

Community-Driven Linked Data Approaches in *Builders and Defenders*: Nashville's Historical Black Civil War Database

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Abstract

The *Builders and Defenders* database (www.buildersanddefenders.org) is a collaborative project which collects the biographical information of Nashville's Black population during the Civil War era. With over 18,500 entries, it offers fresh insights into the far-reaching viewpoints, experiences, interpretations, and meanings surrounding the history of the free and enslaved Black builders of Nashville's wartime defenses and the defenders of the city and a nation free from chattel slavery. It is grounded in work with this population's descendants and others working in local Black history and is, therefore, shaped by many different perspectives. This article embodies the team's reflections on the collective decisions and conversations between descendants, public and academic historians, computer scientists, and software developers working together to provide open-access historical information that was locked away behind paywalls or difficult to access on microfilm. These collaborations allow for an efficient, flexible exploration of the history that continues to impact the lives of Black Nashville and the nation. These continuing conversations with local groups highlight how the team's intentions and methodologies are shaped by and continue to shape the community-driven approach to linked data.

Introduction to *Builders & Defenders*: The Case Study of Fort Negley

On the top of St. Cloud Hill, three miles from downtown Nashville, Tennessee, sits Fort Negley, the Civil War-era Union fortification built by enslaved and free Black people. Many had self-emancipated from neighboring states, running toward Union lines in Tennessee and enlisting to help the war effort. Others were offered up by enslavers sympathetic to the Federal cause or hoping for an additional paycheck. Others still were forced from homes and churches band into the building process by the military, while another group came voluntarily, motivated by promises of wages. Together they were nearly 5,000 strong and built the fort and all of Nashville's other wartime infrastructure. Shortly after, around 13,000 Black soldiers of the USCT defended Fort Negley and the city in the Battle of Nashville, one of the Civil War's final deciding conflicts [Lovett 1982] [Fitch 1864, 619–620]. Afterward, they and their descendants settled in the area, creating and participating in the city's oldest free post-war Black neighborhoods and institutions. Today, many Black Nashvillians can trace their ancestry to this Fort Negley population.

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The *Builders and Defenders* database (www.buildersanddefenders.org) is a collaborative project which makes available the biographical information of this Black Civil War era population.^[1] With nearly 20,000 entries, it offers fresh insights into the far-reaching viewpoints, experiences, interpretations, and meanings surrounding the history of the free and enslaved Black builders of Nashville's wartime defenses, as well as the defenders of both the city and of a new union free from chattel slavery. It is grounded in work with this population's descendants and others working in local Black history and is, therefore, shaped by many different perspectives. Authored by Angela Sutton, the team's PI, and Jessica Power, the graduate research assistant, this article embodies the team's reflections on the collective decisions and conversations between descendants, public and academic historians, and software developers working together to provide searchable open-access historical information that was locked away behind paywalls or difficult to access on microfilm. These collaborations allowed for the creation of an efficient, flexible exploration of the history that continues to

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impact the lives of Black Nashville and the nation. In this article, we the authors bridge ideas and methodologies from two fields — digital humanities and public history — in important ways. By focusing on how centering the needs of descendant communities shaped the eventual digital product and process, we offer insights for other digital public humanists, especially those working on Black digital humanities projects.

A Note on the Positionalities, Viewpoints, and Presumptions of the Authors

This article is written by Angela Sutton, the project's PI, and Jessica Power, the graduate research assistant of the project at the time of writing. In projects like this, with a white PI and a small, white team working out of a primarily white private research institution in the Southern United States, partnering with Black descendants and public historians working with Black history, there has to be a shared understanding of the power imbalance and lack of justice and parity in the past and present. Vanderbilt University was created during Reconstruction with the goal of mending the relationship between Northern and Southern states, yet it spent decades educating an elite who would uphold and exacerbate the worst of the Jim Crow South.^[2] As an institution, Vanderbilt is still grappling with how to fully acknowledge and address its role in the persisting racial injustices impacting the Black Edgehill neighborhood in which Fort Negley is located, as well as the wider city of Nashville. In efforts to rebuild trust between representatives of Vanderbilt and the local Black community, these issues had to be front and center of every collaboration. Successful implementation of the project and creation of the database hinged on the shared understanding that locals must make the decisions that best reflect their experiences, specialized knowledge, and needs, whereas academics at Vanderbilt whose ancestors are not present in the records must find ways to understand and implement those decisions that follow best digital humanities praxis or communicate clearly ways these decisions aren't feasible and work toward finding acceptable alternatives.

Therefore, everyone working on the project or on its community advisory board must remain committed to the antiracist approach of making freely available formerly suppressed data and being transparent about the subjective means of data collection, cleaning, and presentation.^[3] We take the stance that historical objectivity is a fool's errand (no Reconstruction-era pun intended) and lean into full subjectivity and unashamed presentism. We are together uncovering the complex and uncomfortable history of the ways in which American understandings of the past have not been shared and how burdens have not been carried equally among us as a result.

Without the community of descendants and public historians committed to archival justice, there is no *Builders and Defenders* database project. The subject matter of the project is incredibly local; only descendants and locals working in public history here know how local document generation occurred, where the information is now, and who we had to approach to get permissions to extract and share it. However, the ramifications of the data that comes out of this project are international.

Jamaica's dub poet Mutabaruka often says, "Slavery isn't Black history. Slavery interrupted Black history". If that is the presumption this project is approaching this topic with (and it is), then we need to think more carefully about whose history it is and how the "Black" label is being deployed. The approach to this historical database is Black-centered, because representations of Blackness that did not serve white supremacy (such as builders with specialist knowledge, defenders with nation-shaping aspirations, or veteran communities creating Black institutions) are the ones that have been suppressed. Black Tennesseans' ancestors are the ones missing from the overall existing narratives, and we are creating the databank others can use to insert them and reinterpret our shared history in light of the new information. The database addresses a problem the world experienced (slavery) and the ramifications we all still face together (continued unfreedom, the global legacies of anti-Blackness, and the suppression of information related to this). This project speaks to historical erasure and the horrors this has exacerbated in Black-majority nations as well as those with Afro-descended minority populations around the world. In this way, the local becomes global, and local experts make the most valuable collaborators in uncovering global processes.

This article is divided into two parts, then further sub-divided into topics. In many ways, the divisions mirror the iterative process the project team (PI, graduate research assistant, and system architect), the community advisory board (consisting of descendants of Fort Negley and public Black history experts), and various local contributors underwent in

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the creation of the *Builders and Defenders* database. We offer details of the collective, consensus-based decision-making processes around data collection, cleaning, connecting, and curation that are too often not made explicit in process-oriented case studies.

In Part 1, we discuss how these conversations with descendants and public Black history experts as well as our system architect and developer, Jim Schindling, shaped our methods, terminology, process, searchability, software, and how and why the data is relational and linked. In Part 2, we offer a description of three discussions which pushed the team to adjust the temporal limits of our Civil War era database, expanding its scope far beyond typical historical demarcations, and why that speaks to the Black Nashville historical community's understanding of itself.

