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Ella Sharp's Hillside Farm: Expressions of Class and Gender in Nineteenth Century Rural Michigan

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ELLA SHARP'S HILLSIDE FARM: EXPRESSIONS OF
CLASS AND GENDER IN NINETEENTH
CENTURY RURAL MICHIGAN

by

Carol A. Nickolai

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Carol A. Nickolai

ELLA SHARP'S HILLSIDE FARM: EXPRESSIONS
OF CLASS AND GENDER IN NINETEENTH
CENTURY RURAL MICHIGAN

Carol A. Nickolai, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 1994

This study examined ways in which social class and gender were expressed in the landscape and material culture of the Merriman-Sharp Farm, a nineteenth century upper class farm owned by women in Jackson, Michigan. Material culture studies, landscape architecture, and architectural history were used in addition to available documents to focus on how the Merriman-Sharp family reflected their class and gender affiliations.

The social construction of reality is an ongoing process at the Merriman-Sharp farm through the Ella W. Sharp Park and Ella W. Sharp Museum. The ways in which the Ella W. Sharp Park and Ella W. Sharp Museum present these issues of class and gender to the modern public were also considered.

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INTRODUCTION

Among the largest and most prosperous farms in nineteenth-century Jackson County, Michigan was the Merriman-Sharp Hillside Farm. Mary and Dwight Merriman built the farm into one of the finest in the county, then turned it over to their daughter and her husband, Ella and John Sharp, so that the Merrimans could move into town. The Merrimans and Sharps were "gentlemen farmers" who oversaw the activities of the farm, but employed people to do the actual work. Their farm provides insight into issues of both class and gender -- since it was entirely owned by Mary Merriman and later Ella Sharp.

In 1912 Ella Wing (Merriman) Sharp willed much of her farm, home, and personal property to the City of Jackson with the specific provision:

To convert not less than 400 acres of my home farm...into a park to be known as the Ella W. Sharp Park and perpetually maintained for park purposes; The contents of my home...suitable for the nucleus of a museum which is my wish, shall be maintained in my farm house.

Although the museum was not established immediately after her death, as the park was, the city did fulfill the literal provision of the will by pushing most of the Sharp belongings into one side of the house and closing it off.

Jackson, itself, is a medium to small city in south central Lower Michigan. Since its founding in 1829 as the next stop west of Ann Arbor on the Detroit-Chicago rail and road routes it has attracted, and lost, a great deal of industry. In the last half of the nineteenth century it was a booming industrial town heavily involved in the railroads, with carriages, women's undergarments, and furniture among some of its largest manufacturing concerns (Bohn 1993).

The preservation of the Merriman-Sharp house and its contents provides an interesting opportunity to examine issues of social class and gender on a nineteenth century farm. Anthropologists are interested in issues of social class and gender because these issues are socially constructed in the context of culture. People create and manipulate these concepts through interaction with each other and the material world. Their interaction with the material world is preserved in objects and the way they structured the environment. The analysis of these objects can provide some insight into the class and gender systems of the past. These issues will be approached in this study through an analysis of material culture, architecture, and landscape.

Jackson provides a useful background for this study since it is not unlike many other smaller cities in the Midwest whose industrial prosperity was directly linked to the railroads. The Merriman-Sharp farm is interesting for the opposite reason; it is not typical of farms either in Jackson county or other parts of the region. The family was clearly in an upper socioeconomic class, and as the property was owned by women they may have had more influence than was usual in its management.

After a consideration of theoretical and historical background this study will examine how class and gender were socially constructed through the material remains of the farm. It will also explore the current use of the property as a park and museum to try to understand how these past issues might best be portrayed to modern visitors.

THEORETICAL ORIENTATION AND METHOD

Historical Archaeology

Archaeology has been recognized as a legitimate and useful field of academic inquiry for well over a century (Trigger 1989); history has been a recognized field for far longer. Although these two areas investigate, in a broad sense, the same thing -- the human past -- they are often pursued in isolation from one another. The source of this isolation is in the different ways that the two fields define what they do and how they do it.

Historians usually attempt to ascertain what happened, and why it happened, through the study of documents written at the same time as the event they are studying. Although traditionally it has been concerned mainly with "important men" and "important events," since the 1960s the "new social history" has focused on the actual lives of all kinds of people. Even more recently, historians have begun to examine material culture preserved in museums and private collections (e.g., Schlereth 1992).

Archaeologists, most trained in the principles of anthropology, attempt to describe and understand the culture of past peoples through the examination of the "archaeological record." The exact definition of the archaeological record varies (Patrik 1985), but can be generally taken to include all items used, made, or modified by past people and usually recovered by means of excavation. Thus archaeologists are often concerned with periods and places for which there is no documentation.

However, there are periods and places where the work of archaeologists and historians can productively overlap because of the presence of both archaeological and documentary materials. Historical archaeology is defined as the study of "the cultural remains of literate societies that were capable of recording their own history" (Deetz 1977:5). In this context the concept of the archaeological record is expanded to include all items of material culture that have been preserved. Consequently, most studies in historical archaeology draw upon information and ideas from several areas of material culture studies including (a) landscape architecture, (b) museum studies, and (c) architectural history. The source of information is not as important as its relevance to the problem being studied.

Theoretical Background

Historical archaeology explores, in addition to archaeological materials, resources not available to other archaeologists: (a) contemporary written records and (b) secondary documents. How to integrate the documentary record with the material record concerns all historical archaeologists to some extent. Leone and Potter (1988) have identified two main ways in which these are most often linked: (1) to excavate first, then use the documents to identify what is seen archaeologically; and (2) to start with the documents, then excavate to fill in the gaps and add detail. They find both of these methods lacking because they act as if one kind of evidence is dependent on the other. This thinking leads archaeologists to search for only very specific information, and to discard anything unexpected.

In place of these methods Leone and Potter (1988) draw on some of Binford's work with middle-range theory in ethnoarchaeology to propose a new method for historical archaeology. They argue that the documentary record should

be considered independent of the archaeological record. Although these two kinds of information reflect the same historic periods and the same activities, they were created separately. By separating the two, each enhances the other's meaning. Leone and Potter suggest that the way to use this independence is to establish a descriptive grid, usually based on the documentary record, to derive expectations of the archaeology. Instead of being discarded, any deviations from the grid are in turn used to ask more questions of both the archaeological and the documentary records. They further suggest that the source of these discrepancies may lie in organizational behavior not previously perceived.

Although Leone and Potter indicate that middle-range theory is seldom used in historical archaeology, Kosso (1993) speculates that it is used far more frequently without being explicitly labeled. Kosso attempts to demystify middle-range theory by arguing that it is not a special kind of theory, but is a particular use of theory. He also contends that middle-range theory can be seen in operation and can be described and explained. It is not enough to simply use theories, they must be described as well.

This paper will attempt to follow Leone and Potter's lead by considering the documentary and archaeological records as independent expressions of the past. The documentary record for middle and late 19th century history in general is extensive. Consequently much has been recorded about many of the people and events of that time, including a substantial amount on Jackson, Michigan. Much of this information, however, is biased in favor of upper class white men and the "important events" in which they participated. There is also a significant collection of documents associated with the Merriman-Sharp family. Although these documents reflect the activities of the Merriman-Sharp family, they were, in most cases,

received by the family rather than created by them (i.e., not the letters written by Ella Sharp, but the ones received by her). This clearly reflects Leone and Potter's point that documents are created separately, and for different purposes, than the archaeological record.

A variety of other documents available include (a) federal census schedules, (b) wills and court documents, and (c) maps drawn when the park was created. Some of these documents are not complete. Several years of the federal agricultural census schedules were accidentally destroyed; and others contain errors. Yet any available documents are useful, and even errors can be enlightening. For example, one of the most common errors in historical documents is the age of individuals listed on the population census -- this can help to reveal attitudes toward age (see for example Federal Population Schedule for Jackson County 1890).

The material record at this site consists of a number of above ground objects, including (a) the family house; (b) some outbuildings; and (c) many of the original furnishings. This may not seem archaeological in a strict sense, since none of the collection has been recovered by excavation. However, it is much the same as the materials that might be recovered by archaeology. Since it is still possible to establish what items did belong to the Merriman-Sharp family (by catalog numbers), we are not confused in the collections between which items were owned by the family and which later acquired by the museum.

The landscape, material culture, and documents all reflect, in different ways, the social class and gender relations with which this study is mainly concerned. Paynter (1982) contends not only that social stratification is clearly evident in settlement patterns, but he goes one step further to argue that settlement patterns help to create and maintain the stratification of class and gender roles. The landscape is

the result of human action and can thus be considered as much a cultural artifact as any other human-made object (Lewis 1979). Individual use and possession of land also make powerful statements. For example, the kind of house a landowner builds and its proximity to other buildings or gardens can help to signify social status. This analysis does not produce universal truths, since there is nothing decreeing that a rich person must live in a bigger or more fashionable house than the neighbors, only that the rich man is likely to do so. It is also possible to find indications of gender differences in the use of objects and space. Men and women engaged in different activities, and consequently used the material objects and space around them differently.

Museums and the Past

Although people can learn about the past in many ways, museums allow them to interact with the material culture that past people used to structure their own social reality. Historic house museums, which depict a house restored to how it supposedly was at some point in the past, have become popular over the last 20 to 30 years (Butcher-Young 1993). These are restored and opened to enable the public to see and experience what life was like in "olden times." Unfortunately, they usually depict life in slightly idealized "good old times" instead.

The people of the past did not have a monopoly on constructing cultural landscapes. We do the same in the present. How we attempt to reconstruct the landscape of the past often reveals more about us than it does about anyone or anything in history. Our beliefs about the past form a very important part of our own social reality. We collaborate to eliminate detrimental stories and try to promote those that show our ancestors, or our town, in a good light.

Museums are widely known to be conservative about presenting the past too realistically lest they scare away visitors with an overabundance of realism. For example, Colonial Williamsburg cleans the streets so that modern tourists are not driven off by recreated 18th century odors. However, when museums are reluctant to present the more unpleasant realities of life they also risk obscuring the relations of class, power, control, and inequality. In fact, in many circumstances they do not want to depict these relations, because they do not fit with the perception many Americans have of the past as a time of egalitarianism and opportunity. Consequently, many museums, especially historic houses in small cities and towns, present an idealized past.

Museums need to tackle the hard problems. They need to remember that there were more people inhabiting our past than middle and upper class white males and their "important events." Even historically-accurate representation may still mislead the modern public which interprets the symbols used differently from their meaning in the past. Or it may leave people to create their own meanings because they have no reference points for past symbols. To be effective a museum needs to contain both historical materials, and interpreters who understand the meanings and relationships and can convey them to the public.

