

Interpretation: Historic Preservation at Cannonsburgh Village

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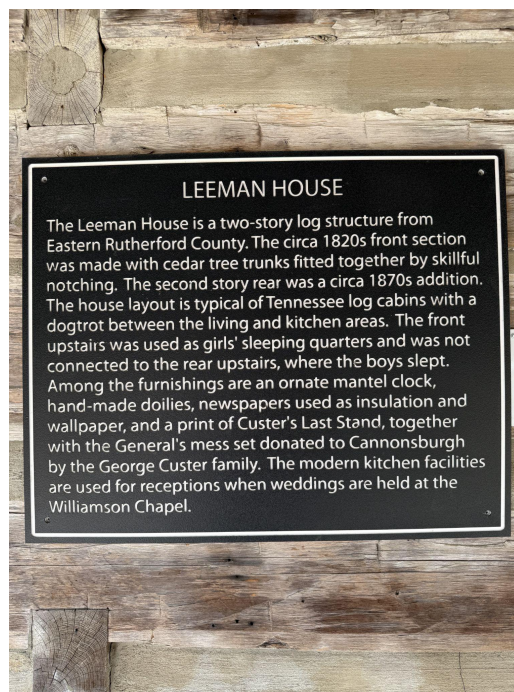
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Essentials in Historic Preservation and Cultural Resource Management

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Cannonsburgh Village, an open-air museum located in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, exemplifies the charm and history of 19th-century rural life in the American South. As a curated experience that recreates a historical setting, the village attracts visitors keen on learning about the past. A notable feature of the village is its interpretative markers—plaques affixed to various structures and buildings. While these markers are intended to provide context and information about the historical significance of the structures, they can also pose significant challenges in the field of historic preservation. This essay will explore how such interpretative markers can be detrimental to the preservation of historic integrity and authenticity while proposing sustainable alternatives that respect both the structures and the context in which they exist.

One of the primary concerns regarding interpretative markers at Cannonsburgh Village is their potential physical impact on the historic buildings that inhabit the site. The common practice of affixing plaques to the walls, particularly those constructed from aged wood, raises serious concerns about structural integrity. The act of screwing these markers into surfaces can lead to long-term damage, as the delicate nature of older materials makes them particularly susceptible to injury. This process can result in unsightly holes that mar the visual appeal of the heritage structures, compromising the aesthetic integrity that is often a crucial aspect of a historic site. Moreover, the act of attachment can weaken key load-bearing elements, increasing the risk of structural failure over time. With prolonged exposure to the elements, these interpretative markers may further catalyze chemical reactions with the original materials, accelerating weathering and deterioration. As a result, the longevity and preservation of these invaluable sites may be jeopardized, raising essential questions about the balance between education and preservation in historical contexts.



Interpretative marker at the Leeman House, screwed onto the wooden exterior.

Interpretative markers often aim for brevity and simplicity to convey complex histories efficiently. However, this can lead to oversimplification or misinterpretation of crucial historical facts. Nuanced stories regarding social, economic, and cultural aspects are frequently lost in the quest for quick comprehension. For example, the marker for the Windlass Well provides a physical description and its family-centered use, but does not explain what a “windlass” well is. Visitors may leave with a misinterpreted understanding of history, which can perpetuate incomplete narratives about the Cannonsburgh’s past.



Interpretative marker at the Windlass Well.

Considering the possible adverse effects of interpretative markers on heritage sites, it becomes crucial to explore sustainable alternatives. These alternatives should not only prioritize the preservation of historic values but also enhance the educational experiences available to visitors. By focusing on solutions that respect and protect the integrity of historical landmarks, we can ensure that the stories and significance of these sites are communicated effectively without compromising their authenticity. Emphasizing eco-friendly and culturally sensitive methods can provide richer educational opportunities while fostering a deeper appreciation for history among visitors.