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Part I: How Conversations with Descendants and Developers Shaped the Database

1. How the Conversations Began

First, the Fort Negley descendant community is the central group at the heart of this project. They descend from the builders and defenders of Fort Negley and Nashville during the Civil War — many of whom settled in Nashville and founded some of the earliest post-emancipation Black neighborhoods in Middle Tennessee. Over multiple generations, the descendant community has always been the foundation of historical knowledge about the fort and the Black laborers and soldiers. Given that historical written records often failed to preserve Black lived experiences and instead echoed archival silences due to the racist structures of power surrounding the generation and preservation of primary sources, Black families preserve their own histories in alternative ways: through oral and community traditions.^[4] Specifically, historical scholarship around Fort Negley largely focused on white Tennessee military history of the Civil War. Outside of Bobby Lovett's work, little research was done on Black experiences surrounding the Civil War Fort Negley. However, via oral and community traditions, Black families passed down histories about their ancestors through community elders that shaped how future generations remembered their past.^[5] The support of Nashville's chapter of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society further promoted discovery and networking around the history of this local population.

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Through the act of preserving and passing down historical narratives about their connections to the physically imposing Fort Negley over generations, members of the descendant community created a deeply interconnected circulation of knowledge about their ancestors. These histories played a large role in effecting change in the preservation and the public history of Fort Negley. They also played a large role in the genesis of this database project: when land adjacent to the fort was sold for development in 2017, determined descendants approached Sutton, who spoke at a Parks Board Meeting in favor of preserving the fort, for collaboration. This served as a very concrete example of how descendants claimed a political role in determining what happened to their community's history, both discursively and materially. At the time, Sutton, the project director, worked with the Slave Societies Digital Archive (slavesocieties.org) and used her skillsets gained there to help produce and distribute video oral histories of the descendant population. These oral histories became the start of the *Fort Negley Descendants Project* (www.buildersanddefenders.org/descendants). In these videos, descendants chose which stories and evidence to highlight, and they had control over the final edits. Their strategic deployment of personal histories to the public eye through a collaborator from an institution such as Vanderbilt demonstrated this population's deep understandings of power structures as they related to the value placed on Black cultural and material heritage. Each video displays intentionality in crafting a counter-narrative to the one that had resulted in the land at the fort being sold.

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In working with descendants and other Black genealogists (in particular, Taneya Koonce, then president-elect of the Nashville chapter of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society, and at the time of publication the president as well as secretary of the national body), it became apparent that this Fort Negley community faced many hurdles in access to the records about their ancestors and that Sutton's work with SSSA had provided her with the skillset needed to make a necessary archival intervention.

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Sutton had direction from two prominent Black Civil War descendants in the broader Black Nashville community:

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Eleanor Fleming and Gary Burke. Fleming is a descendant of Ruffin and Egbert Bright, two enslaved men that federal officers pulled out of Scruggs' Place in Southwest Nashville and forced to assist in the construction of Fort Negley. Burke is a descendant of Private Peter Bailey from the United States Colored Troops (USCT), a veteran of the Battle of Nashville at the conflict at Granbury's Lunette and stationed at Fort Negley as part of the enduring federal presence in the city during Reconstruction. Fleming, who found her connection to the fort coincidentally by browsing the site's Twitter account when it released some of the names of the laborers, spoke in the video for the *Fort Negley Descendants Project* about the lengths she had to go through to trace the generations of her family back to these laborers. Burke, who worked as a living history interpreter of the USCT at Fort Negley, made the discovery while attending meetings of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, Camp Donelson (suvcw.org). Both wished for more of the sources they consulted to be available in one place online rather than having to visit several archives, consult multiple formats, and wrestle with multiple styles of 19th and early 20th century handwriting [Hall 2022]. Over the course of several years, Sutton consulted academics, descendants, and other Nashvillians in the local history community while planning and collecting the skills and information necessary to create such an online and perpetually free-to-use database.

The larger grants supporting this database are for community-driven linked data, and the idea was twofold: (1) that we would accept data from the community and find ways to clean and link it through the historical database software Spatial Historian; and (2) that we would allow the community to determine what sources were most necessary for this database and what they needed to be accessible online from the sources. Sutton approached the project with the understanding that descendants who have already done the work of tracing their ancestry knew best the pitfalls others would encounter. The project also presumes that descendant voices must be centered in all interpretations of the site and its history. The database therefore was created with the understanding that digital projects have ethical responsibilities to center this community as subject-matter experts and generators of knowledge, rendering the process a co-creation. 13

Taneya Koonce of AAHGS had a big hand in shaping the project's scope as well. She gave generously of her time to create a two-part video for the *Fort Negley Descendants Project* that includes slides with resources to help potential descendants know where to look and how to approach the task of reconstructing the family tree. In part two of the video, Koonce assists with a live search for the ancestry of Destiny Hanks, the undergraduate intern of the project at the time, who is a Nashville local with many of the same last names in her family as are in the *Builders and Defenders* database. 14

[6] Koonce instructed Sutton and the students working with the FNDP on the sources and places where most Black genealogists from Tennessee get stuck in their search, namely the “Brick Wall” of the 1870s: the dead end that the usual genealogical records hit prior to emancipation, when most Black Americans were not listed as people in their own right, but among the material possessions of others. Her specialist knowledge and local connections to descendants make her an invaluable advisor to the project and made it clear to Sutton that this project couldn't be a mere transcription project where the creators remove themselves from the end product — it had to have clear subjective goals in order to be helpful for a specific audience. Therefore, the descendant community's needs shaped what data we accepted, how we collected and cleaned it, how it was made searchable, and what types of information from the sources became centered.

2. Terminology

Conversations with descendants and members of Nashville's public history community shape the way the data is structured and the archive is organized, and this is reflected in the name of it. Prior to engaging in this endeavor, Sutton attended and spoke at the Nashville Conference on African American History and Culture, a conference that brings together descendants, students, academics, artists, genealogists, public scholars, community organizers, activists, and others who contribute to the uncovering and reservation of local African American history and culture (ncaahc.org). Discussions around Sutton's 2020 presentation on Fort Negley's UNESCO designation in this space generated the name of the *Builders and Defenders* archive. 15

“Laborers” and “soldiers” were the labels given by the federal military during the Civil War in the documentation, and the terms are reflective of white supremacist understandings of Black contributions to the war. This database is called “Builders and Defenders” rather than “Laborers and Soldiers” because it rejects the notion that enslaved and formerly 16

enslaved Black Americans were the mere physical labor component of the Union, only doing as they were instructed, and instead places them at the heart of the conflict. In contrast to “laborer”, the term “builder” encompasses planning creativity, architecture, soil science, masonry, engineering, and collaboration. It highlights the fact that most documentation of slave labor renders absent the creativity, discovery, and knowledge that the enslaved brought to their work, for which enslavers took credit. Similarly, we use the term “defender” rather than soldier “soldier” because the former describes someone who understands the stakes and is willing to risk everything they have, including their life, to defend their personhood, their communities, and a nascent idea of freedom. Black defenders of the Civil War, whether enrolled in the military or not, were nation-builders. “Soldiers” implies that they fought as hired hands for the old Union, which was at its heart just as plagued by racism as the Confederacy and which benefited financially from the South's national and global export trade in products produced by enslaved people. Defenders fought for a new Union without legalized slavery, where their descendants could have free lives, and they defended this ideal with everything they had. [7]

On insistence from both Taneya Koonce and Eleanor Fleming we also changed category names and search headings to better reflect the ways in which we now use language (for example, “slave” became “enslaved”; “owned by” became “enslaved by”; and “colored” became “Black”), while working with Jim Schindling, our system architect and developer to ensure that the outdated terms would return the same results if typed into the search bar [Foreman et al. 2022]. That way, the database website affirms the humanity of the enslaved while not obscuring primary source documentation or making the site less searchable for users unfamiliar with best practices for describing slavery and race [Sutton 2021] [Sutton et al. 2023].