Since these messages are often subtle, I propose that museums need to be evaluated in two contexts. First, we need to be sure that the site is historically accurate, within reason, and that it reconstructs what the public thinks it does. Second, the site should be evaluated in terms of current culture. How does the public interpret what they're seeing, and does this have anything to do with reality?

HISTORICAL SETTING

Historical Perspective

The Ella Sharp property was continuously occupied from at least 1855 to 1912 and was subsequently transformed into a park and eventually a museum. The period of historic occupation covers nearly 60 years; over these years the landscape experienced a variety of changes as the result of events at both the local and national level. Although the Civil War, near the beginning of this period, represented a major political upheaval, it was primarily the product of forces that had been operating since the end of the Revolution (Unger 1986). The period between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of World War I was a time of widespread social and political change. The 1870s and 1890s both had significant economic downturns. Industrial workers were organizing labor unions; farmers were organizing agrarian movements (the Grange and The Alliance) which culminated in the shortlived Populist Party of the mid-1890s. The Temperance, Women's Suffrage, and City Beautiful movements, gaining popularity and influence, combined with the rapid proliferation of women's clubs and the thwarted ideals of Populism to become Progressivism (Unger 1986).

These new movements did not simply appear; and men and women pursued them for different reasons. Men were involved mainly on the political and union fronts. Workers, mainly men, banded together to attempt to improve their working conditions and wages; when they experienced little success with the employers they turned to politics to try to force change from the top-down. This sudden need was a reaction to the increasing size of companies, and to the increasing impersonal nature

of the business world. Further, the introduction of new "labor-saving" machines and more efficient methods, made both the industrial and farm workers feel that their jobs were threatened (Unger 1986:503).

Since the number of middle and upper class women who did not work was increasing, and family size was decreasing, there was a growing number of women with little to occupy their time (Hymowitz and Weissman 1981: 79). The 'cult of true womanhood' with its doctrine of separate spheres for men and women, had already taken hold firmly, further limiting their options (Hymowitz and Weissman 1981: 95, Cott 1977: 199). Since women were supposed to represent the finer side of human nature as a civilizing force in the household, we should perhaps not be surprised that these women soon became both advocates and followers of the City Beautiful movement. By planting flowers and trees and undertaking a variety of community cleaning projects, these women attempted to extend their civilizing force outside the realm of the home and create a kinder, gentler landscape of industrial capitalism. The Temperance movement can also be seen as a similar attempt by women to improve society around them. This involvement outside the home brought them into contact with the male movements also trying to improve conditions, and helped pull both men and women into the Progressive movement.

As a consequence, people constructed, and reconstructed, the landscape and material culture around them to express their ideas about social class and gender. Numerous authors have considered the changing ways in which people have used material culture to express such ideological issues, and a few examples will be considered here.

In their article "Meaning and the Built Environment," Anderson and Moore (1988) explore social and economic inequality at the Ashton Villa House Museum in

Galveston, Texas. They begin by analyzing the house, itself. They suggest that both the style (Italianate) and name demonstrate not only the owner's newly attained status, but also his connection to the established American elite.

In the first half of the 19th century, Greek Revival architecture and an interest in classical antiquity were very popular. It was widely accepted that classical philosophy and modes of government had contributed significantly to American democracy. Building in the Greek, and to some extent Roman, manner both paid homage to and spread these ideals.

By the middle of the 19th century, though, American ideals and society were shifting from an emphasis on egalitarianism towards individualism. Greek architecture, which closely imitated the form and shape of classical Greek temples, allowed little expression of individuality. While remaining within the idiom of classical architecture, the more ornate Italianate style allowed the expression of information about wealth and status. This, however, soon gave way to Queen Anne eclecticism, which permitted -- even encouraged -- every house to be both as ostentatious and as individualistic as possible. Thus, as Anderson and Moore (1988:387) state: "The built environment is more than shelter for the people who built it; it is a physical representation of the ideology that shapes the society. It repeats the myth by which they construct their lives and social order."

There are other ways besides architecture to express class on the cultural landscape. The pattern of residence is significant. In cities and towns, people of similar backgrounds group together, forming fashionable and not-so-fashionable neighborhoods. In rural areas, the patterns of buildings associated with farms also are revealing; a farm that has separate houses for the farm hands is clearly more prosperous than one that does not.

Perceiving gender on the landscape is somewhat more difficult, although by no means impossible. Yentsch (1991) points out that dairying was primarily carried out by women, until it became industrialized when it was taken over by men. She uses this fact to suggest that a closer analysis of the ceramics recovered from historic sites, specifically for vessels used in dairying, would reveal more about the presence and activities of women. I might also further suggest that out-buildings associated with dairying could be usefully analyzed.

A different kind of analysis of women is presented by Ames (1992). Part of his analysis focuses on the role of parlor organs in constructing the identities of women. Ames (1992: 182) argues that the parlor organ represented an increased emphasis on religion in the home. Women began combining the roles of consumer and saint by presiding over the activities centered on the organ. Parlor organs were linked to the female sphere of behavior: playing one allowed a woman to act out the role of a "genteel lady and moral mother" (Ames 1992: 164). Gospel hymns were some of the most popular parlor organ music, which linked the woman at the organ with the outside world of religious power -- and further reinforced her role as the maintainer of morality and civilization in the home.

Another aspect of Ames' analysis focuses on parlor suites, the sets of chairs with which Victorians furnished their formal rooms. These typically included seven chairs: (1) a sofa; (2) a large, armed gent's chair; (3) a smaller, lower armed ladies' chair; and (4) four small, unarmed chairs. Ames contends that these chairs represented the same kind of structured inequality found in Victorian society. The largest and most comfortable chairs were clearly identified as belonging to males, the chairs for females were less comfortable and provided less support. Every time Victorians encountered a parlor suite they were reminded of the inequalities of their

society: that men ranked higher than women, and that there was limited room at the top of the social scale.

If it is harder to locate women in the material, and even the documentary, record, it is because: (a) women of the nineteenth century were of lower social status and so left fewer written documents; (b) their activities were usually hidden in the private spaces of the household; and (c) much modern historiography is done by men who are looking primarily at male activities. Women, especially of the middle and upper classes, were expected to stay at home raising their children, or pass the time in the company of other women. In teaching their children the rules of "proper" behavior and of the different spheres of women and men they reinforced their own social status and passed it on to their daughters. However, it is also true that these women, congregating in women's clubs -- talking and complaining about their lives - - eventually formed a movement demanding equality for women (Hymowitz and Weissman 1981: 119).

Brief History of Jackson, Michigan

In the summer of 1829, three men hiked two days west from Ann Arbor to an easy ford on the Grand River. One of the men, Horace Blackman, was originally from Tioga County, New York, where he had heard reports about Michigan from surveyor Jonathan Stratton. Much westward migration had already bypassed Michigan, partly because it was difficult to get into a territory bounded on three sides by water, and partly because much of the land was believed to be a marshy unfarmable wasteland (Deming 1984).

However, by the time of Blackman's expedition of 1829, conditions were starting to change in southern Michigan. Although Ann Arbor remained the last

settlement west of Detroit, Blackman's Location, as Jackson would briefly be known, was a clear next development. Its advantages included much suitable farmland, good supplies of wood, an easy ford across the Grand River, a convergence of Indian trails, and a location on the projected route of the new territorial road between Detroit and the mouth of the St. Joseph River -- all within a hard day's ride from Ann Arbor. Upon his return to Ann Arbor, Blackman registered his claim for 160 acres.

Within a few months another group had settled upstream from Blackman's claim, dammed the river, and begun building a mill. These men and Blackman compromised on their plans for a new village. That same winter a surveying party stayed for a few days in Blackman's cabin and decided to name the place Jacksonburgh, in honor of President Andrew Jackson. Some local stories claim that the Post Office renamed the town Jacksonopolis, but either way in 1838 the citizens opted to simply call their community Jackson.

The town grew fairly rapidly due to its location. It was also named the county seat and was a serious contender for the state capital. Business established an early and lasting hold on Jackson. Many businesses catered to travellers passing through, and as Jackson prospered they also brought in luxuries for the residents.

Unfortunately, as has often been the case, the area Native Americans did not benefit from Jackson's success. In 1839 and 1840, the United States cavalry gathered up approximately 1500 local Potawatomis, who had never caused any trouble for the settlement, and transported them to Fort Howard, Wisconsin.

In 1838, Jackson became the location of the Southern Michigan Prison. The prison was a boon to local manufacturers since it contracted inmate labor to private business at a low cost as a means of rehabilitation. With a steady supply of cheap

labor, Jackson industry had a head start on much of the rest of the state. Pressure from other industries and non-convict labor eventually forced the contract labor system to be abolished in 1909, by which time the remaining Jackson industry was able to survive without this advantage and had probably already begun to decline anyway (Deming 1984).

Further, in the early 1840s, Jackson became for three years the western terminal of the Michigan Central Railroad. This began a long association with railroads that peaked in the last decades of the 1800s (Deming 1984: 42). By the 1870s, Jackson was at the junction of six separate railroads and used this advantage to become a center for engine manufacturing and repair. This preeminence was short-lived as the rise of the automobile and then of diesel locomotives after 1900 permanently eclipsed Jackson's railroad industry.

Two other main Jackson industries went into steep decline in the same time period. Coal mining reached its peak in the 1880s, but as cheaper and better quality coal began arriving from Ohio, it declined. By 1902, the coal industry was, for all practical purposes, ended (Bohn 1993).

Jackson's third main industry, women's undergarments, also peaked near the end of the 19th century and lasted until just after World War I (Deming 1984). The invention in Jackson of the popular Bortree Duplex Corset helped centralize the women's undergarment industry here. By 1934, changing fashions, new kinds of elastics, and East Coast girdle manufacturers had driven all but two local corset companies out of business. These last two eventually went out of the corset business completely and into therapeutic or prosthetic support garments and devices (Deming 1984).

In the middle of the 19th century, Jackson was actively interested in state and national politics. Jackson's most lasting contribution to national politics was hosting the July 6, 1854 convention which resulted in the organization and first political platform of the Republican Party. Some historians argue that the Party had been formed at an earlier convention in Wisconsin, but the Republican Party was not clearly a unified force until after the Jackson gathering. Jackson residents firmly supported the Union and the Constitution in the debate leading up to the Civil War. During the War, itself, Jackson contributed both labor and resources to the Union effort.

Besides a prison, railroads, corsets, coal, and politics, 19th century Jackson had all of the social institutions that make up a thriving community. People established churches from a wide variety of denominations and a synagogue. Schools were also established early (e.g., Parson's Business School ca. 1870s), including small colleges in several neighboring communities. A larger college was late in coming to Jackson, itself: the Jackson Union School District did not establish Jackson Junior College until 1928. In the 1960s, the College finally outgrew its downtown location, moved to a new campus outside of the city, and became Jackson Community College.

