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James Buchanan's Vision and the Making of Walnut Grove Plantation

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James Buchanan's Vision and the Making of Walnut Grove Plantation

by

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Abstract

In 1961, Walnut Grove manor, an Upcountry South Carolina plantation house built around 1765, was donated to the Spartanburg County Historical Association (SCHA) for preservation and rehabilitation as a museum. James E. “Buck” Buchanan worked as the plantation’s director from 1961 until his death in 1974. Buchanan, with a background as an artist, curated Walnut Grove in a way that reflected his experience as a painter and store-front exhibit designer as well as his interest in the story of early Upcountry South Carolina settlers. Privileging the Upcountry narrative he wished to tell over authenticity, during his tenure as director Buchanan restored the main house to its late eighteenth and early nineteenth century façade, brought historic buildings from across the Upstate to Walnut Grove Plantation and rehabilitated them to replace structures that had once existed at Walnut Grove but had been lost over time, and fully reconstructed one building that had not survived. As a result, Walnut Grove Plantation can be viewed not only as a museum focused on Upcountry South Carolina History, but also as a monument to Buchanan’s unique vision.

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James Buchanan's Vision and the Making of Walnut Grove Plantation

In 1961, Walnut Grove manor, an Upcountry South Carolina plantation house built around 1765, was donated to the Spartanburg County Historical Association (SCHA) for preservation and rehabilitation as a museum. Over the next decade the plantation house was restored to its late eighteenth and early nineteenth century appearance. It was also given an interpretation that focused on the narrative of Upcountry settlement from about 1765 to 1830 as well as the plantation's unique contribution to the Revolutionary War in South Carolina.

Perhaps no single person has had as substantial of an impact on the development of Walnut Grove Plantation as James E. "Buck" Buchanan who served as the property's first director from its birth as a public historic site in 1961 until his death in 1974. Buchanan was not a trained museum professional. He was an artist who prized history and loved his community and in Walnut Grove Plantation he found a project which combined these two passions. During his years as a director Buchanan worked to improve the plantation and create a historic site that would serve as a memorial to a time and people long past. In

order to accomplish this, Buchanan added numerous buildings to the property and laid the foundation for the interpretation of the site that still exists today.

More than a museum that depicts life in the South Carolina Upcountry during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Walnut Grove Plantation can be viewed as a museum commemorating the vision of James Buchanan. While at first glance Buchanan appears simply to have followed the philosophies of outdoor museums like Colonial Williamsburg, upon further investigation it becomes evident that he held a unique viewpoint which shaped the preservation and interpretation of this outdoor museum. Buchanan, an artist by profession, curated Walnut Grove in a way that reflected his background as a painter and store-front exhibit designer as well as his interest in the history of early Upcountry South Carolina settlers.

An understanding of the outdoor museum movement in America is important in order to comprehend fully Buchanan's preservation decisions. Buchanan adopted a variety of preservation methods including restoring the main house to a specific time period, bringing historic buildings from across the Upcountry and rehabilitating them to serve new purposes, and reconstructing buildings that had been lost over time. Buchanan's background as an artist led him to favor creating an aesthetically pleasing narrative over remaining true to the unique histories of each individual building and to emphasize the decorative

arts. His narrative also privileged early Upcountry History and the plantation's role in the Revolutionary War while in some cases deliberately neglecting important issues, particularly slavery, that marred Buchanan's wholly positive image of Walnut Grove and version of its history that he wished to present.

While Buchanan's preservation and interpretive decisions are debatable, there is no doubt that his choices shaped the presentation of the plantation that visitors see today and that it reflects his unique vision for Walnut Grove.

By the time that Walnut Grove Plantation was being rehabilitated several significant "outdoor museums," defined by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as "a restored, re-created, or replica village site in which several or many structures have been restored, rebuilt, or moved and whose purpose is to interpret a historical or cultural setting, period, or activity," already existed in America.¹ Among these were Colonial Williamsburg, Greenfield Village, and Old Sturbridge Village. Although there is no evidence to suggest that Buchanan visited these sites, he would almost certainly have been familiar with these outdoor museums and looked to them as models for his own preservation work at Walnut Grove Plantation. By examining the preservation movement as it unfolded in outdoor museums across the United States and into the 1970s, one

¹ William J. Murtagh, *Keeping Time: The History and Theory of Preservation in America* (Pittstown, NJ: Main Street Press, 1988), 75.

can begin to understand the context of the decisions that James Buchanan made regarding the preservation of Walnut Grove Plantation.

Colonial Williamsburg is perhaps the best known and, in terms of visitation and imitation, one of the most successful efforts in history and tourism in United States history. It created its iconic setting by both restoring buildings still in existence on the property and recreating buildings that had been destroyed over time, both of which were actions Buchanan took during his time at Walnut Grove Plantation. The development of Colonial Williamsburg marked the beginning of the outdoor museum movement in the United States and was therefore a crucial model for Buchanan and others who would later create similar institutions.²

John D. Rockefeller was primarily responsible for establishing this historic community in 1926 at the urging of W. A. R. Goodwin, rector of the Bruton Parish Church in Williamsburg. Rockefeller's primary motivation for creating the museum was patriotism, a desire to share the values of freedom and democracy with future generations. Throughout the process, Rockefeller had approximately ninety historic buildings stretching over one hundred and seventy-five acres site, restored. Today, the museum boasts around thirty exhibition buildings.³

² Murtagh, *Keeping Time*, 79-80.

³ Murtagh, *Keeping Time*, 79-80.

Four of the most aesthetically-significant buildings bear special attention as they are particularly important to the image created by Williamsburg and give significant insight into the preservation philosophy of the site. These include the Capitol, the Governor's Palace, the Wren building of the College of William and Mary, and the Bruton Parish Church. Both the Capitol and Governor's Palace are complete reconstructions, meaning they were built based on buildings that *used to exist* in Williamsburg, but had since been destroyed. The Wren building of the College of William and Mary was recreated through "heavy reconstruction." The Bruton Parish Church is the least changed of these buildings, but has still undergone some reconstruction as part of the outdoor museum.⁴ Williamsburg, with its mixture of restored and recreated buildings, reflected trends in American historic preservation which would continue for decades and influence the design of countless museums such as Walnut Grove Plantation.

