

King Farm: 1859–1915 - The Era of Bennett and Ruef

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Introduction and Background

Location Context:

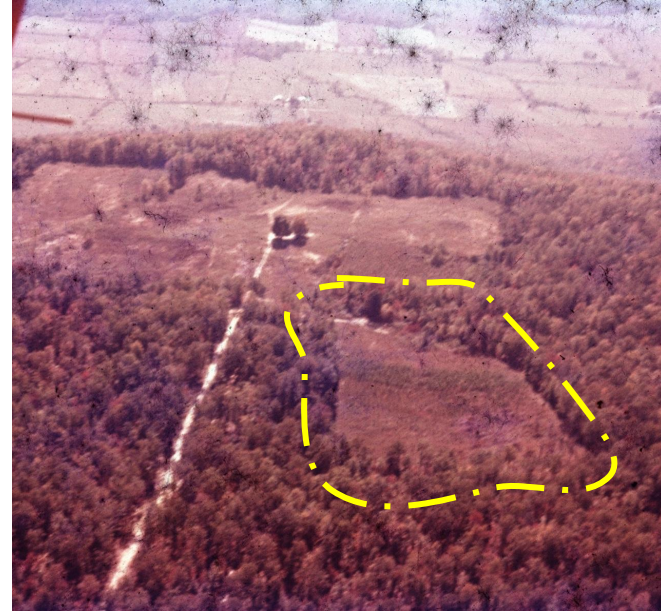
- 30-acre King Farm parcel on the southern Cumberland Plateau
- Unique geographical and ecological challenges, including poor soil conditions (if ecologists could address this..)

Historical Context:

- Post-Civil War reconstruction and economic recovery
- The rise of regional commerce and timber industries

Our Characters:

- Winfield Scott Bennett: Timber speculator and dealer
- Christian Ruef: Swiss immigrant, butcher, and livestock manager



Field Assessment

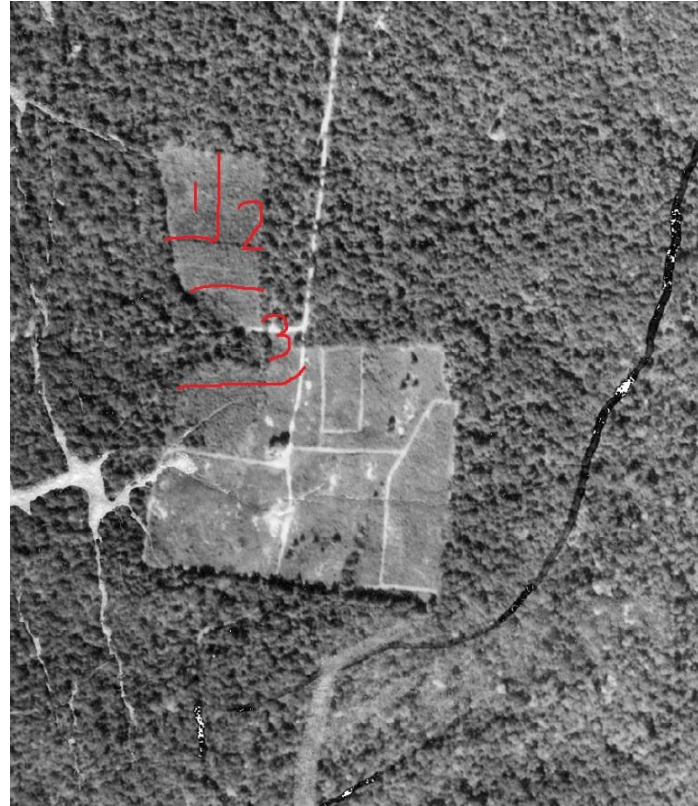
Our Plots : 1, 2, 3, adjacent roads, and the cabin site.

