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The "Negro Park" Question: Land, Labor, and Leisure in Pitt County, North Carolina, 1920-1930

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By ANDREW W. KAHRL

FOLLOWING THE CLOSE OF ANOTHER UNPROFITABLE SUMMER SEASON, in September 1927, William H. Moore, a white tobacco and cotton tenant farmer in Pitt County, North Carolina, leased his recently built riverside amusement park to Nelson “Nep” Hopkins, an African American caterer and restaurant owner from nearby Farmville. For two summers Hopkins operated eastern North Carolina’s only riverside “Negro park,” hosting families, church groups, and couples and providing relief from the brutal, exploitative labor conditions on the area’s tobacco plantations and in its stemming factories. He was one of many entrepreneurial African Americans who, in varying degrees of collaboration and competition with whites, sought to profit from an increasingly mobile rural African American public—and a nascent black consumer culture—by acquiring waterfront real estate and developing seasonal leisure resorts.¹

In the arrangement with Hopkins, Moore, too, found relief from a perilous financial situation. Having failed to turn a profit operating the resort for whites only, he risked losing his entire savings on this ill-planned investment. The property’s absentee landowners, however, did not share Moore’s concerns, had little sympathy for his plight, and had no desire to see their property become home to an African American leisure enterprise. After learning in December 1927 of the agreement between Moore and Hopkins, the landowners, brothers Kemp

¹ Dick Lewis to Kemp Plummer Lewis, January 12, 1928, Folder 231, Kemp Plummer Lewis Papers #3819 (Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), hereinafter cited as Lewis Papers. The author would like to thank Steve Stowe, Claude Clegg, Khalil Gibran Muhammad, John Bodnar, and the anonymous reviewers for the *Journal of Southern History* for their comments and criticisms of earlier drafts of this article; the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the North Caroliniana Society for their generous support of this project; and John Lawrence, head of the North Carolina Collection at the Joyner Library at East Carolina University, for his invaluable research assistance.

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Plummer Lewis, Ivey Foreman Lewis, and Richard Henry "Dick" Lewis, feared the effect of a "Negro" resort on the property's long-term commercial real estate value and the family's reputation, and they ordered Moore to terminate the sublease.

This outcome should come as no surprise to scholars of America in the age of Jim Crow. Indeed, the commercialization of leisure and the emergence of distinct recreation spaces in cities, towns, and even rural areas in the first decades of the twentieth century did not merely result in the racial segregation of leisure. These changes also subjected African Americans' own efforts to claim space for recreation and leisure-based commerce to increased scrutiny and censure by a white public who saw signs of black mobility as a threat to their own tenuous status and by a real estate industry that understood black leisure spaces as a market liability in need of containment. Across the rural South, the conversion of farmlands into commercial and residential real estate gave rise to a model of race management grounded less in the exploitation of black bodies and more in the exclusion of black persons. During these years, numerous attempts by African Americans to acquire waterfront property and develop black resorts in various parts of the United States succumbed to political pressure, legal chicanery, or, when all else failed, the arsonist's torch.²

Given what we think we know about race relations and so-called racial etiquette in the Jim Crow South, the story of Moore and Hopkins's seemingly audacious partnership should have ended with the Lewis brothers' stern admonition—disapproval that was presumably shared by local whites—and Moore's meek acquiescence to his landlords' demands in the interest of white racial integrity. But that was not the case. The landowners' efforts to snuff out the "Negro park" generated howls of protest, not just from Moore, but also from a cross-class conglomerate of his white neighbors, all of whom were invested, either directly or indirectly, in the viability of Moore's venture and African Americans' enjoyment of leisure. Ensnared in the messy tangles of credit and debt that cash crop economies weaved, this group of farmers, merchants, buyers, and tenants all agreed on the necessity of the continued solvency of Moore's project and the provision of commercial amusements for black farm laborers. Though the debate between the local, economically insecure white farmers and merchants and the distant, privileged Lewis brothers centered on the "respectability"

² See Andrew W. Kahrl, *The Land Was Ours: African American Beaches from Jim Crow to the Sunbelt South* (Cambridge, Mass., 2012).

of Hopkins's guests, the contest had little to do with African Americans' conduct or with the resort's adherence to any supposed code of rural white supremacy. Rather, the conflict over the best use of this remote stretch of shore turned on more fundamental questions regarding the "best use" of black persons on white land and the role of leisure space in labor management, questions that were inextricably tied to the declining fortunes of farmers, the rise of a more migratory labor force, and the introduction of commercial amusements and leisure-based entrepreneurship into previously isolated regions of the rural South in the 1920s and 1930s.

In recent years, groundbreaking scholarship has examined the changing geography of race and class in twentieth-century America. This spatial turn has profoundly deepened historians' understanding of how, to borrow George Lipsitz's apt phrase, "racism takes place"—both literally and figuratively—and how relations of power are constituted through built environments and the land itself.³ This article offers several important, related interventions into this body of work. First, it calls attention to the dynamic relationship between land use, race, and class in the remaking of the early-twentieth-century rural South. This approach constitutes a departure from much of the recent scholarship on this era, which has tended to implicitly, and uncritically, endorse the historian Neil R. McMillen's contention that African Americans' "place" in the Jim Crow South "was always more behavioral than spatial in nature."⁴ Second, this study demonstrates the instability and contingency of racialized space more broadly. The marking of physical places as "white" and "colored" was far more contested and contentious than histories of this era might indicate; it was a process subject to the shifting winds of changing economies and demographics and tied to the complex set of social and economic relations that whites and blacks produced on the local level. Third, this essay complicates and, in so doing, enriches our understanding of leisure space in the making and unmaking of Jim Crow. Scholarly and popular representations of segregated leisure have tended to privilege the descriptive over the analytical and have advanced a one-dimensional narrative of white exclusion (maintained by primordial fears of bodily contamination and sexual violation), black resistance (through litigation and direct action against segregated

³ George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia, 2011).

⁴ Neil R. McMillen, *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Urbana, 1989), 23.

public places and private facilities), and finally, the triumph of justice over the once-insurmountable forces of fear, hatred, and ignorance. Rarely do these histories of race and leisure address questions of land, labor, and political economy. Similarly, scholars have only begun to map the geographies of leisure and trace the rise of leisure-based economies in twentieth-century America.⁵

The "Negro park" question did not alter the balance of power in Pitt County so much as it revealed some of the ways that power operated on this changing rural landscape. It did not instigate a fundamental transformation in the meaning of race but rather demonstrated the inherently contingent, place-bound, and spatial nature of race. The spatialization of leisure in the rural South and the conflicting demands of commercial and agricultural economies profoundly influenced both white and black understandings of the difference race made, giving rise to new forms of race-based exploitation, altering relations of power and dependence, and providing new avenues for African Americans to negotiate white supremacy and pursue economic empowerment. This case study of work and play in a rural county demonstrates the role of leisure activities and enterprises in mediating relations of class and power and sheds new light on the ways Jim Crow took shape—and took place—on and through the land.

