constellations, unlike the interiors of the later 19th century with their proliferation of purely decorative objects.⁴³

From the sparseness and utilitarian constellations of the furnishings in the interior spaces, it may be inferred that Greene County residences served as manufactories integrated with the economic activities of their owners. Identified by Horace Bushnell in 1864, this pre-industrial (i.e., antebellum) era role of the home was later replaced by the role of spiritual sanctuary.⁴⁴

Sociability

Provision for social exchange within the family and with friends was revealed through the analysis of the furnishing data in the Greene County inventories. In 1833, Sara Gayle of Greensboro expressed sentiments about home which may have also been those of her neighbors.

Every room in the dwelling is consecrated by some happiness, or some grief, of which it had been the scene--where I can sit down at a lonely fireside and feel that it is peopled with beloved ones, cheerful faces and voices of music, existing perhaps in memory alone, but once familiar there.⁴⁵

⁴³See Grier, 129ff.

⁴⁴See Handlin, American Home, 6-7, citing Horace Bushnell, Work and Play (London: 1864), 39-76.

⁴⁵Sarah Gayle, "Journal," 13 January 1833. Hoole.

The decedents exhibited an apparent understanding and acceptance of the social symbolism and utilitarian roles of such furniture as center tables and sets of chairs, especially those designated parlor chairs. The frequency of fireplaces⁴⁶ also suggests the gathering of friends and family at night,⁴⁷ especially when the scarcity of artificial lighting is recalled. Using these utilitarian forms along with sofas and extension dining tables, decedents provided opportunities for the creation of social groups. They also perceived the appropriateness of spatial allocation for family governance and social segregation;⁴⁸ furnishing the parlor with costly items as a place of elegance accessible to visitors and the dining room with less valuable forms as a place of everyday gathering for the family.⁴⁹

Role of Women

The role of the mistress of a 19th century American home was primarily that of the mother, who could almost become a part of the house itself through association with the forms furnishing the structure.⁵⁰ This role included the

⁴⁶Fireplaces are common in existing antebellum buildings and fireplace equipment is common in the inventories.

⁴⁷See Roche, 134.

⁴⁸Similar findings are suggested by other researchers. See St. George, Material Life, 7.

⁴⁹Similar findings are suggested by other researchers. See Clark, "Domestic Architecture," 543.

⁵⁰See Handlin, The American Home, 17.

management of residential furnishings recorded by Lida Robertson's attention to the order, polish, and cleanliness of her home (see above).⁵¹ Based on the historic records consulted, it appears that Greene County women contributed significantly to interior decoration through the creation of textile furnishings for the enrichment and 'softening' of their homes.⁵² Sophia Watson participated in the making up of her household linens and furnishing textiles: sheets, curtains, cushions, carpets. Sara Gayle, the wife of a governor of Alabama, engaged in the making of a rag rug for her dining room. As in other parts of the United States, the Greene County drawing rooms and parlors were probably considered particular domains of the lady of the house, providing opportunities for the display and arrangement of furniture and ornaments.⁵³

Women may have also played an important role in the provision for sociability in Greene County homes. An effect of the absence of women or a family on the allocation of interior space might be seen in the inventory of Stephen S. Sorsby (owner of 77 slaves), who apparently lived alone with his overseer. His residence contained a dining room,

⁵¹See Lida Bestor Robertson, "Diaries," 28 April 1856. ADAH.

⁵²It has been reported that women were recognized as connoisseurs on textiles appropriate for the home. See Garrett, 266.

⁵³See Garrett, 55-56.

overseer's room, big room, center room, and upstairs space but lacked the primary social space, a parlor, and had no sitting room without a bed.⁵⁴

Garrett has pointed out that the final decision for the acquisition and selection of furnishings for 19th century American homes "often fell to the husband as in earlier times."⁵⁵ For Greene County, there is the record of the wedding trip of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Watson to Mobile in 1845 where they purchased and presumably jointly selected the majority of the furnishings for their Greensboro home. But women in Greene County apparently had limited opportunities to shop for furnishings, as did Sara Gayle when contemplating the purchase of a new carpet.⁵⁶ However, whether the responsibility for the final decision to buy lay with wife or husband when shopping in Mobile or Greensboro or attending public auctions of personal possessions was not revealed by the records.

⁵⁴None of these rooms was furnished with the sofa, set of chairs, and center table and without a bed as would a typical parlor. "Sale of the Estate of Stephen S. Sorsby," GCPCR S (14 February 1860): 967-971.

⁵⁵Garrett, 267.

⁵⁶See Sara Gayle, "Journal," 4 December 1832. Hoole.

Suggestions for Further Research

The basic research on late antebellum southern interior furnishing practices in Greene County conducted in this study provides a basis for further research into early Victorian life in Alabama, the South, and the United States. (The data developed in this study should be compared with extant Alabama furnishings, extant furnishing constellations, and family traditions to more fully establish furnishing practices within the Alabama Black Belt.) Another step in the exploration of this subject is the examination and analysis of probate inventories for decedent slave owners outside Greene County to determine whether findings on utilitarian form and furnishing constellation occurrences in Greene County represent practices in other regions of the South.