One of the most effective and innovative alternatives for enhancing visitor engagement is using digital interpretative tools, particularly mobile applications. Imagine visitors arriving at a historical site and being able to download an app specifically designed for that location. This app could harness the power of Quick Response (QR) code technology, allowing users to scan codes

placed discreetly near various structures to access a wealth of information. These QR codes could serve as gateways to an interactive experience beyond traditional signage. When scanned, they could provide detailed historical narratives, architectural insights, or even personal anecdotes from individuals who lived in a given era. This would enrich the visitor's understanding and foster a more personal connection to the site. The app could utilize augmented reality features, overlaying historical images, descriptions, or animations onto the real-world views of the buildings as seen through the device's camera. For instance, visitors could point their smartphones at a crumbling wall and see what it looked like decades ago, complete with corresponding historical events in that spot. Cannonsburgh Village has employed QR codes already. However, to fully realize the potential of this technology, it is crucial to ensure that the QR codes are functional and easily scannable. Unfortunately, not all QR codes at historical sites are functional.

Rather than attaching plaques directly to the historic buildings, the village could opt for elegantly designed free-standing interpretation panels placed thoughtfully at key locations throughout Cannonsburgh Village. These panels would be curated to blend seamlessly with the village's charming aesthetic, showcasing beautifully crafted designs that echo the area's architectural style. Each panel would offer in-depth educational content, providing visitors rich historical context and engaging narratives about the village's heritage. By keeping these informative displays separate from the historic structures, this strategy minimizes the risk of physical damage to these treasured edifices. It enhances the overall visual harmony of Cannonsburgh Village as a cohesive historical site.

Pannier Graphics, a leading manufacturer of outdoor signs, panels, exhibit bases, and frames, is well-equipped to produce the high-quality, durable free-standing interpretation panels needed for Cannonsburgh Village. With a proven track record of creating stunning signage solutions for outdoor environments, such as their work for South Cumberland State Park and Oak Ridge, Pannier Graphics can design and fabricate panels that perfectly complement the village's historical character.



Interpretive Wayside Markers at Oak Ridge.¹

¹ “Manhattan Project National Historical Park - Interpretive Wayside Markers,” Explore Oak Ridge, n.d., <https://exploreoakridge.com/wayside-markers/#markers>.



New Wayside panel signs, made by Pannier Graphics, for the Tennessee State Park.²

² Pannier, "New Interpretive Signs for Tennessee State Park," Pannier Graphics - Durable Outdoor Signs and Frames, January 21, 2022, <https://panniergraphics.com/interpretive-signs-tennessee/>.

- **Cedar Bucket**

- **Interpretative Text:**

- *“WORLD’S LARGEST CEDAR BUCKET (Original)*
 - *Year built: 1887*
 - *Material: Red cedar*
 - *Height: 6’*
 - *Weight: 800 pounds*
 - *Diameter: 6’ at base, 9’ at top*
 - *Capacity: 1,556 gallons*
 - *Built by: Tennessee Red Cedar Woodenworks Company, Murfreesboro, Tennessee.*
 - *The bucket was originally built as a promotional exhibit by the Tennessee Red Cedar Woodenworks Company, a manufacturer of cedar buckets in Murfreesboro. The bucket resided in Murfreesboro, but was exhibited at the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 and at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in 1904. In 1950 the cedar bucket factory burned, and the bucket was sold to a local grocer, who kept it on display adjacent to the store. Around 1965 the bucket was auctioned off to an amusement park in Rossville, Georgia. The bucket was brought back to Murfreesboro in 1976. The original cedar bucket was partially destroyed by arson on Father’s Day 2005.”*
 - *“WORLD’S LARGEST CEDAR BUCKET (Current)*
 - *Year rebuilt: 2011*
 - *Material: Cedar*
 - *Height: 70 ¼” tall*
 - *Weight: 1,580 pounds*
 - *Diameter: 6’ at base, 7’6” at top*
 - *Capacity: 1,573 gallons*
 - *The current cedar bucket was rebuilt by the Rutherford County Blacksmith Association under the leadership of Donnie Fergus, Jeff Henderson and Don Greer. The bucket was rebuilt using the original handle, hardware and bands from the original bucket.”*
 - **Historic Ties:** Cedar bucket manufacturing.
 - **Interpretation Issue(s):**
 - The text is dense and difficult to read at a glance.
 - The marker focuses on the facts and figures of the bucket but lacks the story and context that would make it more interesting.
 - The QR code does not work.
 - **Interpretation Needs:**
 - Explain the historical significance of cedar buckets in the region. Provide information about the Tennessee Red Cedar Woodenworks Company and

its role in the community. Discuss the cultural and social context of the time when the bucket was built.