Another famous predecessor in outdoor museums that was likely to have inspired Buchanan, and was itself inspired by Colonial Williamsburg, was Sturbridge Village in Massachusetts. At Sturbridge Village reconstructed and old buildings, in addition to newly constructed buildings, were brought together from multiple sites to recreate a New England village setting. Albert Wells collected artifacts belonging to his ancestors including devices they had

⁴ Murtagh, *Keeping Time*, 79-80.

developed for their trades until his collection became too large to house by himself. Wells then hired Arthur Shurcliff, the landscape architect for Colonial Williamsburg, to advise him on the creation of a new historic site where he could display his collection. Wells envisioned the site as a place not just to teach about historic arts and crafts, but also historic ways of life. He wished to show how objects were made, used, and what influenced their designs. In the end, eighteen reconstructed or old buildings were moved to the site.⁵

Another outdoor museum that was likely to have inspired Buchanan was Greenfield Village. Envisioned by Henry Ford, it opened to the public in 1933, less than ten years after Williamsburg, and followed a different historic preservation ideology than the colonial Virginia site. At this museum, buildings were brought together from across the world and reinterpreted to create a distinct narrative. Driven more by the desire to educate, as opposed to patriotism like Rockefeller, Henry Ford chose to craft an outdoor museum which would recreate a New England townscape near Dearborn, Michigan.⁶

Ford chose to bring historic buildings from elsewhere and relocate them to create Greenfield Village. These buildings were sometimes interpreted in their original context but other times repurposed to reflect the narrative that Ford wished to tell. First, Ford moved the Scottish settlement school which he had

⁵ Murtagh, *Keeping Time*, 83-84.

⁶ Murtagh, *Keeping Time*, 81-82.

attended as a child to the site, then added a tavern from Clinton, Michigan. By 1929, the site included a courthouse, a railroad station from Michigan, a post office, a farmhouse, and a carding mill. Later, Ford added more buildings from across the Atlantic including two cottages from England and a five-story London jewelry shop. Reduced three levels, the jewelry shop was modified in order to house Ford's watch and clock collection. During the fiftieth anniversary of the invention of electric lighting Ford had laboratory buildings from Menlo Park, New Jersey, moved to Greenfield Village.⁷ Like Buchanan, Ford prized the narrative he wished to recount to his audience and the aesthetic experience of his museum above remaining true to the authenticity of the individual buildings.

Buchanan's preservation philosophy shared elements of the philosophies of each of these outdoor museums. Like those who planned Colonial Williamsburg, Buchanan chose to restore and reconstruct buildings which had once existed on the historic site but had disappeared over time. In order to accomplish this, Buchanan brought buildings from other locations and repurposed them to fit with his vision for Walnut Grove in a fashion similar to the outdoor museums of Sturbridge Village and Greenfield Village. In this way, it would appear that Buchanan was modeling his museum on these famous examples. However, upon closer examination it becomes clear that Buchanan's

⁷ Murtagh, *Keeping Time*, 81-82.

own background and historic preferences also had a crucial impact on his preservation and interpretive decisions at Walnut Grove.

In 1961, Thomas Moore Craig and his wife, Lena Jones Craig decided to donate Walnut Grove Plantation house, their family's historic home in Roebuck, South Carolina, to the Spartanburg County Historical Association (SCHA) along with eight acres of land surrounding the home. With this donation, the couple hoped to preserve the site and encourage its use as an educational tool. Originally built by their ancestors, Charles and Mary Moore, c. 1765, the house had seen multiple generations of the Moore family come and go over nearly 250 years of Upcountry history. In the six years that followed the donation numerous volunteers from the Spartanburg community, particularly members of the Junior League and the Spartanburg County Foundation, worked to research the property and gather period furniture to fill the house. Finally, on October 15, 1967, the property was officially opened to the public.⁸

Buchanan, one of the founding members of the SCHA and a part of Walnut Grove's restoration from the time it was donated to the organization, envisioned a Walnut Grove Plantation which would transport visitors back to the Revolutionary era and the first years of the new republic. Toward that end he not only restored buildings which existed on the property when it was given to the

⁸ "Walnut Grove Plantation," Spartanburg County Historical Association, accessed November 29, 2011. <http://www.spartanburghistory.org/history.php>.

SCHA, but also removed additional historic buildings from their original locations and relocated them on the property. Sometimes these buildings retained their original functions; however more than once Buchanan repurposed these buildings to represent other structures which would have initially existed on the property but had been lost over time. Moreover, at least one building, the



Figure 1: Walnut Grove Plantation main house prior to restoration by SCHA.

Plantation bore little resemblance to the plantation that visitors encounter in Roebuck today. However, an anonymous \$5,000 donation allowed the association to begin restoration work post haste.⁹ The original

Doctor's Office, was a complete fabrication, a reconstruction designed by Buchanan to model a building that had existed on the property decades earlier.

When first donated to the SCHA in 1961, Walnut Grove



Figure 2: Walnut Grove Plantation main house after restoration by SCHA.

⁹ "Historical Society Plans Restoration of Landmark," *Spartanburg Herald-Journal*, April 9, 1961.

restoration of the house lasted from 1961 through 1968. At that time the manor house was repainted outside as well as most rooms inside the house. Cracked chimneys were repaired, cedar shingles matching those that originally topped the roof were laid, and, as the front porch was rotten and sagging “a practically new front porch had to be made.”¹⁰ By March of 1963, nearly two years after the house was donated, restoration of the building’s exterior had been completed and the process of restoring the home’s interior had begun. This included the replacement of much of the original wood flooring on the first floor¹¹ and the restoration of fireplace mantels.¹²

When the SCHA acquired Walnut Grove Plantation there were very few original buildings on the plantation other than the main house. However at this point Buchanan had already developed his unique vision for what Walnut Grove Plantation could be. He envisioned numerous structures that would work together to create a village consisting of twelve total buildings. “It had to be a small village,” he claimed, “for that is what was there in the beginning, actually more. What isn’t there now will come later I hope.”¹³ In order to accomplish this

¹⁰ “Restoration Under Way on Kate Berry Homestead,” *Spartanburg Herald-Journal*, November 24, 1962.

¹¹ “Restoration Work Progresses,” *Spartanburg Herald-Journal*, March 15, 1963.

¹² “Restoration Under Way on Kate Berry Homestead,” *Spartanburg Herald-Journal*, November 24, 1962.

¹³ James Buchanan, James Buchanan Diary Transcript, pg. 1, 1968. Walnut Grove Plantation Archives.

vision in several instances Buchanan chose to take historic buildings from across the Upstate, load them up, transport them to Walnut Grove, and rehabilitate them to fit with his vision for the plantation. Buchanan did not use these structures to give voice to their stories as individual properties separate from Walnut Grove but to substitute for buildings that had once existed on the property and had since been lost to the ravages of time. He had no interest in these buildings' own histories, but only in them as they could be used as props or set pieces to tell Buchanan's version of the history of Walnut Grove Plantation.

Even the nomination form for the National Register for Historic places suggests that all the buildings on the site, whether original to the property or not, were meant to work together to paint a picture of life in the Upcountry prior to 1830. According to the nomination form "The Walnut Grove House, outbuildings, and furnishing provide a fully documented picture of life, and an example of social history in upcountry South Carolina prior to 1830... In addition, the fully furnished kitchen and school room, and the recreation of such buildings as the smokehouse and blacksmith shop bring life to history and give visitors a picture of what education, cooking and living were like on the South Carolina frontier in the second half of the eighteenth century."¹⁴ This simple statement demonstrates how necessary the addition of buildings to Walnut

¹⁴ Walnut Grove Nomination form for National Register of Historic Places, 1970. Walnut Grove Plantation Archives.