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3. Process

To counter the disparity in access to genealogical and historical sources, the project had to be unapologetic in centering descendant needs. This also has the effect of restoring balance to the history of the Civil War as the vast majority of information readily available is about its white participants, making the database a valuable tool for public historians who want fairness, accuracy, and diversity in modern depictions of the conflict. This is especially critical as the Battle of Nashville saw the largest African American wartime participation out of any Civil War conflict, and the records of the soldiers who participated point toward a host of diverse motivations.^[8]

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One concrete example of this is the ways in which a dataset dubbed the “Labor Rolls” was processed for entry into the database. The team worked closely with Krista Castillo, the curator of the Fort Negley Visitor Center at the time. The Visitor Center is a city-government public history hub for the education and preservation of Fort Negley, and Castillo kept a small and specialized archive there with primary and secondary sources and artwork concerning Fort Negley Park. Castillo was central to helping our team find and interpret many of the documents for the database and place them in their various historical contexts. She offered insights throughout the process on the sources, the manner in which they were originally created, and the complexities of military and local government bureaucracies and organizations that often make data extraction challenging.

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The “Labor Rolls”, as they are locally referred to, are a collection of documents that the federal military created in the 1860s to keep track of the almost 5,000 enslaved and free Black people who worked on the construction of Nashville's Civil War defenses. They are a complicated and unwieldy collection of documents consisting of a ledger and then several smaller ledgers and lists collected by the white officers supervising the construction of each site in the defense system, including forts, camps, batteries, trenches, and redoubts. Each ledger or list was compiled slightly differently, and some overlapped with the main ledger, while others did not. Some were copied and altered, some were compiled, but there seems to be no uniform reason for this and no standard approach that fits every entry. Many duplicate entries were able to be merged, as they were the result of multiple scribes working on the ledgers, but there were just as many we could not merge because we could not be sure that they were in fact the same person. Whenever there was lack of complete certainty, we kept both entries to avoid further erasure from the historic record [Sutton 2021] [Sutton et al. 2023].

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After cleaning the various transcriptions given to us by Krista Castillo at the Fort Negley Visitors Center and Fletch Coke

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of the Nashville City Cemetery Association (who raised the funds needed to hire Natalie Goodwin at the Tennessee State Library and Archives to transcribe them from microfilm) and ingesting them into our archival software platform, we matched the transcripts to information from other sources previously unaccounted for in the data. For example, the transcriptions of military service records for USCT soldiers helped us find additional information about soldiers of the 12th regiment (members of the 12th served at Fort Negley and the Battle of Nashville, and historical sources state that many members of the 12th were former laborers forced to enlist by Union officers) [Stearns 1864].^[9] Cross-referencing and linking these different datasets allowed new details about the 12th regiment soldiers to be traced or to emerge: the original enlistment papers that provided details about where the soldiers were born, their ages and occupations, and their enlistment officers and locations. The majority of the soldiers were local from Nashville and regional Middle Tennessee cities. However, the records also show a large geographic swath from places in the South like Virginia, Alabama, Louisiana, and the Carolinas, as well as northern states like Pennsylvania and Ohio [Compiled Military Service Records n.d.]

The data also provided additional information about soldiers during their service, such as lengthy medical records about their lived experiences if they got sick or hurt and later died (including details about their condition, residence, and marital status, occasionally, and the name and address of their spouse), records of their promotions in rank, and sometimes papers about soldiers deserting. These records illustrate how the soldiers' lived experiences cannot be historically characterized as a monolith or in a single, linear narrative. Rather, these documents illustrate that the laborers and soldiers came from far-reaching places seeking freedom and safety behind Union lines and that their service in constructing Fort Negley and defending it in the USCT was animated and driven by a countless range of motivations, perspectives, and experiences. While the fort was built in Nashville, its impact and significance reach far beyond the local. As the data about the geographies of the soldiers and laborers illustrate, the history of the fort is connected to the southern and northern states and, in turn, serves as a lens for understanding the US more broadly as a nation during and after the Civil War.

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4. Searchability and Software

With the data ingested, figuring out searchability was the next big hurdle. The team consulted Koonce and a handful of descendants to clarify how they would search for their ancestors. We asked what Black genealogists generally type into search boxes, what presumptions come with those searches, and what types of things they are expecting or hoping to find. At meetings of the Nashville chapter of AAHGS, Sutton heard from the presenting members who reconstructed their family histories about pain points and where they struggled. From there it became clear that we had to restructure the data to be people-first and relational. While the original Labor Rolls and other military documents were created for economic purposes — to keep track of hours, for both payment and the possibility for reimbursement to Union-sympathizing enslavers who voluntarily offered up the people they enslaved for Union labor — we could create our own categories for the purpose of centering social history. We could determine how categories relate to one another and the rest of the data to help descendants find out more about their ancestors. The accompanying website of the database contains a lengthy page explaining these choices and the rationale behind them.

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As the team built our digital practices around these approaches, we especially relied upon Dr. Jim Schindling's Spatial Historian software for constructing the database — an emerging technology platform developed by Schindling which allows us to organize, ingest, and analyze identifying historical information, social networks, and spatial patterns of people in the database [Schindling 2021] [Schindling 2020]. Spatial Historian is an indispensable technology for the aggregation of multivalences around the relationships, archival records, and experiences of the Black laborers, soldiers, their families, and descendants throughout the database. The flexibility of Spatial Historian allows us to customize the software interface according to the community's needs rather than according to how the documents were created, or how documents might typically be organized for academic or institutional needs. The real benefit is that, without any specialized technical training, we can filter lists of people by any of the attributes chosen by the community advisory board, easily view personal and social connections, and create statistical outputs in the form of charts, maps, and spreadsheets.