- **Interpretation Solutions:**
 - Highlight the most interesting aspects of the bucket's history, such as its use at the World's Columbian Exposition and the Louisiana Purchase Exposition.
 - Explain why the bucket was built and what it was used for.
 - Include information about the people who built and restored the bucket.
 - Provide context about the history of cedar bucket making in Murfreesboro.
- **Loom House**
 - **Interpretative Text:** *"Originally built in the early 1800s in Rutherford County, this is a typical example of that era. Transported here to Cannonsburgh in 1975, it is authentic in every detail and now houses an early 1800s hand loom which can be seen in operation on special occasions here in the village during our open season."*
 - **Historic Ties:** Household, craftsmanship.
 - **Interpretation Issue(s):**
 - The QR code does not work.
 - **Interpretation Needs:**
 - This interpretive marker, while providing some basic information, could be significantly enhanced to engage visitors more deeply.
 - **Interpretation Solutions:**
 - Rewritten label: "Originally built in the early 19th century within Rutherford County, this historic dwelling exemplifies the architectural style and construction methods of that period. Relocated to Cannonsburgh Village in 1975, it has been meticulously preserved to maintain its authenticity. The house now serves as a captivating time capsule, showcasing an early 19th-century hand loom that can be seen in operation during special events and the village's open season."
- **Westbrooks Country Store**
 - **Label:** *"This store, originally located at Link (in Southwestern Rutherford County), was built in 1899 and is typical of the area general stores from the early 1800s through the 1940s. In addition to groceries, country stores carried a wide variety of items including dry goods, clothing, hardware and medicines. The merchant kept fresh produce in stock through barter or by buying surplus goods from people. The country store was also a popular meeting place for people to share conversation, fellowship, or a friendly game of horseshoes. The local merchant also served as postmaster for the mail that arrived two or three times a week."*
 - **Historic Ties:** Pre-car, commercialism, communication.

- **Interpretation Issue(s):**
 - The QR code does not work.
- **Interpretation Needs:**
 - This interpretive marker, while providing some basic information, could be significantly enhanced to engage visitors more deeply.
- **Interpretation Solutions:**
 - Rewritten interpretative text: “Originally nestled in Southwestern Rutherford County’s Link community, this country store, constructed in 1899, offers a fascinating glimpse into the heart of rural life from the early 1800s through the 1940s. More than just a place to shop, these country stores were vital community hubs for people to share conversation, fellowship, or a friendly game of horseshoes. Beyond groceries, country stores stocked a diverse range of goods, from dry goods and clothing to hardware and medicines. Local merchants often acquired fresh produce through barter or by purchasing surplus goods from community members. The local merchant often doubled as the postmaster, serving as a vital link to the outside world, especially during the era when mail arrived only two or three times a week.”
- **Doctor’s Office**
 - **Interpretative Text:** *“Every town of notable size had a country doctor. And although the doctor saw many of his patients making house calls, he also maintained a small office near his residence where patients could come to him for treatment. This structure is furnished as an early medical office. The building originally came from south of Murfreesboro.”*
 - **Historic Ties:** Medicine, healthcare.
 - **Interpretation Issue(s):**
 - While informative of country doctors, it does not state information or the relationship of a country doctor to Murfreesboro.
 - The QR code does not work.
 - **Interpretation Needs:**
 - The interpretive marker would be best suited for the building if it included additional information on healthcare in Murfreesboro before the creation of health insurance, construction of hospitals (Ascension St. Thomas Rutherford Hospital, Alvin C. York VA Medical Center, Westlawn Hospital, etc.), development of the public health department, Blue Cross and Blue Shield—all loped under “organized public health institutions”—and emphasizing rural healthcare.
 - **Interpretation Solutions:**
 - Rewritten interpretative text: “Before organized public health institutions, every significant town in the region had a country doctor, a vital figure in

rural healthcare. While these doctors often made house calls to care for their patients, they also maintained small offices near their homes, where patients could seek treatment. This historic structure, originally from south of Murfreesboro, has been preserved and furnished to authentically represent an early medical office, offering a glimpse into the past of rural healthcare.”