(Interior furnishing historians disagree as to whether or not the South was different from the rest of the United States. Ames viewed the South as different, but Garrett treated the North and the South as having similar furnishing practices. Comparison of the Greene County findings to a similar study on a northern county to identify similarities and divergences in furnishing form and constellation occurrences could begin to address carefully the question of regional distinctions in residential furnishings. Such a study should address characteristics like item value, the constituent forms in interior space furnishing constellations, and structural material preference. This

line of study might also address the question of the level of antebellum culture in the South through the occurrence of forms like pianos and books.

There is also need for further research to aid in the cultural interpretation of residential furnishings as recorded in existing historic documents. One area of cultural interpretation which may prove particularly useful would be the investigation of societal influence on furnishing selections. Additional studies using statistical analysis of probate data are necessary to establish the representational accuracy of the furnishing practices recommended in mid-19th century published materials. Most importantly, additional research is needed on the social, psychological, and utilitarian messages inherent in furnishings and furnishing constellations which can enhance the interpretation of probate inventory data.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

DECEDENTS

DECEDENTS

Adams, William C.
 Allen, Joshua
 Allen, Richard
 Anderson, James A.
 Anderson, Jane
 Andrews, Patrick Henry
 Ashley, William R.
 Avery, William

Barker, Larry M.
 Barnes, Arthur D.
 Barry, Elizabeth J. (Miss)
 Barry, Jane (Mrs.)
 Beazley, Mary R.
 Beazley, Philip F.
 Bell, William A.
 Bizzell, James
 Bizzell, Mary
 Bizzell, William
 Borden, Arnold
 Borden, David
 Borden, Thomas R.
 Bowden, John (1848)
 Bowden, John (1854)
 Bragg, John H.
 Brassfield, Tilman P.
 Brassfield, William [F?]
 Briggs, Henry
 Briggs, Patsy L. R.
 Brown, Allen P.
 Brown, William P.
 Brownlee, Andrew
 Buchanan, Samuel
 Bullock, Wiley
 Bullock, Wiley G.
 Burns, Peter
 Burton, Ephram T.
 Butler, David

Camak, David
 Campbell, John
 Carlton, Ira
 Carnathan, George H.
 Carnathan, William
 Carpenter, Elizabeth
 Carpenter, Priscilla
 Carpenter, Simeon
 Chadwick, Shelly W.
 Chambers, Samuel

Chandler, Scott
 Chapman, Simeon
 Cherry, Samuel T.
 Chiles, David
 Chiles, Larkin
 Chiles, Thompson
 Cochran, Martha
 Coleman, Radford E.
 Coleman, Wilson H.
 Collins, Stephen
 Colvin, William
 Cook, John
 Creswell, John T.
 Croft, Henry T.
 Croom, Richard
 Croom, Thomas H.
 Croom, Wiley J.
 Cummings, James

Dallas, Alexander
 Davidson, Rufus A.
 Day, Rachel
 Derden, Temperence
 Dillard, Benjamin F.
 Dobbin, Leah
 Dunlap, John

Eatman, Henry
 Eatman, John
 Ellis, Robert N.
 Ellis, Stephen
 Estes, John
 Evans, Abner
 Evans, Andrew J.
 Evans, Stith
 Exam [Exum?], Wiley

Ferrell, William A.
 Fleming, Robert
 Fortson, William
 Foster, Nancy
 Frederick, George W.
 Free, Simeon
 Freeman, John P.
 Freeman, Joseph J.
 Freeman, Phoebe
 Friend, Nathaniel
 Garrett, Richard W.
 George, James G.

Gewin, Christopher C.
 Gill, James
 Glenn, Jincey P. (Mrs.)
 Gordon, Jesse (1847)
 Gordon, Jesse (1854)
 Goree, Carolyn (Mrs.)
 Graham, Alexander
 Gray, John

 Hamilton, Peter
 Hamlet, William R.
 Hanna, Andrew M.
 Hanna, Jane
 Hanna, Samuel
 Harkness, William
 Harris, Archibald
 Harris, Hambleton T.
 Harris, John R. (1848)
 Harris, John R. (1852)
 Harris, Johnathan
 Harris, Leodicia
 Harris, Mary
 Harrison, Elizabeth J.
 Harrison, Henry
 Harry, Thomas
 Hatter, William R. (Col.)
 Head, James
 Head, William C.
 Hellen, Walter
 Hendrick, Henry G.
 Herndon, Emma
 Herndon, Harry T.
 Herndon, Thomas
 Hicks, Asa
 Higginbotham, George G.
 Hill, Nancy A.
 Hill, William W.
 Hinton, Peter H.
 Hinton, William
 Hitt, David
 Hobson, Matthew
 Holdcroft, Edward F.
 Holloway, Benjamin
 Hooper, Thomas B.
 Hopkins, Joseph
 Hopper, William
 Hord, William
 Horn, Edmund
 Horton, Jesse
 Huckabee, Elizabeth A.
 Huckabee, George F.
 Hunt, Thompson [P.?]