Ecological Observations:

- Evidence of deforestation and recovery patterns
- Soil analysis revealing limited agricultural viability

Historical Artifacts:

- Remnants of grazing fencing (noticed by Dr. Evans) and potential cabin foundations
- Proximity to transportation routes enhancing land value



Human Interaction with the Land

Winfield Scott Bennett (1859–1901):

- Likely from Winchester
- Purchased the land at a tax auction for ~ 35 cents/acre, used for timber exploitation
- Bennett received half of the land compared to Barnes's 103 acres in the original deed
- Logging activities spurred conflicts with the University of the South due to deforestation on nearby land
- Speculative resale to Christian Ruff of \$3 per acre capitalized on economic recovery post-1901

Human Interaction with the Land

Establishment of the University (1857)

- Logging, mining, agriculture, and water management
- Arguments over land
 - Overlapping land plots/deed claims
 - W.S. Bennett and the University
- Increased population per square mile
- The bad blood between the University and the Bennett family fizzles out



Timber Dispute between W.S. Bennett and The University

- Letter from George R. Fairbanks to Governor of Tennessee A.S. Marks in Jan. 1880
- Noticed large amounts of felled timber “outside of the lines,” and they plan to contact Thomas Gipson who hauled the timber to find the quantity cut & hauled.
- Claims “parties” involved should be made to pay “smart money”
- Wood taken from the land by Bennett was likely sold to the RR Co. for RR ties
- Timber logging meant losses in the lands assets and major ecological change

Complaint Against W. S. Bennett for Logging On and Beyond the Barnes Tract

Excerpt

Source: George R. Fairbanks to A. S. Marks, January 1890, A. J. Skidmore & Franklin County vs. U. of S. folder, Leases and Deeds, 1828-1880, Box 33, Superintendent of Leases Collection, University Archives.

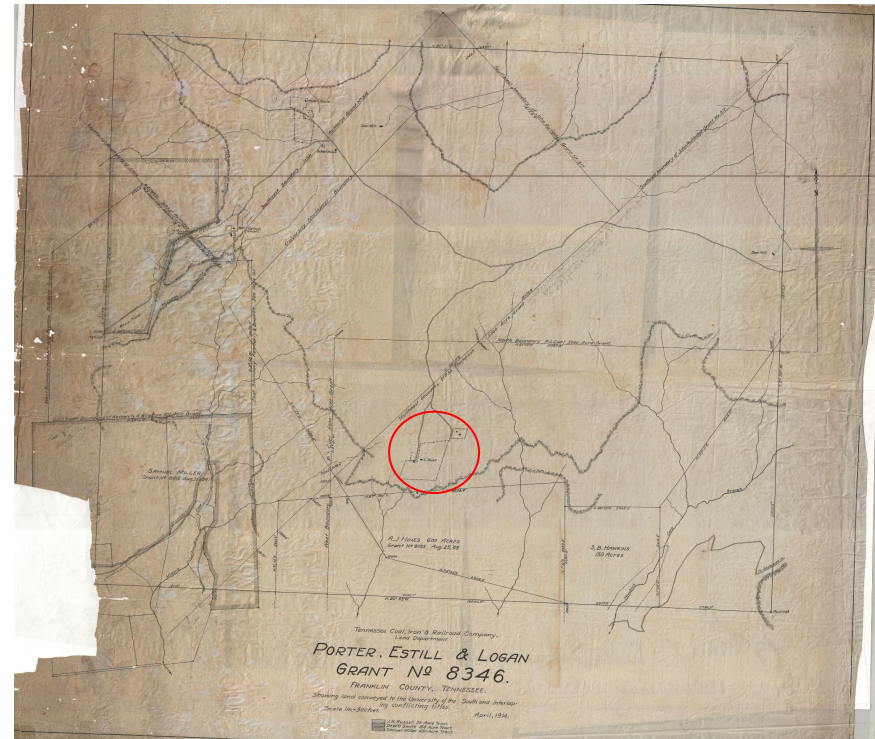
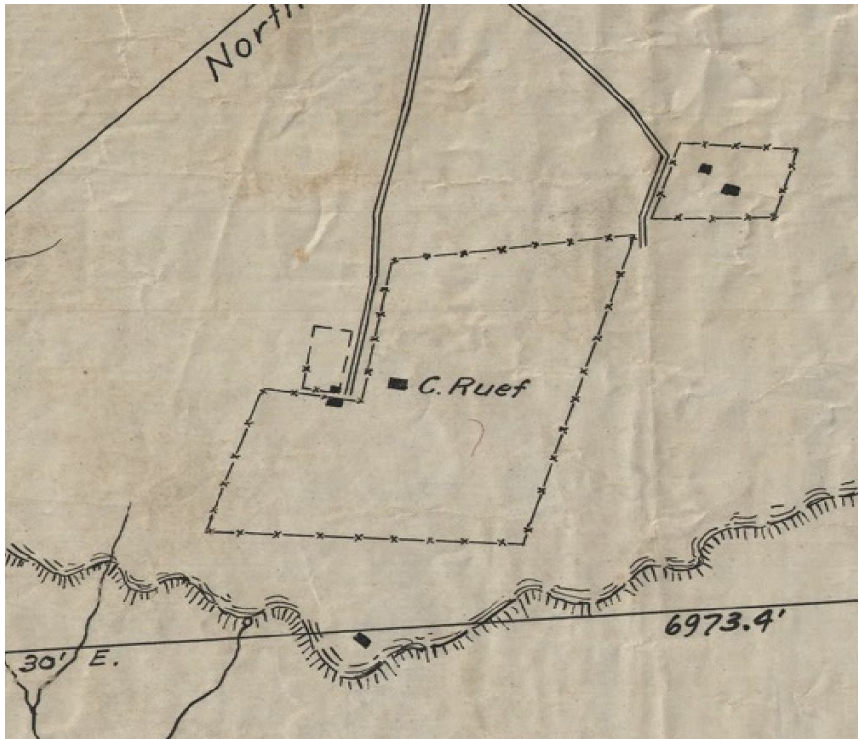
Sewanee Jany 1890
Hon. A. S. Marks