Pitt County, North Carolina, lies at the center of what came to be known in the opening decades of the twentieth century as the "New Belt" of tobacco cultivation. By the 1930s, the area encompassing the market towns of Greenville, Wilson, and Kinston, North Carolina, grew 40 percent of the crop in the state; according to promotional materials, Pitt County alone produced and sold more bright-leaf tobacco than did any comparable market in the world. From August through November each year, approximately 75 million pounds of

⁵ Notable exceptions include Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, 2005), esp. 105–30; Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997), esp. 145–67; and N. D. B. Connolly, "Timely Innovations: Planes, Trains and the 'Whites Only' Economy of a Pan-American City," *Urban History*, 36 (August 2009), 243–61. For works that consider the geography of racialized leisure space in the Jim Crow South, see Nathan Daniel Beau Connolly, "By Eminent Domain: Race and Capital in the Building of an American South Florida" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 2008); Kahrl, *Land Was Ours*; and William O'Brien, "The Strange Career of a Florida State Park: Uncovering a Jim Crow Past," *Historical Geography*, 35 (2007), 160–84. For histories of the twentieth-century rural South that emphasize place and geographical context, see James C. Cobb, *The Most Southern Place on Earth: The Mississippi Delta and the Roots of Regional Identity* (New York, 1992); J. William Harris, *Deep Souths: Delta, Piedmont, and Sea Island Society in the Age of Segregation* (Baltimore, 2001); and Mark Schultz, *The Rural Face of White Supremacy: Beyond Jim Crow* (Urbana, 2005).

tobacco moved through warehouses in the county seat of Greenville.⁶ “[N]o other area,” social scientist Rupert B. Vance observed in 1932 of the counties of eastern North Carolina, “produces cash crops of such value; no area has increased its tenancy rate so rapidly, and in no area do live stock, milk, and home-grown vegetables play so little part in farming.” In contrast to the Piedmont, where in the early 1920s “69 percent of the farmers owned their own farms and homes,” in the eastern counties 68 percent of the farmers were tenants, a disparity that grew more pronounced over the period.⁷

African Americans had long served as the backbone of Pitt County’s economy. The area’s amenability to cash crop agricultural production encouraged the growth of large plantations, and the county’s black population remained near 50 percent of the total well into the twentieth century.⁸ Each acre of bright-leaf tobacco required, on average, 403 hours of labor. Moreover, tobacco processing was resistant to mechanical innovations. In 1927 a Greenville factory introduced ten mechanical stemmers that in theory would eliminate two-thirds of a warehouse’s workforce. But, as would continue to be the case in the coming years, this technology quickly proved disappointing as it was unable to stem leaves without causing “excessive damage” to the crop, and factory operators remained dependent on a large workforce well into the mid-twentieth century.⁹ The region came to resemble a poor man’s Mississippi Delta, except that in contrast to full fields, with cotton growing up to the coppers’ doorsteps, for every cultivated acre of tobacco ten acres of soil lay barren, ravished and impoverished from previous years’ harvests. “The tobacco territory is a disheartening sight to the traveller who is accustomed to well-kept fields and a neat countryside,” J. Russell Smith wrote. “The first impression is that everyone has recently moved away save a few who cultivate a patch of corn and

⁶ Anthony J. Badger, *Prosperity Road: The New Deal, Tobacco, and North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, 1980), 3 (quotation); *Greenville: The Hub of Eastern North Carolina* (Greenville, N.C., 1930), 16, available online in East Carolina University Digital Collections, <http://digital.lib.ecu.edu/13433.7>.

⁷ Rupert B. Vance, *Human Geography of the South: A Study in Regional Resources and Human Adequacy* (Chapel Hill, 1932), 32–34 (quotations on 33).

⁸ John L. Cheney Jr., ed., *North Carolina Government, 1585–1979: A Narrative and Statistical History* (Raleigh, 1981), 1245.

⁹ Vance, *Human Geography of the South*, 208–9; Pete Daniel, *Breaking the Land: The Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Cultures since 1880* (Urbana, 1985), 184; Jack Temple Kirby, *Rural Worlds Lost: The American South, 1920–1960* (Baton Rouge, 1987), 343–47; Roger Biles, “Tobacco Towns: Urban Growth and Economic Development in Eastern North Carolina,” *North Carolina Historical Review*, 84 (April 2007), 156–90, esp. 178–79 (quotation on 179).

tobacco here and there."¹⁰ Tobacco tenant farmers, suffering under what Vance characterized as "the most abject rural poverty" in the nation, remained highly mobile, often moving from farm to farm at the end of the season in a futile search for better work arrangements, leaving behind dilapidated homes and depleted fields for the next tenant.¹¹

Amid this landscape of poverty and decay stood stately mansions that once housed the county's largest slaveholding families. Built prior to 1791 by John Foreman, one of Pitt County's original white settlers, the Greenwreath plantation mansion was located eight miles outside Greenville along one of the county's oldest hard roads. In the 1920s Greenwreath remained in Foreman's descendants' hands. The plantation covered over three hundred acres and was bordered by the Cottendale plantation to the south and west and—after a precipitous descent to sea level on the edge of the cultivated fields—the Tar River to the east.¹²

While the home remained structurally sound into the 1920s, its owners had long ago left for greener pastures. In 1893 Ivey Foreman began renting the property to local farmer William H. Moore. Upon Foreman's death in 1919, Richard Henry Lewis, an uncle by marriage, inherited the property and continued the lease with Moore.¹³ Unlike most of his contemporaries, Moore paid Lewis a flat annual rental fee instead of a share of the profits from each year's harvest. Moore's tenancy arrangement placed him in a more advantageous position to capitalize on high prices for cotton and tobacco but left him potentially vulnerable to severe indebtedness when prices were low. By the early 1920s Moore had saved enough money through farming cotton and tobacco to purchase a home and other parcels of land in nearby Farmville, and he began subleasing Greenwreath to farmer J. M. Satterfield.¹⁴ Soon after, Moore conceived a plan to generate more profits from the plantation through revitalizing the once active but recently desolate river shore.

River landings dotted the Tar River's banks, serving as places of commerce and community since the earliest days of settlement. Centre

¹⁰ Quoted in Vance, *Human Geography of the South*, 207.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹² See Gladys Moore Wooten, "Greenwreath," in Pitt County Historical Society, *Chronicles of Pitt County, North Carolina* (Winston-Salem, N.C., 1982), 112. For a description of the property as it appeared in 1938, see Elizabeth Sparrow McCord, *Travel Diary, 1938*, Folder "Miscellaneous," Thomas Sparrow Papers #1 (East Carolina Manuscript Collection, Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, N.C.).

¹³ W. H. Moore to Kemp Plummer Lewis, December 5, 1927, Folder 225, Lewis Papers; obituary of Richard Henry Lewis, Folder 229, Lewis Papers.

