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Projects at military sites have played a major role in the development of historical archaeology. The location of Fort San Fernando de las Barrancas, a Spanish post from 1795 to 1797 on the Fourth Chickasaw Bluff, is yet to be found, but this plan drawn by Victor Collot based on his 1796 reconnaissance will be a valuable resource for interpretation if the site is discovered. (Mississippi Valley Collection, University of Memphis)
Much of the early work that led to the development of historical archaeology as a separate field of study took place at the sites of American and Canadian military forts. In Tennessee, as well, the subject of the earliest report, in 1937, documenting a historical site excavation was a portion of the Civil War fortification remains at Fort Donelson. Like most of Tennessee’s early archaeology projects, the vast majority of which concerned prehistoric Native American sites, the work at Fort Donelson was conducted under Federal sponsorship. Private agency interest in historical archaeological research came after the federal projects of the 1930s, but it too first focused on a military theme. By the 1950s, a citizens group called the “Fort Loudoun Association” was sponsoring archaeological excavations at the site of Fort Loudoun, an eighteen-century post constructed in lower East Tennessee by British soldiers.

Over the next two decades, projects at military sites continued to play a major role in the development of historical archaeology. By the late 1970s, the discipline had been largely redefined in terms of broad scientific goals and objectives, especially the “science of cultural evolution” as defined in Stanley South’s *Method and Theory in Historical Archaeology* in 1977. South used many examples drawn from the archaeology of military sites. In Tennessee, the practice of historical archaeology mirrored similar trends. A survey of historical archaeology reports for Tennessee sites, completed through the year 1980, showed that while the largest category of excavated sites was “domestic sites” (homes, farmsteads, and plantations), the second largest category was “military sites,” accounting for 29 percent of the total.

But in 1980 very little historical archaeology had taken place in Tennessee; only fifty-nine final reports for historical site excavations were in existence. Over the next fifteen years this number increased dramatically as the effects of various late 1970s and 1980s environmental laws came into full force. By the end of 1995 the total number of excavation reports for Tennessee historic period sites had reached 217. While most of this new work focused on domestic sites (largely because private contracting firms conducting federal or state-funded “cultural resource management” projects in construction areas produce most reports), military sites still held second place, even though they represent a rather restricted portion of the total number of potential sites in Tennessee.

Clearly, the trend in favor of military sites as popular candidates for the limited funding available for conducting purely research oriented archaeology projects shows no signs of changing. The basis for this fascination ranges from romanticized notions concerning a “frontier life” carried out behind the walls of Tennessee forts to an academic view of military sites as significant repositories of evidence reflecting the life ways of different groups of people. Throughout its historic period Tennessee witnessed a wide range of military activities, resulting in a variety of types of military archaeological sites, and these have the potential to provide — through archaeology — unique evidence about specific phases of our past. This article explores the potential of that evidence by examining six phases in the history of Tennessee’s military sites.

**Pre-Territorial Military Sites**

Only a few “military” posts were constructed in the area that is now Tennessee previous to the establishment of the “Territory South of the River Ohio.” For this and other early phases there are sometimes problems for distinguishing military posts from civilian posts, but this article does not include those defensive works (“forts,” “stations,” and “blockhouses”) constructed by Euro-American settlers. Its focus is on “military” posts that existed due to the activities of soldiers, including active duty militia, who were paid for their services by some governmental agency.

The two earliest constructions that may be considered military were Fort Prudhomme (1682) and Fort Assumption (1739) in what is now extreme West Tennessee. Both of these were relatively short-term posts established by French forces on bluffs overlooking the east bank of the Mississippi River. The exact location of these sites remains unclear, and they may have been destroyed by subsequent meanders of the river.

Excluding a failed attempt to establish a garrison at an eighteenth-century structure known as “The Virginia Fort,” the next military post in what...
Archaeological explorations began at Fort Loudoun in the 1950s, but it was not completely excavated until the 1970s, as TVA prepared to inundate the site under the Tellico Reservoir. Information from this work, shown here in an aerial view near the end of the excavation, led to a full-size replica of the fort built on higher land. An artist’s rendering shows the original fort’s structures. (Aerial view courtesy of Tennessee Valley Authority and drawing courtesy of Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation)

is now Tennessee was Fort Loudoun. Constructed by British colonial troops, beginning in 1756 during the French and Indian War (1754-1763), it was established near the heart of the Cherokee Nation in present-day Monroe County. Their tentative alliance with the British had failed by 1760, and Cherokee besieged and finally destroyed Fort Loudoun.

The initial archaeology at Fort Loudoun yielded a partial understanding of the fort’s overall plan and individual buildings. The inundation of this site by the construction of Tellico Reservoir in the 1970s led to a complete excavation sponsored by the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Tennessee Division of Archaeology. Following this final excavation, a full-size replica of Fort Loudoun was built on higher land, and this structure and a modern museum are the focal points for what is now Fort Loudoun State Historic Area.