- **Williamson Chapel**

- **Interpretative Text:** *“The Williamson Chapel, relocated from the Northern part of Rutherford County and adapted from an early schoolhouse, is representative of small country churches in the South. Its present appearance gives insight to the evolution of the building. The original simple frame structure was updated by the more ornate Victorian interior and the stained glass windows, while the steeple represents the latest effort to modernize the structure. Churches of this sort likely served as a focal point for the circuit riding minister. He probably preached here twice a month and went out among the smaller churches on the other Sundays. The extended smaller churches on the other Sundays. The extended length of services—several hours—compensated for their infrequency. Inside, the center aisle divides the church and the churchgoers; the women and men sat on different sides. Today, this chapel is used for weddings.”*
- **Historic Ties:** Religion.
- **Interpretation Issue(s):**
 - The QR code does not work.
 - Lack of context: The marker provides some information about the history of the chapel, but it lacks context about the broader history of the area and the role of the church within the community.
 - Focus on weddings: The marker ends by stating that the chapel is now used for weddings. While this is interesting information, it may not be the most relevant aspect of the chapel’s history and significance.
- **Interpretation Needs:**
 - Explain the role of small country churches in the South, especially in the 19th century, and their importance in the local community. This includes understanding how churches were central to social and religious life in rural areas.
 - Churches often served as community centers in rural areas, where people gathered not just for worship, but also for fellowship, education, and support. The chapel’s role as a social hub could be highlighted to show its importance in shaping local culture.
 - The extended length of services should be contextualized within the religious practices of the time. The need for long services in rural

communities where ministers only visited biweekly highlights the importance of these gatherings, which were likely a major social event.

- **Interpretation Solutions:**

- Provide more context about the history of the area and the role of the church within the community.
- Highlight other aspects of the chapel's history and significance, such as its use for worship and community gatherings.
- Rewritten interpretative text: "Originally a simple schoolhouse in northern Rutherford County, this historic chapel offers a glimpse into the religious life of early settlers. The building's evolution, from a modest frame structure to a more ornate Victorian interior, reflects the changing tastes and aspirations of the community. Imagine the scene: a circuit-riding minister, arriving on horseback, preaching to a congregation gathered within these walls. The extended services, lasting several hours, provided a much-needed spiritual connection for those living in rural areas. The division of the congregation by gender, a common practice in the era, speaks to the social norms and expectations of the time. Today, the Williamson Chapel continues to serve as a place of gathering, particularly for weddings. As you explore this historic site, consider the countless stories it holds—of faith, community, and the enduring spirit of the human heart."

- **Leeman House**

- **Interpretative Text:** *"The Leeman House is a two-story log structure from Eastern Rutherford County. The circa 1820s front section was made with cedar tree trunks fitted together by skillful notching. The second story rear was a circa 1870s addition. The house layout is typical of Tennessee log cabins with a dogtrot between the living and kitchen areas. The front upstairs was used as a girls' sleeping quarters and was not connected to the rear upstairs, where the boys slept. Among the furnishings are an ornate mantel clock, hand-made doilies, newspapers used as insulation and wallpaper, and a print of Custer's Last Stand, together with the General's mess set donated at Cannonsburgh by the George Custer Family. The modern kitchen facilities are used for receptions when weddings are held at the Williamson chapel."*
- **Historic Ties:** Post-Revolution, frontiers, household.
- **Interpretation Issue(s):**
 - The QR code does not work.
 - The marker provides information about the Leeman House itself, but it lacks historical context about the Leeman family or the significance of the house in the community. Information about how the house was used, the

lives of the people who lived there, or the architectural style of the house would add depth to the interpretation.

- No clear sections: The information is presented in a continuous block of text, making it difficult to follow. Dividing the text into sections with headings would improve readability.