¹⁴ Ivey Lewis to Dick Lewis, December 20, 1927, Folder 227, Lewis Papers.

Bluff, located across the river from the Greenwreath plantation, was throughout the nineteenth century the chief point for shipping crops grown in the area to Greenville markets. Alongside the warehouses were picnic grounds as well as rough and raucous barrooms and gambling dens. As historian Roger Biles has observed, "Warehouses became the epicenters of the communities during harvest season, which lasted from August to early November of each year." During the heyday of river commerce, the warehouses owned by Robert Randolph Cotten at Centre Bluff, like those in other warehouse districts, attracted a motley crew: "Peddlers hawked apples, razor blades, patent medicine, and other items on the streets alongside beggars, swindlers, confidence men, and armed thieves seeking farmers' newly acquired wealth." In the off-season these same "warehouses served as venues for cotillions, boxing matches, political rallies, farm machinery expositions, high school graduations and formals, reunions of Civil War veterans, and other special events."¹⁵ As it drew a critical mass of people to its banks, the river became a key site of commercial activity in the rural South, and it represented a place of opportunity for those seeking to escape the clutches of poverty and debt servitude.¹⁶

But as railroads extended into the rural hinterlands of eastern North Carolina at the turn of the twentieth century, river traffic declined, along with the river's place in rural community life. The steamboats that had once plied the river and served as transportation for both people and goods going to market ceased to operate. Many of the landings were abandoned. After railroad lines had reached Farmville by 1900, the formerly vibrant riverside landings stretching from Falkland to Greenville became known as "the dead cities of the Tar."¹⁷

From their deaths came the stirrings of a new water-based economy. For Pitt County's business and landed classes, the early 1920s were prosperous times that demanded more elaborate leisure destinations. On the streets of Farmville, Moore had been taking note of complaints aired by the local merchants and professionals about the lack of nearby commercial recreation. After hearing that the Farmville Rotary Club had been making "a concerted effort to get some one

¹⁵ Bruce Cotten, *As We Were: A Personal Sketch of Family Life* (Baltimore, 1935), 45–48; Biles, "Tobacco Towns," 173 (first quotation), 177 (second and third quotations).

¹⁶ On spaces of commerce in the rural South, see Lu Ann Jones, "Gender, Race, and Itinerant Commerce in the Rural New South," *Journal of Southern History*, 66 (May 2000), 297–320.

¹⁷ Cotten, *As We Were*, 55.

to establish" a pleasure resort, Moore decided that such a venture would squeeze more profit out of his rented lands. In Moore's mind, Greenwreath's uncultivated section along the Tar River offered the ideal setting for an elite pleasure resort. Dense foliage would shade guests from the unforgiving temperatures of the summer months, and the location offered the perfect balance of accessibility (either by boat, automobile, or horseback) and seclusion.¹⁸

Richard Henry Lewis was, as his sons recalled, "dubious" about Moore's proposition. Rather than anticipating a respectable resort for the established and up-and-coming, Lewis imagined his stretch of the Tar becoming a magnet for the types of outlaw crowds the river had long attracted, and he expected that over time the resort would diminish the value Lewis saw in his land—a value that was measured less in the short-term exploitation of the property's various assets and amenities, and more in its function as a symbol and site of familial identity and a generator of honor, respect, and reputation among peers and from social inferiors.¹⁹ In his negotiations with his landlord, Moore assured Lewis that he would maintain a high-class resort, one that would attract the respectable and well-heeled from Pitt and nearby counties and would, in turn, allow Moore to develop the uncultivated portion of the plantation to its full economic potential. Located on the edge of a steep decline, roughly two hundred yards from the shore and canopied by dense cypress trees, the proposed site for the resort was an area of the property that, given the soil and topography, was virtually impossible to cultivate. Subject to seasonal flooding, it likewise bore little potential as a place for residential development. Instead, Moore aimed to create a place that would attract groups and individuals for pleasure and diversion and, in the process, transform what had long been informal, community-oriented activities into a profitable commercial enterprise. Rather than a cleared field and a river of questionable safety, his park would offer picnickers a permanent pavilion and man-made lake. Instead of bringing a lunch from home, visitors could buy food and drink from his concession stands. The impetus behind Greenwreath Park signaled, on a smaller

¹⁸ "Opening Green Wreath Park," *Farmville Enterprise*, May 15, 1925, p. 1.

¹⁹ Ivey Lewis to Dick Lewis, February 20, 1929, Folder 272, Lewis Papers. In his study of the white upper class of York, South Carolina, in the late 1940s, Ralph C. Patrick Jr. observes, "The present generation's relationship to the family's property and heirlooms is that of custodian rather than outright owner. One is not free to dispose of property that symbolizes his family's position; he is duty bound to preserve it and to pass it on to the next generation." Ralph C. Patrick Jr., *Townways of Kent*, edited by John Shelton Reed and Dale Volberg Reed (Columbia, S.C., 2008), 19.

scale, the growing commercial potential of the rural countryside in the age of the automobile.²⁰

Despite his misgivings, Lewis allowed Moore to pursue his scheme under the condition that it remain "a high class resort." This somewhat ambiguous provision was written into their agreement.²¹ In the fall of 1924, Moore embarked on his ambitious (and costly) project. He dammed a creek that flowed from the river to create a small lake suitable for swimming, a body whose waters would be replenished by springs snaking down the hillsides, thus keeping it "clean and sanitary" and safe for children.²² He offered to guests "Nice all-wool Bath suits and bathing caps for sale or rent" at "reasonable" prices.²³ He stocked the lake with fish, placed piers and diving boards along its edges, and supplied canoes for guests wishing to row out to the middle. Farther back from the lake, Moore built a pavilion, bathhouse, and dance hall, all fully equipped with electric lights powered by his own private plant.²⁴ "There will be good music on all occasions," Moore promised, from college glee clubs and orchestras on Saturdays to "[d]evotional music on Sunday evenings."²⁵ Indeed, Moore seemed confident he could channel the different uses of the river—as a place of pleasure, rest, sustenance, and devotion—toward commercial profit. But he had done so at considerable risk. By the time he was ready to open his resort to the public, Moore had invested, by his estimation, between \$7,000 and \$8,000 of his own savings in the project.²⁶

²⁰ "Opening Green Wreath Park," *Farmville Enterprise*, May 15, 1925, p. 1. On automobile travel and the rise of rural tourist and recreational retreats in the twentieth-century South, see Anne Mitchell Whisnant, *Super-Scenic Motorway: A Blue Ridge Parkway History* (Chapel Hill, 2006); Richard D. Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky: Tourism and Society in Western North Carolina* (Tuscaloosa, 2005); and Richard D. Starnes, ed., *Southern Journeys: Tourism, History, and Culture in the Modern South* (Tuscaloosa, 2003).