Newspapers also have a long history in Jackson; the first settlers considered a newspaper so important that in 1837 they paid Nicholas Sullivan to move to town and start one. Jackson has gone through a number of newspapers, reflecting various political viewpoints, including a paper in opposition to the Canadian government. One daily paper remains. The town now has two radio stations and shares its television stations with Lansing.

From the 1850s on Jackson did not lack cultural entertainment. Although the town now supports only a couple of movie theaters and a single live theater complex at the Community College, in the last century several theaters offered everything from vaudeville to opera. Jackson's location on the main east-west route between Detroit and Chicago put it in the path of many travelling shows and entertainers who often got off the train to give a few performances. There were also many social clubs and groups, for both men and women. Women could choose among 20 literary clubs and at least three groups striving to improve the quality of life in town. Jacksonians were, perhaps justifiably, proud of the high regard in which Jackson women were held in other parts of the state (De Lind, n.d.).

At the turn of the century Jackson was home to many manufacturing firms, giving rise to the slogan "The World Takes What Jackson Makes," but this was not to last (Bohn 1993). As the railroad business began to decline, Jackson turned toward automobile manufacture. The town had long had a successful carriage-making business, but these manufacturers only reluctantly ventured into the untried auto industry. The Jackson Automobile Company, active from 1902 to 1922, was the first, longest-lived, and most successful auto company; but at least 25 automakers operated in Jackson. The last, Earl Motor Company, folded in 1924. These small businesses simply could not compete with larger companies based in Detroit. Fortunately, while Jackson's automakers failed, other companies, such as Aeroquip, succeeded by making auto, and later aviation, parts. In the early years of the 20th century, Jackson also became home to two electric utility companies -- Consumers Power Co. and Commonwealth Associates (Bohn 1993).

All this manufacturing activity needed a sizeable labor force, in addition to the convicts at the prison. The majority of Jackson's working population was skilled

and semi-skilled workers, many of whom emigrated mainly from Canada, Scotland, England, Wales, Ireland, Germany and Poland, as well as a small, primarily post-Civil War African-American community (De Lind, n.d.). These working class people, however, did not make decisions for the area. A small, wealthy, elite of business owners and gentlemen farmers decided Jackson's development. Still, this diversity of social standing, economic class, and ethnicity helped to make Jackson a town with many interests, and the number of churches and social clubs multiplied (De Lind, n.d.).

Jackson, like many early 19th century towns, was partly a farming community. For many years farming remained common, even within the city limits. As a county, Jackson once led the state in producing, packing and shipping beans, and boasted in 1895 that it grew more corn per acre than any other county east of the Mississippi River. In the late 19th century, Jackson was also widely respected for the speed and quality of its horses. So whatever happened in the manufacturing area, the business of farming quietly continued.

As the original businesses of Jackson declined in the first half of this century, people began to pay more attention to the side effects of the manufacturing process. Partly as a result of the waste that had been expelled into the air and the Grand River for many years, people to move to the many surrounding suburban lakeside communities. Little was done to reduce the pollution until after World War II. Further, the value of city real estate early in Jackson's development had encouraged urban development at such a pace that the city was almost left without parkland. The civic-minded gifts of two prominent citizens -- Ella Sharp, who donated well over 500 acres as a park at her death in 1912, and William Sparks, who planned and

donated 465 acres of parkland, including a large artificial waterfall in 1929 -- ensured that Jackson would not again be without green spaces.

Suburbanization steadily increased after the Great Depression and World War II . Although county population has nearly doubled since the 1930s, city population continued to drop. Business also moved out of the central business district. Two urban renewal projects in the 1960s and a brief experiment with a downtown pedestrian mall (probably modeled after Kalamazoo, Michigan) failed to bring significant business to the downtown area. Larger businesses, including Gilbert-Commonwealth and Aeroquip, have also been steadily moving out of town; although the city now sits on I-94 it has never regained its former economic position.

Today, Jackson manufactures on a much smaller scale than in the past, and many smaller businesses have disappeared completely. Periodically, Jackson attempts to revitalize itself, most recently in the 1960s and 1980s, but many residents wonder what will become of the town. While many retirees from area businesses maintain summer residences here, many of Jackson's best young people move away to attend state universities and never move back.

Brief History of the Ella W. Sharp Park and Museum

In the early 1850s, Mary Wing Farnsworth, a recent widow from Glens Falls, New York, visited a cousin in Jackson County, Michigan. Her father, Abraham Wing, a businessman, had already bought several sections of land in Michigan for speculation. When he traveled to Jackson to escort his daughter back to New York, he bought approximately 400 acres, including a small three room house, as a new home for Mary.

It seems likely that Mary met Dwight Merriman, who had moved to Jackson from New York eight years earlier, on that first visit, for within a year of moving to the new farm in 1855 she married him. Abraham Wing turned the farm over to Dwight's management, but not his ownership. The now more than 600 acre Hillside Farm became one of the most outstanding in the state, growing a variety of crops, supporting orchards, and raising both a large dairy herd and fine horses. The farm is reported in 1865 to have had 1,000 apple trees, 1,000 peach trees, and 600 pear trees planted in straight rows 24 feet apart, to have manufactured 120 pounds of cheese daily, and to have made wine from grapes grown on the property (Jackson Daily Citizen). Dwight Merriman is also reported to have spent a considerable amount of money maintaining the two mile stretch of road into town.

The original building, believed to have been built in the early 1840s, was 1 1/2 stories, with two rooms on the main floor, a single loft-like room above, and a partial basement (Figure 1). This small house could hardly have accommodated a "gentleman farmer" and his growing family. So in 1857, using money provided by Mary's father, the Merrimans began building a large two-story Greek Revival addition to the front. The addition is an independent structure, with its own half-height basement, and its long side facing the street. It also completely obscures the earlier building. At the same time a small Greek Revival porch was added to the side of one of the original rooms (Figure 2).

In the early 1860s, a five-story Italianate tower was added in the space behind the Greek Revival front and next to the original house. A matching Italianate porch on the side of the tower balanced the Greek Revival porch on the opposite side of the house. A small two story section off the back of the tower may have been added at this time, although its use remains uncertain until an 1890s remodeling into

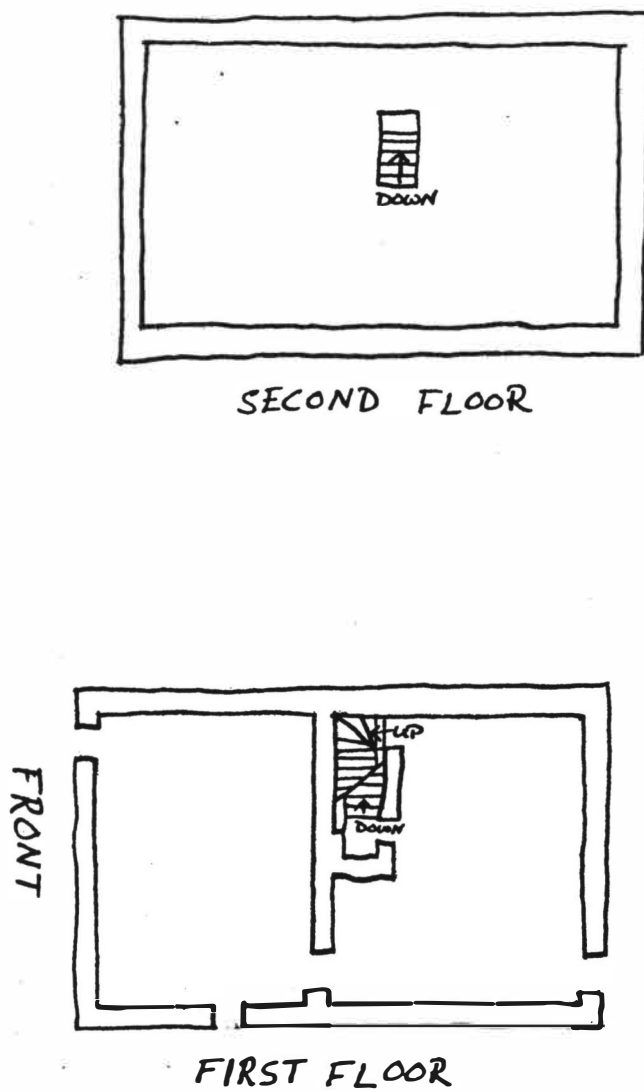


Figure 1. Plan of Merriman-Sharp House ca. 1855.

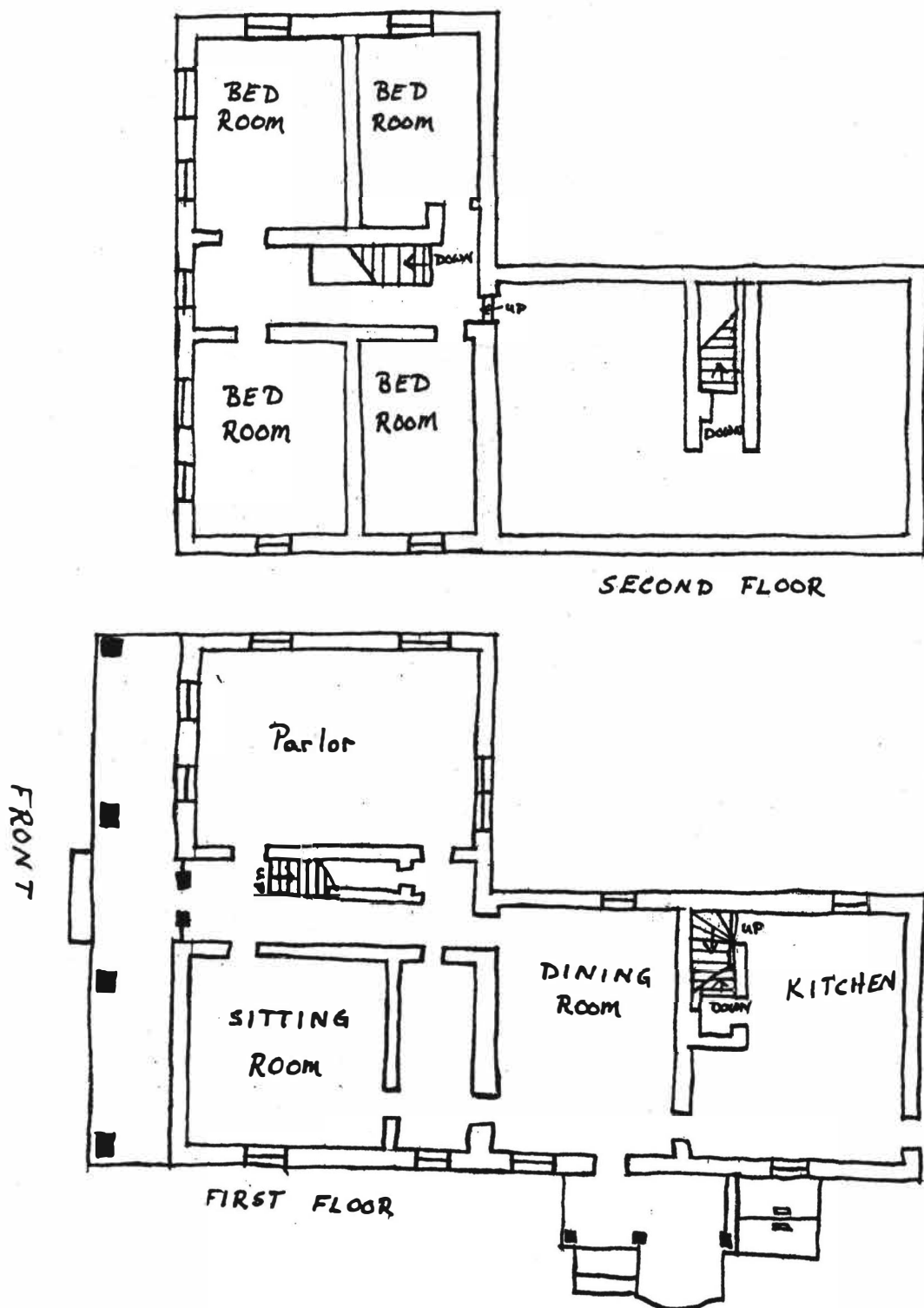


Figure 2. Merriman-Sharp House After 1857 Addition.