After the demise of Fort Loudoun, Virginia militia carried out a brief counter offensive against the Cherokee, and their activities included the construction and short-term occupation, in 1761, of a post called Fort Robinson. This palisaded and bastioned structure, which was located near the Long
Island of the Holston in present day Sullivan County, merits consideration as a military post. Otherwise, the vast majority of frontier forts and stations were private settler constructions. There were, however, a few difficult-to-classify posts that may qualify as pre-territorial military sites.

One Middle Tennessee example is the site of Martin's Blockhouse, apparently located in what is now eastern Sumner County. North Carolina militia soldiers sent from the east to help defend the Nashville area built this briefly occupied post in late 1787. The larger group was called Evans Battalion; a company commanded by Captain William Martin is credited with building the blockhouse.12

Two East Tennessee forts that seem to have been military in nature were Fort Patrick Henry and Eaton's Fort, both in present-day Sullivan County. Eaton's was initially constructed in 1773 as a fort for protection of area settlers, but a large force of Virginia militia took it over and rebuilt it at the start of the Revolutionary war. It remained garrisoned as a militia post with a varying number of soldiers between ca. 1776 to 1784.13 Fort Patrick Henry is said to have been established in 1776 at or near old Fort Robinson and was also garrisoned until the end of the Revolutionary War. It is described as a three-sided stockaded and bastioned enclosure, fronting on a high bank of the Holston River. It covered a large area, perhaps three acres, and approximately 2,000 Virginia militia soldiers sent to thwart British-armed Cherokee raiding parties initially occupied it.14

Local settlers using local resources built other East Tennessee Revolutionary war period forts, including Fort Watauga and Fort Lee, so these examples seem to fall short of a military classification.15 Regardless of how they are specifically categorized, though, all of these early sites, where they still exist, are important historical archaeological resources with the potential to help develop a clearer understanding of a time in Tennessee's development that left few written records.16

Territorial Militia Posts

In 1790 the area that was to become Tennessee was made "The Territory South of the River Ohio," shortened to the "Southwest Territory."17 Initially, groups of settlers handled the defense of the Southwest Territory's eastern and western (now Middle Tennessee) settlement areas. Soon, however, the federal government began to take an active role in the territory's defense, and its involvement led to two kinds of military activity that produced significant archaeological sites.

Two years after the establishment of the territory, hostilities between factions of the Creek and Cherokee tribes and the white settlers had become so intense that territorial governor William Blount placed major portions of the Territorial Militia on "active duty" (meaning in part that these troops became eligible for reimbursement for their services). In connection with this increased state of readiness, some small militia posts were constructed and garrisoned for varying periods of time. In the Washington District, a post was established near the confluence of the Clinch and Tennessee rivers and was referred to as the Southwest Point Blockhouse, or Blockhouses. By 1794 similar posts had been established — Tellico Blockhouse on the Little Tennessee River, Fort Grainger on the Tennessee River below Knoxville, and Bull Run Blockhouse near the north edge of the Knoxville settlement.18

In the Mero District, a single militia post was established at the location commonly called the "Crossing of the Cumberland." A small detachment of militiamen commanded by Sampson Williams initiated this post in March 1792.19 Williams, soon promoted to the rank of Lieutenant, continued to command militia soldiers here until early 1794. The name commonly applied to this post was the Blockhouse at the Crossing of the Cumberland, and there are records showing that its soldiers were eligible for pay for their service, fulfilling the requirements for a military garrison.20

In mid-1794, the Blockhouse at the Crossing of the Cumberland was replaced with a larger militia post, constructed by a large detachment of Washington District militia soldiers sent to the Mero District for that purpose. Small companies of territorial militia soldiers garrisoned this new post, named Fort Blount, until 1796, then State of Tennessee militia troops stayed there until mid-1797. These "active duty" militiamen were compensated for their service, with most of the privates
Of the six territorial militia posts in Tennessee, most are now inaccessible. However, much of Fort Blount was excavated in 1989-1994 (view left), and its remains suggest a Spartan existence for the militiamen and federal soldiers who lived there from 1794 to 1798. An artist’s drawing shows the three permanent buildings within the fortified enclosure. (Tennessee Division of Archaeology)

receiving from $17.98 to $19.98 at three month intervals. In mid-1797 federal soldiers replaced the militia.21

Perhaps not surprisingly, minor fraud seems to have made its way to the frontier with this early experiment in territorial military bureaucracy. A review of documents concerning Fort Blount showed that a few of the soldiers listed on 1795 muster rolls were not actually on duty. In later testimony one individual stated that he was never even in the militia, but that two men from Captain William Gillespie’s company persuaded him to sign a power of attorney for such service, and they made assurances it would be of no harm for me to give a power, that 30 men was allowed to be at Ft. Blount, & they was desirous to draw the pay, for as many as was allowed at that fort, that the pay drawn for those that did no duty might be divided between the Captain & those that did duty at Ft. Blount. I am ready also to assert that I was wounded by the fall from a horse & ...