- **Interpretation Needs:**

- Detailed information about the Leeman family, including their origins, notable members, and their connection to the house.
- The role of the Leeman House in the community's history, such as its use as a residence, a business, or a community gathering place.
- Identifying key themes related to the house's history, such as family life, local history, or architectural heritage, and developing interpretive content around these themes.

- **Interpretation Solutions:**

- Organize the text: Divide the text into sections with clear headings, such as "History of the Leeman House," and "The Leeman Family."
- Add historical context: Provide more information about the Leeman family, the significance of the house in the community, and the architectural style of the house.

- **Outhouse**

- **Interpretative Text:** *"The term 'outhouse' is used in North American English for the structure around a simple pit toilet. The term 'outhouse' may also be used for any small building away from a main building, used for a variety of purposes, but mainly for activities not wanted in the main house."*

- **Historic Ties:** Pre-plumbing.

- **Interpretation Issue(s):**

- The QR code does not work.

- **Interpretation Needs:**

- Inform visitors of the use of an outhouse before the installation of indoor plumbing.

- **Interpretation Solutions:**

- Rewritten text: "In the days before indoor plumbing, outhouses were an essential part of daily life. This humble structure served as a private retreat for a variety of needs. Its simple design, often consisting of a wooden frame and a pit dug into the ground, belies its importance in maintaining public health and hygiene. Though necessary, the outhouse could also be a rather unpleasant experience, especially in harsh weather conditions. Visitors to Cannonsburgh Village can gain a firsthand appreciation for the challenges of life without modern conveniences."

- **Smokehouse**

- **Interpretative Text:** *“A smokehouse is a building where meat or fish is cured with smoke. The finished product might be stored in the building, sometimes for a year or more. Even when people in some rural American areas during the twentieth century, notably where electricity still was not available, did not use smoke, they nevertheless called such a building—typically a small square unpainted wooden structure in the backyard—the “smokehouse.” Hogs were slaughtered after the onset of cold weather, and hams and other pork products were salted and hung up or placed on a shelf to last into the following summer. Traditional smokehouses served both as meat smokers and as a place to store the meats, often for groups and communities of people. Food preservation occurred by salt curing and extended cold smoking for two weeks or longer. Smokehouses were often secured to prevent animals and thieves from accessing the food.”*
- **Historic Ties:** Household.
- **Interpretation Issue(s):**
 - The QR code does not work.
 - The text on the marker is factually correct, but it is not engaging or interesting. It is written in a dry, academic style that is likely to bore visitors.
 - It is too long and wordy. The marker could be shortened significantly without losing any important information. It lacks a human element.
 - The text focuses on the smokehouse itself, rather than the people who used it.
- **Interpretation Needs:**
 - The importance of the smokehouse in rural communities, especially in the absence of modern refrigeration, should be explored. The smokehouse often played a central role in local food security and community self-sufficiency, providing essential provisions for families and communities.
 - The process of smoking and preserving meat could be tied to broader seasonal cycles of work in agricultural communities. The smokehouse was often just one part of the larger seasonal pattern of food preparation, harvest, and storage, essential for year-round sustenance.
 - The smokehouse has a prominent place in the culinary history of many rural American areas, particularly in the South. Providing context for how smoked meats like ham, bacon, and sausage became important regional staples would help visitors appreciate the cultural significance of these foods.
 - Include oral histories or personal stories from those who used smokehouses in the past would provide a more intimate and relatable connection to the building’s history. These could focus on the importance

of food preservation for survival, community bonding, or cultural practices tied to the smokehouse.

- **Interpretation Solutions:**

- Keep it concise and easy to read. Avoid overly complex language.
- Use vivid language to paint a picture. Engage the visitor's senses.
- Highlight the cultural significance of the smokehouse. Connect it to the broader history of the region.
- Rewritten interpretive text: "Imagine the rich aroma of hickory smoke filling the air as hams and bacon were slowly cured within these walls. This smokehouse was a testament to the ingenuity and resourcefulness of our ancestors. A smokehouse was a vital part of life in 19th-century Tennessee. Here, meat, primarily pork, was cured through a process of salting and smoking. This method extended the food's shelf life, ensuring sustenance through the winter months. This smokehouse reflects the self-sufficiency of early settlers in Middle Tennessee. By curing and smoking meat, families could preserve their food supply for extended periods. This practice was essential, especially during harsh winters when fresh food was scarce. The smokehouse also served as a storage room, keeping the meat safe from animals and thieves."