closets and bathrooms. During construction of the tower, the roof of the three room house was raised to create three full rooms upstairs. No other structural changes have been made to the house since completion of the tower, although a garage-like structure off the back of the house, which enclosed a well or cistern, was added at some time (Figure 3).

Dwight and Mary Merriman had four children: twins Ella and Frank in 1857; son Dwight Tracy in 1858; and son Howard Lincoln in 1863; Unfortunately, all three boys died: Frank at age four; Dwight at 20; and Howard at 29. As a young woman, Ella attended the Michigan Female Seminary in Kalamazoo and accompanied her mother on two trips to Europe. In 1881, Ella married John Sharp, a local lawyer, and two years later they took over management of Hilleside Farm. Dwight and Mary moved to a large Italianate house in town.

In an unusual circumstance for the 19th century, neither Dwight Merriman nor John Sharp ever owned Hillside Farm. At the death of Abraham Wing all his property, including the farm, was placed into a trust for his two daughters, which could not be disbursed until after the death of his then current wife. By the time she died, Mary had already done so and left her share of the trust to her daughter Ella. Although Dwight was a trustee of the Wing estate and contested Mary's will, he never gained ownership of the property.

John Sharp continued his law practice and activity in local Republican politics. He held several elected offices including Supervisor of the Census, Prosecuting Attorney, City Attorney, and State Senator. Ella Sharp continued to travel in the United States, Canada and Europe. She also became involved in forestry, child welfare, public recreation, Kalamazoo's Michigan Female Seminary, and civic improvement. She founded Jackson's Town Improvement Association in

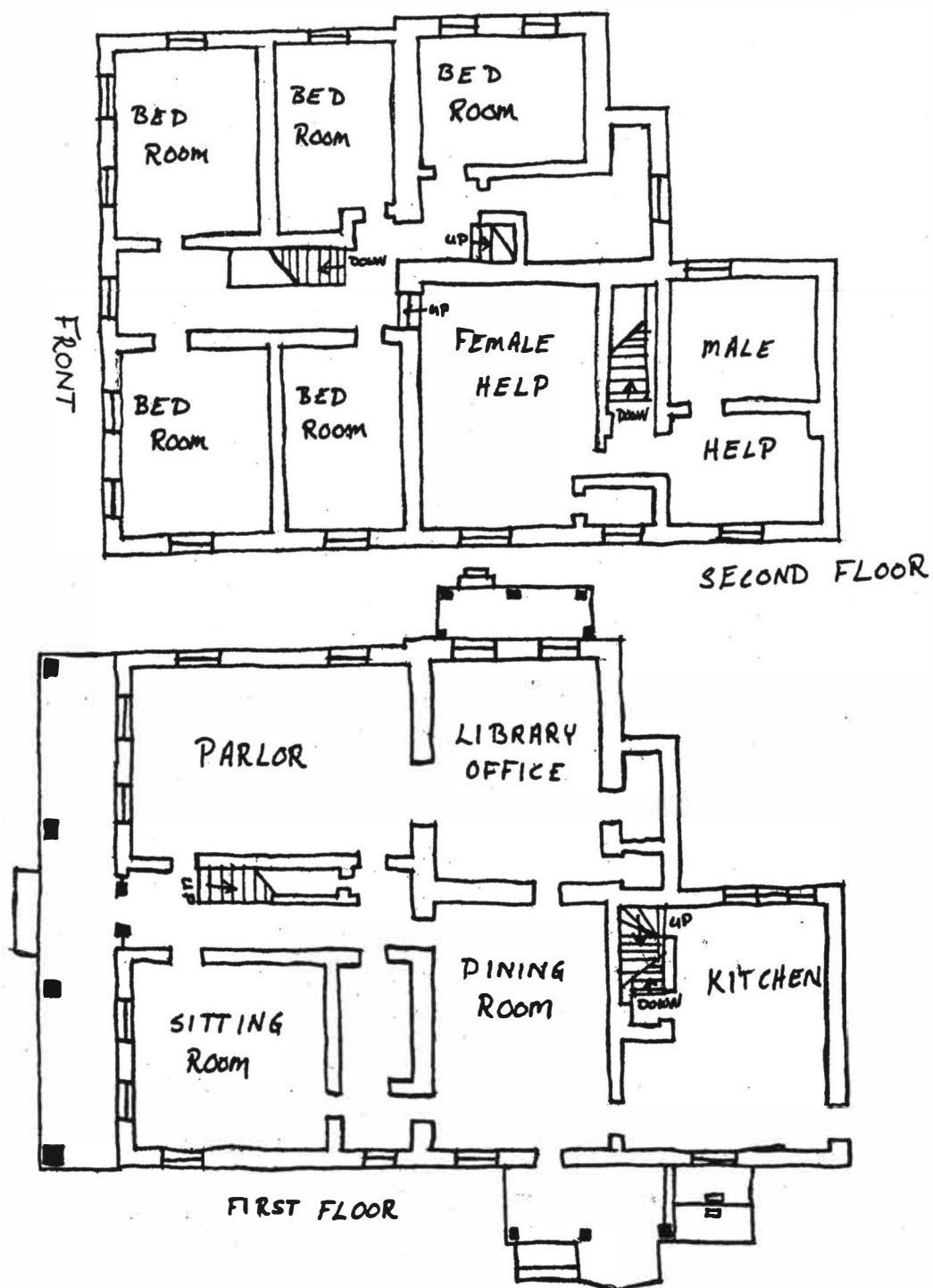


Figure 3. Merriman-Sharp House After 1862 Addition.

Note: Room functions set by interviews (Loftis n.d.).

1902, and remained president for ten years. Although the Sharps are widely reported to have loved children, they never had any of their own.

After John Sharp's death in 1908, Ella continued her involvement in civic causes. She also planned to remodel the ground floor of her house in the style of the popular Arts and Crafts movement, with exposed wooden beams and a brick hearth. The rooms, after remodeling, would better reflect her use of them. Due to illness, she had for some time been using the ground floor tower room as a bedroom and her dining room as the farm office (Figure 4). She continued to manage the farm until her death, listing herself as "Manager of Hillside Farm" on a "Who's Who" application (Loftis n.d.).

When Ella died in 1912, at 55, she again demonstrated her civic consciousness by willing the majority of her property and belongings to the City of Jackson. In her will she specifically requested that at least 400 acres of the farm be used as a park and that her home be maintained as a museum. The Ella W. Sharp Park was established with 530 acres of the farm and opened in 1916. The city sold the remainder of the land and eventually it was developed into housing. The city's original plans for the park and formal gardens have never been fully realized. In fact, the house's own formal gardens were demolished. Park facilities now include athletic fields, tennis courts, playgrounds, swimming pool, eighteen hole golf course, miniature golf, and picnic areas. Among the plans that did not succeed are a Depression Era attempt to establish a zoo and extensive formal colonial style gardens.

The museum took longer to be realized. For approximately the first 50 years after Ella's death, the park supervisor lived in half of the house while the Sharp possessions were stored in the other half and the attics. The Museum Association,

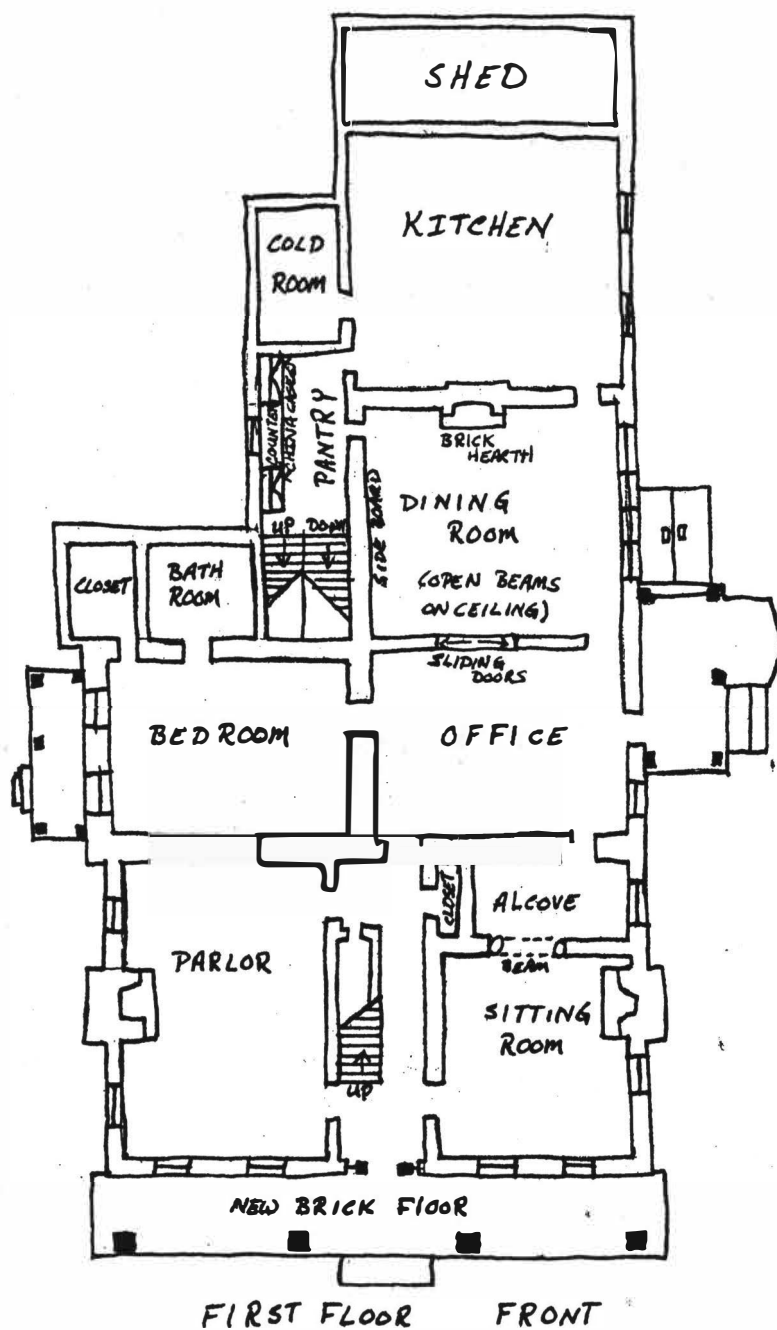


Figure 4. 1910 Plans for the Merriman-Sharp House.