Hutchins, Mary
 Hutton, Aquilla D.

 Jackson, David
 Jackson, John T.
 Johnston, John C.
 Johnston, Madison
 Johnston, Thomas W.
 Jones, Elizabeth
 Jones, James
 Jones, John (1847)
 Jones, John (1849)
 Jones, Stirling

 King, John
 King, Littleberry
 Kinnaird, James
 Kirkpatrick, James
 Kirkpatrick, Mary (Mrs.)
 Kirksey, Robert B. W.
 Knox, John
 Knox, Matthew

 Lavender, Nicia
 Lay, Amos
 Leatherwood, James
 Leatherwood, Mary
 Lee, Alfred
 Lipscomb, John E.
 Lipscomb, James H.
 Locke, James [C.?]
 Locke, John (1848)
 Locke, John (1856)
 Logan, Clem
 Logan, Leroy
 Logan, Martha
 Logan, William C.
 Logan, William

 McAlpine, Alexander
 McAlpine, John E.
 McAlpine, John E.
 McAlpine, Robert F.
 McAlpine, William Lee
 McCrackin, Arthur H.
 McCrackin, Jimmi
 McCrackin, Margaret
 McFadden, Robert H.
 McNally, Thomas
 McShan, Ferdinand H.
 McShan, John
 Martin, James T.

Martin, John
 Martin, Margaret
 Martin, William
 Mason, Henry S.
 May, Henry
 May, James
 May, John
 May, Pleasant Sr. (Maj.)
 May, Thomas B.
 May, William Sr.
 Mayes, Edward
 Mayo, Levi
 Meinerbreuker, John
 Melton, West A.
 Meredith, Joseph C.
 Meriwether, Walter L.
 Meriwether, William
 Meriwether, Zachery
 Minor, Frances T.
 Mitchell, Ransome
 Mobley, Nancy
 Mobley, Wiley
 Moody, Martin
 Morrow, Samuel

Neighbors, Mary
 Nelson, John
 Nichols, Thomas

Parham, Francis
 Parham, John
 Park, Anedsa [Amasa?]
 Parr, Henry
 Parr, John (1847)
 Parr, John (1854)
 Parr, John M.
 Patterson, William
 Patton, Samuel
 Paul, David D.
 Pearre, Alexander
 Peck, Frederick
 Perrin, George C. Dr.
 Pettigrew, James
 Phillips, Robert H.
 Pickens, Joseph
 Pickens, Robert
 Pickens, Samuel Col.
 Phippen, Bannister
 Phippen, Bethena
 Phippen, Eldred D.
 Phippen, Peleg P.
 Powell, Milton

Price, William Sr.

Randolph, Richard
 Randolph, Richard K.
 Randolph, Robert C.
 Rasberry, Joseph
 Reid, Samuel D.
 Reynolds, Gilbert
 Reynolds, Jefferson
 Richardson, Allen
 Ricks, Josiah
 Riddle, Thomas
 Ridgway, Elizabeth
 Roberts, Penelope (Mrs.)
 Roden, James
 Ross, Walter R.
 Rutledge, Issac

Scears, Martha
 Shaw, Miles M.
 Shelton, Nelly P.
 Shivers, Jesse
 Sims, George
 Smith, Elam
 Smith, Jonathan
 Smith, Lucy (Mrs.)
 Smith, Robert P.
 Smith, Wright W.
 Snedecor, Issac C.
 Sneed, Clavin B.
 Sorsby, Stephen S.
 Sorsby, William C.
 Spencer, Candis (Mrs.)
 Spencer, William M.
 Springs, Thomas J.
 Steele, Abner A. Sr.
 Steele, Ezekiel B. G.
 Stevens, Lewis
 Stewart, John F.
 Stickney, Joseph B.
 Strickland, Sampson
 Stringfellow, Eli
 Stringfellow, Elizabeth
 Summey, Jacob

Thedford, William
 Thetford, Thomas
 Thornton, Elisha
 Thornton, Luke
 Thurmond, Thomas
 Tisdale, Henry
 Toney, William H.

Townsend, Thomas
Truit, Charlotte Mixon
Turnstall, James L.

Underwood, Annett
Upchurch, Abel
Upchurch, Laton

Walker, Henry
Walker, Jemison
Walker, Martha
Walton, William
Watson, James H.
White, John S.
White, Moses

Whitehead, Edwin D.
Whitworth, Frances (Mrs.)
Whitworth, Jeremiah
Williams, Charles
Williams, Henry
Willingham, Mary [L.?
Willingham, William
Wilson, Drury
Wilson, Jaconiah
Wilson, James S. W.
Winston, John J.
Winston, John M.
Witherspoon, Thomas S.
Wynne, Nicholas J.
Wynne, Robert Sr.