Grove Plantation was to the narrative that Buchanan hoped to recount to visitors to the museum. Buchanan did not attempt to hide the fact that some of the buildings were “recreations” of buildings that originally existed on the plantation, suggesting that he did not view the repurposing of historic buildings from across the Upstate, or the reconstruction of buildings lost over time, as negative. Without these buildings it would have been much more difficult for Buchanan to illustrate what life was like for early settlers in the Upcountry.

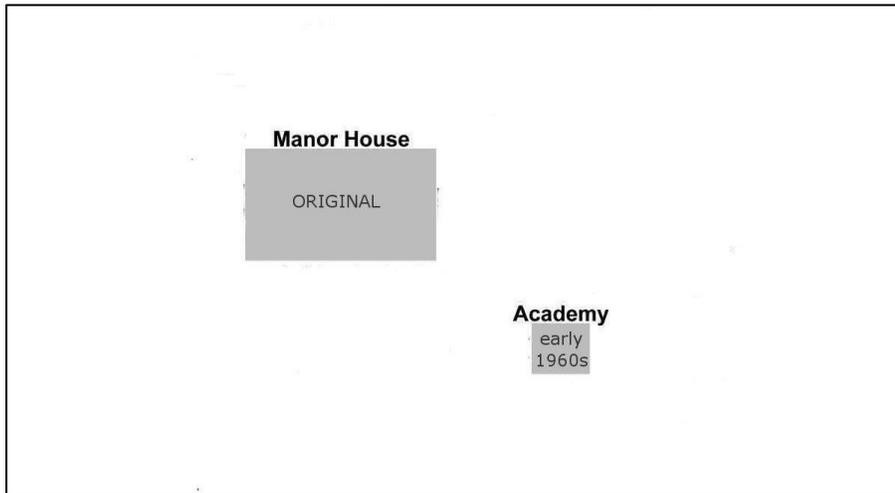


Figure 3: Map of Walnut Grove Plantation after addition of Rocky Springs Academy.

One of the first buildings brought to the Walnut Grove Plantation campus, the Rocky Springs Academy (*See Figure 3*), was actually used in accordance with its original purpose and had a Walnut Grove connection. The Moore family built the academy in 1770, just five years after building the main manor house. This school serviced not only the Moore children but also the children of various

farmers in the area at the time including the Barrys, the Crooks, and the Means. In order to provide for all of these families and not just the children of Walnut Grove Plantation, the building was originally located about one mile from Walnut Grove in a location that was more convenient for all of the families who sent their children there.¹⁵

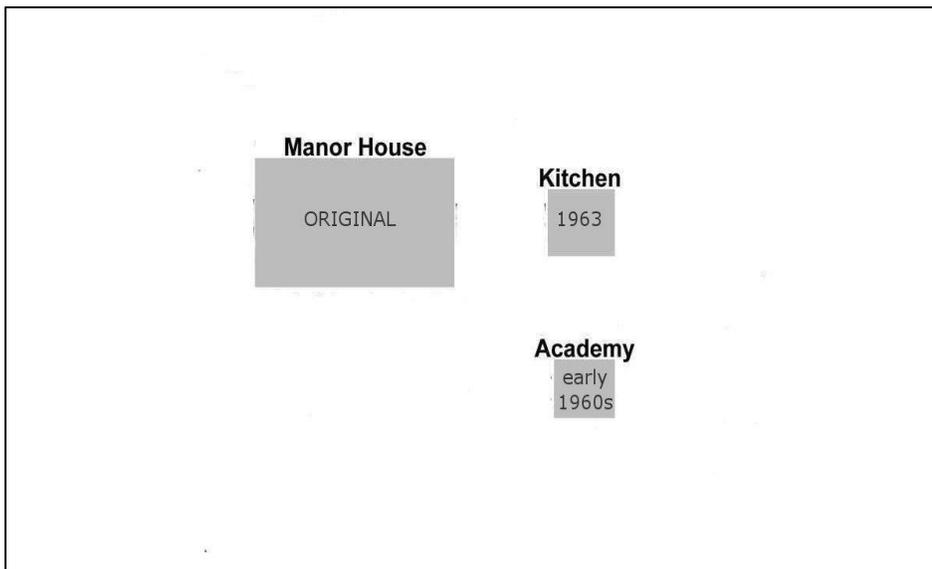


Figure 4: Map of Walnut Grove Plantation after addition of Kitchen House.

When the academy was not in session the building was used as a spinning or weaving room. Rocky Springs Academy was added to the Walnut Grove campus in the early 1960s in order to bring it closer to the plantation so that visitors would not have to walk a mile in order to view the building. Moving this building to Walnut Grove allowed Buchanan to talk about education during early settlement in the South Carolina Upcountry as well as how settlers weaved

¹⁵ 1998 Walnut Grove Tour Book. Walnut Grove Plantation Archives.

their linens, however the interpretation of the building remained unaltered from what it would have been had it remained in its native location.¹⁶

The addition of the kitchen building illustrates Buchanan's willingness to acquire old buildings and adapt them to suit his purposes at Walnut Grove and the fact that he felt no obligation to remain true to the historical authenticity of individual buildings. Originally the building (*See Figure 4*), was not a kitchen at all but a log cabin built in 1777 in Glendale, South Carolina. Donated by Alan Calhoun, it was moved in 1963 to its current location behind the main house of Walnut Grove in order to replace the kitchen building that had once existed behind the main house but had long ago disappeared.¹⁷

This log cabin was placed on top of the foundation of the original kitchen house. Buchanan saw the addition of this structure as a suitable solution to the problem of the missing kitchen, despite the fact that it had never functioned as a kitchen, because it was built around the same period as Walnut Grove's plantation kitchen. In addition it was built using mud chinking to keep out the weather, the same construction technique used in the original kitchen.¹⁸ After the move, the cabin was renovated to match the "big house."¹⁹ A letter from Charles

¹⁶ 1998 Walnut Grove Tour Book. Walnut Grove Plantation Archives.

¹⁷ Walnut Grove Visitor's Center panel. Walnut Grove Plantation.

¹⁸ Walnut Grove Visitor's Center panel. Walnut Grove Plantation.

¹⁹ "Moore Plantation Soon to Get Fine Addition," *Spartanburg Herald-Journal*, February 2, 1965.