have been excused from military duty. 22

Of the six territorial militia posts, the potential for archaeology is limited due to the inaccessibility of some of the sites. There is presently no clear information on the condition of the sites of Fort Grainger and Bull Run Blockhouse. The Southwest Point Blockhouse site is under Watts Bar Reservoir. Remains of the Blockhouse at the Crossing of the Cumberland are apparently submerged under Cordell Hull Reservoir. The site of Tellico Blockhouse has been excavated, but militia activity at this location was minor compared to the later federal military garrison (discussed below). The best information concerning a territorial militia post comes from the site of Fort Blount, in what is now Jackson County. The militia built and maintained Fort Blount from 1794 to 1797, and its subsequent federal garrison was small and lasted less than a year, from mid-1797 until early 1798. Following several years of research concerning its probable location, the site was finally found during a 1989 archaeological exploration project. Grants for additional seasons of work were obtained, and by the end of 1994 the excavation of most of the site was complete.23

The artifact collection from Fort Blount provides an interesting record for interpreting the daily lives of soldiers and travelers on the edge of Tennessee’s early frontier. Compared to later sites, there is a relative scarcity of more expensive items, with common wares, such as fragments of what are believed to be locally made earthenware food storage jars, being more frequent. The architectural remains also suggest a Spartan life-style, with evidence for no more than three permanent buildings within a fortified enclosure. The artist rendering of this post, based on archaeological data, provides a
view of something very important for understanding Tennessee's early history; without archaeology it would have remained unknown.  

Another important territorial period military post was the short-lived Spanish post, Fort San Fernando de las Barrancas, established in early 1795 on the Fourth Chickasaw Bluff, later the site of Memphis. Fort San Fernando, constructed under supervision of Don Manuel Gayoso de Lemos, Governor of the Natchez District, represented a last attempt on the part of the Spanish government of Louisiana and West Florida to control this upper portion of the lower Mississippi Valley. The fort was abandoned and destroyed in early 1797.  

In 1980 an archaeological excavation in search of remains of Fort San Fernando was conducted in a several-block area of north downtown Memphis. The traditional site location, Auction Square, failed to produce any evidence of Spanish occupation. Test excavations at other locations uncovered many things relevant to the early history of north Memphis, but still failed to define an exact site for Fort San Fernando.  

As is common practice in historical archaeology, considerable research on Fort San Fernando focused on surviving documents. This research included an investigation of map resources, such as Victor Collot's important view showing Fort San Fernando (which he called Fort des Ecores at Margot) in relation to other things on the Fourth Chickasaw Bluff. Several years after the Fort San Fernando archaeology project, the author learned of the existence of a detailed plan of the "Fort at the Chickasaw Bluffs," which apparently has never been published. A copy is included here. If any remains of this fort still exist and are ever discovered, this map would be an extremely valuable resource for site interpretation.
Early Federal Military Posts of the Territorial and Statehood Period

During Tennessee's territorial period, federal officials also dispatched federal soldiers to aid in the region's defense. This policy was initiated in early 1793 when a single company of the "3rd Sub Legion" arrived in Knoxville, capital of the Southwest Territory.28 These troops were charged with carrying out mandates of the Secretary of War, and they were soon directed to play an active role in attempts to solve the constant border disputes between the American settlers and the Native Americans.29

One of the first posts constructed by the federal military was called the Knoxville Barracks.30 At the same time, federal soldiers began to assist or replace the militia troops at Southwest Point Blockhouse, Tellico Blockhouse, Fort Grainger, and Bull Run Blockhouse. These initial garrisons preceded a gradual buildup in numbers of federal troops, which reached a maximum of about 500 to 600 soldiers between 1797 and 1799, including almost the entire Fourth United States Infantry Regiment, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Butler, which arrived in the summer of 1797. These federal troops constructed several new posts. After 1800 there was a period of decline in numbers of federal troops, and in 1813 the last remnants of this once substantial force were withdrawn from Tennessee.31

Elsewhere, this early federal military presence has been treated as a theme referred to as "Early Federal Military Sites in Tennessee."32 This work suggests that there were about sixteen extant or in some cases destroyed sites: in East Tennessee — Knoxville Barracks, Southwest Point Blockhouse(s), Tellico Blockhouse, Fort Grainger, Bull Run Blockhouse, Fort Southwest Point, Belle Canton, Union Cantonment, Fort Marr, and Hiwassee Garrison; in Middle Tennessee — Fort Blount, Fort Nash, Butler's Cantonment, and Wilkinson Cantonment; and in West Tennessee — Fort Adams (Pike) and Fort Pickering. Aside from Fort Blount, primarily occupied by militia troops and discussed above, only two of these sites have received any meaningful archaeological investigation.

The site of Tellico Blockhouse, like Fort Loudoun, was extensively excavated during the
early 1970s in connection with the Tennessee Valley Authority’s construction of Tellico Reservoir.33 Perhaps because of a fire in 1800 that destroyed most of the Secretary of War records, no plans or maps that show their appearance are known to exist for any of these early federal military posts in Tennessee.34 Thus, one of the most obvious direct benefits of archaeological work at such sites is the below-ground architectural information recorded during controlled excavations, which can in turn be used to depict how these places once looked. Tellico Blockhouse, initially constructed in 1794 but modified several times, was perhaps best known for its “Factory” for trade with the Cherokee, constructed in 1796. In the accompanying artist rendering, this building is depicted as the one standing alone near the center of the lower parade ground.