formed in the 1960s by a group of community women and the Junior League, established the Ella Sharp Museum as a privately supported, non-profit organization separate from the city's management of the park. They also undertook the gradual restoration of the house. The new museum moved a log cabin and old schoolhouse to the grounds, built a new exhibition gallery, and tried to make the best of what outbuildings had been left in place (or moved to a new place) by the park authorities. Although a recent project has remodeled the gallery and original granary, and moved the log cabin farther from the house, the museum grounds continue to appear overcrowded (Figures 5 and 6).

1. Dibble Schoolhouse - An 1885 one-room school.*
 2. Hillside Farmhouse - Ella W. Sharp's 19th century home.
 3. Wood Working Exhibit
 4. 1915 Case Steam Tractor
 5. Tower Barn - View 19th century carriages, sleighs and farm equipment.
 6. Historic Shop Exhibit Building - Print Shop, Doctor's Office and General Store.*
 8. Eli Stillson Log House - View the exterior of this early Michigan log cabin house.*
 9. Granary - Hillside farm's original grain storage building*
 10. Storage*
 11. Jackson Public Schools Planetarium
 13. Galleries
 14. Parking
- *Not Part of the Ella Sharp Museum Complex

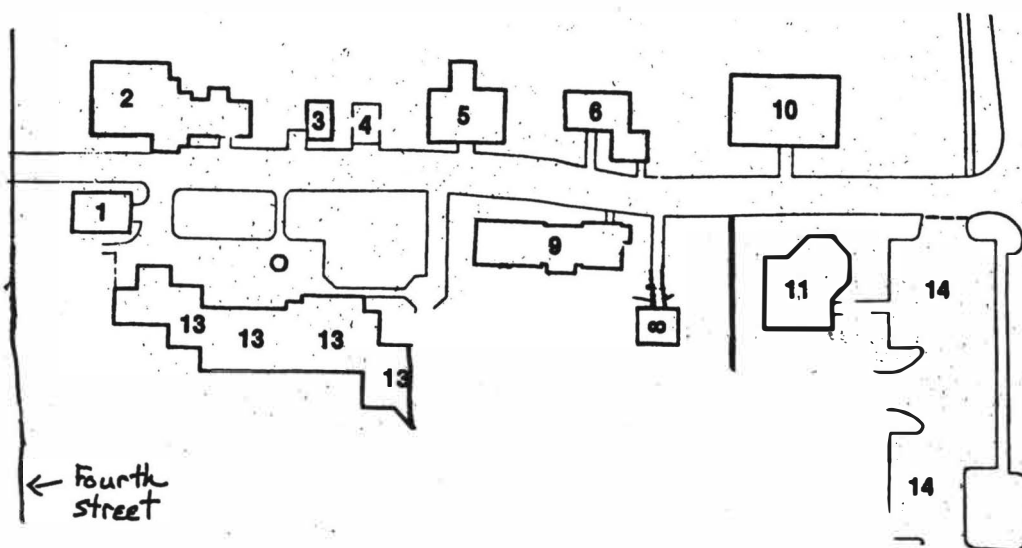


Figure 5. Original Museum Complex.

Adapted from: Ella Sharp Museum Visitor's Guide.

1. Dibble Schoolhouse - An 1885 one-room school.*
2. Hillside Farmhouse - Ella W. Sharp's 19th century home. Guided tours of the farmhouse are on the hour and half-hour.
3. Wood Working Exhibit
4. 1915 Case Steam Tractor
5. Tower Barn - View 19th century carriages, sleighs and farm equipment.
6. Historic Shop Exhibit Building - Print Shop, Doctor's Office and General Store.*
7. Storage*
8. Eli Stillson Log House - View the exterior of this early Michigan log cabin house.*
9. Granary - Hillside farm's original grain storage building, now the Granary Restaurant.
10. Storage*
11. Jackson Public Schools Planetarium
12. Hadwin Center
13. Galleries
14. Parking

*No Public Access

1. Not Part of the Ella Sharp Museum Complex

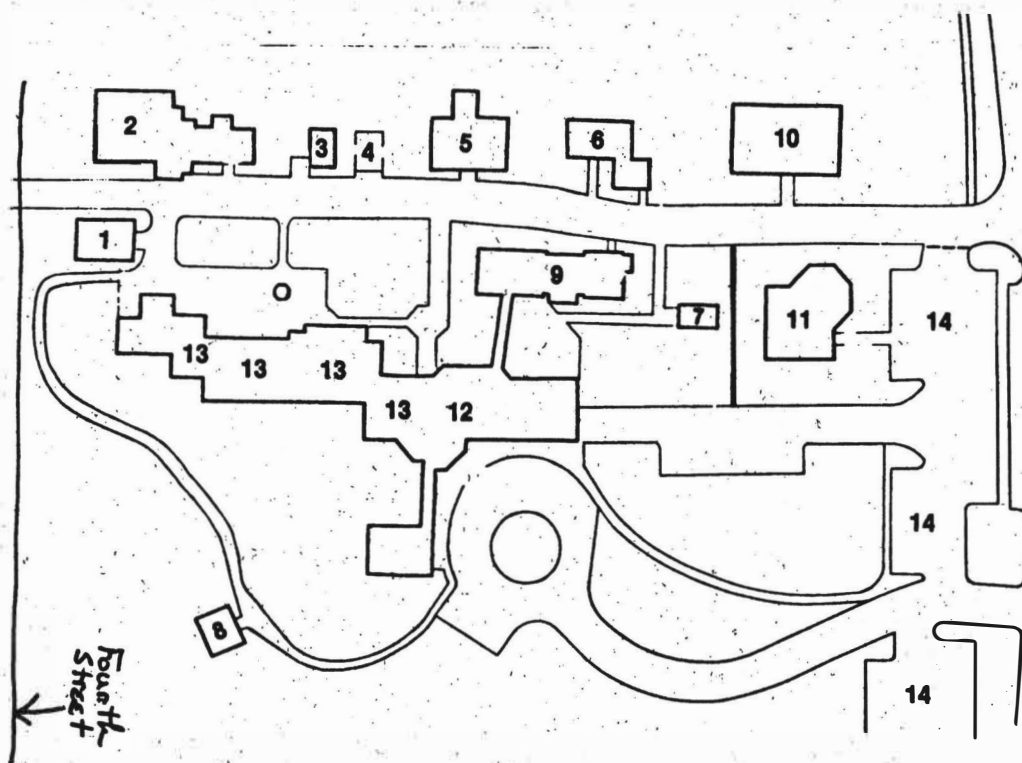


Figure 6. Current Museum Complex.

Adapted from: Ella Sharp Museum Visitor's Guide.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Late Nineteenth Century Summit Township

The Merriman-Sharp farm is closely linked to the history of the Jackson area. The farm, already of substantial size when purchased by Abraham Wing, grew and prospered under Dwight Merriman's management. Having already been cited by the State Agricultural Society as one of the finest farms in the state (Jackson Daily Citizen, 1865), it seems from contemporary reports to have reached its peak of productivity in the 1870s and 1880s. Although it continued to support the family very well until Ella's death in 1912.

In 1860, the one year for which detailed Federal Agricultural Census figures are available for Jackson County, the two largest farms in Summit Township were Merriman's 390 acres and Shoemaker's 950 acres. Not surprisingly, these farms are also the most valuable and far exceed the average values for the entire township in every category (see Table 1). However, plat maps show that the Shoemaker farm was sold into many smaller pieces, eventually for urban development.

Federal census figures show that the total county population grew steadily through the end of the nineteenth century, but the number of farms in the county decreased 2% between 1880 and 1890, then dropped 4% between 1900 and 1910. While the average acreage per farmer remained fairly steady from 1880 to 1910, the average cash value of the farms dropped until 1900 then surged again in 1910 (see Table 2). The Merriman-Sharp farm has many times both the average acreage and average cash value in all of these years (Figures 7 and 8). However, in later years,

Table 1
1860 Federal Agricultural Schedule,
Summit Township, Jackson County

	Total	Avg	Merriman	Shoemaker
Farms	98			
Total Acres	17,831	182	390	950
Improved	10,046	103	300	700
Unimproved	7,785	79	90	250
Cash Value	\$537,620	\$5,486	\$38,800	\$43,300
Implements	\$13,424	\$137	\$2,000	\$800
Livestock	\$68,585	\$700	\$3,233	\$9000
Orchard	\$3,381	\$35	\$200	\$300

Table 2
1880 to 1890 Average Farm Values,
Jackson County

	1880	1890	1900	1910
Farms	3,368	3,617	3,860	3,736
Total Acres	113	114	110	113
Improved	86	86	82	81
Unimproved	28	29	31	32
Cash Value	\$5,190	\$4593	\$4003	\$6885
Implements	\$202	\$146	\$179	\$277
Livestock	\$568	\$517	\$507	\$886

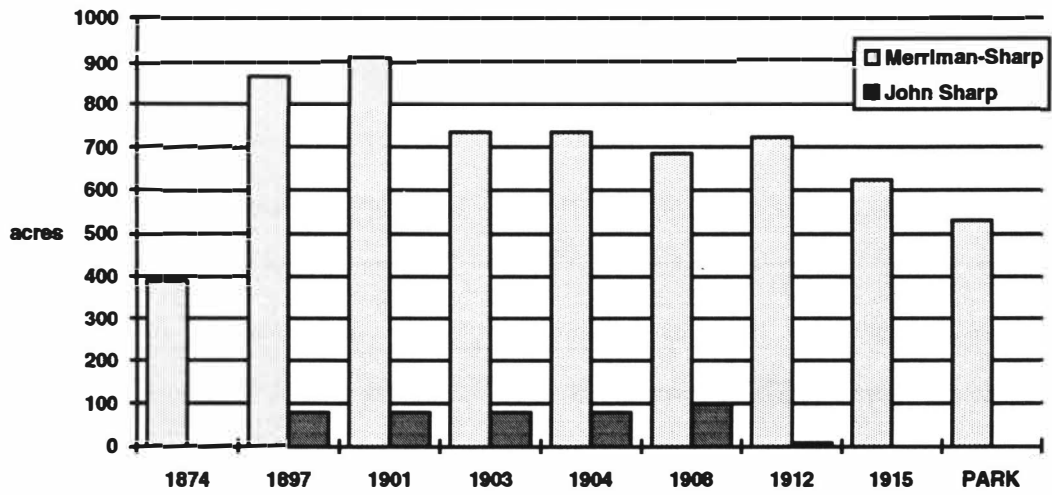


Figure 7. Merriman-Sharp Owned Acreage.