- **Windlass Well**

- **Interpretative Text:** *"Windlass wells were used commonly in this area from 1885-1940. This model is mounted on poles next to the hand-dug well. This windlass well model was normally used as a family pump and not as a community pump."*
- **Historic Ties:** Pre-industrial, pre-plumbing, water extraction.
- **Interpretation Issue(s):**
 - There is not description of what a "windlass well" is.
 - Concerning "commonly used in this area," it is too broad and does not specify what "area" it entails. Is it Murfreesboro, Rutherford, or Middle Tennessee?
- **Interpretation Needs:**
 - The label information should be rewrote to inform visitors the content of a windlass mechanism.
- **Interpretation Solutions:**
 - Rewritten interpretative text: "Windlass wells were a common feature in Middle Tennessee, including Murfreesboro, from 1885-1940. This type of well used a simple mechanical device, a windlass differential pulley, to draw water from a deep well. The windlass typically consisted of a horizontal beam with a rope and bucket attached. By turning the beam, users could raise and lower the bucket, retrieving water from the well

below. This particular model, typically mounted on poles beside a hand-dug well, was primarily used by families for their daily water needs. Unlike community pumps, which served larger groups, windlass wells were private sources of water for individual households.”

- **Ash Hopper**

- **Interpretative Text:** *“The ash hopper was essential to every family in the days when soap was homemade. The hopper provided storage for wood ashes used in making lye soap. Come spring, soap-making time, water was poured over the ashes and after several hours of soaking, lye began to drop from the bottom of the hopper. Animal fats were mixed with the lye, boiled and allowed to cool until solid. After the mixture cooled, it was cut into blocks and placed in the smokehouse to cure.”*
- **Historic Ties:** Pre-industrial, household, craftsmanship, soap-making.
- **Interpretation Issue(s):**
 - The current interpretative labeling talks about homemade soap-making using the ash hopper, but does not inform readers how or why it is related to Cannonsburgh or Murfreesboro.
- **Interpretation Needs:**
 - The label information should be rewritten for better, informed interpretation.
- **Interpretation Solutions:**
 - Rewritten interpretive text: “In the days before modern conveniences, every family in Middle Tennessee, including those in Murfreesboro, relied on homemade soap. A key tool in this process was the ash hopper. This simple yet essential device stored wood ashes, a vital ingredient in lye soap production. Come springtime, when soap-making was a common household chore, water was poured over the ashes. After several hours, lye, a caustic solution, began to drip from the bottom of the hopper. This lye was then mixed with animal fats, boiled, and cooled to form solid soap. The finished soap was cut into blocks and cured in a smokehouse, ready for use in the household.”

- **The Town Hall**

- **Interpretative Text:** *“The town hall, or courthouse, became important in most Southern communities as [the] population grew. This early 1800s town hall is an interesting contrast to the 1859 Rutherford County Courthouse, which can be seen to the right in the distant background. This log building was originally a one-room cabin and later a cook room. This limestone chimney was moved with the structure and rebuilt. Inside are housed some early Rutherford County records along with a table used by the Murfreesboro City Council after the Civil War.”*

- **Historic Ties:** Civic, government, frontiers.
- **Interpretation Issue(s):**
 - Label information does not tell historic ties prior to the 1859 Rutherford County Courthouse.
 - The log structure's original purpose was to house enslaved people, and the label makes no mention of that. Symbolic annihilation of enslaved narrative.
 - The QR code does not work.
- **Interpretation Needs:**
 - Explain the role of town halls and courthouses as central places for governance and community life in Southern towns as populations grew in the early 1800s. Highlight the typical functions of these buildings in early American settlements—acting as places for legal, political, and civic meetings, as well as a central space for social activities.
 - The transition from small, informal meeting places to more established government buildings as towns like Rutherford County grew should be addressed. This helps situate the building within the broader context of civic evolution in the South during the 19th century.
 - The town hall is a product of the post-Revolutionary South, reflecting both the physical and political shaping of early communities. An interpretation of the building in the context of the broader historical trends in Southern governance, particularly the development of legal systems, local governments, and post-Revolutionary ideals, would enrich visitors' understanding.
 - The town hall's use after the Civil War can be interpreted in the context of Southern Reconstruction. This would allow visitors to explore how the community rebuilt and redefined local governance after the war, with particular attention to the shifting political and social dynamics of the period.
- **Interpretation Solutions:**
 - Rewritten interpretative text: "The town hall, or courthouse, became important in most Southern communities as the population grew. This log building possibly began its life as a one-room slave quarters and later a cook room. This limestone chimney was moved with the structure and rebuilt. This early 1800s town hall is a contrast to the 1859 Rutherford County Courthouse. Inside are housed some early Rutherford County records along with a table used by the Murfreesboro City Council after the Civil War."
- **University House**