The Tellico Blockhouse project yielded the largest artifact collection (nearly 80,000 individual items) that had ever been available for studying the material remains of a Tennessee military post from this period. 35 At approximately the same time, however, the University of Tennessee sponsored two archaeological field schools at the site of Fort Southwest Point in Kingston, Tennessee, and a sizable collection also began to emerge from that work.36 The information derived from these collections soon began to be used in a variety of ways by researchers, including studies directed toward interpreting the contrasting material remains associated with the different peoples of Tennessee’s frontier culture. Throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, there were dynamic interactions between the three major groups, Native Americans, American settlers, and federal soldiers.37

In the 1980s the Tennessee Division of Archaeology carried out several additional seasons of work at Fort Southwest Point, which was constructed in 1797 and served as East Tennessee’s main headquarters for federal soldiers until 1807. (From 1801 to 1807 it housed both a federal garrison and the Cherokee Indian Agency operated by Colonel Return Jonathan Meigs). By the end of 1986, the artifact collection from this site had reached a total of nearly 59,000 items, allowing a number of interesting comparisons to be made between this collection and the one from the site of Tellico Blockhouse. 38

Indeed, the combined use of artifact and documentary data pertaining to the Fort Southwest Point site led to considerable re-interpretation of its history. Formerly all lines of evidence seemed to indicate that Fort Southwest Point was closed and abandoned in 1807, when its primary functions, along with those of Tellico Blockhouse, were consolidated and transferred to a new post called Hiwassee Garrison. As archaeological work at the Fort Southwest Point site progressed and the artifact collection grew large, it became obvious that a minor but significant number of the military buttons found were of two types not used until 1808. This discovery prompted a renewed search of documentary sources, including examining muster rolls for Hiwassee Garrison, and eventually it was concluded that portions of the Fort Southwest Point facility had remained in use until about 1811, apparently as a kind of depot for military supplies being shipped down the Tennessee and other river systems. 39

As was possible for Tellico Blockhouse, the several seasons of archaeological work at the Fort Southwest Point site uncovered enough evidence to produce an image of the buildings, palisade lines, and other structural components as they may have appeared around 1800.40

The site of Tellico Blockhouse, in Monroe County, is now maintained as a ruins stabilization historic site as part of the larger Fort Loudoun State Historic Area. The City of Kingston, which owns the property, is developing the site of Fort Southwest Point as an on-site reconstruction.41 The recreated blockhouse shown in the accompanying photograph matches the building shown at the extreme right in the artist rendering. The sixteen early federal military sites vary greatly in their archaeological potential, but those few that are still intact and have not been excavated are among the most significant and endangered historical sites in Tennessee.

**Other Pre-Civil War Military Sites**

Between the early 1800s and 1860, infrequent military activity produced sites with varying degrees of archaeological potential. These resources include an unknown number of Tennessee muster grounds and encampment areas used by the volunteer troops
Excavations at Fort Southwest Point in the 1980s yielded useful information for comparison to Tellico Blockhouse and a new interpretation of its history. The exploration uncovered enough evidence to yield an image of the fort and allowed for the on-site reconstruction of Structure 10, a corner blockhouse. (Tennessee Division of Archaeology)

commanded by General John Cocke (East Tennessee) and General Andrew Jackson (Middle Tennessee) who participated in the Creek War of 1813-1814 and the War of 1812 (1812-1815). Two important mobilization and encampment sites mentioned in the scarce literature on this subject are Camp Blount in Lincoln County and Camp Ross in present day Hamilton County. Though most of Tennessee’s War of 1812 activity involved active-duty militia soldiers preparing for engagements outside the state, a few federal military soldiers were also periodically encamped in Tennessee. One such federal encampment was adjacent to Nashville.42

An encyclopedic guide to military posts in the United States lists a Camp Armistead, said to have been located in Monroe County from 1832 to 1835 and garrisoned by elements of the Second United States Artillery.43 Presumably its purpose had to do with federal government relations with the Cherokees, but nothing more is known about it. However, it is clear that substantial numbers of regular federal army soldiers came to Tennessee in connection with the forced removal of the Cherokees. Following ratification of the dubious Treaty of New Echota in mid-1836, troops under the command of General John E. Wool were stationed in the Cherokee territory of southeast Tennessee to “maintain order.” After all efforts on the part of the Cherokee to prevent their removal had failed, General Winfield Scott was sent to Tennessee with a small army to enforce the removal. These troops were posted at various points throughout the region and erected a number of stockade forts for “gathering and holding the Indians preparatory to removal.”44 Several of these posts are indicated on at least two maps filed at the National Archives.45 Most were located in what are now Bradley and Polk Counties, including Fort Cass, Fort Foster, Fort “Morrow” (Fort Marr?), Camp Worth, Camp Munroe, and unnamed “forts” at Cleveland, Red

In the 1830s, a number of federal stockade forts were built or adapted for new use for gathering the Cherokee in southeast Tennessee for removal to the west. The only structure from these forts to survive is a corner blockhouse from Fort Marr, moved from its original location in 1922. (Tennessee Division of Archaeology)
Clay, and Ross’s Landing (Chattanooga). Another source mentions a Camp Hetzel, and provides a lengthy discussion of Fort Marr, which was an older post adapted for reuse during the removal. A blockhouse that was part of Fort Marr is still standing in Polk County, though not at its original location. This is a unique architectural resource in Tennessee representing late eighteenth to early nineteenth-century federal military activities and needs to be recognized as in great need of a preservation plan.