Dear Sir

I think it is important that we should take some steps to secure payment for the timber removed from our land recently as well as within the past two years. Under the pretence [sic] of cutting on the Dennis Barnes tract he [W. S. Bennett] not only cut within the lines of that tract but outside of it in the winter of 1888, I understand, and in 1889. The cutting recently has covered large area and is of considerable pecuniary value. There is a large quantity of timber on the ground not hewed, and some hewed and not hauled. I suppose Mr. DuBose can ascertain of Thomas Gipson, who has done I think all the hauling for Bennett, how much has been hauled. Or if necessary we can have the stumps counted and the cuts noted. I do not know to what extent the R. R. Co has paid for ties now being hauled or what Mr. Bennett's responsibility is. We ought to be paid for the damage occasioned by cutting off our finest timber exemplary damages, but I fear would not stand much of a chance before an ordinary jury of getting anything more than ordinary stumpage, but if possible where a trespass has no excuse as in this case the parties ought to be made to suffer some smart money. . . .

(University Archives, 2024)

Possibility of Homesite or Cabin on the Property



(Porter, Estill and Logan Map, 1914)

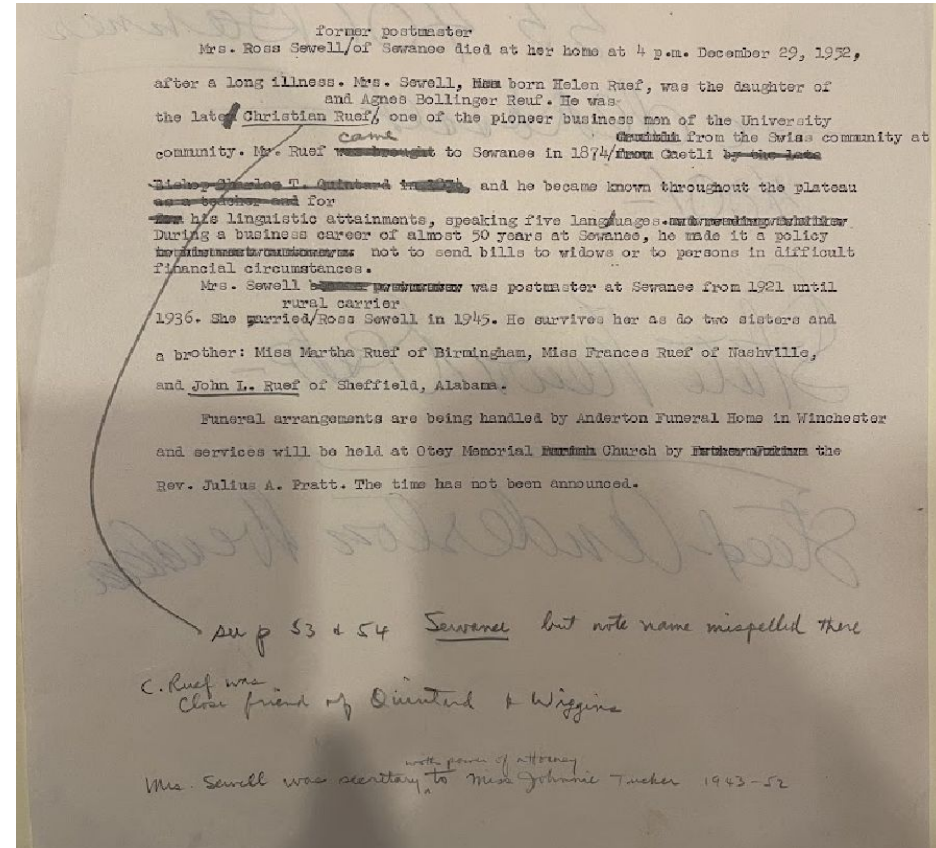
Human Interaction with the Land

Christian Ruef (1901–1915):

- Owned three different plots of land (Leases: 97, 143, 217)
- Operated a butcher shop in Sewanee Village
- Managed the land primarily for livestock grazing of pigs
- Freer forest grazing is likely: food waste from school likely deposited here as feed, and pigs allowed to graze throughout the University owned forest.
- Sold the land in 1915, leveraging wartime inflation for a significant profit
- During, 1915, wartime demand of products ranging from coal to livestock further boosted land value across the U.S.
- Ruef bought land for \$3 an acre, and sold it for \$15 an acre
 - \$11,141 today, and \$47,349 today

Ruef Background info from funeral announcement

- Ruef, a Swiss migrant who came to Sewanee in 1874 from Grutli was considered a “Pioneer Businessman” on the mountain
- Spoke 5 languages and had a profitable career of 50 years on the mountain
- In addition, as a mark of his upstanding character, Ruef was known not to send bills to widows or those struggling financially.



Legacy and Current Implications

Ecological Legacies:

- Impact of deforestation and grazing on current forest community composition
- Successional changes in vegetation reflecting past land-use patterns

Historical Importance:

- Bennett and Ruef's actions illustrate the interplay of individual decision-making with broader historical forces



Broader Historical Drivers

Economic Trends:

- Post-Civil War deflation followed by modest inflation after 1901
 - a. Ruff bought land for \$3 an acre, and sold it for \$15 an acre
 - i. \$11,141 and ~ \$47,349 today, respectively
- World War I increased demand for agricultural and natural resources

Policy and Practices:

- Transition from open-range grazing to fenced livestock management
- Early environmental impacts from timber and grazing activities

National and International land-use from 1859-1915

- Industrial growth and urbanization
- Agricultural expansion & innovation converted forests and grasslands into farmland, increased intensity of cultivation
- Railroads opened new areas for settlement and development.
- Conservation laws (General Revision Act) established forest reserves.
- Population growth and immigration increased land demand for housing and farming.
- Legal frameworks, like the U.S. Forest Service, structured land management.