APPENDIX B

RECORDING FORMS

Furnishing Form

Estate Code _____

PROBATE COURT

Greene County, Alabama
1845-1860

FURNISHINGS, TEXTILES, AND KITCHENWARES

Date	Volume	Page	Name of Estate	No. of Slaves
1	1	1		1
1	1	1		1

APPRAISAL - INVENTORY - SALE

[illegible]

Estate Form

1. Estate Code: _____ (Inventory #: _____)
2. Year: _____
3. County: _____
4. Testate: Yes _____ No _____
5. Probate Document Type: Inv. _____ App. _____ Sale _____
6. Sex: Male _____ Female _____ Unknown _____
7. Race: Black _____ White _____ Other _____ Unknown _____
8. Age: _____
9. Number of Family Members: _____ Source: _____
10. Occupation: _____ Source: _____
11. Total \$ Value of Estate: \$ _____
12. Total Acreage: _____
13. Total \$ Value of Real Estate: \$ _____
14. Total \$ Value of Personal Property: \$ _____
15. Total Number of Slaves Owned: _____
16. Total \$ Value of Slaves: \$ _____
17. Total \$ Value of Residential Furnishings: \$ _____
18. Named Rooms: Named Room _____ Individual Form _____
19. Post Office or Community of Residence: _____

APPENDIX C

FURNISHING FORM FILE

FURNISHING FORM FILE

Utilitarian Form Variables

Seating Furniture

Armchair	Lounge Chair
Bench	Office Chair
Bench/Table	Ottoman
Chair	Revolving Chair
Chair/Cushion(s)	Rocking Chair
Chair (Sitting)	Seat
Child's Chair	Settee
Cricket	Sick Chair
Crooked Back Chair	Sociable
Easy Chair	Sofa
Dining Chair	Sofa/Pillow(s)
Divan	Stool
Folding Chair	Tête-à-Tête
Footstool	Windsor Chair
High Chair	

Reclining Furniture and Related Furnishings

Bed Cord	High Post Bedstead
Bed Curtain(s)	High Post Bedstead/Furniture
Bedstead	Lounge
Bedstead/Bed	Large Bed/Bedstead/Furniture
Bedstead/Bed/Furniture	Large Bedstead/Furniture
Bedstead/Cord	Large Bedstead/Mattress/Cover
Bedstead/Mattress	Low Bedstead/Furniture
Bedstead Screw/Wrench	Low Post Bedstead
Bed Steps	Low Post Bedstead/Furniture
Child's Bedstead	Mosquito Bar, Net, etc.
Cot and Cot/Bed/Bedding	Post Bedstead
Couch	Post Bedstead/Furniture
Couch/Spring Mattress	Tester Bedstead
Cradle, Child/Infant	Tester Bedstead (Half Tester)
Crib	Trundle Bedstead
Crib/Mattress	Trundle Bedstead/Bed/Furniture
Curtain Bedstead	Valence(s)
Divan	Valence(s), Bed
Half Post Bedstead/Furniture	Valence(s), Foot

Task Surface Furniture and Related Furnishings

Bookcase and Secretary	Ink Stand
Bookcase/Writing Desk	Leaf/Folding/Fall Table
Bureau with Books	Pier Table
Bureau with Bookcase	Secretary
Breakfast Table	Secretary/Bookcase
Candle Stand	Side/Sideboard Table
Card Table	Side Table (Folding)
Center Table	Slab
Center Table/Marble Top	Slab Table
Chamber Pot/Night Glass	Stand
Corner Table	Table
Desk	Table/Cover
Desk/Bookcase	Table/Glass
Desk/Drawer(s)/Books	Table/Leaves
Desk and Table or Table Desk	Table/Marble Top
Desk, Office	Table/Wall
Desk, Portable	Tables, Pair or Set
Desk, Writing	Tea Table/Stand
Dining/Dinner Table	Wash Bowl/Pitcher
Dining Folding Table	Wash Bowl/Wash Pan
Dining Tables, Set of	Wash Stand
Dressing/Toilet Table	Wash Stand/Bowl/Pitcher
Dressing Table/Cover	Wash Stand/Furniture/Set
Dressing Table/Glass	Wash Stand/Marble Top
Dressing Table/Glass/Cover	Work/Sewing Table
Extension Table	Writing Table
Half Round Table	

Storage or Display Furniture and Related Furnishings

Bofat with Furniture	Corner Press/Cupboard
Bookcase	Cupboard
Bookcase/Library	Cupboard/Furniture
Bookcase/Stand or Table	Drawer or Set of Drawers
Book Shelves	Etagere/Notion Stand
Bureau	Hat Rack/Stand
Bureau, Dressing	Knife Box
Bureau/Glass	Liquor Case/Bottles
Bureau/Glass Ware	Press
Caddy/Tea Caddy	Press, China
Case/Bottles	Press, Clothes
Case/Knives/Forks	Safe
Case, Wine	Safe/Contents
Chest	Safe, Meat
Chest/Clothes	Sideboard
Chest of Drawers	Sideboard/Furniture
Clothes Rack/Stand/Horse	Sideboard/Mirror