While Tennesseans overwhelmingly supported the Mexican War in 1846-1848, only a little information exists about specific locations that may have been used for Mexican War military preparations. Camp Blount was apparently reused in a manner similar to its War of 1812 function, and one historical marker designates a Mexican War “Muster Ground” in present-day Hamblen County.

Possibly the most unusual antebellum Tennessee military site was the Memphis Navy Yard. This federal construction, located at Memphis more for political than practical considerations, was begun in 1845 and soon included quarters for naval officers and enlisted men and numerous buildings devoted to the various functions inherent in ship building. Partly due to the failure of Congress to provide continuing appropriations, the experiment was not a success, and according to one critic:

The only credible piece of work turned out of this novel navy yard was the great iron steamship of war, “Allegheny,” which was entirely built and equipped here with the exception of her hull. This was a most wonderful war vessel! Her speed is said to have been four miles per hour down stream, that being the ordinary rapidity of the current, and four hours to the mile up stream, and after a brief but entirely unsatisfactory history, having cost the Government nearly $500,000 she was totally condemned. The navy yard itself was overtaken by a similar fate. . . [in 1854 the property was returned to the city of Memphis].

The site of the Memphis Navy Yard received minimal archaeological investigation in the late 1980s while it was being destroyed by a major urban construction project. Some staff members from the Tennessee Division of Archaeology conducted a brief salvage investigation that included limited recording of some of the remains being exposed. The current status of most of the other sites discussed in this section is uncertain, but there is an urgent need to investigate representative examples while intact sites still remain.

Civil War Era Military Sites

Tennessee was second only to the state of Virginia in terms of Civil War military actions, and no phase of Tennessee military history has attracted more public interest. In recent years there has been an increased interest in the physical remains of those events. Tangible remains such as battlefields have received recognition at the national level, while at the state level a number of Civil War era sites and buildings are open to the public or are under consideration for use in tourist development plans.

Most of the private citizen activity concerning Tennessee’s Civil War sites has been divided between two groups — site preservationists and Civil War relic collectors. Activities of the former usually center on the management of areas with some kind of visible remains, often standing “historic” buildings that had some wartime use or association. Members of the second group share the common goal of finding and collecting items associated with the war, usually by the use of metal detectors. The number of individuals that belong to this group is uncertain, but it is clear to anyone familiar with Civil War sites that it is large number of people.

Historical archaeologists were late in turning to the investigation of Civil War sites as archaeological resources. In the mid-1980s, the statewide site information file maintained by the Tennessee Division of Archaeology for cultural resource management purposes contained only a few Civil War era military sites. Finally, a realization that these sites were rapidly disappearing spurred the development of what became the first in a series of site investigation and recording (site survey) projects devoted to this theme.
The first of these projects was carried out in Middle Tennessee in 1988-1989. Before this survey, only eleven sites of Civil War military activity were on record for this region. By the end of the project that number had increased to 143. The Middle Tennessee survey provided the means for developing the methods and definitions needed for this kind of investigation. Sites were initially located using many kinds of documentary sources and assistance from informants, and they were recorded in terms of one or more "components," such as battlefields, encampments, headquarters, military hospitals, and a range of fortification and earthwork types. The methods employed were readily adaptable to other regions, and the success of the Middle Tennessee survey provided the impetus for expanding to the level of a statewide survey.

A similar survey next occurred in West Tennessee. Work in this region required exploring some new kinds of sources and developing some new component definitions. By the end of fieldwork in 1993, the West Tennessee sample of recorded Civil War era military sites was eighty-nine. This left only East Tennessee to survey, and it was assumed that this region would also be the most complex. Some relevant survey work already completed in the Chattanooga area suggested that the number of East Tennessee sites that could be recorded, especially along the Chattanooga to Virginia railroad corridor, would exceed the numbers found in any other region of the state. A general survey of East Tennessee Civil War era military sites was initiated in 1996, and by the end of the work in this region 188 sites were recorded.

The project focusing on East Tennessee was also designed with the broader goal of completing a statewide survey, and some additional sites have been recorded in Middle and West Tennessee. The final statewide total for Civil War era military sites through 1999 is 443. This number provides a suggestion of the magnitude of the impact that the Civil War had on Tennessee, but it definitely understates the actual number of sites that may once have existed. Even among the sites now on record, preservation varies greatly. Many forces, principally urban development and widespread non-archaeo-

A SERIES OF SURVEYS FOR CIVIL WAR ERA MILITARY SITES ACROSS TENNESSEE HAS RECORDED 443 SITES AS OF 1999. ENCAMPMENTS, SOME SIMILAR TO THE WINTER QUARTERS ILLUSTRATED IN THIS 19TH CENTURY DRAWING BY EDWIN FORBES, NOW ACCOUNT FOR THE MOST NUMEROUS CATEGORY OF SUCH SITES. (LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, LC-USZ62-14188)
logical artifact collecting, are conspiring to make this an incredibly threatened resource. Since 1988 a number of sites, some of them only recently recorded, have been destroyed. Relative to the Civil War, the greatest challenge for historical archaeology is to find ways to preserve by scientific excavation the data associated with particular site types — information that once gone can never be replicated from any other source.