Gignilliat, President of the SCHA, thanked Alan Calhoun for the gift of the eighteenth century house to SCHA for removal to Walnut Grove Plantation: "It is really a gem of the period with its hand-hewn log construction, and will make a perfect 'kitchen' for our needs," he declared.²⁰

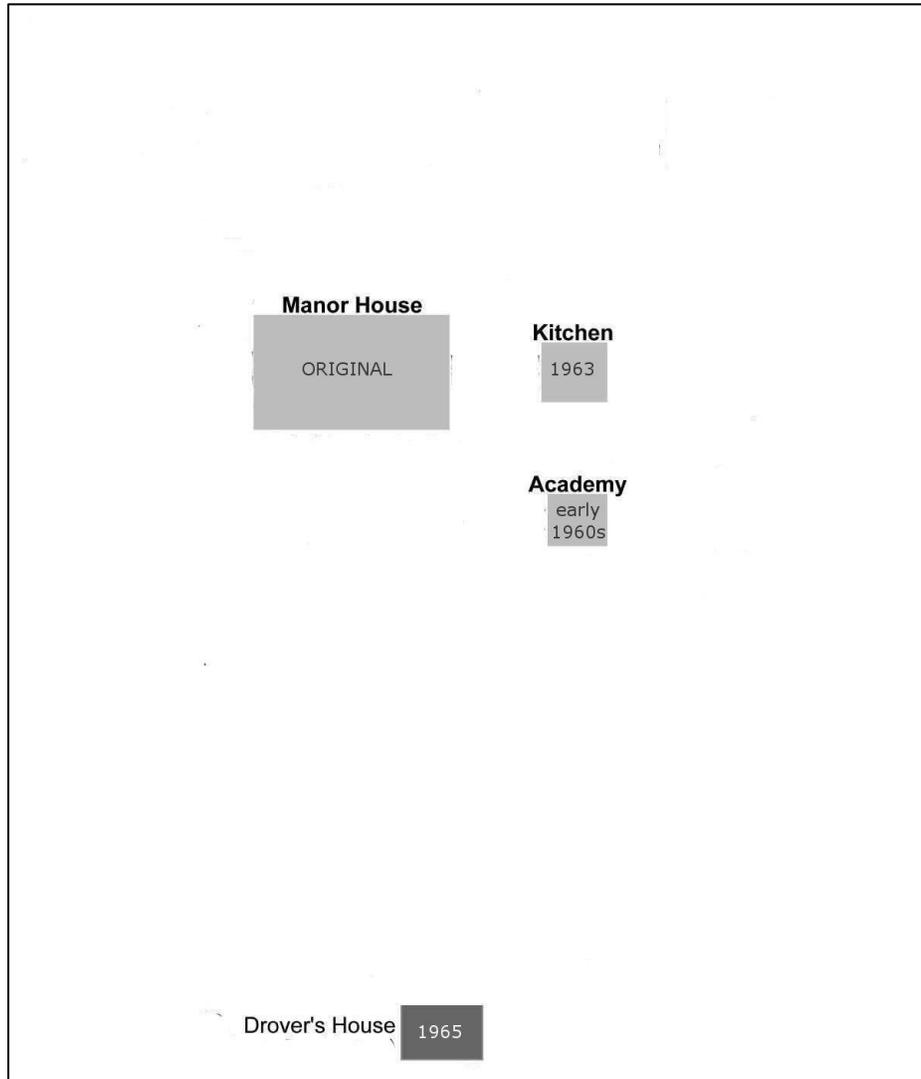


Figure 5: Map of Walnut Grove Plantation after addition of Drover's House.

²⁰ Gignilliat, Charles. *Charles Gignilliat to Mr. Alan Calhoun, December 10, 1962.* Letter. Walnut Grove Plantation Archives.

Another building moved to Walnut Grove had no connection at all to the plantation until James Buchanan invented one. Brought to the plantation in 1965, the Drover's House (*See Figure 5*) was added to the property due mostly to its significance to Upcountry history. This Drover's House was the last drover's house in the Upstate and had originally sat in the Walnut Grove community, about four miles away. Built around 1780 and originally run by the McCarley family, the house was used as a resting place for the overnight stops of cattle drivers who used the road going from the mountains to Charleston in order to take cattle to the markets in the port city.²¹ Mount Calvary Presbyterian Church donated the house to the SCHA.²²

Adding the Drover's house enabled Buchanan to expand the narrative of Walnut Grove itself to include more about Upcountry history. He also used it for a more practical purpose. As part of SCHA's contract with Buchanan, which named him the resident director of Walnut Grove Plantation, he was required to live in the Drover's House on the plantation and "spend as much time as possible protecting the property."²³

²¹ James Buchanan, *Walnut Grove Plantation Tour Book*, 1970. Walnut Grove Plantation Archives.

²² Buchanan, *Tour Book*.

²³ Buchanan, *Diary Transcript*, pg. 2.

