CASE STATEMENT

A Nineteenth Century Kitchen
for Meadow Farm Museum

Henrico County, Virginia

The Friends of Meadow Farm and
Henrico County Historical Society

2019
Creating a 19th century Interpretive Kitchen for Meadow Farm Museum

BACKGROUND Meadow Farm, located off Mountain Road in Henrico County, Virginia was owned and occupied by seven successive generations of the Sheppard Family, beginning with an original land grant in 1713. The farm was added to the Virginia and National Historic Registers in 1975, and in 1976 the family's last occupant, Mrs. Elizabeth Adam Crump donated the property to Henrico County. The County undertook efforts to restore and interpret the property, and in 1981 Meadow Farm Museum opened to the public. Visitors now enjoy interacting with historic interpreters to learn about domestic life, agriculture, animal care and craft/trades in rural 19 century Virginia.

The current farm site comprises 150 acres and is part of a larger recreational tract that also includes Crump Park and FR&P Park (outdoor sports facilities). The farm includes the original house, begun in 1810, other purpose-built or relocated farm buildings and an Interpretive Center, opened in 1993.

The farm site is open for activities such as exercise and casual farm observation on a near-continuous basis and more than two hundred thousand visitors access the farm in this connection each year. Programs offered to interpret the farm include regular tours and numerous special events, often seasonally themed throughout the year. Ten thousand annual program participants include many school groups and interpretive center visitors.

Henrico County evidences its commitment to the museum through its funding of an annual operating budget covering museum operations, historic interpretation, historic preservation, animal care and a museum staff of eight individuals.

The Friends of Meadow Farm is a 501(c)(3) corporation created to support museum operations and, along with the Henrico County Historical Society is partnering with the
County to enhance programing through creation of a 19th century interpretive kitchen building. Please see the attached letter confirming the County’s enthusiasm and support for this project.

A KITCHEN FOR MEADOW FARM  Typical of 18th and 19th century southern farms, Meadow Farm originally featured a separate building to house the kitchen, in this case located east of the farm house. We know the size and location of the kitchen from archaeological examination of the site (see diagram A: Meadow Farm Outbuilding Sites). In an evolution also typical of southern farms, 20th century occupants aspired to an “indoor” kitchen and this was accomplished early in that century by converting a large, first floor bedroom into the “modern” kitchen. The older, detached kitchen fell into disrepair and was eventually demolished.

1970s efforts to restore the farm house to interpret 19th century life included removal of the indoor kitchen and restoration of the original bedroom. This left Meadow Farm without a kitchen to help portray a critically important aspect of domestic life. This significant lack has long been recognized as a “soft-spot” in the museum’s programming. At this point, the Museum and its supporters aspire to create a new building, a replacement kitchen to more fully portray period life.

“FOODWAYS” AS CULTURAL SIGNIFIERS  Beyond sustenance, think of the role that acquisition, preparation and consumption of food plays in the daily lives of people – and think of how vastly these activities in the 19th century vary from our experiences today. Regarding acquisition, what foodstuffs were consumed? Which came from the farm itself and which were bought or bartered?

Regarding preparation, what social conventions governed operation of the farm kitchen? Were there roles for particular family members? Would learning of these conventions help us understand and value the critical roles of enslaved individuals in sustaining farm life?
Meadow Farm Outbuilding Sites

Archeological Investigation, 1996

Diagram A
Seasonal variation in food consumption was a factor in prior generations. What conventions surrounded the taking of meals and how did traditions and foodways prescribe both daily life and various holiday observances?

Addressing these and other issues will be a major enhancement to the museum’s programmatic offerings. Visitors will enter an aesthetically appropriate facility where programs will engage their senses of sight, smell, touch … and taste. These new offerings will be a major educational and cultural asset for our community. The new facility and programs, in conjunction with current interest in local food sourcing and farm-to-table food offerings provides an opportunity to significantly increase attendance and participation in museum programs.

THE RIGHT FACILITY  Experts have begun to envision the physical characteristics of an interpretive 19th century kitchen building for Meadow Farm Museum. Early program development from 2007 shows a potential floor plan in Diagram B. The diagram shows a building of approximately 19 feet square with a large attached walk-in cooking hearth with oven. The building will be located near (but not directly over) archeological remains of the original kitchen.

Diagram B
More recent work appears in diagram C, 1 and 2 showing prospective renderings of the building exterior and interior. The building can be built in a style totally respectful of the surrounding farm buildings, but employing modern construction methods. The interior will deftly incorporate concealed features to assure safe and sanitary food preparation practices and modern utilities.

**Diagrams C1 & C2**

**THE FUNDING CAMPAIGN**  
Friends of Meadow Farm and the Henrico County Historical Society are engaged in raising funds for this $300,000 project. Success in this endeavor will advance the project for consideration and approval by the Henrico County Board of Supervisors. Significant on-site construction is hoped-for in 2020.

The County and supporting groups will be pleased to provide prominent recognition on the building and/or on-site for significant project contributors. This includes the possibility of naming the facility in recognition of a particular individual(s) or entity.

Project inquiries can be addressed to:

John Hoogakker  
Henrico County Historical Society  
[jhoogakker@wlu.edu](mailto:jhoogakker@wlu.edu)
Attachment

May 10, 2019

Friends of Meadow Farm
Henrico County Historical Society
Attention: Mr. John Hoogakker
200 College Road
Henrico, VA 23229

RE: Meadow Farm Replica Kitchen Project

Dear Members of the Friends and the Society:

It's a pleasure to offer this letter of support and encouragement towards your ongoing capital campaign efforts to provide a new interpretive kitchen building at Meadow Farm. Henrico County first opened Meadow Farm in July of 1981 and remains fully committed to using this unique historical property to preserve and interpret the distant past for the benefit of future generations.

Recreating the original detached kitchen and cooking hearth has been a longstanding desire of both staff and volunteers to better and more accurately portray the foodways and domestic conventions of rural 19th century Virginia. Both the Friends and the Society have been tireless advocates for the addition of this key structure, which would have played a central role in daily life at Meadow Farm.

Please be assured that the Division of Recreation and Parks supports efforts to raise outside funds to construct a replica kitchen and stands prepared to assume full construction, operational, and maintenance responsibility going forward once such a project is successfully funded.

I believe this project will make a significant improvement to Meadow Farm's ability to positively impact future visitors and reflects positively on every individual and organization involved.

Sincerely,

Edwin C. Luther, IV

pc: Deputy County Manager for Community Operations
Recreation Services Division Manager
Recreation Manager