Though many specific types of Civil War military sites have not been examined through archaeological excavation, there have been more Tennessee excavation projects for this category than for any other military phase. As noted earlier, the first reported historical site excavation in Tennessee concerned the remains of Fort Donelson. Other excavation projects were carried out on this federally-owned site beginning in the 1960s, helping to establish a trend of using archaeology to investigate some of the state’s larger Civil War fortification complexes. “Fort” projects dominate the work carried out in the 1970s, the 1980s, and the 1990s, and there are at least fourteen excavation reports concerning these sites.

Another focus is battlefield archaeology. One study of a portion of the 1864 Battle of Franklin battlefield, adjacent to the state-owned Carter House, which served as the Union command center, demonstrated how archaeological methods can add insights into events that may already seem extremely well documented. Historians had examined this particular battle in great detail. Nevertheless, careful recording and quantifying of artifacts, especially dropped and impacted bullets, produced some information about specific battle activities that could not have been known from an examination of documents alone.

The work at Franklin demonstrates how historical archaeology can provide information beyond what is recorded in writing. While similar examples can be cited in connection with fortification remains and battlefields, very little excavation has been conducted on what is the largest portion of the Civil War archaeological record, that is the remains of numerous Union and Confederate encampments, which were occupied for varying lengths of time all across the state of Tennessee. All of these are, or at one time were, repositories of significant information about the day-to-day lives of common soldiers, a subject still sparsely treated, compared to military battles, in the Civil War literature.

While there are Civil War diaries, photographs, and drawings (such as the one shown by Edward Forbes) that provide ideas and images of camp life, the archaeological record for encampments is by far the largest untapped source of information. The only Tennessee report of its kind so far completed demonstrates this potential. This archaeological study of a military encampment site, one used by Union troops involved with the 1863-1864 defense of Knoxville, includes analysis and description of the form and contents of a number of features that were excavated and interpreted as the physical remains of the partially below-ground winter huts used by the soldiers stationed at this location. The archaeological photographs of these features provide an enticing look into the past, and a sense of what it was like to have been there during the Civil War. Tennessee historical archaeology needs many more such investigations carried out while a range of representative Civil War encampment sites can still be found.

Indeed the entire field of Civil War military sites archaeology is in need of some kind of enhanced research assistance in Tennessee. The importance of the Civil War in Tennessee’s history seems clearly understood by all, yet there has been a kind of widespread reluctance to recognize the seriousness of the fact that, as the state develops, representative Civil War sites are disappearing at a steadily increasing rate. To restate what should now be obvious, these sites are repositories of information that can never be replaced. Even when sites cannot be preserved in fact, archaeology provides methods for recovering and preserving that information. When these same sites are lost without archaeology being conducted, the loss is complete.

Post-Civil War Military Sites

Tennessee has an unknown number of post-Civil War military sites that are more than fifty years in age, the minimum age for listing sites or buildings in the National Register of Historic Places and one standard used for defining things as “archaeological.” Among these are sites associated
with America’s participation in the Spanish American War (1898), World War I (1917-1918), and World War II (1941-1945). There has not been a systematic survey or excavation concerning any of these periods.

More than four regiments of Tennesseans served in the Spanish-American War, fighting in Manila and Cuba. Columbia Arsenal in Maury County, a government facility built in 1888 and operated until 1901, was used as a training center for some of these troops. In East Tennessee, two 1898 training encampments were established in Knox County, Camp Wilder (renamed Camp Poland) and Camp (Bob) Taylor.

Nearly 80,000 Tennesseans were mustered into service for World War I, and at least one large troop mobilization and training ground, Camp Andrew Jackson, was established near Nashville in 1917. Actual training for almost all of the Tennessee troops, however, occurred in Georgia, North Carolina, or in France. Park Field near Millington in Shelby County was used for training pilots.

World War II activities in Tennessee were complex and may be difficult to define in terms of potential “military sites.” Fortunately, in 1992 an entire issue of the Tennessee Historical Quarterly was devoted to understanding this war’s impact on Tennessee, and these articles could serve as a guide for the assessment of relevant sites. A simple listing of the more obvious examples will suffice for noting these potential archeological resources, which will no doubt receive more attention in years to come. Important World War II training camps included Camp Forrest (Coffee County), Camp Tyson (Henry County), and Camp (later Fort) Campbell (Stewart County, Tennessee, and Trigg and Christian counties, Kentucky). The largest troop impact, however, came from the fact that an estimated million soldiers were trained in the state, especially in Middle Tennessee, between 1941 and 1945 during what is collectively referred to as the “Tennessee Maneuvers.” Troops involved in this activity included major elements of the 101st Airborne Division, the U. S. Second Army, and General George S. Patton, Jr.’s, armored divisions. Air training facilities were established at Smyrna Army Air Field (Rutherford County), Dyersburg Air Base (Dyer County), and Northern Field at Tullahoma (Coffee County). The nation’s only barrage balloon training center was located at Camp Tyson, and the largest inland naval operation was at Millington Naval Base. Prisoner of war camps were established in conjunction with Camps Forrest, Tyson, and Campbell, and separately at Crossville, Lawrenceburg, Tellico Plains, Memphis, and Nashville. Of major importance to the war effort, but difficult to classify in terms of “military sites,” are facilities such as the Holston Ordnance Works (Sullivan County), the Milan Ordnance Center (Gibson and Carroll counties), and Tennessee’s most famous of all war sites, Oak Ridge Reservation (Anderson and Roane Counties).