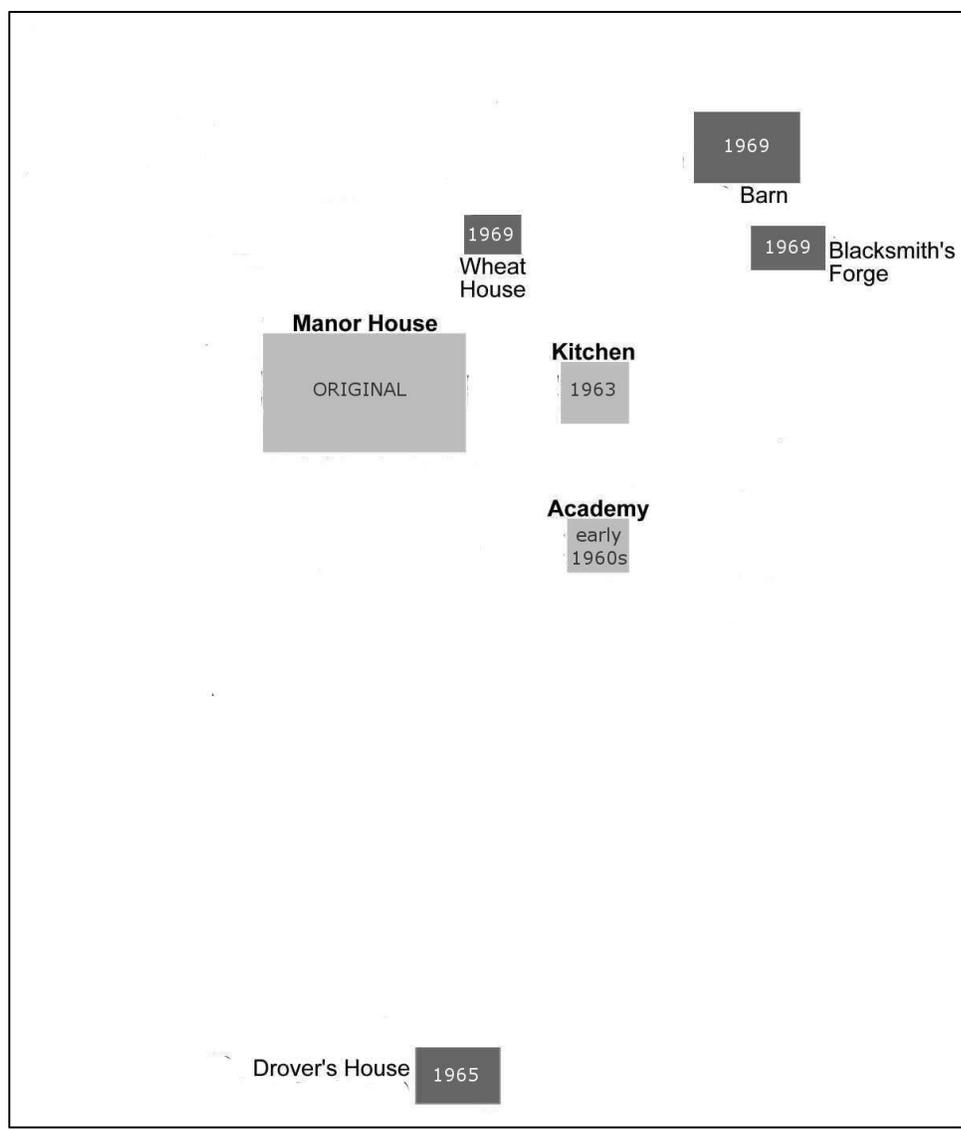


Figure 6: Map of Walnut Grove Plantation after addition of Horse Barn, Wheat House, and Blacksmith's Forge.

Under Buchanan's direction Walnut Grove continued to grow and yet more buildings were added that had no original connection to the plantation but were useful in telling Upcountry history. In 1969 several new buildings were moved to the Walnut Grove Plantation campus (*See Figure 6*). Like the Drover's House, the ways in which these buildings were interpreted on the campus did

not necessarily reflect their original functions, but rather were added in order to tell the history of Walnut Grove Plantation and early Upcountry lifestyles.

In February of 1969, an two-story log barn arrived in Walnut Grove for rehabilitation as the horse barn on the plantation. After having been donated by A.C. Patterson, the barn was disassembled at its home in Inman and reconstructed on location at Walnut Grove.²⁴

The wheat house arrived on the plantation shortly after on March 12, 1969.²⁵ Brought to Walnut Grove in one load in the back of a flat-bed truck, the wheat barn was originally a log cabin located in York County and donated by Robert Black.²⁶ Buchanan and his helpers worked to fix the new building up by pulling out nails, cleaning up logs, and adding a few additional logs. Originally Buchanan imagined that the wheat house would add to the plantation only externally, not as a building that visitors could walk into. This is evidenced by the fact that he declared that it would hide a “multitude of sins,” by which he meant modern tools that would not have been found in the eighteenth century South Carolina backcountry, such as a wheelbarrow, modern rakes and shovels,

²⁴ Coleman, Frank. *Frank Coleman to Mrs. A.C. Patterson, March 3, 1969*. Letter. Walnut Grove Plantation Archives.

²⁵ Buchanan, Diary Transcript, pg. 8, March 12, 1969.

²⁶ Correspondence between Frank Coleman and Mr. Robert Black. August 1968. Walnut Grove Plantation Archives.

and a riding lawnmower.²⁷ The blacksmith's forge was also added to the property that year.²⁸

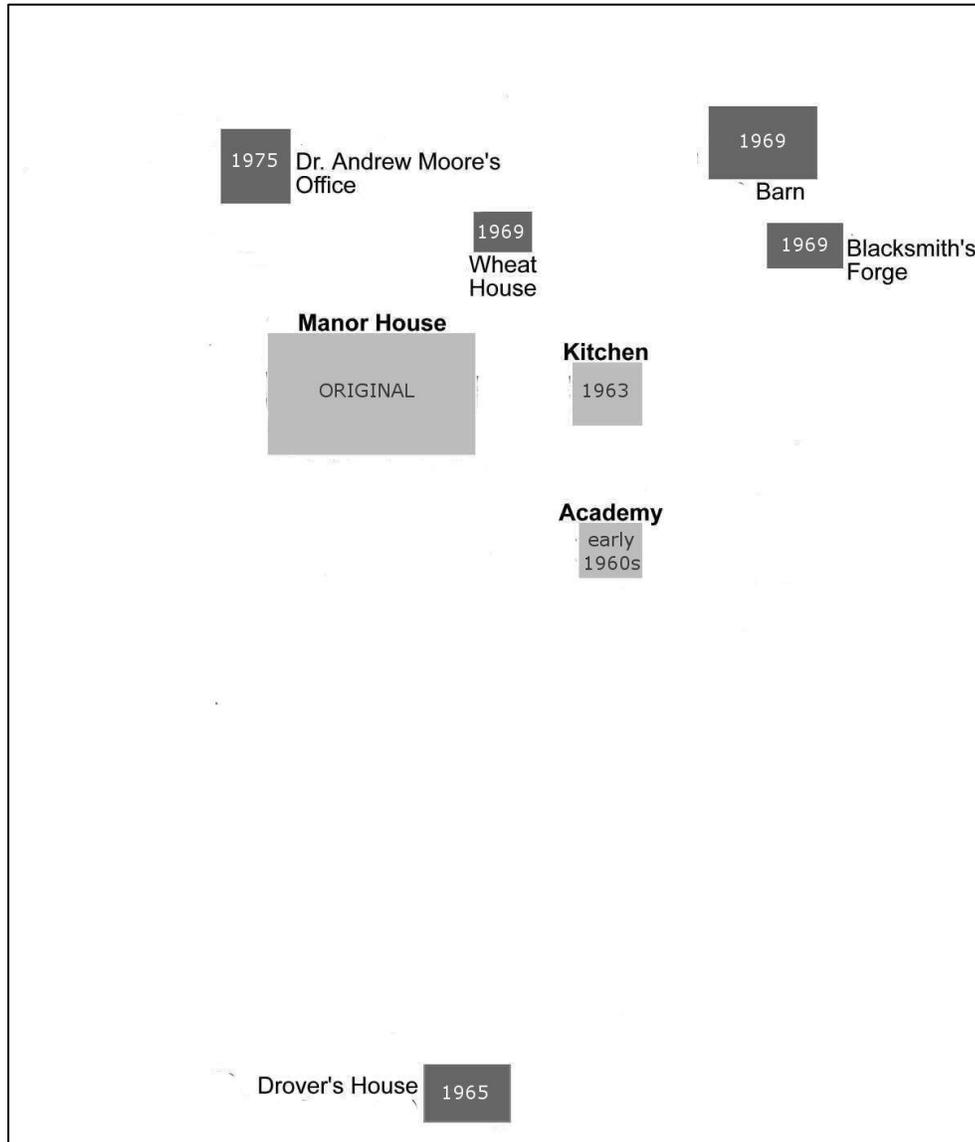


Figure 7: Map of Walnut Grove Plantation after addition of Doctor's Office.

²⁷ Buchanan, Diary Transcript, pg. 8, March 12, 1969.

²⁸ "New Additions at Walnut Grove Recapture Plantation's Charm," *Spartanburg Herald-Journal*, June 6, 1969.