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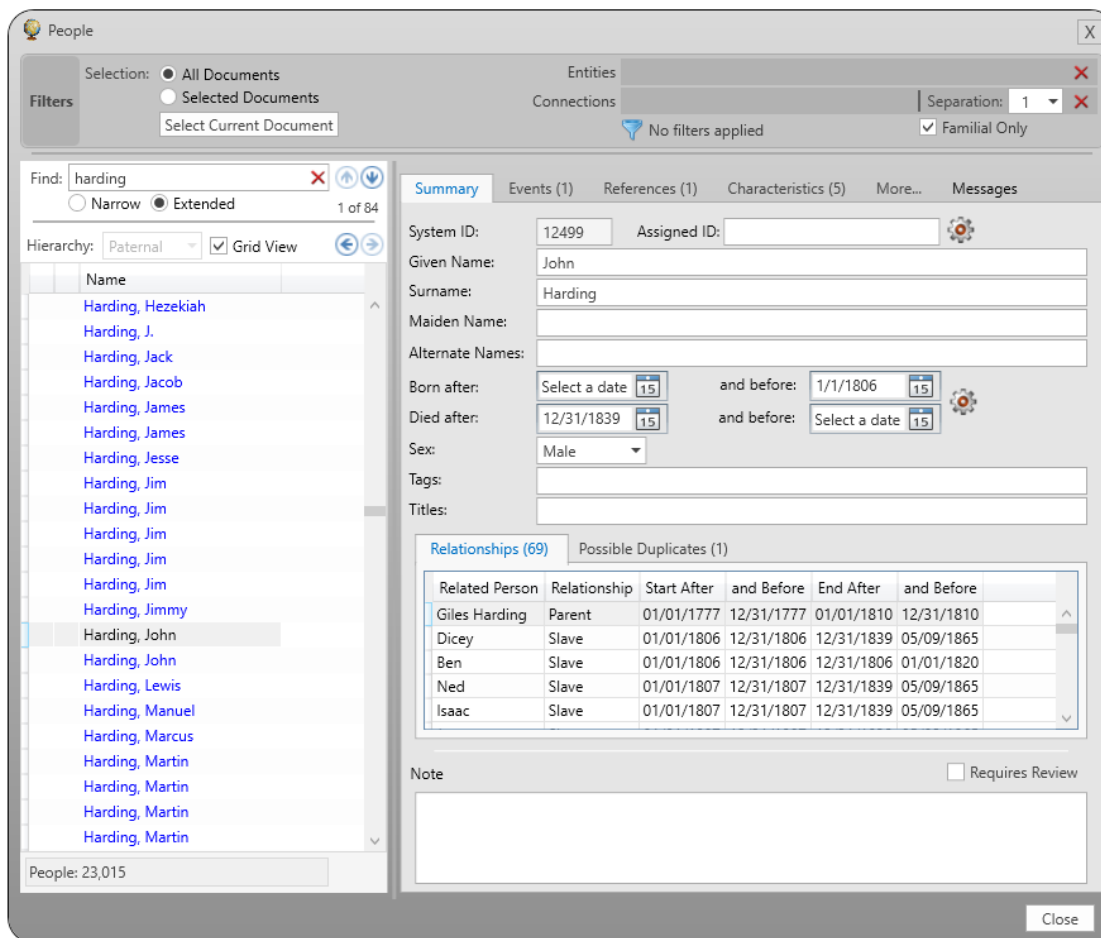


Figure 1. The Spatial Historian interface, which allows for manual manipulation of the data once ingested and then updates the site only when the users determine. This interface can be altered to track different types of data in various ways, according to the requests of the advisory board. This functionality allowed the team to create shared events and relationships between people and institutions that descendants and local public historians in particular find desirable.

This is particularly important for how we engaged with and responded to the community-driven elements of the project. Our choice was to prioritize working with Schindling because he created a software that was responsive and could be adjusted with minimal coding. While Spatial Historian is proprietary, the ability of the software itself to be changed for community members to reflect how they would like to see data represented and visualized was the most important consideration. 25

For example, there were many unproven assumptions and estimates in the Middle Tennessee community about this population of enslaved and free Black Civil War participants, particularly when it came to origins. This matters to local genealogists who anecdotally have found kin from all over the nation. What we know about Black fugitivity in this time period confirms that soldiers and others who labored with and for the Union troops came to Nashville from all over the Southeast and Midwest for a wide variety of reasons, though up until now there was no aggregate data available. Schindling took on this challenge and used Spatial Historian to generate a map that contains toggles which allow for the user to map one location or dataset at a time, or to view every spatial datapoint available in the database at once.^[10] Though each dataset contains different spatial data (some contain birthplaces, others include locations of enlistment, and still others record residential or employer addresses, or even the locations in which crimes involving this population were recorded), Schindling was able to improve Spatial Historian to accommodate our needs. Viewing all data points simultaneously confirms that Nashville's Black Civil War population was incredibly diverse, hailing not only from all over the Southeast and Midwest, but also from the Northeast, Canada, and even some Western states. This type of nimble responsiveness made working with Schindling a priority. 26

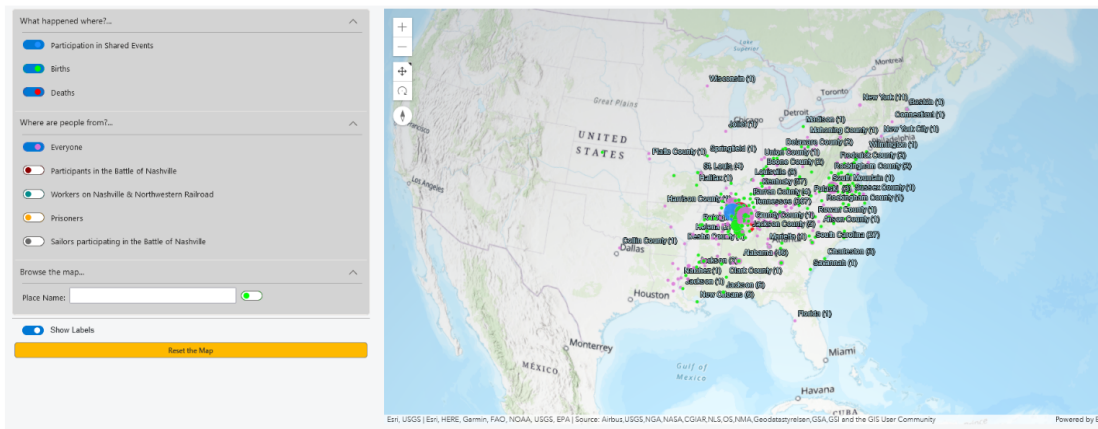


Figure 2. A screenshot of the mapping feature in the *Builders and Defenders* database, taken in October 2023. The toggles for “Participation” in shared events, births, and deaths are activated, as is the toggle for “Everyone”, allowing for a visualization of every element of spatial data at once. Doing so allows the user to gain an understanding of the geographically diverse origins of Nashville’s Black Civil War-era population, which was the genesis of the city’s modern Black population.

5. Linked Data and Relational Database Approaches

Initially, this database was envisioned as a linked data project — a conceptual approach and field where disparate sources online are connected to a central server. A key example of this in the area of slavery and emancipation is the *Enslaved* dataverse.^[11] However, so little of the Black Fort Negley history was available online to be connected to wider linked database systems. Therefore, we shifted our project’s goals toward linking the data that we created and curated in our database and online — which then became accessible to be connected to linked database systems. In other words, we aggregated, verified, cleaned, and curated data regarding Fort Negley and its builders and defenders in order to participate in already existing linked data projects. Most of our data has been shared with *Enslaved* and their *Journal of Slavery and Data Preservation* to be ingested in these larger linked data systems.^[12] This allows Nashville and the history of Fort Negley to participate in these linked networks, something that is of particular importance given that Nashville was a central hub for Black people shortly before, during, and after the Civil War, thereby linking the city with nearly every state east of the Mississippi River.