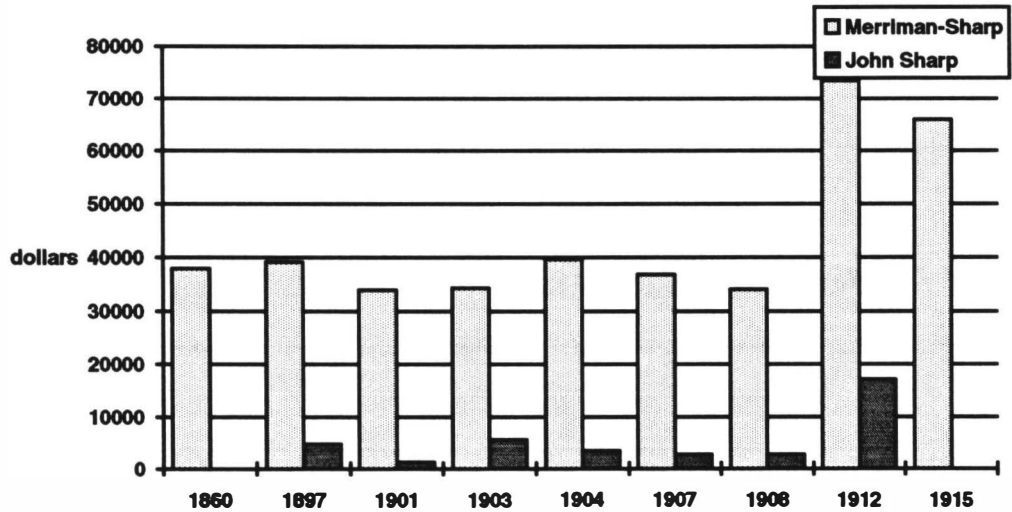


Figure 8. Value of Merriman-Sharp Owned Land.

the increased cash value of the Merriman-Sharp property probably reflects its proximity to the southern edge of the city rather than its value strictly as farm land.

Thus as the city grew, the Merriman-Sharp farm (and fortune) grew as well. As the city of Jackson turned to industry and farming in the area declined slightly in importance, the Merriman-Sharp farm also began slipping into a decline in production. The direction of city development makes it seem likely that had Ella Sharp not created a park after her death, the farm would have been developed into housing.

As well as contributing to the farm economy of Jackson, the Merriman-Sharp family was also closely involved in the social scene of the city. While all family members had fairly high levels of community involvement, Ella's activities stand out most markedly. In addition to her involvement with the women's clubs of Jackson, she was also part of the statewide movement -- corresponding with, visiting, and entertaining women from all over the state.

Her most significant involvements were with civic concerns, city beautification and forestry. On the statewide level she participated in a movement to set up stations to watch for fires in the state forests. She also attended state conventions on several related topics. In Jackson, she helped found the Town Improvement Association, which strove to improve Jackson by making it a cleaner and healthier place to live. They sponsored such projects as planting flowers on municipal property and attempting to reduce the fly population.

The Merrimans and the Sharps identified themselves with members of the upper class, and were seen that way by both townspeople and farm help. Yet, the few available recollections from people who lived with the Sharps as children of the

farm help never fail to mention that despite the Sharps status in the community they never felt they were too good to sit in the kitchen and eat with the help (Loftis, n.d.).

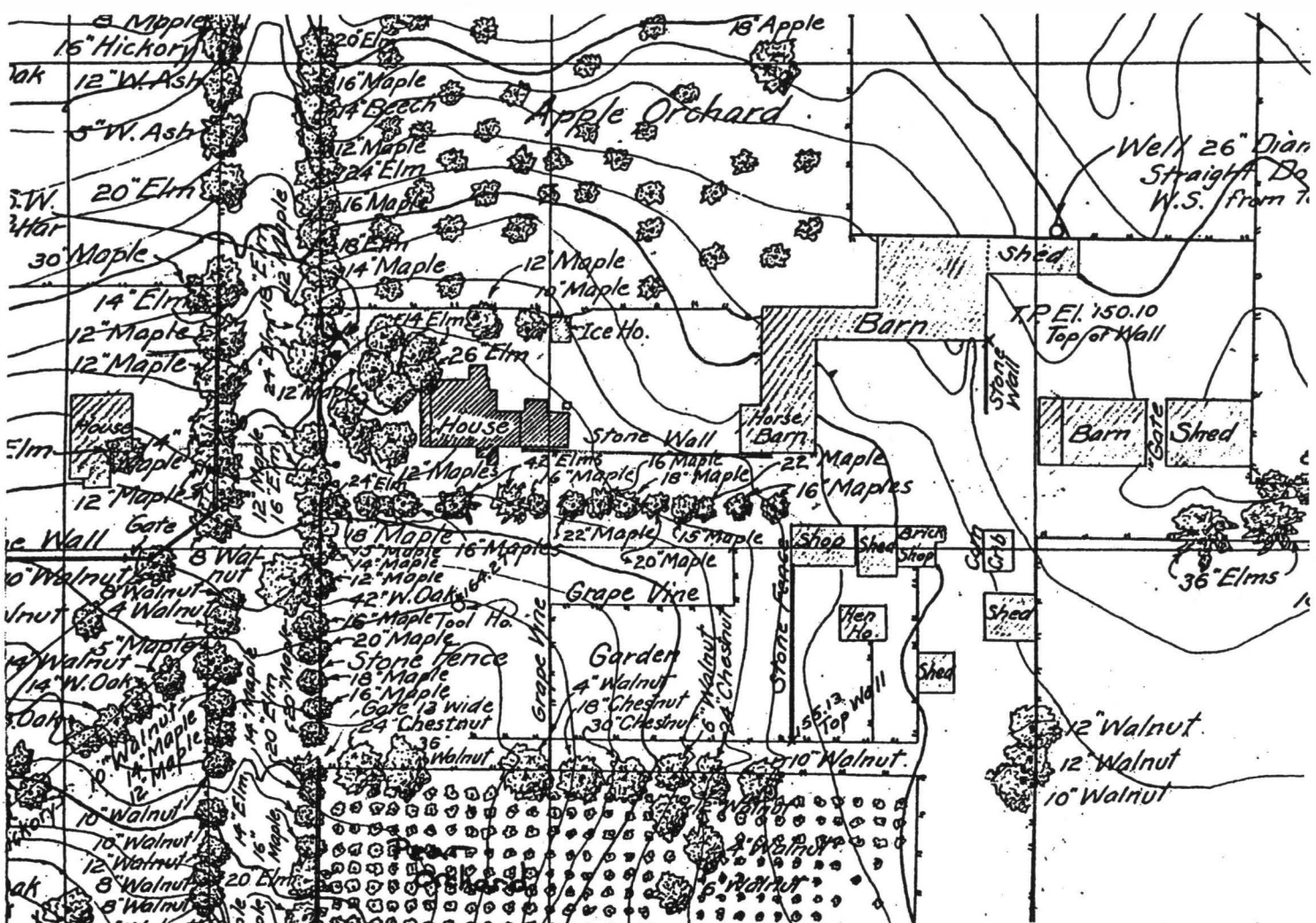
Social Class on Hillside Farm

People are constantly using the space and objects around them to express social reality as they perceive it. The Merriman-Sharp family was no different; they manipulated the landscape of Hillside Farm to create the impression of an upperclass town-house despite its countryside location. The size of the property, itself, is an indicator of wealth, as are the locations of buildings. In addition to their own house, the Merriman-Sharps owned several other houses which were occupied by the farm help. They also maintained barns in several places on the property, as well as those nearest the main house (Figure 9).

One of the first decisions that Mary and Dwight Merriman made after moving onto the farm in 1856 was decide to expand the house. This decision was affected by two considerations: (1) the original house was small; and (2) it did not accurately reflect their social and financial status. This resulted in the Greek Revival addition to the front of the house.

The building of the Italianate tower is a different issue. It seems to have been motivated, to a much greater extent than the first addition, by a desire to appear more fashionable. It is also interesting that the tower was completed in 1862, in the midst of the Civil War. The Merrimans' Italianate tower may be a reaction to the Civil War on two levels. First, the War was a prosperous time for many northern farmers -- including the Merrimans. The Jackson Daily Citizen (1865) reported that the Merrimans were able to sell peaches for \$6 per bushel, a

Figure 9. Original Area Around Merriam-Sharp House.
Source: Map in Ella Sharp Museum's Collection.



record in the state, during the war. Second, in times of social and political upheaval people attempt to maintain order by reasserting the differences between classes partly through ostentation by the upper classes (Shackel 1991). Thus, building the ostentatious tower may be a reaction to the political unrest before and during the war. The tower would have further reinforced the Merriman's status to visitors because the ground floor room, with its separate ornate porch entrance, was used as an office for the farm.

The Merrimans also used the fences around the property to express their class affiliation. Dwight Merriman and Abraham Wing brought a stone mason from New York to build a stone wall extending half a mile along Fourth Street. The stones were cut and fitted together without mortar to form a wall about four feet wide at the base, two feet wide at the top, sunk one foot into the ground, and about four feet tall. This construction is reported to have cost \$5 per rod (five and a half yards). In addition to the admiring looks of passersby, the stone wall also earned Dwight a silver medallion from the Michigan State Agriculture Society in 1869 (Loftis n.d.).