At least one building was a complete reconstruction, a model of a building that had once existed on the property. However the Doctor's Office (*See Figure 7*) was a recreation of a building that had existed at Walnut Grove Plantation at around the turn of the eighteenth century. Opened in 1975, it was described as a tribute to one of Charles and Mary Moore's youngest children, Dr. Andrew Barry Moore, who became one of Spartanburg County's first medical doctors c. 1800. The building includes medical equipment from the early 1800s when Dr. Moore would have been practicing in the Upstate.²⁹

Although the Doctor's office was not completed until a year after Buchanan's death, Buchanan anticipated its eventual creation with excitement.³⁰ Again, he does not appear to have had any qualms about the inauthenticity of recreating a building that had once existed on the property but had been destroyed in recent years. For Buchanan, narrative superseded all else.

Buchanan based his decisions regarding how to restore the main house, what buildings to bring to the property and rehabilitate, and what buildings to reconstruct on his experiences as an artist and his own attitudes toward certain historical periods. Buchanan's background as a painter and store-front exhibit designer led him to privilege an aesthetic narrative and setting over the authenticity of the buildings at Walnut Grove and to place a special emphasis on

²⁹ Walnut Grove Visitor's Center Panel. Walnut Grove Plantation.

³⁰ Buchanan, Diary Transcript, pg. 7, March 7, 1968.

the decorative arts. Furthermore, his own passionate interest in the Revolutionary era, as well as in providing an illustration of life in the Upcountry prior to 1830, influenced his preservation and interpretive choices at the museum.

That Buchanan spent the years before beginning his work at Walnut Grove as an artist clearly influenced his decisions as curator. Regarding the preservation and interpretation of Walnut Grove Plantation he sought to create an aesthetic setting in which visitors could experience historic life in the Upcountry of South Carolina. According to one obituary, Buchanan and art were “synonymous.”³¹

Long before he was restoring historic buildings and leading tours, Buchanan had worked as a painter and as a store window exhibit designer. In both instances he had been in the business of creating objects, that he hoped others would find aesthetically pleasing. As he designed the plantation village, this background led him to emphasize the aesthetic appeal of the historic site. This is not to say that Buchanan did not view the history of the site as significant, but rather that he often valued the presentation of beautiful aspects of Walnut

³¹ “James E. “Buc” Buchanan, 1909-1974,” Spartanburg Regional History Museum Archives.

Grove Plantation above remaining true to the distinct histories of the individual buildings.³²

Although he studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Buchanan considered himself to be a self-taught artist. Moreover, through the years Buchanan studied with artists including Constantine Pougialis of the Art Institute of Chicago, James Pace of the Art Institute of Atlanta, and Howard Leigh, a famed water colorist from Mitla in Southern Mexico.³³

Buchanan also worked for the Aug. W. Smith Co. department store for twenty-six years as an exhibit designer for the storefront windows, an experience that would prove useful as he sought to arrange the buildings at Walnut Grove Plantation into their own exhibit on Upcountry History. At the department store Buchanan became accustomed to arranging objects in a way that would appeal the public.³⁴ Buchanan received national recognition with awards for the design and originality of his displays.³⁵ A trip to view his infamous “T’was the Night Before Christmas” display in the store windows became a holiday tradition for many living in Spartanburg County. After leaving Aug. W. Smith, Buchanan

³² “Make Spartanburg a Better Place to Live.” Spartanburg Regional History Museum Archives.

³³ “Make Spartanburg a Better Place to Live.” Spartanburg Regional History Museum Archives.

³⁴ “James E. Buchanan,” *The Drover’s Post*, Spartanburg County Historical Association, September, 1974.

³⁵ “Make Spartanburg a Better Place to Live.” Spartanburg Regional History Museum Archives.

became an art instructor for a community art class in Spartanburg, but this position did not last long as he grew impatient with for “would-be-Rembrandts.”³⁶ Additionally, he designed sets and costumes for the local Little Theater and had a role in founding the Spartanburg Art Guild.³⁷

After these experiences, the idea of designing a space where visitors could interact with the world as it had been in the early history of the nation, a place where they could be transported to a different time, appealed to Buchanan. Walnut Grove gave him an opportunity for creating an aesthetically pleasing “exhibit” far larger than a store window, far more permanent than theatrical sets or costumes. He had a chance to use multiple buildings filled with hundreds of artifacts to tell a story that was both pleasing and educational. Buchanan hoped that “Seeing Walnut Grove [would] bring the history your children study to life.”³⁸

Furthermore, Buchanan’s background as an artist led him to prize the decorative arts objects presented at Walnut Grove. He emphasized them in his narrative of the plantation. This emphasis is best illustrated by the tour script

³⁶ “Walnut Grove Director Enjoys Solitude, Painting,” *Spartanburg Herald-Journal*, January 1, 1972.

³⁷ “James E. Buchanan,” *The Drover’s Post*.

³⁸ “Walnut Grove, A Link with the Past,” *Spartanburg Herald-Journal*, August 2, 1968.

Buchanan wrote in 1970 and the articles written concerning Walnut Grove Plantation.

Most of the tour script Buchanan wrote for his guides in 1970 focused upon the interior design, furniture, and housewares found in each room. When bringing visitors into the Keeping Room, or living room, the tour guide is instructed to point out the paint and paneling of the room as well as the Bible box, the Queen Anne tea table, the oriental tea set, the floor lamp, and the prints on the walls.³⁹ In the next room, Buchanan's script focuses on the bed and bed linens, the trunk on the floor, a candlestand, and the wall decorations.⁴⁰ Other rooms follow suit and, at the end of the script for each room, Buchanan added a list of descriptions of objects that patrons might ask about and information about each of those objects. Buchanan's tour script clearly demonstrates his own inclination toward emphasizing the decorative arts.

Visitors to the museum also took notice of the emphasis on the decorative arts at Walnut Grove Plantation. Articles found in the local newspaper, *The Spartanburg Herald-Journal*, focused on the decorative arts at the site and Buchanan's contribution to this aspect of the museum. Articles spanning the

³⁹ Buchanan, *Tour Book*, 10-11.

⁴⁰ Buchanan, *Tour Book*, 14-15.

years of 1962 through 1970 discussed the fireplace, mantle, “friendly hearth,”⁴¹ and “lovely antiques” housed inside the buildings.⁴² One article specifically targeted “furniture enthusiasts” whom the author suggested would be particularly impressed by “a look at the original Early American.”⁴³ Another spoke to Buchanan’s impact on the design of the building. Describing him as “an authority on color,” the author claimed that “His reproduction of the original mahogany graining in the Keeping Room of the manor house is indeed a significant example of his skill. Mr. Buchanan’s touch can be seen everywhere at Walnut Grove: in the faithfully revitalized wall colorings: in the carefully restored furnishings and in the warmth and lived- in feeling of each room.”⁴⁴

Beyond the decorative arts, Buchanan’s vision focused on the narrative he was trying to present to his visitors which superseded the importance of remaining true to the unique history of each individual building. As with any historic site, there were decisions that had to be made about how to interpret the narrative of the property. Having been built in 1765, the plantation had witnessed nearly two hundred years of history before becoming a museum.