²¹ Ivey Lewis to Kemp Plummer Lewis, December 22, 1927, Folder 228, Lewis Papers.

²² "Opening Green Wreath Park," *Farmville Enterprise*, May 15, 1925, p. 1 (quotation); "Green Wreath Park Now Open" [advertisement], *Greenville Daily Reflector*, May 26, 1925, p. 4. Such an amenity was no trivial concern. Each spring and summer, mothers fretted over their children's unsupervised escapades along bodies of water, which annually claimed the lives of some area youths. Bruce Cotten's brother Robert drowned in the Tar River. A month before the Greenwreath resort opened, the *Greenville Daily Reflector* reported the death of eight-year-old Linda Smith, who drowned in a lake near Robersonville in Marion County after rowing out unaccompanied. Cotten, *As We Were*, 45; "Roberson Lad Drowns Yesterday," *Greenville Daily Reflector*, April 20, 1925, p. 1.

²³ "Green Wreath Park Now Open" [advertisement], *Greenville Daily Reflector*, May 26, 1925, p. 4.

²⁴ "Opening Green Wreath Park," *Farmville Enterprise*, May 15, 1925, p. 1.

²⁵ "Green Wreath Park Now Open" [advertisement], *Greenville Daily Reflector*, May 26, 1925, p. 4.

²⁶ W. H. Moore to Kemp Plummer Lewis, December 29, 1927, Folder 229, Lewis Papers.

For the May 29, 1925, grand opening, Moore offered guests "free bathing privileges," "barbecue cooked the old-fashioned way," and musical entertainment by Kollmeyer's Carolinians, an orchestra "composed of some of the best musicians" from the area. The local newspaper, the Farmville *Enterprise*, was heartened that an "ideal resort" was now within close reach. "Farmville and Pitt county have long needed a pleasure resort," one article commented, and now they had "one of the best and prettiest places of its kind in Eastern North Carolina." Throughout the day and into the night, an "unusually large crowd of people" poured in from all directions for a peek at the much-ballyhooed resort. Moore's wife, Susie, served refreshments and sandwiches to couples as they emerged from the dance floor.²⁷ In the weeks after the park's opening, the Sunday school of Farmville's local Episcopal church held its annual picnic outing there. Throughout that first summer the resort also hosted groups such as the Women's Auxiliary of the Episcopal Church, the Intermediate Christian Endeavor Society, the Rotary Club, and the Boy Scouts.²⁸

The time and the place seemed to ensure the resort's success. But, as Moore soon discovered, he was not alone in perceiving the benefits of amusement enterprises in eastern North Carolina. During the same years that Moore sunk his savings into the riverside resort, like-minded entrepreneurs and capital investors concocted similar plans and opened even grander resorts. This quest to unlock eastern North Carolina's leisure and tourism potential was fueled by the state's good roads movement. Founded in 1901, the United States Good Roads Association exemplified Progressive reformers' strategies for improving social conditions and stimulating local economies in the rural South. Before the 1920s, roads in eastern North Carolina (as in much of the rural South) simply ran from plantations such as Greenwreath to the county seat. Proponents instead envisioned an interconnected highway system as the first step in a broader modernization initiative to facilitate rural residents' access to markets and lead, over time, to a more prosperous and enlightened citizenry. "Good-roads advocates," one historian notes, "saw highways as mediums of social and economic

²⁷ "Green Wreath Park Now Open" [advertisement], *Greenville Daily Reflector*, May 26, 1925, p. 4 (first and second quotations); "Opening Green Wreath Park," *Farmville Enterprise*, May 15, 1925, p. 1 (third through sixth quotations); "Opening Green Wreath Park," *Farmville Enterprise*, June 5, 1925, p. 1 (seventh quotation).

²⁸ "Locals/Personals," *Farmville Enterprise*, June 19, 1925, p. 2; "Field Day at Green Wreath Park," *ibid.*, July 17, 1925, p. 3; "Episcopal Auxiliaries Field Day Meet at Green Wreath Park," *ibid.*, July 24, 1925, p. 3; "Falkland News," *Greenville Daily Reflector*, August 1, 1925, p. 2.

uplift for rural areas. With improved transportation would come better marketing facilities, better schools, better churches, and increased cultural opportunities." Good roads also offered better prospects for pleasure travel and amusement.²⁹

In 1912 the federal government sought to encourage road construction by promising to pay one-third of the costs for new highways. In the years that followed, North Carolina, which historian George Brown Tindall described as "at the forefront of the movement" for good roads in the South, embarked on an aggressive road construction campaign. Between 1919 and 1926, over \$125 million in federal and state funds were spent on building roads in the state. In 1921 the state legislature passed a \$50 million bond issue for highways. By 1928 the state highway system consisted of 7,551 miles (3,738 miles were hard-surfaced) and made accessible previously unreachable sections of the state's eastern coastline and western mountains. Between 1920 and 1930, the number of motor vehicles in the state rose from roughly 140,000 to over 485,000.³⁰ Centrally located in the state's eastern half, Pitt County became a hub in North Carolina's increasingly dense highway network. By 1930 Greenville had "seven hard surfaced roads leading from the city radiating in every direction," connecting the once isolated region to the coast, the Piedmont, and cities north.³¹ The roads that joined Greenville to Farmville and Falkland—the roads that made Greenwreath such a seemingly ideal location for a resort—were now part of a network linking the rural county to the rest of the state and the nation.

For Greenville's middle- and upper-class families, a weekend vacation to the growing number of resorts on Pamlico Sound and the Atlantic coast suddenly seemed not only enticing but also feasible. "The fine roads have given a simply tremendous boost to the State's tourist traffic," one article reported.³² In years past, trips to the coast necessitated extensive planning and preparation as well as a substantial outlay of time; such travel was a luxury available only to those whom

²⁹ Jeanette Keith, *Country People in the New South: Tennessee's Upper Cumberland* (Chapel Hill, 1995), 108. On the ties between good roads movements and tourism development, see Marguerite S. Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940* (Washington, D.C., 2001), 137-68. See also Howard Lawrence Preston, *Dirt Roads to Dixie: Accessibility and Modernization in the South, 1885-1935* (Knoxville, 1991).

³⁰ Post Office Appropriations Act of 1912, Public Law 336, *U.S. Statutes at Large*, 37 (1912), 539-60, esp. 551-52; "Improved Roads Bring Change," *Farmville Enterprise*, October 3, 1930, p. 3; George Brown Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge, 1967), 225-27 (quotation on 225), 254-58.

³¹ *Greenville: The Hub of Eastern North Carolina*, 19.

³² "Improved Roads Bring Change," *Farmville Enterprise*, October 3, 1930, p. 4.