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We also prioritized relational approaches to data. Any person in the database who was found in the same primary source, or was related to another person, or was known to be at the same event or location as others, is linked to all of the others in the database with a key. This allows their names and information to appear in the search results for the individuals they are linked to, helping researchers reconstruct kinship networks. For example, those men who built Fort Negley and were then coerced to join the 12th regiment of the USCT and fight in the Battle of Nashville would appear in search results that, with one further click, will also show the people who helped built Fort Negley with them, along with others in their regiment. This decision was affirmed again after speaking with a descendant (who prefers to remain unnamed in this article) of Payton Wilkes of the 15th Regiment of the USCT.

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This descendant reached out to the team and provided the pension record of their ancestor as well as details about his lived experiences that the descendant’s family had preserved for generations through oral histories, photos, and traditions [Soldier’s Certificate No. 636,381 n.d.]. Our team engaged in an iterative process with them, using their information and the information in the database to help reconstruct Wilkes’ biography. The document highlights many of aspects of Wilkes’ life, such as his experiences as a free person in Ohio before the war, his service with the 15th Regiment of the USCT in Nashville, the soldiers who he served with and who later moved with him to Ohio, and some of the injuries he sustained. His record gave further insight into his life and family after the war, including the names of his wife and children, as well as the details of his pension application in the 1880s. In addition to the pension record, the descendant generously shared with the team the oral histories their family passed down across generations about Wilkes, along with photos of some of his children, who were also discussed in the pension record. When the team provided a list of the fellow soldiers who had served with Wilkes and testified in his disability hearings in the 1870s, the

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descendant exclaimed that they recognized all those last names because they were the last names of their family friends in Appalachian Ohio^[13]. This shed light on the profound connection Wilkes had to the soldiers he served with in his regiment in the Battle of Nashville — many of whom traveled back to Ohio with him after the war and whose descendants are still close to this day. Cases like those of the Wilkes descendants confirm that builders who built together and defenders who defended together often became each other's families after the Civil War, creating bonds that endured over multiple generations. Therefore, prioritizing relational data in the database helps descendants and other researchers reconstruct some of the relationships that might otherwise have been lost, or provide valuable clues for other avenues to explore.

Once these decisions were made, we ensured that all forms of data collection, cleaning, and ingestion were compatible with the *Enslaved: Peoples of the Historical Slave Trade* project (enslaved.org) and that all data collected for *Builders and Defenders* is shared with their team. As this population's data touches on global diasporic themes such as enslavement, self-emancipation, armed resistance, freedom and unfreedom, citizenship, self-reconstruction, community, Black education and enterprise, and more, we wanted assurance that it could be accessed in multiple places that catered to different audiences. The *Enslaved* project collects and connects datasets from around the world to reconstruct the lives of people involved in the historical slave trade, allowing researchers to browse interconnected data, generate visualizations, and explore short biographies of enslaved and freed peoples and their descendants. Each dataset submitted by researchers must be accompanied by a peer-reviewed data article that places it into context and explains the choices that the research teams made in the collection, cleaning, and presentation of the data. These articles are published in the peer-reviewed, open-access *Journal of Slavery & Data Preservation* (jsdp.enslaved.org). The project also worked with emerging methodologies and technologies to make this research and information accessible in the database. Rooting itself in the methodologies of the burgeoning and dynamic field of the Black digital humanities and the digital Black Atlantic [Risam and Josephs 2021] [Gallon 2016] [Noble 2016] [Alkalimat 2021], we sought regular feedback from colleagues and the community to ensure our practices and approaches for building the database remained in line with these principles.^[14]

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Part II: How Conversations with Descendants and Public Historians Challenge the Spatial and Temporal Limits of the Database

Descendants and public historians who have been rooted in the space of Middle Tennessee for generations have different conceptions of periodization and spatial issues than academically trained historians. These differences in have led to many fruitful conversations about what should belong to the database, how to define the spatial/temporal limits of the database, and the directions in which our team needed to move to keep the database relevant to the concerns of the stakeholders and various communities who will rely on it. Initially the *Builders and Defenders* database was conceived as a Civil War era project. Engaging with the local community has convinced us that the most urgent lessons to come out of the Civil War with regard to Black Nashville are the ways in which the injustices of slavery extend beyond the end of the war into the present. Descendants and local historians wanted easier access to more documentary sources that trace these continuities within their families and communities through the 19th and 20th centuries, and many offered their own research and transcriptions to help us broaden the database and make plans for the next phase(s) of the project. Below we will share three such conversations to show how the understanding of self and community many of Nashville's Black descendants and public historians hold has pushed the temporal limits of the database. The three conversations revolve around the Bass Street neighborhood, the Tennessee State Penitentiary records, and the records of the Tennessee Central Railway.

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1. Temporal Expansion vis-à-vis The Bass Street Neighborhood at Fort Negley

The next phase of the project involves expanding the database to include more information about the Bass Street neighborhood at Fort Negley Park. One of the most surprising and exciting collaborations has been with the archaeologists, public historians, and descendants involved in uncovering the history of this Reconstruction-era Black neighborhood founded in Nashville at the base of the hill that the fort was built upon. It was formed largely by Black Civil War veterans and their families who wanted to remain close to the relative safety of Union soldiers stationed at the fort

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during Reconstruction. Sutton, the director of the *Fort Negley Descendants Project*, helped organize a Community Day for a collaborative archaeological dig and research project led by Andrew Wyatt, associate professor of anthropology at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU), his former student Clelie Cottle Peacock, and Zada Law, director of the MTSU Geospatial Research Center and member of the Technical Advisory Committee at Fort Negley Park. This dig involved the Black Nashville community, Vanderbilt University, and local community members in October 2021 [Gonzalez 2019].^[15] The Bass Street neighborhood at Fort Negley Park was a vibrant space of Black life and community from the end of the Civil War until the people living there were forcibly displaced during urban renewal efforts with the construction of Interstate-65 and the Children's Museum in Nashville in the 1960s. What was formerly thought of as “disturbed” land due to the construction of this museum yielded significant intact cultural deposits of this Reconstruction-era Freedman community of Black veterans.

With direction from descendants like Philip Minter and Vernice Scruggs, who had lived in the neighborhood as children, MTSU professors and their students carefully surveyed and excavated numerous sites on the land where houses, the Bass Street Church, and community areas like the outhouses, the “Rock Garden” Juke Joint, and the walnut house/skating rink once stood.^[16] Learotha Williams, professor of public history at Tennessee State University, provided the 1900 census and local Nashville archival insights, and, with the help of MTSU students and professors using a Sanborn map, was able to locate where specific families on the census once lived [Owens 2021].

The descendants of Bass Street were instrumental in helping both the archaeologists and the database team better understand how and why the people of the Bass Street neighborhood must join the Civil War era database. Along with Phillip Minter and Vernice Scruggs, who both lived in the neighborhood, Jeneene Blackman, CEO of the African American Cultural Alliance and descendant of Bass Street through her grandmother, whose home was destroyed to make room for the interstate, tell stories of community, education, disability, holidays, and removal. In doing so, they help connect the site to the enduring displacement cycles that Black people of the diaspora face due to spatial violence. Each generation the spatial violence against Black communities takes a new form, with eerily similar and damaging results: the fracturing of community and all the good that comes from it. While descendants have kept the memory alive, much of Nashville had never heard of the area. Much of its remnants are beneath the highway and former Children's Museum (now the Adventure Science Center). The neighborhood's descendants, their remnants, and the ways in which they have been and continue to be treated are emblematic of the geographies of violence that planners of urban environments across the US both intentionally and unintentionally created and continue to create around historic African American communities [Boone 2023].