⁴¹ “Restoration Under Way on Kate Berry Homestead,” *Spartanburg Herald-Journal*, November 24, 1962.

⁴² “Spartans Spend Years in Research, Restoring Projects for Plantation,” *Spartanburg Herald-Journal*, October 11, 1967.

⁴³ “Walnut Grove, A Link with the Past,” *Spartanburg Herald-Journal*, August 2, 1968.

⁴⁴ “Spartans Spend Years in Research, Restoring Projects for Plantation,” *Spartanburg Herald-Journal*, October 11, 1967.

Buchanan could have chosen any single year, generation, or historic event, or any combination of the above to focus on in his interpretation. Buchanan's narrative revolved around two central storylines: First, Upcountry South Carolina History and the lifestyles of the people who lived in the Upcountry between 1765 and 1830; and second, the Moore family and their contribution to the Patriot cause in the American Revolution. He wanted to transport the men, women, and children who visited the plantation back to the colonial and early national eras in United States history. Moreover, he wanted to make the American Revolution come to life, hoping that his visitors would leave with a better understanding of what Upcountry living was between 1765 and 1830.

Buchanan's tour script utilizes discussion of decorative art objects, such as furniture and ceramics, in order to explain how early settlers in the Carolina Upcountry lived. The Academy was used to discuss education in the colonial Upcountry and the ways in which settlers made their clothes and linens. Buchanan used the kitchen to talk about the cooking practices and diets of the regions colonial inhabitants. Finally, the Drover's House allowed tour guides to explain the history of early Upcountry "cowboys" and trade routes to visitors.⁴⁵

Articles from local newspapers also reflected the importance of Walnut Grove's Revolutionary War significance to the narrative Buchanan prioritized.

⁴⁵ Buchanan, Tour Book.

Following the donation of Walnut Grove to the SCHA, journalists noted that Walnut Grove served as the home of Kate Berry, the Moore family daughter who assisted General Daniel Morgan in the Revolutionary War in Upcountry South Carolina by helping to round up militia and acting as a scout on several occasions.⁴⁶ Even after Walnut Grove Plantation became more established these references continued to appear in newspaper articles covering the development of the historic site.⁴⁷ *News for South Carolina Local Historical Societies* noted the historical significance of Walnut Grove as it related to the Revolutionary War as well. Before detailing the unique architecture and decorative art objects that one can find at Walnut Grove Plantation, an article covering a preview tour held at Walnut Grove spent a paragraph discussing the history of the plantation from its birth in 1765 through its role in the Revolutionary War.⁴⁸

Had Buchanan left the property as he found it, without bringing more buildings to Walnut Grove's campus, he would not have been able to recount as rich a narrative of how the Moores, and other families living in the Upcountry of

⁴⁶ "Historical Society Plans Restoration of Landmark," *Spartanburg Herald-Journal*, April 9, 1961. "Group to Restore Old Walnut Grove Plantation," *Spartanburg Herald-Journal*, October 18, 1962. "Restoration Under Way on Kate Berry Homestead," *Spartanburg Herald-Journal*, November 24, 1962.

⁴⁷ "Fire Damages Room, Attic of Historic Barry Home," *Spartanburg Herald-Journal*, December 26, 1965. "Walnut Grove, A Link with the Past," *Spartanburg Herald-Journal*, August 8, 1968. "Historical Society Plans Doctor's Office at Walnut Grove," *Spartanburg Herald-Journal*, March 3, 1972.

⁴⁸ "Preview Tour Held at Walnut Grove," *News for South Carolina Local Historical Societies* 7 (1967): 5.

South Carolina in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries had lived. Had he not chosen to move the Academy, repurpose buildings from across the Upstate to act as the kitchen house, wheat house, and blacksmith forge, or worked to reconstruct the doctor's office, Buchanan might have been able to *tell* visitors what life was like for early South Carolina settlers in the Upstate, but he would not have been able to *show* them. Had Buchanan and those who worked at Walnut Grove chosen this approach, Walnut Grove would not have had the same impact on its visitors.

One obvious and important omission from the narrative of Walnut Grove recounted by James Buchanan is any mention of slavery on the plantation. This also reflects of Buchanan's attitudes and purposes.

According to Patricia West, curator of the Martin Van Buren National Historic Site and professor at State University of New York, "When a house becomes a museum, its function is shaped by the exigencies of the period in which the museum is founded, in particular by the political issues so meaningful to those defining its public role."⁴⁹ Buchanan was formulating his interpretation of Walnut Grove in the midst of the turbulent Civil Rights Movement, a transformative experience for the nation and especially the South that influenced

⁴⁹ Patricia West, *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's House Museums* (London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999), xi.

many other museum professionals to place greater emphasis on African American history and the history of race relations, including slavery.

During this era many historians turned their attention to the history of ethnic minorities and especially African-Americans. In 1956 the Booker T. Washington Monument was added to the National Park Service. In 1962 Congress took responsibility for the home of abolitionist and civil rights advocate Frederick Douglas.⁵⁰ In her book *The American Mosaic: Preserving a Nation's Heritage*, Antoinette Josephine Lee wrote that "caught up in the social upheavals of the 1960s, both ivory-tower academic historians and those associated with historical societies and museums sought relevancy in writing the history of identifiable ethnic groups."⁵¹

James Buchanan, however, did not take this approach to his narrative of Walnut Grove Plantation in the 1970 tour script that he authored. Perhaps aware that discussion of slavery would not contribute to the positive narrative he was constructing about the Moore Family and Upcountry history, Buchanan avoided the subject of slavery as much as possible. Only once did he mention slavery in his script. According to Buchanan's instructions, when a tour guide stood in the

⁵⁰ Robert E. Stripe, *A Richer Heritage: Historic Preservation in the 21st Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 386.

⁵¹ Robert E. Stripe and Antoinette Josephine Lee, *The American Mosaic: Preserving a Nation's Heritage* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997).

kitchen building, which doubled as a weaving room, he or she was to indicate that the Moore family not only needed to clothe themselves, but also their nine slaves.⁵²

Otherwise the subject of slavery did not come up in the tour guide. This was clearly a deliberate omission. A note at the end of the tour script speaks volumes. There Buchanan inserted a special note to the tour guide regarding discussion of slavery on the plantation. Buchanan stated that "Slaves were too expensive to be mistreated. They were well taken care of, fed, clothed, and doctored right along with members of the family." However, perhaps not wanting to provoke discussion on this sensitive area, or raise questions about this benevolent interpretation of the institution of slavery, he concluded the script by stating that "the less said about it to the group, the better."⁵³

Buchanan's policy of avoiding slavery is consistent with West's theory that historic house museums represent their curators' positions on the political issues of the time. Buchanan most likely left slavery out of his narrative as a reaction against developments in race relations that led historians, more sympathetic to the Civil Rights Movement, to create narratives that included African-American history. Buchanan's view of this era of reform was reflected in

⁵² Buchanan. Tour Script.