Interaction Evidence

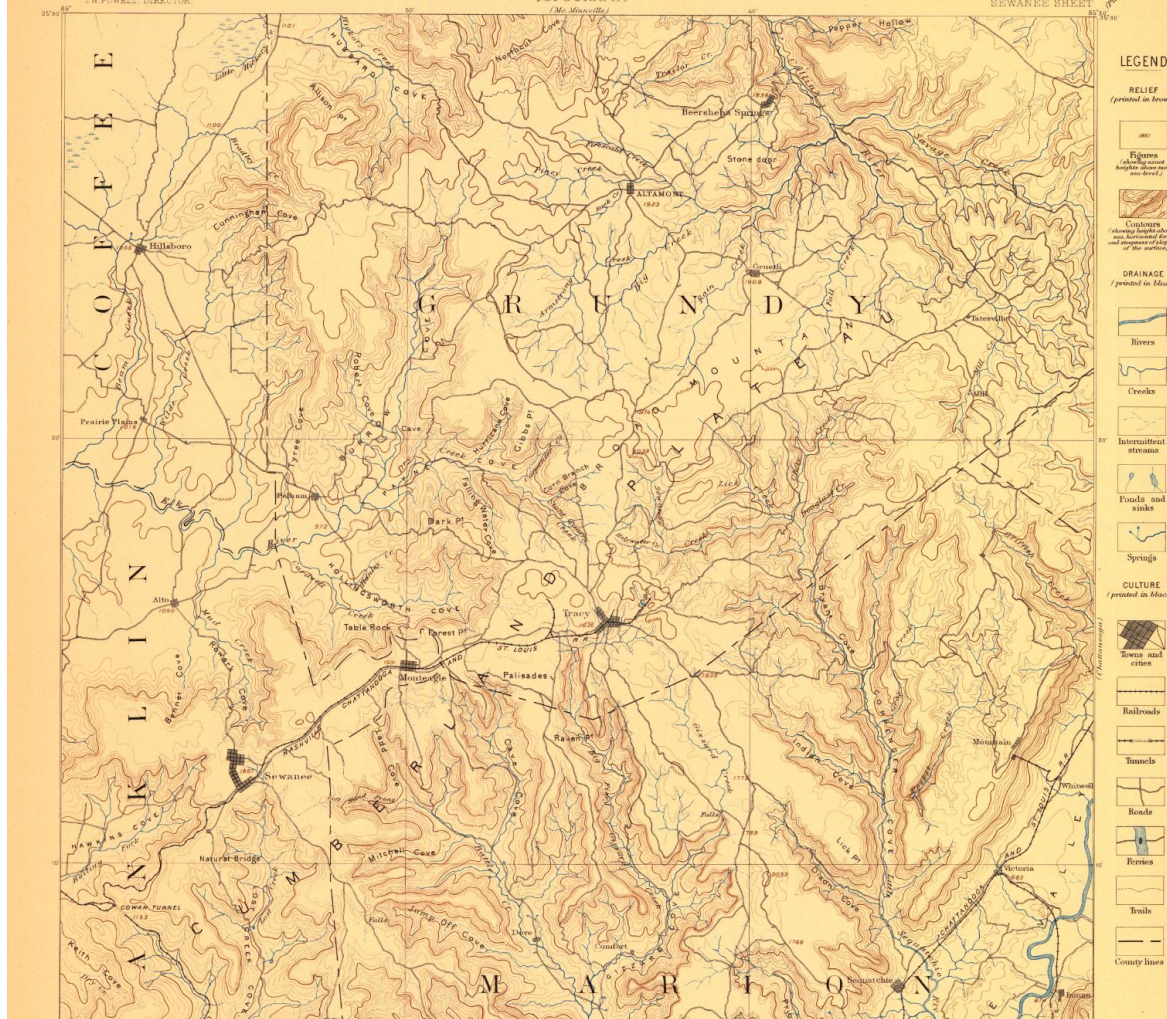
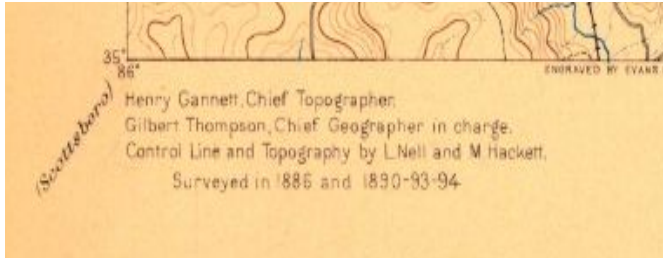
- Christmas Fern is a major indicator of human disturbance
 - Non-natural banks or roads
- Patterned holes in a multitude of trees