Descendants of both Fort Negley and the Bass Street site have helped cement the database project's grounding in restorative spatial justice and archival justice — as the former residents and other members of Black Nashville community discussed in interviews, the previous people of Bass Street were forcibly dislocated by the construction of the interstate in the 1960s [WPLN 2022]. Minter, whose family was persuaded to leave by agents of the city promising a better quality of life, recognizes the ways in which this move impoverished his access to community and all the history that is preserved through a community's displays of intangible cultural heritage. In a conversation with the archaeologists and Sutton, he asked, “Why couldn't they have updated our homes where they were?”^[17]

This so-called urban renewal represents one of many actions that created a landscape of violence and systemic racism at Fort Negley Park, which includes a large portion of the Bass Street site. The efforts of the descendant community to preserve the history of Fort Negley and Bass Street shaped the creation and goals of the *Builders and Defenders* database project, and the team works with the descendant community to support and prioritize their needs in the face of these contested claims. More recently, in 2017, developers attempted to purchase land next to the fort to build commercial and residential buildings, despite vehement community outcry [Historic Nashville 2017]. Two years ago, in 2020, despite public disapproval, the Adventure Science Center (located on part of the Bass Street neighborhood archaeological site) planted an arboretum around the building [Phillips 2021] [The Committee of Bellyachers 2021]. The Science Center rents part of Fort Negley Park from Metro Parks Nashville, and the former CEO sought out and was granted all of the legal permissions to do this as a tenant of this public land. Everyone in the chain of permissions did their due diligence and acted in accordance with laws that obliged them to allow the creation of the arboretum, while

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failing to protect the interests of the descendant community. Paid archaeological consultants were present when the trees were planted, and they unearthed earthware, ceramics, remnants of architecture, buttons, small arms cartridges, and other artifacts from the Bass Street neighborhood, as well as a biface stone tool of Native origin, when holes for the trees were dug [Rael et al. 2021]. As the appropriate permissions had been granted, the trees were still planted, and now descendant communities are concerned about the ways in which growing roots will destroy the other artifacts that remain [Blackman 2021].^[18]

Jeneene Blackman has pointed out that laws regarding land use with origins in Jim Crow now fail to protect the histories of the people Jim Crow targeted. For centuries, the documents and artifacts of her ancestors were not preserved at the same rate or with the same care as those of others in the city, and this disparity reaches into the present. For her and many other descendants of Bass Street, this incident with the arboretum is one in a long line of erasure and suppression of the primary sources and artifacts that allow scholars and the public to construct and challenge popular understandings of the Civil War, as well as Reconstruction-era and Jim Crow history. In 2023, the American Battlefield Trust presented Blackman with an award for her efforts to protect this rare and little-understood site [Koik 2023].

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Given the urgency around the Bass Street site, Sutton secured funds from the Curb Center for Art, Enterprise & Public Policy to partner with archaeologists Steve Wernke and Giles Spence Morrow at Vanderbilt to photograph and create 3D imaging of some of the Bass Street artifacts to make them available to scholars and the public. These scans are being used by teachers at the University School of Nashville and a student at Belmont University in the creation of educational materials for students which are available to the public at no cost on the *Builders and Defenders* database website.^[19] In 2023, Sutton and Dr. Andrew Wyatt of MTSU secured an Ethnography and Archaeological Research grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities Office of Research to return to the site to collect further oral histories and excavate another piece of the time-sensitive Bass Street site [Vanderbilt University Research News 2023].

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2. The Tennessee State Penitentiary and Black Nashville Civil War Sources

In addition to the descendant community of Black Nashville, the team has also worked with a variety of local public historians in developing the project and challenging its temporal limits. Chuck Sherrill, a former state archivist and librarian at the Tennessee State Library and Archives, helped the team find additional sources. With a lifetime of experience in Tennessee genealogy and a past researching and writing about the people imprisoned at the Tennessee State Penitentiary from 1850 to 1870, he knew that information about many of the people represented in our database was in those records, as Southern states controlled the formerly enslaved and continued to extract forced labor from them through incarceration. Sherrill's book, *Tennessee Convicts: Early Records of the State Penitentiary, Volume 2, 1850-1870*, provides an invaluable glimpse into the lives and experiences of the incarcerated men and women in the southern prison before, during, and after the Civil War [Sherrill 1997]. His work is especially relevant to our project for a number of reasons. Following the Civil War, former enslavers in the South incarcerated Black Americans en masse and exploited their labor through convict-leasing programs as a means of maintaining white supremacist structures of power and racist hierarchies from the era of slavery. Sherrill's data from the Tennessee State Penitentiary reflects the broad historical patterns of Black mass incarceration after the Civil War: the percentage of Black inmates in the state of Tennessee increased dramatically, from roughly 5% of the prison's population prior to the civil war, to about 62% in 1869 [Sherrill 1997].

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Given that a majority of the laborers and soldiers formerly stationed at Fort Negley settled in Nashville after the war and emancipation, Sherrill's dataset overlaps with the *Builders and Defenders* database, illuminating a broader and longer history of the fight for Black freedom in Nashville. Sherrill's book makes use of thousands of primary source material from TSLA, including prison ledgers, pardon requests, sentencing trial records, legislative reports, and more. Drawing upon these sources, Sherrill compiled a list of the incarcerated men and women and wrote detailed notes about their imprisonment. From these notes, we learn about prisoners' family and social networks, where they were born and where they resided, as well as their ages, occupations, aliases, and their experiences inside the prison, such as if they ever escaped or requested pardons. We also get a glimpse of the larger occupation, the Civil War and Reconstruction-era politics at stake, and the ways in which Black people once more became the locus of these conflicts: many pro-Confederate Tennesseans used their political power to send Black Civil War soldiers/veterans to prison, while those

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sympathetic to the Union or to Black freedom used theirs to arrange for pardons.

Thanks to Sherrill's assistance and the access we were granted to his research dataset, our team worked to clean and ingest this data for the database. We focused on analyzing data from the Black men and women incarcerated in the Tennessee State Penitentiary and reconstructing their lives, social relations, and experiences that Sherrill spent years finding and transcribing from the archives. We found that these records provide a rich source through which to analyze slavery and freedom before and after the war, especially in relation to Fort Negley. For example, before the war, numerous individuals were imprisoned for “harboring slaves” — in other words, for helping enslaved men and women escape from slavery and gain freedom. One such example comes from the prison record for James Peck, a twenty-five-year-old Black man convicted in Nashville, TN, who was imprisoned in 1857 for “harboring a slave” and released in 1863, when the city was under Union occupation [Sherrill 1997, 274]. Peck's record shares rich details about who he was — a free Black man born in Pennsylvania, a cook by trade whose relatives lived in Pittsburgh and whose wife, Sarah Graham, lived in Cincinnati, OH [Sherrill 1997].