Sideboard Safe
Stand
Sugar Chest
Towel Rack/Stand
Trunk

Trunk, Hand
Trunk, Travel
Wardrobe
What Not Table/Stand
Work Box

Fireplace and Heating Equipment

Andirons
Andirons/Shovel/Tongs
Andirons/Shovel
Andirons/Tongs
Bed Steamer
Bellows
Coal Hod
Coal Scuttle
Cook Stove
Fire Dogs/Dog Irons
Fender
Fire Carrier
Fire Irons
Fire Screen
Fire Irons/Shovel/Tongs
Fire Irons/Tongs

Fireplace Tool Stand
Footstove
Hearth Brush
Mantlepiece
Poker
Range (Cooking)
Range/Fixtures/Apparatus
Sand Box
Shovel
Shovel/Tongs
Stove
Stove/Fixtures/Apparatus
Stovepipe
Stove/Pipe
Tongs

Lighting Equipment

Branched Candlestick
Candlestick
Chandelier
Girondel(s)
Girondels, Mantle
Lamp
Lamp, Argand
Lamp, Astral
Lamp, Center Table
Lamp, Fluid

Lamp, Globe
Lamp, Lard
Lamp, Mantle
Lamp, Passage
Lamp, Patent
Lamp, Solar
Lamp, Suspended
Lantern
Snuffer
Snuffer/Tray

Floor Coverings

Carpet
Carpet/Rug
Carpeting
Door Mat
Foot Mat
Hearth Rug/Mat

Mat
Matting
Oil Cloth Carpet
Rug
Stair Carpet/Rug

Textile Furnishings

Blinds, Window
Cornice, Window
Cornice, Rings, Tassels, etc.
Curtain
Curtain, Window
Curtain Bands
Curtain Rods

Curtain Tapes
Curtains/Fixtures
Curtains, Set or Stand of
Knobs, Window
Shades, Window
Table Cover
Lamp Mat

Art

Drawing
Engraving
Map
Map-United States
Map-Alabama
Map-Texas
Map-Greene County
Painting
Painting, Framed

Painting, Landscape
Painting, Oil
Picture
Picture, Indian
Picture, Framed
Picture Frame(s)
Portrait
Portrait, Subject Named
Statuary

Looking Glasses

Dressing Glass
Glass
Looking Glass
Looking Glass/Drawer
Looking Glass/Feet

Mantle Glass
Mirror
Pier Glass
Toilet Glass
Shaving Glass

Clocks

Clock
Clock, 1 Day
Clock, 8 Day

Family Clock
Mantle Clock

Amusements

Accordion
Backgammon Box, Board, etc.
Bugle/Trumpet/Blowing Horn
Chess Board/Table
Chessmen
Dominoes
Fiddle/Violin
Flute
Guitar
Melodeon

Music Box
Music Stand
Pianoforte/Piano
Piano/Cover
Piano Cover
Piano Rack
Piano/Stool
Piano Stool
Whist Table

Printed Materials

Bible/Testament
Bible, Family
Book(s) or Library
Books, by Title

Hymn Book
Novels
Pamphlet(s)

Miscellaneous Furnishing Forms

Flower Pot/Flower Box
Fly Brush
Mantle Ornaments
Microscope
Ornaments
Peacock Feather

Sewing Machine
Spittoon/Spit Box
Telescope
Thermometer
Vase/Flower Vase

Utilitarian Form Descriptors

Identified Location in Interior Space

Space Identified by Name with Contents Itemized

Space Not Identified by Name

Space Name Suggested, Space Implied by Sequence of Items
Listed in Inventory or Single Item Identified as
Appropriate for a Specific Interior Space

Specific Interior Space

Bedroom # 1
Bedroom # 2
Bedroom # 3
Bedroom # 4
Bedroom # 5
Bedroom # 6
Big Room
Center Room
Counting Room
Dining Room
Drawing Room
Dressing Room
Family Room
Hall
House, Inside
House, Outside
Kitchen

Library
Lumber Room
Nursery
Office
Overseer's Room
Parlor
Passage
Passage # 1
Passage # 2
Passage, Back
Passage, Downstairs
Residence, Second
Residence, Third
Sitting Room
Stairs
Upstairs

Structural Material

Animal Skin.

Bear Skin	Morocco
Buffalo Skin	Skin, Otter
Hair	Skin, Seal
Hide or Skin, Unspecified	Skin, Sheep
Leather	

Fiber.

Cloth	Linen	Straw
Cotton	Mohair	Wool
Horsehair	Silk	

Wood.

Ash	Mahogany	Rosewood
Beech	Maple	Walnut
Cedar	Maple, Curled	Willow
Cherry	Oak	Wood, Unspecified
Ebony	Pine	
Ebony/Bronze	Poplar	

Metal.

Brass	Copper	Pewter
Brass Rimmed	Gilt/Gold	Silver
Brass Top	Iron	Steel
Britannia	Iron Bound	Tin
Bronze	Metal, Unspecified	

Stone.