Summary and Conclusions

The archaeological investigation of military sites played an important role in the general development of historical archaeology in Tennessee. The first excavation of a military site was conducted in the 1930s, with an initially slow increase in numbers of excavation reports through the 1960s followed by a steady increase from the 1970s to the 1990s. Site surveys, especially what became a statewide survey of Civil War era military sites, have been instrumental in defining the size and nature of the various military site data bases. For the entire state there are at least 500 historic period military sites that have been or could be recorded with some level of meaning. The degree of preservation of these, however, is diverse, and many of those previously recorded simply no longer exist as meaningful archaeological resources.

Probably no other category of historic period sites in Tennessee is more threatened than are military sites. As much as any other group, these are often locations associated with towns and cities that have been directly affected by Tennessee’s urban expansion of the last twenty years. The consequences of this expansion for historic sites are frequently their immediate and total obliteration through the force of large earth moving machines. Simultaneously, the hobby of metal detecting has to a large extent also focused on military remains, and sites often in no immediate danger of being lost to development are, nevertheless, being slowly depleted of their contents. This “eating away” of the
archaeological record is in the long run almost as destructive to the significant evidence contained in these sites as is their complete removal.

Two avenues exist for attempting to preserve this legacy. Direct site preservation is the method of choice, and a number of federal, state, and local agencies are already doing commendable jobs managing some important public-owned resources. Unfortunately, because site preservation requires land acquisition, or at least preservation easement, which then requires site management and its associated costs, only about twenty-two “protected” military sites are found in Tennessee. The relatively new Tennessee Wars Commission has begun a program dedicated to these kinds of resources, and it has already achieved some important successes in site preservation. Currently this program offers the best hope for saving some of Tennessee’s unprotected military sites.

Meanwhile, there is still a tremendous need for the preservation of information by archaeological recovery in those cases where site destruction cannot be avoided. So far this has only been done in any meaningful way in a few instances where expenditures of state or federal funds caused destruction or modification. The vast areas of private development and other activities on private lands are not bound by any legal requirements to protect these sites, and there have been few opportunities to fund or conduct archaeological excavations in such situations. This is clearly where the major challenge lies for those wishing to avoid the enormous loss that would result from the destruction of 95 percent of the military site record, this being the part that is privately owned. How to modify this potential loss is a question that needs input from everyone interested in the significant historical information contained at Tennessee’s military sites.


6. Though by 1995 the percentage of military site excavation reports (N=39) had dropped to 18 percent. See Samuel D. Smith, A Bibliographic History of Historical Archaeology in Tennessee, (Tennessee Division of Archaeology, Miscellaneous Publication No. 4, 1996).


8. The Virginia Fort appears on Henry Timberlake’s map entitled “A Draught of the Cherokee Country,” labeled “A Fort Built by the Virginians 1756 and soon after destroyed by the Indians,” Lieut. Henry Timberline’s Memoirs 1756-1765, annotated by Samuel Cole Williams (Marietta, Georgia, 1948). It was intended to serve as an aid in recruiting Cherokee warriors to fight against the French, but it remained unused at the time it was burned. The site, in what is now Monroe County, was archaeologically discovered and tested in the 1970s. It appears that the fort had a more or less square-sided configuration, based on a difficult to interpret pattern of large support posts. See Richard R. Polhemus, “The Virginia Fort” (University of Tennessee, Department of Anthropology, unfinished manuscript).


10. The 1970s Fort Loudoun archaeology is discussed in a preliminary report, Carl Kuttruff and
Beverly Bastian, “Fort Loudoun Excavations: 1975 Season,” The Conference on Historic Site Archaeology Papers 1975, 10 (1977):11-23, and some of the technical data have been reported separately; see: Emanuel Breitburg, “Bone Discardment Patterns and Meat Procurement Strategies at British Fort Loudoun (Tennessee), 1756-1760” (M.A. Thesis, Vanderbilt University, 1983). Unfortunately, a long expected final excavation report for this project is still pending.


14. Spoden, Historic Sites of Sullivan County, 43-44.


16. The site of one of these posts, Fort Watauga, received some brief archaeological testing in the 1970s before it was destroyed for commercial development, see Carl Kuttruff, “Fort Watauga” (Tennessee Division of Archaeology, unpublished manuscript, 1979). This information was used in designing the replica of Fort Watauga that is now a part of the Sycamore Shoals State Historic Area.