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3. The Tennessee Central Railway and Black Personnel Records

Another public historian who helped challenge our database's temporal limits was Carter Newton, the archivist of the Tennessee Central Railway (TCR) Museum's document collections. After reading about the archaeological work happening at Bass Street in October 2021 and how former Black laborers and soldiers settled in Nashville after the war, Newton reached out to our team. He highlighted another potential direction of research overlap: the employee records of the TCR. These personnel files started in the 1880s with the establishment of the railway, and Newton found numerous records of the African American employees who worked there. These connections grow further given the proximity between the railway and the fort — the TCR is located only two and a half miles from Fort Negley and Bass Street in the neighborhood of Cameron-Trimble, another historically Black Nashville neighborhood created after the war. Furthermore, archaeologists found railroad artifacts among the belongings of Fort Negley's veterans at Bass Street. However, the history of these records was fraught with preservation challenges. A fire in the mid-twentieth century destroyed many of the employee records and, more recently in March 2021, a destructive tornado that ran through Nashville destroyed parts of the TCR building [Bryan 2021]. In an effort to protect and preserve as many records as possible, many of the TCR employees, volunteers, and community members offered to house the records. The archive became scattered in the garages and basements of TCR employees' homes and has slowly returned to the refurbished building one carload at a time.

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With the support of Newton, Power went to the TCR museum and archive to analyze the records of Black workers and gather as much information about their personal and social lives as possible, finding several overlapping surnames from the *Builders and Defenders* database. These files from 1914-1956 offer a vast range of information about the employees and their experiences and social networks. In most cases, we were able to gain insights about basic personal information such as names, employment dates, and occupations, ranging from boiler washer to buffet car porter, engine watchman to wheel pressman. In many other cases, files had additional records related to employee information that shed light on their social relations, geographies, and experiences.

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For example, several records included the individual's original employment application, which often supplied workers' residential addresses, family member names, education, past employment and references, and interview responses regarding their work history and why they wanted this job. For example, in Thomas Duncan Britt's case, we found connections to the historically Black Fisk University, where Britt studied “Pre-Medical” before joining the railway for work as a porter (Personnel Record of Thomas Duncan 1942). Britt also shared that he had additional training as a photographer and musician. He stated that one of the reasons he wanted to work at the TCR was because “I have had railroad experience and like the work and want to change my present line of work”.

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In another record, the file for Stanley Stone, a white teenager working at the TCR, we found interviews with Black colleagues about an injury Stone received (Personnel Record of Stanley Stone 1927). Through these interviews we were able to record first-person perspectives of two Black workers, Tom Brooks and Wendell Thompson, who discussed the incident as well as their roles at the TCR in one-page reports taken. For example, Brooks, a boiler washer states,

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I have been working at the shops 13 years. I was on the engine, 332, with Mr. Crunk on turntable track going to the turntable and when we got near the coach house I heard someone call and I got down and went over to him and pulled off his clothes. He had both of his shoes off and his foot was scalded very badly. (Interview with Tom Brooks 1927)

Thompson, who was also a boiler washer, shared a similar interview:

I am forty years old and have been working at the TN Central shops for three years. I was on engine 332 and noticed Mr. Crunk stopped the engine and saw him get off then I heard the boy calling and I got down off the engine and went over to where they were, near the corner of the coach shop. (Interview with Wendell Thompson 1927)

The database centers this type of historic evidence from a city where so many words of working-class Black residents during the Jim Crow era were never written down or preserved and their connections to Black Civil War history rarely formalized.

These three profiles of Bass Street, the Tennessee State Penitentiary, and the Tennessee Central Railway, help illuminate what has become a broader goal of the project: tracing the lives of the former laborers, soldiers, and their possible descendants after the war and emancipation and into the post-Reconstruction South. In broad terms, this reflects how the project has taken on new and expansive chronological significance. While it initially began as a project focused on the wartime years and its immediate aftermath, new archival connections with the TCR and the Tennessee State Penitentiary illuminate how the history of Fort Negley reverberates long after the war, pushing the team to reconsider traditional historical timelines. Exploring the TCR employment records has spurred the team to look to other areas where potential connections might emerge. Currently, we have begun the early stages of exploring possible connections between former Fort Negley laborers and soldiers and early Vanderbilt University staff and construction crews since the university was founded and built in Nashville in the early 1870s and the builders of Nashville's defenses would have been the most qualified for this work [Conkin 1985].

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In these crucial ways, the descendants, local public historians, and other invested community members in Nashville have led the way in ensuring that the database contains information to trace how local patterns that manifested in slavery persisted into the present once chattel slavery was made illegal. They showed the team how records reflected these patterns and made the case that the information in the *Builders and Defenders* database could not stop at the war's conclusion — it had to take into account the failures of Reconstruction, the retrenchment of enslavers' values after Federal troops pulled out of the city, and the struggles and successes of, as W.E.B. Du Bois put it, Black self-Reconstruction [Du Bois 1935]. Alongside the valuable information from the Bass Street descendants and archaeological site, the Tennessee State Penitentiary record transcriptions, and the Tennessee Central Railroad Employment records, Bass Street neighbors who descended from Black Civil War veteran communities have challenged the temporal limits of the *Builders and Defenders* archive. Today, Blackman, Minter, and Scruggs are still building and defending as their ancestors did. The echoes of slavery persist in the present and are felt the hardest by the descendants of the enslaved who did not see justice when slavery as a legal institution came to an end. This is why our database no longer has an end date: for many in Tennessee, the Civil War is ever-present, and Reconstruction remains ongoing.

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Concluding Remarks

This article outlined the iterative processes and conversations the authors undertook and are undertaking with descendants of the Fort Negley population, local public Black historians, and other community members who have contributed to the database project. We wanted to highlight that these ongoing conversations are crucial to the genesis of a project that appeals to local understandings of self and of history. All humanities and data science decisions we made had to reflect the products of these discussions.

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There is the history that all Tennesseans must learn in school, determined by standards created by a homogenous committee of lawmakers, and then there are the histories that Black Tennesseans learn from breakfasts with

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grandparents and the pulpit, as well as the histories hidden in plain sight (but often not formally recognized by the city or state) in the physical landscape all around us. Too often these histories create competing narratives. To build something useful and enduring, our team had to understand all of these histories, collect evidence from the community members and historians keeping them alive, and build an infrastructure that made them searchable in ways that were recognizable to Black Nashvillians. It is our hope that making the iterative process explicit can be helpful to those scholars seeking to perform similar work.

A large part of this work means making visible the hard work of our local collaborators and ensuring that all generations may benefit from it. At the time of writing, the team has presented this work to several focus groups. AAHGS Nashville has hosted the team twice and made the recordings available on their YouTube channel for other researchers to view. [20] Furthermore, the national body of AAHGS invited Sutton to present at the annual conference in October 2024. Fifth-grade students at the University School of Nashville were the first to use the database in the classroom. They worked with Ms. Connie Lopez-Fink, who allowed us to upload on the *Builders and Defenders* database website the lesson plans she created with Anna Stern at Middle Tennessee State University as members of the Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources Consortium. This lesson plan, including assignments and a PowerPoint presentation, can be found alongside other lesson plans educators in the community have created for students using the database. The *Builders and Defenders* database website now contains free downloadable lesson plans, assignments, and other teaching materials and resources created by local educators for every grade level, suitable both for Tennessee public schools as well as private and home schools. [21] In this way, we hope to bring balance and nuance to the public understanding of our shared Civil War and Reconstruction history.