Thorstein Veblen called the "leisure class." But by the mid-1920s, Pitt Countians reported taking weekend trips to resorts as far north as Virginia Beach, Virginia, and as far south as Wrightsville Beach, North Carolina.³³ Closer to home, new hotels and resorts dotted the shores of Pamlico Sound. The same summer that Moore opened the park at Greenwreath, the new Pamlico Beach Hotel began running advertisements in the *Greenville Daily Reflector* alerting readers to the resort's modern amenities ("a first class dancing pavilion built out over the water, an unsurpassed bathing beach, and fishing grounds teeming with fish to delight the heart of fishermen") and, more important, its easy accessibility: "The roads leading to the Beach have been placed in excellent condition and addition of the pavement all the way to Bath makes it an easy two hour trip from [Greenville]."³⁴ Pamlico Beach, in particular, siphoned off the very families and groups whom Moore had hoped to attract. Not only were wealthy Pitt County families taking weekend trips to Pamlico Beach, but also the local Girl and Boy Scout troops preferred the soundside resort to accommodations closer to home.³⁵ The following summer, Bayview On-the-Pamlico opened outside Washington, North Carolina, offering guests "Unsurpassed bathing, boating and fishing facilities," "Concessions," and "Refreshment stands"—in other words, everything Greenwreath claimed to offer, but set on the expansive and beautiful Pamlico Sound rather than at a small, secluded man-made lake in a river bottomlands.³⁶

While Pamlico Beach and Bayview welcomed "an endless stream of cars" each weekend, with attendance reported in the thousands, Moore found himself, by his own account, "barely [able to] ma[k]e operating expenses." "There has been so many places of this kind developed, and some of them made so attractive with hundreds of thousands of dollars spent on them and the road improvement and auto mobiles has knocked out the small places," he complained.³⁷ During the summer of 1926, not

³³Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (New York, 1899). For reports of Pitt County residents' summer travels, see "Locals," *Greenville Daily Reflector*, May 16, 1925, p. 3; "Locals and Personals," *Farmville Enterprise*, August 7, 1925, p. 3; "Personal and Social Notes," *Farmville Enterprise*, July 22, 1927, p. 3; and "Local Happenings," *Farmville Enterprise*, July 25, 1930, p. 3, June 26, 1931, p. 2, and July 10, 1931, p. 3.

³⁴"Pamlico Beach Hotel to Open on Friday, May 29," *Greenville Daily Reflector*, May 27, 1925, p. 3 (quotations); "Pamlico Beach Hotel" [advertisement], *ibid.*, June 19, 1925, p. 5.

³⁵"Girl Scouts Enjoy Week's Outing at Pamlico Beach," *Greenville Daily Reflector*, June 16, 1925, p. 3.

³⁶"Announcing the Formal Opening of Bayview On-The-Pamlico" [advertisement], *Greenville Daily Reflector*, June 30, 1926, p. 5.

³⁷W. H. Moore to Kemp Plummer Lewis, December 29, 1927, Folder 229, Lewis Papers.

a single church reported picnicking at Greenwreath in the local newspapers, and the Farmville Rotary Club, so influential in convincing Moore to build the resort, instead chose to hold its events at the Public Landing in nearby Washington.³⁸ For the 1927 season Moore found "a couple of white men from Hertford, N.C.," to lease Greenwreath. But, at the end of the summer, they too "claimed to have lost money," and Moore "got nothing" from them in return. After three seasons, Moore had spent more than \$8,000 on Greenwreath Park and "failed to get any profit—above operating expenses."³⁹

Future prospects for recovery seemed bleak. The first winter after the Lewis brothers inherited Greenwreath, Pitt County's economic fortunes took a turn for the worse. Windstorms in early 1927 caused extensive damage to area tobacco farms and resulted in reported losses that year for Moore and many other local farmers.⁴⁰ "[M]ost farmers in this section lost money," Moore wrote; even farm owners could not "mak[e] expenses after paying taxes and upkeep." "The outlook for farm crop prices in the very near future [seems] very discouraging," he concluded.⁴¹ Indeed, conditions deteriorated. Total profits from tobacco production in the eastern counties were steadily dropping, from a high of \$91 million in 1919 to \$50 million in 1928 to a low of \$18.9 million in 1932. The declining fortunes of tobacco paralleled those of cotton, whose price in the state averaged seventeen cents a pound as late as 1929 but was six cents a pound in 1931.⁴² In nearby Edgecombe County, total crop values fell sharply from \$2,610,221 (\$49.10 per acre) in 1927 to \$1,466,477 (\$27.22 per acre) in 1929.⁴³ "I don't see anything but actual hunger in store for lots of these poor tenant folks this winter," Pitt County resident Annie Gorham Crisp wrote to her daughter, Lucy, in September 1929. "The merchants aren't going to be able to feed them, and lots of them will hardly pay fertilizer bills. I try not to think about it any more than I can help, it gets me all upset."⁴⁴ "[T]here is going to be a lot of

³⁸ "Farmville Rotarians Entertain Wives at Gypsy Tea," *Greenville Daily Reflector*, August 21, 1925, p. 4.

³⁹ W. H. Moore to Kemp Plummer Lewis, January 13, 1928, Folder 231, Lewis Papers.

⁴⁰ W. H. Moore to Kemp Plummer Lewis, January 26–28, 1928, Folder 232, Lewis Papers.

⁴¹ W. H. Moore to Kemp Plummer Lewis, January 13, 1928, Folder 231, Lewis Papers.

⁴² Badger, *Prosperity Road*, 21–22.

⁴³ "The Lynching at Tarboro," Folder 751, Howard Washington Odum Papers #3167 (Southern Historical Collection).

⁴⁴ Annie G. Crisp to Lucy Cherry Crisp, September 22, 1929, Folder "Correspondence (family-personal), August–December 1929," Box 9, Lucy Cherry Crisp Papers #154 (East Carolina Manuscript Collection).

suffering for both food and clothes among the whites and negroes," she feared.⁴⁵

Moore's business failings were shared by countless other petit entrepreneurs across the region, whose big dreams—fed, as Ted Ownby has shown, by the emergence of a consumer culture in the rural South—fell prey to oversaturated markets and, as the Great Depression deepened, limited demand.⁴⁶ In the Delta town of Cleveland, Mississippi, for example, three young men sank thousands of dollars into opening the Playmore, a bowling alley and indoor golf course equipped with automatic pin setters, comfortable seats, and all the modern amenities local residents could hope for. Advertised as "the only resort center of its kind between Memphis and New Orleans," the Playmore targeted the same imagined clientele of rural and small-town consumers as Moore had. And, like Moore's, the Playmore investors' gamble backfired. "Before six months had passed," a visitor reported, "they played no more at 'Playmore.' It was entirely deserted. The three excellent bowling alleys had been shipped back to the company who owned them. The deserted miniature golf course was without lights. The three young men who undertook to operate the 'Playmore' went into bankruptcy as a result of their venture."⁴⁷

Dick, Kemp, and Ivey Lewis, who inherited the Greenwreath property after the death of their father, Richard Henry Lewis, on August 6, 1926, did not suffer from the fears of small farmers and business owners who tried to earn a living on these inherited lands.⁴⁸ The Lewis brothers all parlayed their privileged upbringings into successful careers of great status and influence. Both Dick and Kemp were high-level executives at cotton mills in Oxford and Durham, North Carolina, respectively. Dr. Ivey Foreman Lewis, meanwhile, was a professor of biology at the University of Virginia and, at the time of his father's death, was already establishing himself as a preeminent scholar of eugenics and tireless advocate of its practical application. Until his retirement in 1953, Ivey instructed untold numbers of white students in his theories of hereditary racial difference, as a professor and later dean of the university. As Gregory Michael Dorr notes, Ivey was a much-sought-after expert on eugenics who

⁴⁵ Annie G. Crisp to Lucy Cherry Crisp, December 3, 1929, *ibid.*

⁴⁶ Ted Ownby, *American Dreams in Mississippi: Consumers, Poverty, and Culture, 1830-1998* (Chapel Hill, 1999).