The part of the fence directly in front of the house, however, consists of a smooth, mortared, stone wall, with decorative metal work mounted on top and two matching metalwork gates at either end of the circular drive. Since one end of the circular drive was also the main entrance to the farm's barns and outbuildings located behind the house, it would have made for an impressive arrival on the farm. An examination of the 1874 Lenawee County Atlas (which has detailed drawings of 258 houses) for similar fences revealed that no farms and only 1% of non-farm houses had stone walls. Similarly, only 2% of farms had metal work fences, while 63% of non-farm houses had them (see Table 3). The fences the Merrimans' choose for the

Table 3
Comparisons from the 1874 Lenawee County Atlas

	TOTAL	FARMS*	NOT FARMS
HOUSES	258	209	49
FORMAL GARDENS	14%	13%	15%
VEGETABLE GARDENS	20%	23%	8%
ORCHARDS	45%	56%	0%
CROQUET COURTS	15%	17%	8%
WOOD FENCES	62	69%	33%
METAL FENCES	33%	2%	63%
STONE FENCES	1%	0%	1%
HEDGES	2%	2%	0%
NO FENCES	1%	1%	0%
GREEK REVIVAL	58%	67%	18%
ITALIANATE	34%	24%	78%
MIXED	3%	4%	2%

* A farm was defined as any house with barns visible.

most visible parts of the farm are more closely correlated with the kinds that were being built in town rather than those being used on farms.

The Merrimans also spent money improving Fourth Street between the city and their driveway (Loftis n.d.). Ostensibly, this was done because Dwight enjoyed riding on good roads, and for the benefit of his prize horses. Yet, it would also have

served to make the ride out to the farm from town both easier and more impressive, almost as if Fourth Street were one long Merriman driveway.

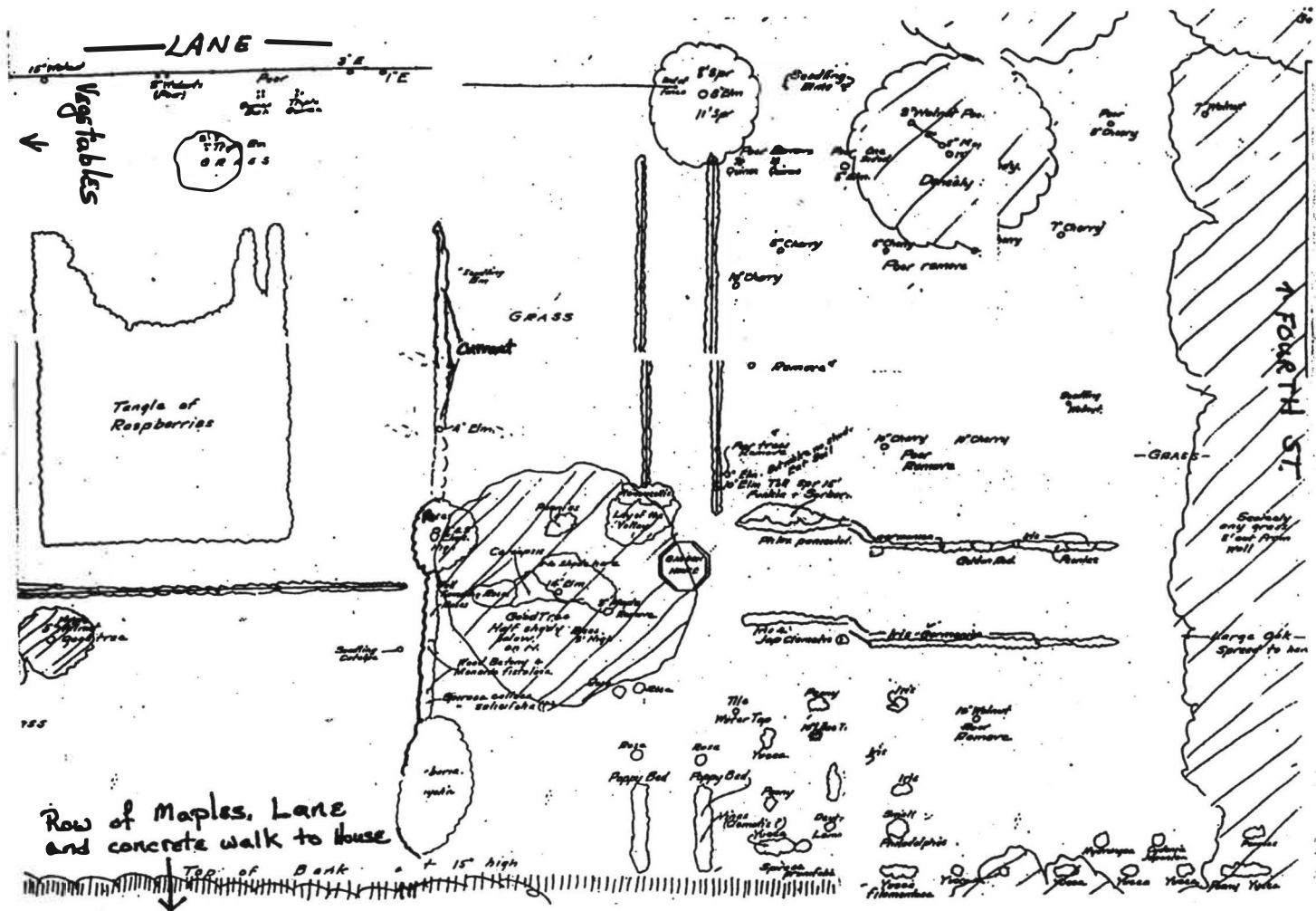
The final element in the approach to the house would have been the gardens. In addition to the orchards, there were both vegetable and decorative gardens. Since these were located just south of the house, anyone arriving at the farm would have had to drive between the house and the gardens to reach the barns. There is no evidence for when the gardens were put in, or how they changed over time, but a 1915 map drawn when the city took over the property shows a substantial and well developed garden, including a small garden house connected to the main house by a paved walkway leading from the back door (Figure 10).

Gender on Hillside Farm

The garden, itself, functions significantly in the expression of both social class and gender (Kelso and Most 1990). The Lenawee County Atlas shows a low incidence of formal/flower gardens, only slightly higher on non-farm properties, but they are associated with more ornate Italianate houses (see Table 3). This probably indicates that the gardens are associated with upper class families. Gardens are also linked to women, since it would have been women who oversaw this part of the household. Only upper class women would be likely to have had enough free time and money to spend on maintaining formal gardens. The presence of the garden would also have indicated that the family had substantial leisure time to spend enjoying it, signaling to contemporaries that they did not have to work especially hard.

When the Sharps took over the farm, Ella would have found maintaining the garden in line with her goals of beautifying the city. She may have felt the gardens

Figure 10. Original Plan of Merriam Sharp Gardens.
Source: Map in the Ella Sharp Museum's collections.



were a way of showing on a small scale what she hoped to accomplish in the city. After her death, the city had plans drawn to redevelop the gardens in an elaborate formal colonial design, but these were never carried out.

Gender relations are also expressed through the furniture inside the house, which included several pieces imported from Europe. In the last decades of the 19th century, furniture was often used to express gender roles (Ames 1992: 115). For instance Ames (1992: 120) sees the parlor suite, in particular, as a metaphor for social relations: the gentlemen's chair is the largest and most comfortable, while the ladies' chair is smaller and less comfortable. The Sharp's parlor suite does not follow Ames expectations, however, for it has two gentlemen's chairs and no ladies' chair. If the relative size and comfort of the chairs is taken to represent the comparative status of their occupants, then these chairs indicate that Ella and John Sharp were, contrary to social expectations, equals. Since it was Ella's property and money that supported the family, it seems not unlikely that the Sharps did not conform to a traditional division of power between husband and wife.

Another item of furniture that Ames uses to describe gender roles in the Victorian family was the piano and/or parlor organ. The two items represent the same thing, parlor organs were simply cheaper versions of pianos. It was considered appropriate for a woman to know how to play the piano, so that she could play in the evenings at home and bring the family together singing hymns. This was supposed to help demonstrate the woman's ability to promote both healthy religion and domesticity in the home.

There is no evidence that either the Merrimans or the Sharps ever owned a parlor organ, but they did have the large rectangular piano brought to Michigan by Mary Merriman in 1856. The furniture that was inside the Merriman town house was

not preserved with the farm house furnishings, but it seems likely that there was a piano there as well. In this way they were able to demonstrate to visitors that they were suitably refined and domestic women who promoted good values and proper behavior in the home, despite also having the unfeminine roles of land owner and manager.

Although Mary Merriman and Ella Sharp did not in all ways conform to their society's vision of what women should be and do, much of their choice of furniture and decoration is conventional for women of the time. Further, it is implied in some of the documents that Dwight Merriman wanted the women to be more "conventional," in that he resented not owning Hillside Farm. Even after the Sharps had taken up residence on the farm, a legal lease was drawn up for the farm between Mary and Dwight clearly stating the privileges and obligations of Mary, Dwight, and the Sharps. Dwight contested his wife's will upon discovering that she gave the farm primarily to Ella on the grounds that those pages of the will were not original and that Mary had discussed a different division of the property with him. He also contested his sons' wills when they gave any interest they had in the farm to their sister. Dwight went so far as to state in court documents that Howard:

was possessed of and governed by an insane delusion in regard to this appellant, his father, which deprived him of testamentary capacity...was thereby unduly induced to dispose of the bulk of his property, including family jewels and keepsakes, away from his father (Appeal of Howard Merriman's Will 1893).

The courts found nothing improper in any of the wills; Dwight not only lost his appeals but also remained dependent on Mary for the rest of his life -- she had given him the right to remain in their townhouse, but not ownership of it.

Even the arrangement of rooms in the house is significant to issues of class and gender. When the Merrimans built the first addition and moved all the bedrooms

upstairs, they participated in an upper-class based movement to segregate the sleeping areas of the house from the social zone. Later, when Ella moved her bedroom to the first floor due to health problems (and moved the office into her dining room), she located it in the traditional place -- just off the parlor. We have no evidence of whether she ever left the french doors open at night. However, after the turn of the century a growing movement extolled the health benefits of breathing fresh outdoor air while sleeping (Cromley 1992: 138).

After John's death she had plans drawn up to redecorate the interior of the house in a more "modern" style that better reflected her actual use of the rooms. This again reflects her class status; not many widowed women would be able to afford to completely remodel the interior of their home and build an addition. Her own death, however, prevented these plans from ever being implemented.

Analysis shows that the social construction of reality is a continual and active process. Over the period that they occupied the property the Merrimans and Sharps used landscape and material culture to express their class and gender relationships. The physical setting of the house, set off from the rest of the farm buildings, surrounded by the gardens and trees reinforces the idea that these are not average farmers (Lenawee County Atlas).

Furthermore, the mostly conventional expressions of upper class gender inside the house show that even women who do not match the social expectation of a subordinate wife, can construct an appearance that they do. The cult of true womanhood had already impressed it firmly upon the minds of late nineteenth century women that whatever they may do outside "women's sphere" it was also necessary to fulfill their obligations as dutiful wives and moral mothers.