⁵³ Buchanan. Tour Script.

a statement he made on New Years' Eve 1969, "Thank heaven I made it through the SAD SIXTIES. A decade that never should have existed."⁵⁴

Another of Buchanan's projects makes it even clearer Buchanan's avoidance of the topic of slavery in his Walnut Grove narrative was a defensive reaction against criticism of slavery and the treatment of slaves in the antebellum South. Indeed, in this project he presented slavery as a benevolent institution especially as practiced at Walnut Grove. In 1974, just before Buchanan's death and four years after composing the tour script for Walnut Grove, he was part of a group that developed a short film focused on the role of Walnut Grove Plantation in the Revolutionary War. This film cast one slave, Cato, as one of the main characters and included several slaves in the background. In the first scene Cato, a slave of the Berry family, arrives at a neighboring plantation to see "children, both slave and free, playing together." When Loyalist forces attack the house, Cato escapes and runs to warn his masters at Walnut Grove that their house will be attacked in the morning, demonstrating his unwavering devotion to the family that owns him. The screenplay describes Cato as "running for the lives of those who own him but do not deprive him of dignity and manhood." After a series of events that leave several partisan soldiers dead, "Kate and Cato are honored equally for having saved the home and the lives of all by their heroic

⁵⁴ Buchanan, Diary Transcript, pg. 18, December 31, 1969.

efforts.”⁵⁵ The screenplay suggests the anxiety felt by Buchanan and the other writers who saw themselves and their region as under attack.

Buchanan clearly believed, however, that the subject was best avoided. Why raise the issue and have to contend with negative comments about how slaves were treated in the South? Instead, he wrote a narrative that presented a picturesque, romantic view of life in Upcountry South Carolina, focused on Upcountry History and the plantation’s contribution to the patriotic cause in the Revolutionary War. Including discussion of slavery in the tour risked shifting the visitor’s focus away from the celebratory narrative that Buchanan wished to present.

Buchanan presented Walnut Grove as he saw it. It is important to recognize that, though today modern preservationists and museum professionals might question the authenticity of James Buchanan’s Walnut Grove due to the repurposing of buildings which were not original to the location, he did not reject the concept of authenticity. For Buchanan, authenticity was important: he sought to recreate the plantation as accurately as possible given the fact that so much of it had been destroyed. He undertook meticulous research to understand what it would have looked like during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. To accurately furnish the plantation, Buchanan and his colleagues read

⁵⁵ “Kate Berry Bicentennial Film Project,” 1974. Walnut Grove Plantation Archives.

and indexed every will and inventory file at the Spartanburg County Courthouse prior to 1830.⁵⁶ The restorations that were undertaken inside the house were meant to be as accurate as possible to what would have existed prior to 1830. Old locks matching the original ones were donated. Modern methods were used to match old woods used in the fireplace.⁵⁷ Buchanan was praised for his efforts to achieve authenticity. "The restoration of the plantation has been authenticated in every detail," wrote one journalist.⁵⁸ Another stated that Walnut Grove presented "an authentic documented interpretation of life in Spartanburg County prior to 1830..."⁵⁹

However, Buchanan represented a part of the preservation movement which favored repurposing and recreating historic buildings in order to create a specific narrative at an outdoor museum. While most historically-minded Americans during the 1960s agreed that preserving our nation's cultural heritage in the form of historic sites was vastly important, deciding how to go about doing this preservation work was debated. The members of a historic preservation committee formed in 1966 drew several different conclusions.

⁵⁶ Buchanan, Tour Book.

⁵⁷ "Restoration Under Way on Kate Berry Homestead," *Spartanburg Herald-Journal*, November 11, 1962.

⁵⁸ "Walnut Grove, A Link with the Past," *Spartanburg Herald-Journal*, August 2, 1968.

⁵⁹ "Walnut Grove Plantation to 'Come Alive'," *Spartanburg Herald-Journal*, October 11, 1970.

Perhaps the most striking of these is the opinion of Walter Muir Whitehill, Director and Librarian for the Boston Athenaeum, regarding open air museums. In his article in the report, Whitehill openly declared his distaste for the majority of open air museums in America that have transported historic buildings from different locations together into one location, creating a small historic village, which was historically inaccurate.

Only incidentally do such villages serve the cause of historic preservation, for, although they have doubtless rescued from destruction some buildings by moving, their primary purpose is the creation of a well-walled illusion, within which the visitor may enjoy a synthetic "past," that relieves the ugliness and monotony of the tedium in which he spends most of his life.⁶⁰

Whitehill further warned that such types of restoration can cross into "pageantry" if not done carefully.

Even those... which are based upon careful research are in essence expensive life-size toys, manufactured for children of all ages who have forgotten how to read. They may be effective instruments of education, amusement, propaganda, or some kind of special pleading, but they have precious little to do with history, and absolutely nothing to do with historic preservation.⁶¹

Although historic sites including Colonial Williamsburg, Greenfield Village, and Sturbridge Village had all chosen to recreate certain historical settings through the restoration of old buildings, moving and reinterpreting

⁶⁰ United States Conference of Mayors. Special Committee on Historic Preservation, *With Heritage So Rich*. (New York, NY: Random House, 1966), 52.

⁶¹ *With Heritage So Rich*, 53.

buildings to fit a contrived narrative, and even recreating buildings that had been lost over time, the appropriateness of such types of preservation was beginning to be questioned by the end of the 1960s. Buchanan, however, followed the model created by the historic sites listed above, which drew visitors during Buchanan's time and continue to attract large crowds even today.

Buchanan saw no problem with removing buildings from their original context and repurposing them because his main goal was to utilize Walnut Grove to recount the story of life in the Upcountry as he understood it and wished to present it. For Buchanan, telling this story took precedence over remaining true to the preservation of individual buildings in their original context. Had he not chosen this path, visitors today might have a very different experience with the plantation. Though the property would have remained more authentic had Buchanan refused to bring unoriginal buildings to the campus, visitors would have learned less about life in the Backcountry around 1800. In addition, those buildings not located at Walnut Grove might well have been destroyed.

Walnut Grove can be seen as more than simply a museum commemorating the history of the plantation but as a monument to the vision of James E. "Buck" Buchanan. Today, the buildings that James Buchanan brought to Walnut Grove Plantation still stand on the property where Buchanan placed

them along with the reconstructed Doctor's Office that he designed. The main house still boasts its late eighteenth to early nineteenth century façade inside and out. Many of the artifacts accessioned during Buchanan's time are yet on display within these buildings. Though a new tour script has been written, it still has the same focus on early Upcountry history and the American Revolution that Buchanan chose around fifty years ago. The Walnut Grove that exists today is a testament as much to the unique vision of James Buchanan as it is to the history of the Upcountry in the early history of the nation.

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