As this article was written for a special edition of *Digital Humanities Quarterly* entitled “Digital Sankofa: Understanding the Past and Futures of Black Digital Humanities”, we the authors would like to add that we do not for a second presume that it is our place to prescribe any future for Black DH. Rather, we can describe where this part of the field (collaborative, community-based digital archival intervention) looks to be headed and share our ways of approaching the issues of positionality that inevitably are part of it. We come to this space and make these observations as guests invited in for various painful reasons: because structural racism barred entry to so many of the Black descendants and local historians who would have wanted to do this work, because Black elders are passing away faster than the community can preserve their stories, and because the safety and longevity of sites and documents related to Afro-descended people are often precarious and/or time sensitive. These points are crucial, but they do not mean that we come to this space for only altruistic reasons.

In the 1960s, James Baldwin wrote, “Whatever white people do not know about Negroes reveals, precisely and inexorably, what they do not know about themselves” [Baldwin 1962]. We the authors have found ourselves in Black DH because all the knowledge that we were not allowed to know has created an intellectual poverty in the profession. With the uncovering and preservation of information related to Black people, we uncover all of our histories. The work reveals that the so-called historical objectivity we were trained to strive for is nothing more than white colonizer subjectivity in disguise, a harmful illusion that hides all we do not know about ourselves as people and as a nation. This means that the future of Black studies will likely witness more scholars from non-Black backgrounds (both racial and methodological) finding that their work is incomplete and their data inconclusive without that which has been stripped and silenced.

Given that most official archives were created in a subjectivity structured around the power dynamics of whiteness, we believe that it is necessary to approach historical projects like this from the opposite end of that subjectivity to correct and right the longstanding injustices perpetuated by archival silences. In turn, this transforms the historical work we do to an actionable field for social change — one in which the marginalized communities who are central to and affected by the research become the key stakeholders and guides to scholars on how to approach and conduct these projects. Rather than keeping findings within the boundaries of the academy and behind paywalled journals, *Builders and Defenders* centers the public — and, specifically, the descendants of Fort Negley — at the core of our database and its public discourse by highlighting descendant stories and generating accessible, free-to-use publications and resources. While we also have academic audiences and goals for this project, it is the descendants who have been so often denied

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participation and engagement with these sources and histories that are the nexus of this project and its findings. Without them there is no database.

If we could put one hopeful prediction for the future of Black DH out there, it would be that rather than creating projects *about* Black people, other non-Black scholars who find themselves in this space looking for a way to combat the impoverishment of our fields will work *with* Black people and Black peoples' subjectivity in good faith for our shared liberation and humanity.

Notes

[1] The authors would like to thank the National Endowment for the Humanities' Digital Humanities Enhancement Grant Program and the National Park Service's American Battlefield Protection Program for providing the funding to create this database and website that experiments with community-driven linked data approaches.

[2] The authors would like to thank Daniel J. Sharfstein, Dick and Martha Lansden Chair in Law, Professor of History, and the Co-Director of the George Barrett Social Justice Program at Vanderbilt Law School for his research pointing out this fact.

[3] Names, affiliations, and photographs of both the project team and the community advisory board, as well as lists of everyone who contributed or has previously worked on the project are available at www.buildersanddefenders.org/people.

[4] Scholarship shaping our approach to the archival silences of Black history include: Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019); Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007); Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995); Marisa Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia, PPA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

[5] For related examples of this, please see the oral history interviews of the descendants of Fort Negley (<https://buildersanddefenders.org/Descendants>), as well as the interview with Black community members of the Bass Street neighborhood (<https://wpln.org/post/bass-street-was-home-to-nashvilles-first-post-emancipation-black-neighborhood-descendants-want-to-keep-its-memory-alive/>).

[6] Both Part 1 and Part 2 are full of resources and links that can be found on the Fort Negley Descendants Project YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@fortnegleydesc>.

[7] The authors would like to thank Professor Linda Wynn, *Metro Historic Nashville*, and the community around the Nashville Conference for African American History and Culture at Tennessee State University's Avon Williams Campus for these vibrant and generous lunchtime conversations over multiple years that helped shape ideas for how to speak about and conceive of this database project, ultimately leading to its name and successful grant applications.

[8] Digital humanities scholarship that has helped guide this project include [Rawson and Muñoz 2019], [Klein 2013], [Madsen-Brooks 2013], and [Turner 2016].

[9] The following quote from Major General Stearns in 1864 illustrates this event: "These men, working in the heat of the Autumn months, lying on the hillside at night in the heavy dews without shelter, and fed with poor food, soon sickened. In four months about 800 of them died; the remainder were kept at work from six to fifteen months without pay. Then all who were able-bodied were forcibly enlisted in the 12th U.S. Colored Troops".

[10] This function is updated live as new data points or datasets are added. It can be accessed at <https://www.buildersanddefenders.org/MappingPage>.

[11] See <https://enslaved.org/>.

[12] See [Sutton et al. 2023] and [Sutton 2021].

[13] Personal communication with descendant of Payton Wilkes via email in 2021)

[14] Of central importance was centering the approaches of Black digital humanities at the forefront of the project and taking direction from

leading scholars in the field such as Roopika Risam, Kelly Baker Josephs, Abdul Alkalimat, Kim Gallon, and Safiya Umoja Noble (to name a few). A foundational space where the team engaged and discussed these edited volumes was at the Black Studies and Digital Humanities Working Group founded and led by Brandon Byrd at Vanderbilt University — a monthly collaboration that joined together graduate students and faculty members to workshop the ideas in this field. This project owes an intellectual debt to the group.

[15] MTSU archaeologists began digging at the Bass Street site in 2018. In 2019, WPLN ran an article about their surprising findings.

[16] The Bass Street Church community still exists today. After having changed location several times in the past 60 years, the congregation now meets at the Bass Street Missionary Baptist Church in Northeast Nashville's Brick Church Pike neighborhood. Pastor Daryl A. Thompson, Sr. was present at the Community Day and led the descendants and archaeologists in prayer over the site of the original church building before the dig. See <https://www.bassstreetmbc.org/> for more information on the church.

[17] Personal communication with Phillip Minter at Fort Negley Park in October 2021.

[18] Jeneene Blackman, descendant of the Bass Street neighborhood and CEO of Nashville's African American Cultural Alliance, wrote an op-ed about what's at stake in the heart of this arboretum conflict in *The Tennessean* newspaper.

[19] To access the educational materials, go to www.buildersanddefenders.org, hover the mouse over "Education", and then select a lesson plan.

[20] These videos are available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-gd2refW98> and <https://youtu.be/Esaury9DGRs?si=IGnTb5eL3apqAC2m>.

[21] Lesson plans can be accessed at the *Builders and Defenders* database website (www.buildersanddefenders.org) by hovering the cursor over the "Education" tab, which will reveal a drop-down menu. The lesson plan created by Lopez-Fink can be found under the item labeled "Bass Street".

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