Reconstructing Reality in the Ella W. Sharp Museum

The process of constructing reality continues today on the Sharp property. Ella's gift of her farm to the city of Jackson for the city's first major park has ensured that in local lore she will be remembered as an upper class woman concerned with the welfare of the whole community. She is often spoken about as if she substituted all the children of Jackson in her maternal affections for the biological children she never had. This puts her into a more clearly defined female role, "mother," and makes her actions more understandable to the public within the context of conventional gender stereotypes.

The Ella Sharp Museum complex is the main center for current interpretations of Ella's life and turn of the century Jackson; there is little else in the park to indicate who she was or where the park came from. The museum complex contains the original house, the granary, two barns, a building originally intended to be the monkey house of a Depression-era zoo, a small woodshop, a log cabin, a one-room schoolhouse, a planetarium, and an exhibition gallery (see Figure 6). Of these buildings, only the house, granary and barns are in their original locations. The others have either been built or moved from other locations. This means that the spatial separation of the house from other buildings achieved by the gardens and orchards has been eliminated. The other buildings on the property -- barns and tenant houses -- have almost all been demolished, making it appear that the Merriman-Sharp family not only lived in close proximity to a number of service buildings, but also did all the farm work themselves.

Although the house is still impressive, its current setting and restoration have robbed it of much of the upper class city look that the family worked hard to establish. The interior of the house, now restored to approximate the 1880s, also

sends mixed signals to the viewing public (Figure 11). Since the Merriman-Sharp family, themselves, lived amidst contradictions this is not surprising. Instead of being confused by these, the public should be encouraged to question their own preconceived notions about gender and class.

The museum's stated goal is to tell the Merriman-Sharp family story, through their home and belongings. The first point of confusion is that many visitors perceive farmers as a group to be unprosperous and do not understand that the Merriman-Sharps were an above-average farm family. The museum does not always sufficiently emphasize the family's socioeconomic status. Further the museum has, for various reasons, removed the butler's pantry and not at all attempted to restore the quarters occupied by the housekeeper, domestics, and some of the hired men. No interpretation has been attempted of the farm, itself, except for the presence of the barns and some old tools stored inside one.

Another issue that frequently concerns visitors is which items in the house actually belonged to the family, as if these are more genuine than objects collected from other sources. The public is also confused when attempting to discern which rooms are reflections of the Sharps and which are simply typical of the period. For example, visitors often question why there is a children's room on the second floor and a toy room on the third when the Sharps had no children. The interpreters are then forced to either admit those rooms are not reconstructed Sharp family rooms, or do some fast talking about Ella's childhood in the house and her deep desire for children.

What the museum presents today as the reality of the Merriman-Sharp family, is not -- and cannot -- be the same as what the family perceived in the past. The essence of social reality is the interaction between people and between people

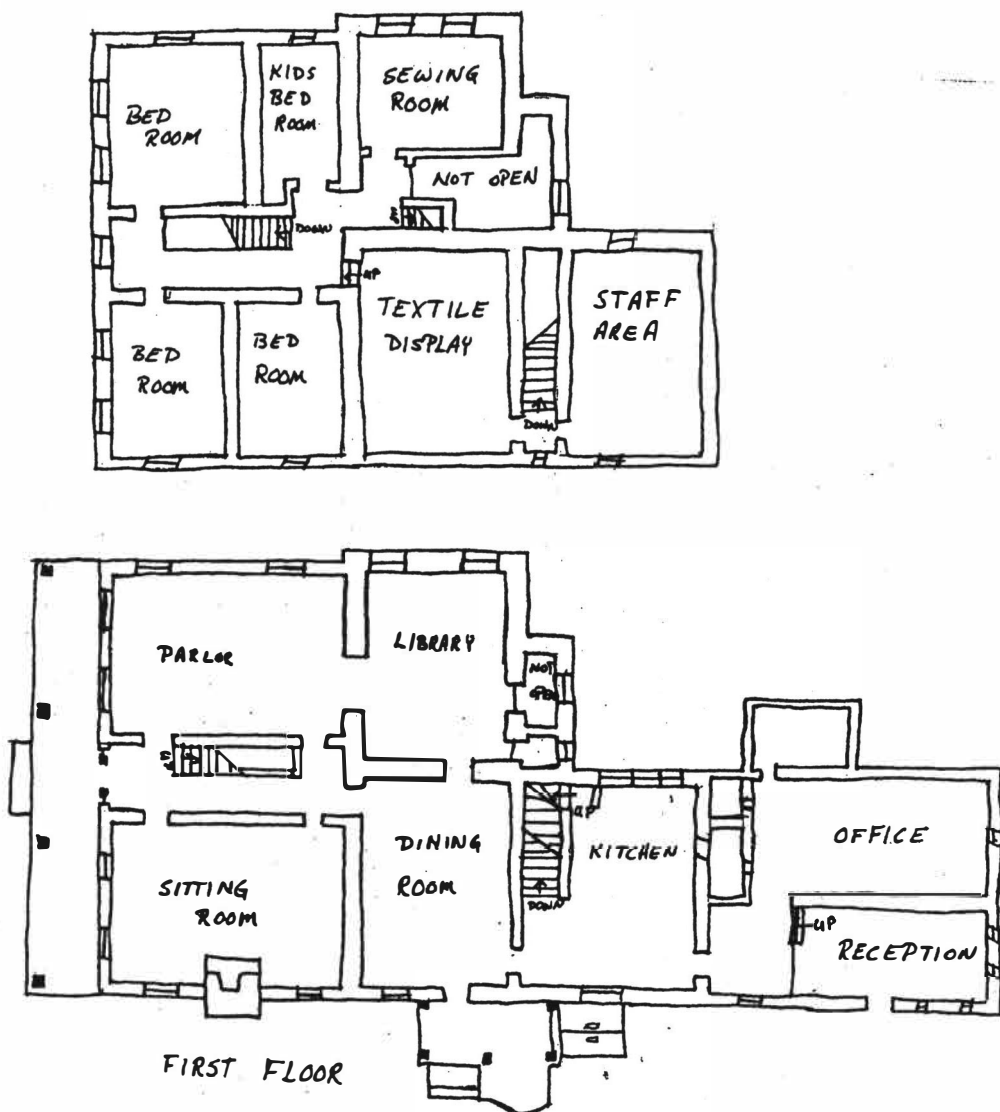


Figure 11. Current Plan of Ella Sharp Museum.

and the environment. The symbolic content of material culture is not inherent in the objects, themselves, it is in the social and historical context of their use (Hodder 1982). The museum attempts to recreate some of this interactive context through the use of human interpreters to lead guided tours of the first floor of the house. Yet even if the house were faithfully recreated in every detail, a modern visitor would not get from the visit the same impressions that one of Ella's contemporaries would, because although the objects may be the same the symbolic content is not. Most modern visitors do not see social relations played out in parlor suites. Nor when viewing the piano and parlor organ in the house do they see symbols of feminine virtue and domesticity. Historical interpretation is not and cannot be neutral. It involves the ideology of the present as well as that of the past.

By transmitting information about the past to the modern public, adults and children, museums play a role in the social reproduction of class and gender roles (Leone 1983). Thus they can be used to either justify or question current social conditions. Museums can do more than merely project current ideology into the past to comfort people into thinking that things have "always been this way"; museums have the tools to make people think about and question how social reality is constructed around them everyday.

CONCLUSION

The social and material expression of class and gender is an active process. Not only has it taken place in the past, but it continues to take place today. The meanings of symbols in social contexts are constantly being negotiated between people. The strength of historical archaeology lies in its ability, through the written documents left behind by people, to recover some of this social context. However, since it is impossible to recover the past completely, it is also impossible to completely understand and interpret the past.

The Merriman-Sharp family manipulated the environment, both material and natural, around their farm and in their house to express their conception of class and gender. This study has shown that the locations and types of buildings, fences, and gardens helped to create the impression of an upper class home on the farm. The use of particular furnishings and room arrangements inside the house helped to extend this impression.

The Ella Sharp Museum today continues the process of creating social reality for its visitors. It is complicated for the museum because modern visitors do not necessarily understand the same symbols as the Sharps used in the past. Reconstructing the past is always a difficult and political issue. Although people want to learn something interesting about the past at a museum, they do not generally want to see the disagreeable side. Museum workers and administrators are conservative about the past as well, fearing that if the visitors do not like what they see they won't come back or give money. In a community-supported museum, like

this one, the problem is even more obvious. The community must like what it sees, and what it wants to see is the "good old days."

Museum professionals seek authenticity in their restorations, but this is a complicated concept. It can mean the restoration is identical to the original, that Ella Sharp would find it the same; or the restoration is similar to the original, that the modern public can identify it as Ella's house. Authenticity is also a power relationship. There is only one authentic Ella Sharp Museum, authorized by the City of Jackson. In a museum, authenticity and authority sometimes merge together since the museum staff have the authority to determine what the public sees as authentic -- and the public often accepts this unquestioningly (Bruner 1994).

Like any piece of research, this study has some limitations. Since no archaeological investigation occurred it was necessary to rely solely on maps for information about the historical landscape. The documentation available for the nineteenth century was also lacking in some places; most notably, the Federal Agricultural Schedules for Jackson County were destroyed in an accidental fire for every relevant year except 1860. It was also necessary to assume that the documentary record is approximately correct (e.g., people frequently lied about their ages on the population census and may have told similar lies about the value of their farms). Where possible I double checked different sources (e.g., ages and some dates), but in many cases that was simply not possible.

This study is not a comprehensive and exhaustive consideration of the Merriman-Sharp property; there are many other approaches that can be productively used. The next logical step in research at the site would be archaeological investigation in the areas around the old garden house, behind the house near the privy and ice house, and in the well or cistern inside the garage. This would help to

turn up more everyday objects in use at the site. While the City of Jackson preserved in the house many Sharp belongings, much would have been discarded in the normal flow of life on the farm.

The focus of the investigation of social class and gender could also be usefully turned away from the Merriman-Sharp family. There were many other people who lived on the farm, single men and women and families, as domestic help and farm labor. Archaeological investigation in the areas around the farm laborers' quarters and the utilitarian outbuildings could help demonstrate differences in material culture between owners and tenants.

Finally, a broader comparison between this farm and other area farms, or between the farm and people in town would be interesting. This could address questions of whether the living conditions of farm labor or tenants varied significantly with the wealth of the farm owners and how these conditions compared to the factory workers who lived in town. Similarly, a comparison between farmers of different wealth levels, and with the people in town, could help to clarify differences in material culture due to wealth and occupation.

Even eighty-two years after her death, Ella W. Sharp's vision of the Jackson landscape continues to influence the construction of local reality. At the turn of the century her "magnificent farm" held as significant a place in the physical landscape as her Town Improvement Association occupied in the city's social community; through the Park, Museum, and Museum Association her continued influence on the physical and social landscape of Jackson is ensured for many more years.

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