Marble	Marble Slab/Top	Stone, Unspecified
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Other Materials.

China	Glass	Paper
Crockery	Ivory	Papier Maché

Surface Treatment

Color.

Black
Blue
Brown
Crimson

Green
Red
Russet
White

White and Blue
Yellow

Material/Technique.

Paint/Painted

Stained

Varnished

Structural Method

Cast
Chandelier
Plated

Turned
Veneer
Wire

Woven

Textile/Textile Pattern

Baize
Calico
Carpet
Carpet, Axminster
Carpet, Brussels
Carpet, Ingrain
Carpet, Scotch
Checked
Chenille
Coarse (Weave)
Damask
Dimity
Domestic

Double Weave/Double Woven
Figured
Fringed
Lace
Marseilles
Matting
Muslin
Oil Cloth
Plain
Plush
Rag
Striped
Yarn

Upholstery/Seating Material

Upholstery Construction.

Cotton Stuffed
Curled Hair Stuffed
Feather Stuffed
Hair Stuffed
Moss Stuffed

Shuck/Husk Stuffed
Sofa Bottom
Spring
Wool Stuffed

Seating Material.

Cane	Plank/Wood	Stool/Solid Bottom
Flag	Reed	Straw
Grass	Rush	Willow
Leather	Shuck	
Palmetto	Split	

Style/Condition

Sailor	Fine/Fancy/Good	New
Cottage	French	Old
English	Home Made/Rough	Plain/Ordinary/Common

Quantity

Real Number of Single Items or Groups
Singular Mention of an Item Assumed to be One
More than One but Number Unknown

Group

Bolt of	Lot of	Set of/Nest of
Box of	Matched Pair of	Stand of
Incomplete Set of	Pair of	

Shape or Form

Deep	Half-Round	Rectangular
Flat	Oval	Square
Four-Square	Round	

Part of Form

Arm(ed)	Drawer(s)	Leg
Back	Drawer, 1	Legs, Having
Bottom	Drawers, 2	Lock
Case	Drawers, 3	Post
Curtain	End	Seat
Cushion	Foot/Feet	Tester
Door(s)	Frame	Top
Doors, 4	Knobs, Having	

Size

Big/Large
Double
Extra Large

High
Long
Medium/Common Size

Small
Short/Low
Single/Half Size

Item Value

Real Appraised or Sale Value of Single Items or Groups
(Dollar Value Plus One Cent to Forty-Nine Cents Rounded
Down to Nearest Whole Dollar-----Dollar Value Plus Fifty
to Ninety-Nine Cents Rounded Up to Nearest Whole Dollar)
Value Not Specified Item Part of Group
Value Unknown

Estate Descriptors

Residence Number

Residence Number
(Three Estates Had More Than One Residence Inventoried.)

Source Probate Document(s)

Appraisal
Appraisal/Inventory
Appraisal/Inventory/Sale
Dower/Widow's Portion

Inventory
Sale
Sale/Appraisal
Sale/Inventory

APPENDIX D

ESTATE FILE

ESTATE FILE

Estate Variable

Residence Number

Residence Number: 001-325
(Three Estates Had Two Residences Inventoried.)

Estate Descriptors

Year of Estate Probation

Initial Year of Probation: 1845 to 1860

County of Probation

All Estates Were Probated in Greene County.

Decedent Testacy

Testate	Intestate	Testacy Unspecified
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Source Probate Document(s)

Appraisal	Inventory
Appraisal/Inventory	Sale
Appraisal/Inventory/Sale	Sale/Appraisal
Dower/Widow's Portion	Sale/Inventory

Identified Location in Interior Space

Space Identified by Name with Contents Itemized
Space Not Identified by Name
Space Name Suggested, Space Implied by Sequence of Items
Listed in Inventory or Single Item Identified as
Appropriate for a Specific Interior Space

Demographic Descriptors

Gender of Decedent Owner of Estate

Male	Female	Unspecified
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Race of Decedent Owner of Estate

White	Black	Other	Unspecified
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Age of Decedent Owner of Estate

Actual Age of Decedent	Unspecified
------------------------	-------------

Birthplace of Decedent Owner of Estate

Alabama	North Carolina	Virginia
Georgia	South Carolina	Scotland
Kentucky	Tennessee	Unknown

Occupation of Decedent Owner of Estate

Farmer or Planter	Attorney
Planter and Physician	Miller
Planter and Attorney	Wagon Maker
Planter and Miller	Overseer
Planter and Warehouse Owner	Unknown
Physician	

Year Decedent Owner of Estate Established Residency

Actual Year of Settlement: 1817 to 1860
Unknown

Precinct of Residency of Decedent Owner of Estate

Boligee	Hollow Square
Clinton	Knoxville
Eutaw	Mt. Hebron
Five Mile	Newbern
Forkland	New Prospect
Garrett's Shop	Pleasant Ridge
German Creek	Springfield
Greensboro	Union
Havana	Unknown

Number of Family Members of Decedent Owner of Estate

Actual Number of Family Members

Economic Descriptors

Value of Cash, Stocks, and Notes Owned by Decedent

Actual Dollar Value None Specified

Acreage Owned by Decedent

Actual Number of Acres None Specified

Value of Real Estate Owned by Decedent

Actual Dollar Value None specified

Value of Total Perishable Property Owned by Decedent

Actual Dollar Value None specified

Number of Slaves Owned by Decedent

Actual Number (All Decedents Included in Study Owned Slaves.)