⁴⁷ "Lynching at Rosedale, Ms.," Folder 752, Odum Papers.

⁴⁸ Folder "Richard H. Lewis M.D.," Box PC.1347.1, Richard H. Lewis (1850-1926) Collection (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh).

strongly influenced Virginia's adoption of sterilization programs for racial and mental "inferiors" and inspired students who later became doctors to perform sterilizations on unwed mothers and welfare recipients. "His teaching," Dorr writes, "acquired a dimension beyond mere complicity in the maintenance of an unjust cultural system of racial segregation."⁴⁹ As Moore soon discovered, Ivey Foreman Lewis's place in the Jim Crow hierarchy similarly shaped his understanding of both the spatiality of race and the boundaries of acceptable commerce at Greenwreath's flagging commercial venture.

In August 1927 Moore began searching for someone to rent and assume managerial control over the resort after the dissolution of his partnership with the two men from Hertford. He did not have to search far. In nearby Farmville, Nelson "Nep" Hopkins operated a popular theater and café on the so-called colored side of town, and he catered events hosted by the area's white businesses and professional organizations.⁵⁰ Seeking to enlarge his business holdings, and likely familiar with the consumer tastes and unmet needs of the area's rural black population, Hopkins offered to rent Greenwreath from Moore and operate it for "colored people."⁵¹ Hopkins's decision to invest in black leisure was indicative of the structure and culture of black business life in early-twentieth-century America. In his 1936 study, *The Negro as Capitalist*, Abram L. Harris noted that amusement and recreational enterprises, alongside real estate, retail, and personal services, constituted the main categories of black business activity. This concentration was due both to the segregation of these industries and to African Americans' comparative lack of capital and unequal access to credit. Places of recreation and amusement that catered to a black clientele were what Harris called "defensive enterprises," the by-products of a segregated marketplace. The business of pleasure, moreover, often required a smaller initial capital outlay than other channels of commerce; merely owning property in an

⁴⁹ Gregory Michael Dorr, "Assuring America's Place in the Sun: Ivey Foreman Lewis and the Teaching of Eugenics at the University of Virginia, 1915-1953," *Journal of Southern History*, 66 (May 2000), 257-96 (quotation on 286).

⁵⁰ "Nelson Hopkins Jr.," in Pitt County Historical Society, *Chronicles of Pitt County, North Carolina*, 392. That a black entrepreneur had a black and white clientele was not unusual in the rural and small-town South. During his field research, sociologist Arthur F. Raper visited the kitchen of a black restaurateur in Woodville, Georgia, after a white doctor insisted it had the finest food, and best service, in town. Raper, *Preface to Peasantry: A Tale of Two Black Belt Counties* (Chapel Hill, 1936), 385. See also Paul K. Edwards, *The Southern Urban Negro as a Consumer* (New York, 1932), 8-10.

⁵¹ W. H. Moore to Kemp Plummer Lewis, December 29, 1927, Folder 229, Lewis Papers.

advantageous location—a riverside landing, along a beach—was enough to get started.⁵²

Since they often lacked the capital to invest in large-scale construction, prospective African American proprietors were keen to exploit white business failings by acquiring shuttered white resorts such as Greenwreath. In the summer of 1926, for example, a group of African American investors purchased the former Pine Crest Inn, a riverside resort located outside Salem, Virginia, that, as one account described, "command[ed] a magnificent view of mountains, valleys, orchards, and pine woods." The resort had once attracted a "select following" of whites before declining attendance and revenue forced its owners to close and sell the property. The group of black investors subsequently refurbished the grounds and reopened the resort as a "[N]egro amusement center."⁵³ As the nation's economy collapsed in the 1930s, African American investors similarly worked to acquire failed white resorts located in oversaturated markets. For example, a group of black investors moved in 1937 to acquire the formerly "swanky" and "exclusive" Edgewater Club, a multistory hotel and resort that had been the centerpiece of a failed "million dollar coastal development," located on Bogue Sound outside Morehead City, North Carolina. The investors worked through a white intermediary from Washington, D.C., so as to circumvent the property's racially restrictive covenant. As one article in a national black newspaper claimed, "If turned into a resort for colored people, [the Edgewater] will rank among the most pretentious in the country."⁵⁴

Though only a select segment of black America could afford the luxury of vacationing at a seaside resort or owning a second home, such attempts to develop places of leisure were celebrated by African Americans as signs of a rising race. In a syndicated column published in 1934, the sociologist Kelly Miller cited fledgling black beach resorts and summer communities as testaments to black achievement and equality: "Whenever a handful of adventuresome Negroes attempt to develop a town or even a village, the whole race swells with pride

⁵² Abram L. Harris, *The Negro as Capitalist: A Study of Banking and Business among American Negroes* (Philadelphia, 1936), 54–55 (quotation on 54).

⁵³ "Pine Crest Inn, Negro Amusement Center, Destroyed by Explosion," *Roanoke Times*, September 7, 1926, p. 1. See also Norwood C. Middleton, *Salem: A Virginia Chronicle* (Salem, Va., 1986), 290.