Interaction Evidence



In each time period how was the KF location connected to the broader landscape through roads, railways, and commerce.



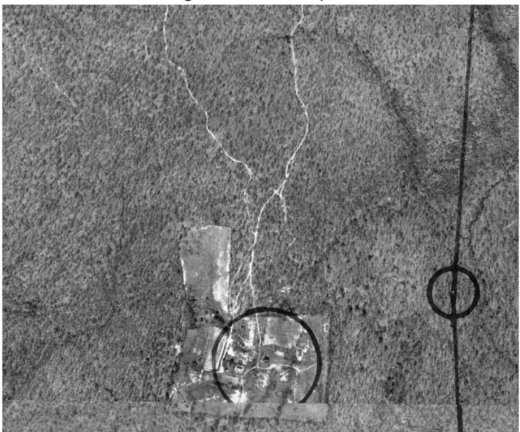
(Henry Gannett, 1894)

McDurmon & Pennington

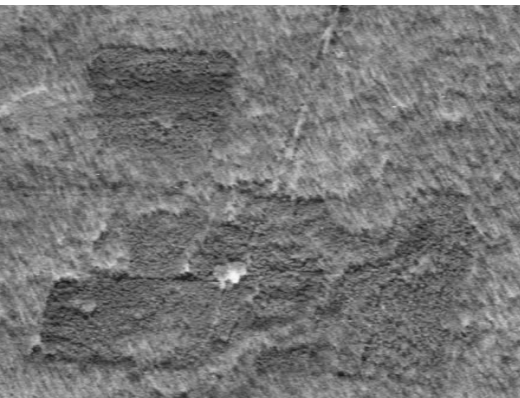
Current forest community a product of the ecological legacies generated by this land-use history?

King Farm: 1951-1952

King Farm: 1950 Airphoto



King Farm: 1977



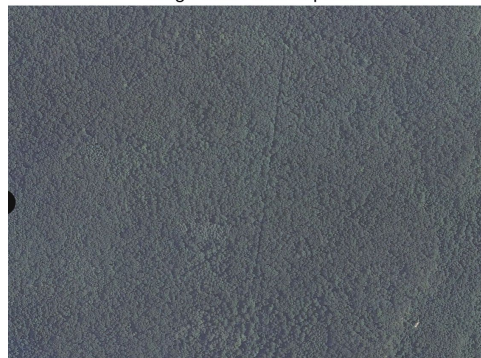
King Farm: 1985 Airphoto



King Farm: 1968 Airphoto



King Farm: 2010 Airphoto





Thanks for Listening!

Works Cited:

- Baker, Lily, et al., editors. *Sewanee*. Sewanee Trust for Historic Preservation, 2006, pp. 53–54.
- Makris, Patricia Short, editor. *Sewanee: People, Places, and Times*. Sewanee Trust for Historic Preservation, 2006.