Value of Slaves Owned by Decedent

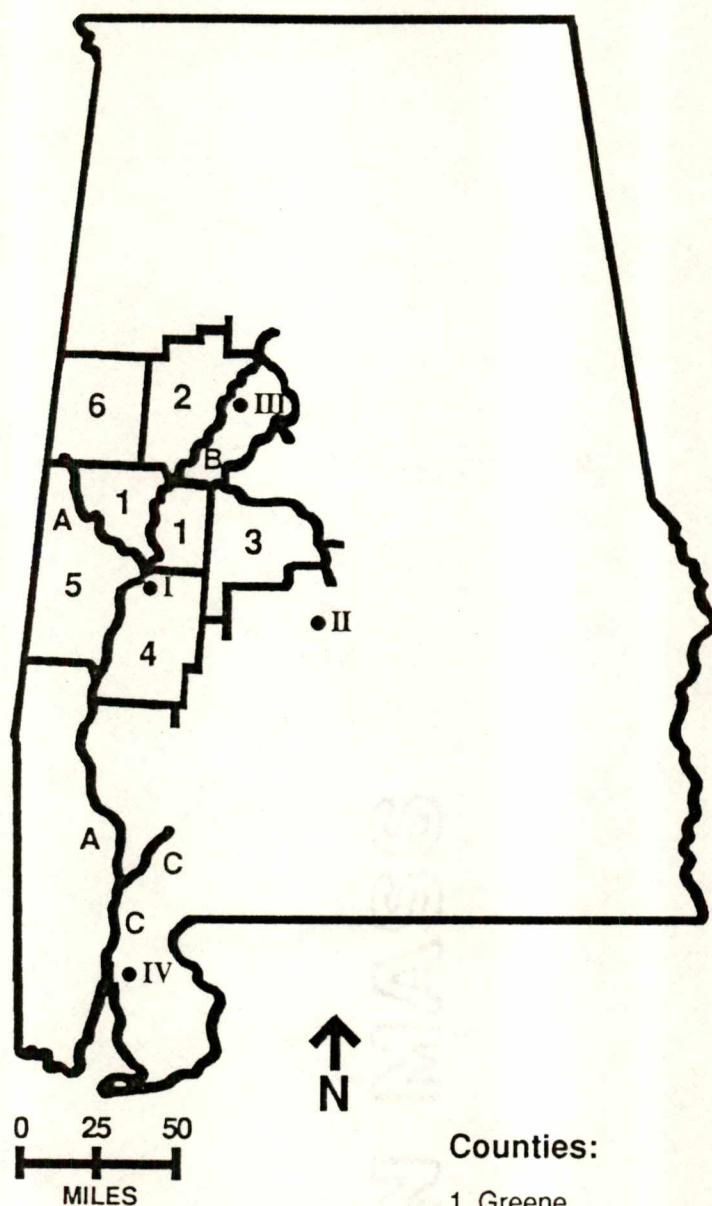
Actual Dollar Value None Specified

Value of Residential Furnishings Owned by Decedent

Actual Dollar Value None Specified

APPENDIX E

MAPS



Rivers:

- A Tombigbee
- B Black Warrior
- C Mobile

Counties:

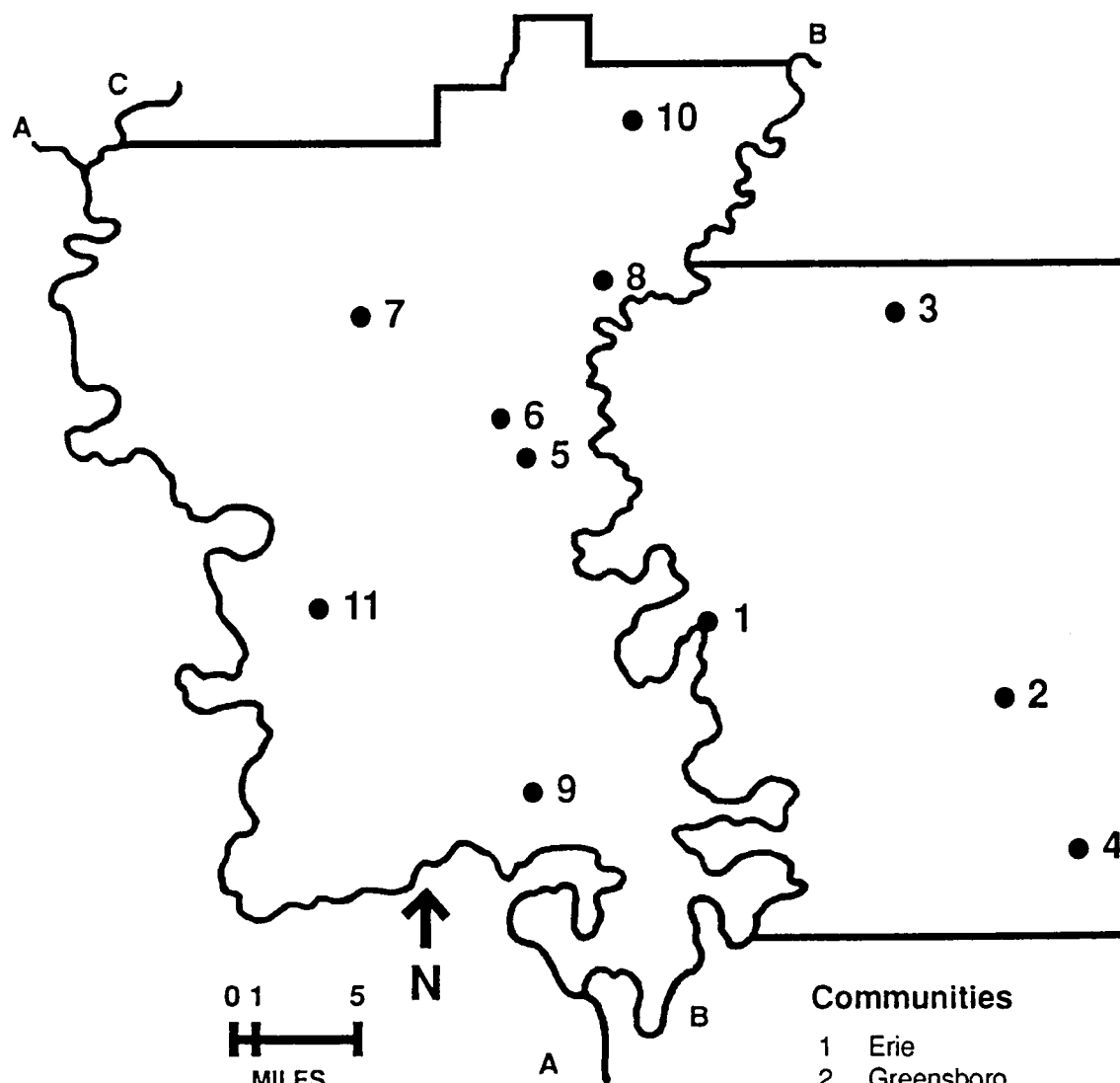
- 1 Greene
- 2 Tuscaloosa
- 3 Perry
- 4 Marengo
- 5 Sumpter
- 6 Pickens

Towns:

- I Demopolis
- II Cahaba
- III Tuscaloosa
- IV Mobile

Greene and Surrounding Counties: 1845 - 1869.¹

¹From Donald B. Dodd, Historical Atlas of Alabama (University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1974), 29-30.



Rivers:

- A Tombigbee
- B Black Warrior
- C Sipsey

Communities

- 1 Erie
- 2 Greensboro
- 3 Havana
- 4 Newburn
- 5 Eutaw
- 6 Mesopotamia
- 7 Clinton
- 8 Springfield
- 9 Forkland
- 10 Knoxville
- 11 Boligee

Antebellum Greene County Towns and Villages.¹

¹From Greene County Precinct Maps: 1858 (Department of Alabama History and Archives).

APPENDIX F

ECONOMIC VALUE RANGES

ECONOMIC VALUE RANGES

Slave Number Ranges

1	-	9
10	-	49
50	-	499

Residential Furnishings Total Value Ranges

\$	1	-	100
\$	101	-	300
\$	301	-	2,000

Estate Total Value Ranges

\$	1	-	5,000
\$	5,001	-	20,000
\$	20,002	and above	

VITA

Lee Wayne Rahe was born in New Braunfels, Texas on July 21, 1947. He attended elementary schools in that city and graduated from New Braunfels Senior High School in May 1965. In September of 1965 he entered Texas Lutheran College in Seguin, Texas. In September of 1966 he transferred to The University of Texas at Austin, and in August of 1969 he received a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Art History.

From 1969 to 1978 he resided in New Orleans, Louisiana where he dealt in European antiques and fine jewelry. He also practiced interior design and taught interior design at the Westbank Business College.

In September 1978, he entered The Graduate School of The University of Missouri at Columbia, and in August 1979 received the Master of Arts degree in Housing and Interior Design. He completed the Parson's School of Design program in Paris, France in the summer of 1982 and has made several other European study trips.

In August of 1984 he accepted a Graduate Teaching Assistantship in the College of Human Ecology and entered The Graduate School of the University of Tennessee. He received the Doctor of Philosophy in Human Ecology with an emphasis in Interior Design in May 1992.

The author is a member of Kappa Omicron Nu and a registered Interior Designer in the State of Alabama.

Mr. Rahe has been a member of the interior design faculty of
The University of Alabama since August of 1979.