⁵⁴ "Swanky \$125,000 Dixie Hotel May Become Colored Resort," *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 24, 1937, p. 2 (quotations); "Seek to Block N.C. Race Resort Development," *Norfolk (Va.) Journal and Guide*, July 31, 1937, p. 6.

over the achievement . . . Even such small enterprises as a successful watering resort swell the heart with pride. . . . [and] show how earnestly we all long for political, economic, and social structure built upon our own foundation." Indeed, leisure-based real estate development not only afforded privileged black Americans outlets for pleasure and relief but also generated new opportunities for black employment and entrepreneurial activity seemingly beyond the confines of the Jim Crow economy. Seasonal black enterprises provided a space where a critical mass of black consumers could converge and where African American performers, entertainers, and hucksters could ply their trades.⁵⁵

Like many white businessmen during these years, Moore also perceived the potential profits to be made (and losses recouped) from servicing this untapped market.⁵⁶ As he later described, "There are no place [sic] near here of the kind for colored people and I had a chance to lease it to a colored man here in Farmville to be operated for colored people . . . I tried hard to make it go for white people and lost money, besides the investment, which was heavy. I think it can be made to pay for colored people. I know now, it could not for white people without spending more money than I had on it."⁵⁷ Hopkins proved a tough negotiator determined to capitalize to the fullest extent possible on Moore's compromised situation. If Moore renewed his lease with the Lewis brothers (regardless of the terms), Hopkins insisted that Moore also renew his sublease with Hopkins under the original terms and conditions. Moore appeared more than willing to accommodate Hopkins, confident that Greenwreath Park's transformation into an African American resort would yield returns.⁵⁸

Such agreements, however, also posed grave risks. The desire of unsuccessful white businessmen to sell or rent their properties to anxious African American investors was matched only by the determination of local whites, particularly those with neighboring real estate and business interests, to prevent these properties from becoming

⁵⁵ Kelly Miller, "Watchtower," *New York Amsterdam News*, June 30, 1934, p. 8. In general, see Kahrl, *Land Was Ours*.

⁵⁶ In his 1932 study, *The Southern Urban Negro as a Consumer*, Paul K. Edwards noted the dominance of white businessmen in the growing market in black-oriented commercial leisure in the South. "Some" commercial establishments, he found, "are owned and operated by enterprising members of the race fortunate enough to secure the necessary capital. The majority, however, are owned by whites who have discovered here a profitable source of income." Edwards, *Southern Urban Negro as Consumer*, 8-9 (quotation on 8).

⁵⁷ W. H. Moore to Kemp Plummer Lewis, December 29, 1927, Folder 229, Lewis Papers.

⁵⁸ John Hill Paylor to W. H. Moore, July 6, 1929, Folder 288, Lewis Papers.

"colored." In September 1926, just months after the grand opening, an anonymous band of arsonists reduced the refurbished Pine Crest Inn in Salem, Virginia, "to a conglomeration of ashes" after a midnight assault. This violent end followed months of hand-wringing by local elected officials and various attempts through legal channels to prevent the resort's opening.⁵⁹ Similarly, soon after a group of black businessmen and professionals circumvented a racial covenant on the property to purchase the Edgewater Club in Morehead City, white residents rose in opposition to the club's proposed redevelopment as a "Negro beach resort" and worked to prevent the investors from assuming full ownership and managerial control.⁶⁰

Just as the automobile transformed the landscape of white leisure, it also made possible the emergence of regional black leisure marketplaces. The mass production of automobiles and the improvement of roads in the rural South, as Valerie Grim points out, were "significant for widening cultural horizons." "The car," she notes, "exposed the younger generation [of rural blacks] to a different world" by enabling access to "additional opportunities for recreation and entertainment."⁶¹ Sociologist Arthur F. Raper contended that the automobile's far-reaching effects on the rural black tenant farmer worked to erode white forms of control: "Within limits determined by ability to buy gas, the tenant can go where he pleases on the public road, and after he gets twenty or thirty minutes from home he travels incognito and is subject to his own wishes. Whether to the city to find work, to the church, to the moonshine still, to the brothel, or to any one of a hundred other places, he goes and comes and nobody knows where he has been." The automobile thus heightened white racial anxieties and, like the development of waterfront properties for commercial recreation, created new grounds for the enforcement of white supremacy. In Macon County, Georgia, Raper found, "a white man . . . advocated that the cars be taken from the Negroes or that the county maintain two systems of roads, one for the whites and one for the Negroes!" so as to prevent instances of whites and blacks crossing paths absent any ritual

⁵⁹ "Pine Crest Inn, Negro Amusement Center, Destroyed by Explosion," *Roanoke Times*, September 7, 1926, p. 1; Meeting minutes, May 17, 1926, Roanoke County Board of Supervisors (Roanoke County Courthouse, Roanoke, Va.). See also Middleton, *Salem*, 290.

⁶⁰ "May Set Up Fashionable Resort Near Beaufort, N.C.," *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, July 31, 1937, p. A6; "Fight Negro Beach Resort," *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 24, 1937, p. 4; "Seek to Block N.C. Race Resort Development," *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, July 31, 1937, p. 6.

⁶¹ Valerie Grim, "African American Rural Culture, 1900-1950," in R. Douglas Hurt, ed., *African American Life in the Rural South, 1900-1950* (Columbia, Mo., 2003), 108-28 (quotations on 121).

of deference.⁶² Other communities attempted to pass laws that prevented black motorists from accessing certain public streets.⁶³

But in Pitt County there were few cries of outrage at the sight of a car- or truckload of African Americans headed toward Greenwreath Park. The economic relations that bound Moore to other local service providers and creditors helps explain why. "The single crop," Frank Tannenbaum observed, "demands two things that are beyond the farmer's reach—extensive credit and elaborate marketing machinery."⁶⁴ With its arable acreage devoted to tobacco and, to a lesser degree, cotton cultivation, Greenwreath, like the rest of the area's plantations, had ceased to function as a self-sufficient unit. As a farmer of one of the county's biggest plantations, Moore borrowed large amounts of seed, fertilizer, and supplies from time merchants and salesmen each spring and paid off his debts after the fall harvest. He also purchased goods from local stores on credit, as well as going into debt to doctors, lawyers, and other service providers. As cotton and tobacco prices plummeted and the real estate speculation market bottomed out in 1926, merchants, manufacturers, and suppliers found themselves caught between their dependence on farmers and their own uncertainties about debtors' ability to pay back what they owed. Moore—a home owner, plantation farmer, and employer of tenants—was despite his appearances more vulnerable than most tenant farmers. Rather than being assured of some, however minuscule, profit at the end of the season, he instead paid the Lewis family \$2,500 annually, an incredibly large sum, even given the amount of acreage. Even when crop prices were high, Moore said, he still "ha[d]n't much to show for it," spending most of his profits on repairs and improvements and finding that he could "make more on the outside speculating in a small way, than . . . on the farm" (thus the initial inspiration for the amusement park).⁶⁵ When prices sank to record lows, as they did in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Moore teetered on the edge of insolvency. Whereas in the early 1920s the arrangement with the Lewis family had

⁶² Raper, *Preface to Peasantry*, 175–76 (first quotation on 175; second quotation on 176).

⁶³ Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York, 1998), 234–35. On the racial dimensions of automobility, see Kathleen Franz, "The Open Road": Automobility and Racial Uplift in the Interwar Years," in Bruce Sinclair, ed., *Technology and the African-American Experience: Needs and Opportunities for Study* (Cambridge, Mass., 2004), 131–53; and Cotton Seiler, "So That We as a Race Might Have Something Authentic to Travel By": African American Automobility and Cold-War Liberalism," *American Quarterly*, 58 (December 2006), 1091–1117.