- **Interpretative Text:** *“1800s residence with dogtrot. The dogtrot, also called possum or dog run, reached its peak in the South from 1780 to 1830. Since connecting log structures is difficult, a family in need of more space would often build a second room a few feet away. Both log rooms and their connecting ‘dogtrot’ would be covered by a continuous roof. The chimneys, either stone or brick, were placed on the exterior to avoid overheating the house from cooking during the warmer months. During the hot summer months, cooking and other family activities were done outside in the dogtrot. This house, which formerly stood on the present site of MTSU campus, dates to the mid-1800s.”*
- **Historic Ties:** Residential, frontiers.
- **Interpretation Issue(s):**
 - Referring to the building as a “University House” is likely to cause misinterpretation or confusion for visitors. The building represents a frontiers dogtrot house; however, visitors may misinterpret it as an early dormitory for MTSU.
 - The QR code does not work.
- **Interpretation Needs:**
 - The title for the dogtrot house needs to be renamed to prevent misinterpretation of what it is.
- **Interpretation Solutions:**
 - Rename the building the “Dogtrot House.”
 - Rewritten interpretative text: “A relic of the antebellum South, this 19th-century residence once stood on the grounds of Middle Tennessee State University, dated mid-1800s. Its ‘dogtrot’ design, a hallmark of the region’s vernacular style from 1780 to 1830, reflects the practical needs and aesthetic preferences of the era. To accommodate growing families, a second log cabin was often added a short distance away, with both structures sharing a common roof. By separating the living quarters and creating a ventilated corridor, this design helped to mitigate the challenges of the region’s hot and humid climate. The exterior chimneys, a common feature of Southern homes, further enhanced the structure’s thermal performance.”
- **1900s Telephone House**
 - **Interpretative Text:** *“The telephone had made its way into many rural homes by the early 1900s. All calls had to be connected by an operator at a switchboard similar to the one at the Cannonsburgh Telephone Exchange Company. This switchboard originally came from the Rockvale Home Mutual Telephone in Southern Rutherford County. Because the operator had to be available at all hours, the switchboard building was also a home.”*
 - **Historic Ties:** Homework, telecommunications.

- **Interpretation Issue(s):**
 - QR code does not work.
 - Telephone switchboard operators were predominately female. The mention of gender roles in early telecommunications would enhance the building's value as a living example of how women's work in this field was both essential and underappreciated.
- **Interpretation Needs:**
 - Explain the advent of the telephone in rural communities during the early 1900s. This includes the challenges of communication in rural settings and how the introduction of the telephone revolutionized both personal and business communications in places where the infrastructure was limited.
 - Highlight the role of women as operators in many rural switchboards. This can lead into a discussion of gender roles in early telecommunication and how women's work in this field was often both essential and underappreciated.
- **Interpretation Solutions:**
 - Rewritten interpretative text: "The telephone made its way into many rural homes by the early 1900s. This vintage switchboard, a relic from the Rockvale Home Mutual Telephone Company in Southern Rutherford County, was the lifeblood of rural communication. The operator, always on call, ensured that every ring was connected, similar to the one at the Cannonsburgh Telephone Exchange Company. Because the operator, almost always female, had to be available at all hours, the switchboard building also served as a home."
- **One-room Schoolhouse**
 - **Interpretative Text:** *"The one-room schoolhouse shows the determination of 19th century settlers [to] provide their children with a basic education. After a community had a building for class, its citizens would hire a teacher with money raised by public subscription. Students were grouped according to grades, with girls on one side and boys on the other. All grades studied spelling and the three Rs. Classes would last only ten to fifteen minutes each, with two or three minutes recesses per day. Since it was not possible to find an existing period schoolhouse, this one was created from logs which came from a large corncrib located in Southern Rutherford County."*
 - **Historic Ties:** Frontiers, education.
 - **Interpretation Issue(s):**
 - The items inside the structure do not correspond to the 19th century theme of the schoolhouse.
 - The QR code does not work.
 - **Interpretation Needs:**