22. War Department Collection of Post-Revolutionary War Manuscripts (National Archives Microfilm Copy No. 904, Roll 4), 172-173.

23. An interim report was completed during the course of the Fort Blount project; see Samuel D. Smith, “Summary of Archaeological Work Conducted at the Fort Blount-Williamsburg Site and a Discussion of Additional Research Objectives” (Tennessee Division of Archaeology, 1993).

24. The rendering shown here (drawn by Fred M. Prouty) will appear with full discussion in a final report by Samuel D. Smith and Benjamin C. Nance, entitled An Archaeological Interpretation of the Site of Fort Blount, a 1790s Territorial Militia and Federal Military Post, Jackson County, Tennessee (to be published as a Tennessee Division of Archaeology “Research Series” report).


26. Some, if not all, of the fort site was probably destroyed during nineteenth-century
changes to the Memphis bluff line. Samuel D. Smith, “Archaeological Excavations in Search of the Site of Fort San Fernando de las Barrancas, Memphis Tennessee” (Tennessee Division of Archaeology, 1982).

27. Little is known concerning the origin of this map, which is contained in the “William Clark Collection” (Box 2, Folder 27) at the Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis.


30. An artist’s rendering of the conjectural appearance of this post appears in Durham, Before Tennessee, following 148.


32. Ibid., 467-471; Smith and Nance, An Archaeological Interpretation of the Site of Fort Blount, a 1790s Territorial Militia and Federal Military Post, Jackson County, Tennessee (pending).


34. Smith, Fort Southwest Point Archaeological Site, 20.


38. Smith, Fort Southwest Point Archaeological Site, 179-465.

39. Ibid., 95 and 299-230.

40. Ibid., 168-178.

41. Another season of work devoted to the archaeological clearing for reconstruction of one more Fort Southwest Point building site (Structure 15) was completed in 1996. Jennifer M. Bartlett, “Summary of the 1996 Excavations at Fort Southwest Point, Kingston, Tennessee (40RE119),” (Tennessee Division of Archaeology, 1997).


45. “The Fort-Cass Emigrating Depot,” drawn by Lieutenant H. Prince, 4th Infantry Regiment, Camp Worth, July 11th, 1838 (Map CA397, National Archives Record Group 75); “View of Posts and distances in the Cherokee Nation, to illustrate major general Scott’s operations in 1838” (copied and reproduced from an original in the National Archives by Ed Townsend, 1975).


47. A discussion of the general history of this building is presented in Smith, Fort Southwest Point Archaeological Site, 174-176.


49. Tom Kanon, Tennessee State Library and Archives (personal communication, 1997).


52. Goodspeed’s History of Shelby County, History of Tennessee (Chicago, 1887), 871.

53. There is no finished report for this work, but the field data collected during the salvage project are on file at the Tennessee Division of Archaeology.

54. Tennessee has four national battlefields (Chickamauga-Chattanooga, Fort Donelson, Shiloh, and Stones River) maintained by the National Park Service, and others are being assessed by the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission, Civil War Sites Advisory Commission Report on the Nation’s Civil War Battlefields (Washington, D.C., 1993), 23.

55. Tennessee 200, “Tennessee's Civil War Heritage Trail” (map and text), in A Path Divided, Tennessee’s Civil War Years (Nashville, 1996); Tennessee now has a Tennessee Wars Commission (administratively affiliated with the Tennessee Historical Commission) that focuses mostly on Civil War site preservation issues.


59. Military boat wrecks and other underwater Civil War sites, for example, have been almost completely neglected. The only reports concerning such resources are Jack B. Irion and David V. Beard, “Underwater Archaeological Assessment of Civil War Shipwrecks in Kentucky Lake, Benton and Humphries Counties, Tennessee” (New Orleans, R. Christopher Goodwin & Associates, Inc., 1993) and Michael Krivor, “Remote-Sensing Investigation and Evaluation of a Potential Civil War-Era Train Wreck, Watauga River, Carter County, Tennessee” (Memphis, Panamerican Maritime, L. L. C., 1997).


61. Timothy L. Dilliplane, Exploratory Excavations at Fort Granger (Franklin, 1975); Gerald P. Smith, “Fort Pillow State Park, Memphis State University Archaeological Field School Excavations, July 13 - August 13, 1976” (Department of Anthropology, Memphis State University, 1977); Steven J. Fox, “Archaeology of Fortress Rosecrans: A Civil War Garrison in Middle Tennessee” (Tennessee Historical Commission and National Park Service, 1978).

62. Robert C. Mainfort, Jr., Archaeological


65. Samuel D. Smith, “Excavation Data for Civil War Era Military Sites in Middle Tennessee,” Clarence R. Geier, Jr., and Susan E. Winter, eds., Look to the Earth, Historical Archaeology and the American Civil War (Knoxville, 1994), 60-75.


72. Tennessee Wars Commission Gazette 1, (Tennessee Historical Commission, 1996). This first issue of the Gazette defines many of the goals and objectives of the Tennessee Wars Commission. There is now also an adjunct organization called the Tennessee Civil War Preservation Association, Inc., which was created in part to facilitate the direct acquisition for protection of Civil War sites.