- Explain the historical context of education in the 19th century, particularly in rural communities. Many families were determined to provide a basic education to their children despite limited resources and infrastructure. The one-room schoolhouse symbolizes the settlers' commitment to education in the face of hardship.
- Discuss the difficulties faced by communities in rural areas when it came to accessing education—limited infrastructure, few qualified teachers, and a lack of buildings. The one-room schoolhouse was a response to these challenges, providing a centralized space for education where there was none.
- Children's attendance at school impacted family life, with some children attending for only part of the year (especially during harvest season) while others may have been needed at home to assist with chores or work on the farm. This should be interpreted within the context of rural family dynamics, where educational attendance was often a balancing act with the demands of agrarian life.
- **Interpretation Solutions:**
 - Rewritten interpretative text: "This one-room schoolhouse, a testament to the unwavering commitment of early settlers to provide their children with a basic education, offers a glimpse into the past. After a community had a building for class, its citizens would hire a teacher with money raised by public subscription. Students were grouped according to grades, with girls on one side and boys on the other. All grades studied spelling and the three Rs. Classes would last only ten to fifteen minutes each, with two or three minutes recesses per day. Since it was not possible to find an existing period schoolhouse, this one was created from logs which came from a large corncrib located in Southern Rutherford County."
- **Gristmill**
 - **Interpretative Text:** *"Gristmills played an important role in the lives of the early settlers and continued to be important until the 1940s. This mill is a scaled-down reproduction of a 19th century mill - Elam's Mill, that once stood on nearby Stones River. The 150-year-old machinery, from an abandoned mill in North Alabama, includes an overshot wheel, where the water flows over the top to create motion. The water, which powers the mill today, comes out of an early deep well still located in the rear of the blacksmith shop. Notice the [sulphur] odor from the untreated water when the mill is in operation. Of special interest are the original grindstones in the mill."*
 - **Historic Ties:** Grist-making.
 - **Interpretation Issue(s):**

- In the text, the word “sulphur” is sulfur spelled in British English, which makes no sense since Cannonsburgh is not related to Great Britain.
- The QR code does not work.
- **Interpretation Needs:**
 - Sulfur needs to be spelled in American English to keep consistency.
- **Interpretation Solutions:**
 - Rewritten interpretative text: “This scaled-down replica of Elam’s Mill, which once stood on Stones River, offers a window into the lives of early Murfreesboro settlers and continued to play an important role until the 1940s. The 150-year-old machinery, from an abandoned mill in North Alabama, includes an overshot wheel, where the water flows over the top to create motion. The water, which powers the mill today, comes out of an early deep well still located in the rear of the blacksmith shop. The original grindstones and antique machinery tell the story of a community shaped by water power and agricultural innovation. The aroma of sulfur, a byproduct of the untreated water, adds to the authentic experience of milling grain, just as it was done centuries ago.”

While interpretative markers at Cannonsburgh Village are designed with educational intentions, their physical and conceptual implications on historic preservation are inherently problematic. Alternatives such as digital interpretation and freestanding panels provide pathways that respect both the authenticity of the structures and the depth of their historical context. Moving forward, engaging more thoughtfully with preservation practices will ensure that sites like Cannonsburgh Village remain educational and culturally resonant for generations to come.

Sources:

Explore Oak Ridge. "Manhattan Project National Historical Park - Interpretive Wayside Markers," n.d. <https://exploreoakridge.com/wayside-markers/#markers>.

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