⁶⁴ Frank Tannenbaum, *Darker Phases of the South* (New York, 1924), 121.

⁶⁵ W. H. Moore to Kemp Plummer Lewis, December 5, 1927, Folder 225, Lewis Papers.

allowed Moore to purchase a home in Farmville, sublet the farm to his own tenant, and invest in the park, by the decade's end Moore had lost his home to foreclosure, had dismissed his tenant, and had moved back to the Greenwreath farm.⁶⁶

Moore's downward spiral was emblematic of broader trends in the tobacco industry. The rise of cigarette production in the first quarter of the twentieth century shifted power from producers to manufacturers.⁶⁷ Industrial production of cigarettes became concentrated in the hands of a small number of large-scale corporations, which leveraged their power to set pitifully low prices for bright-leaf tobacco while generating record profits. "In few industries is there found so great a spread between the price of raw materials and that of the finished product," Rupert Vance discovered, a disparity that left growers like Moore "hardly [able to] receive returns for time and trouble invested." Even after the dissolution of James B. Duke's monopoly on cigarette manufacturing in 1911 under the Sherman Antitrust Act, tobacco farmers continued to experience declining prices for their crops each fall when they hauled them to market.⁶⁸

Moore's creditors no doubt looked with much interest at the fate of Greenwreath Park and were as concerned as Moore was to see the enterprise turn a profit. Moore's ability to secure a contract with Hopkins was thus a welcome relief to the local white business community, all the more so when the Negro resort proved to be a success. As Moore suspected, and as Hopkins's management of Greenwreath soon confirmed, he "c[ould] get more from colored people than [he could] from white people." As local African American Gus Smith told an inquirer, "things were very quiet at the park until the end of the summer when 'the colored folks became right joyful.'" Pleasant sounds, indeed, for the local merchants and small businessmen whose fates were intertwined with Moore's.⁶⁹ "So far as the order and behavior of the colored people I think it just as good as the white people," Moore commented.⁷⁰ "The conduct has been orderly, and

⁶⁶ W. H. Moore to K. P. Lewis and Bros., September 22, 1928, Folder 257, Lewis Papers.

⁶⁷ As Rupert Vance reported, "From 1900 to 1924 cigarette production increased twentyfold." Vance, *Human Geography of the South*, 310.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 309 (first quotation), 308 (second quotation); Robert F. Durden, *The Dukes of Durham, 1865-1929* (Durham, N.C., 1975), 167-68.

⁶⁹ W. H. Moore to K. P. Lewis and Bros., September 22, 1928, Folder 257, Lewis Papers (Moore quotation); Ivey Lewis to Kemp Plummer Lewis, December 22, 1927, Folder 228, Lewis Papers (Smith quotation).

⁷⁰ W. H. Moore to Kemp Plummer Lewis, December 29, 1927, Folder 229, Lewis Papers.

no complaint, objection or criticism has been made by anyone," he later reiterated.⁷¹

The Lewis brothers, however, saw and heard something entirely different happening on their family lands, and they envisioned a far more troubling scenario coming from the resort's conversion from white to "colored." Upon discovering the park in December 1927 during his first visit to the family farm after his father's death, Ivey Lewis wrote his brother Kemp, "The park is very attractive but evidently was a failure and was turned over . . . to the colored people. I think we ought to put a stop to this . . . My impression was that it was to be a high class amusement park."⁷² Over the next several months, Ivey corresponded extensively with his brothers on the need to quickly put a stop to the Negro resort, to either force Moore to reinstitute a whites-only policy or break off negotiations over the lease renewal. Ivey couched his objections in financial terms. "[T]he continued operation of the park for negroes is going to have a very bad effect from the standpoints of the sale we must finally come to," Ivey warned his brothers.⁷³ "Greenwreath is at the end of a fine hard road from Greenville," he contended, "and if there are no unfavorable developments will become more valuable." But ultimately, Ivey worried more about the damage the resort could inflict on an unspoken but no less important part of his and his brothers' inheritance. "Ivey Foreman would turn over in his grave if he knew about" a black amusement park on the plantation, he wrote.⁷⁴

Moore pleaded with his landlords to recognize that the resort, under Hopkins's care, was "operated in a decent and orderly manner."⁷⁵ He assured them that he "would not want to rent the farm and have a nuisance on it."⁷⁶ He lined up local whites to testify to the orderliness of Greenwreath Park and the trustworthiness of Hopkins. Twenty-five signatories to a petition Moore mailed to the Lewis brothers attested that Greenwreath Park was "an asset to the section in which it is located, as well as to the colored people in the County, . . . has been conducted on a good basis, filling the needs of the colored people, and at the same time in no way reflecting or discrediting the community or place on which said park is located." Moore had secured the support of

⁷¹ W. H. Moore to K. P. Lewis and Bros., September 22, 1928, Folder 257, Lewis Papers.

⁷² Ivey Lewis to Kemp Plummer Lewis, December 22, 1927, Folder 228, Lewis Papers.

⁷³ Ivey Lewis to Kemp Plummer Lewis, January 9, 1928, Folder 230, Lewis Papers.

⁷⁴ Ivey Lewis to Kemp Plummer Lewis, January 24, 1928, Folder 232, Lewis Papers.

⁷⁵ W. H. Moore to K. P. Lewis and Bros., September 22, 1928, Folder 257, Lewis Papers.

⁷⁶ W. H. Moore to Kemp Plummer Lewis, January 5, 1928, Folder 230, Lewis Papers.

two deputy sheriffs, the solicitor of the county court, the city manager of Greenville, and the mayor of Farmville. The rest represented a cross-section of local merchants, farmers, planters, and buyers.⁷⁷

It was no coincidence that many of these names appeared on Moore's petition in support of Hopkins and the operation of Greenwreath as a resort for African Americans. G. H. Pittman, who ran J. L. Fountain and Co., a general store in Falkland, sold farm supplies and bankrolled farmers each summer. As the sole farm supply proprietor in nearby Falkland, he likely sold Moore products on loan. C. H. Mayo was a local salesman. E. C. King ran a small store alongside the road between Farmville and Bruce. Each summer, the traffic of African American parties headed to and from Greenwreath passed by his business. M. V. Horton owned a drugstore in Farmville and no doubt saw the health of his business bound up with the financial conditions of customers like Moore. William Peele was a local farmer and small business owner who, like Moore, suffered from low crop prices and an uncertain future. Other signatories hailed from some of the county's wealthiest and oldest families, including J. Y. Monk, the county's preeminent tobacco buyer, who had close ties to tobacco magnates R. J. Reynolds and Duke; and planter W. H. Tyson, whose family preceded the Foremans in the area.⁷⁸ Such local businessmen, as Roger Biles points out, "constituted an elite class whose wealth and prestige allowed them to dominate political and social life in the tobacco towns of eastern North Carolina. They held the majority of the seats in local chambers of commerce and boards of trade, occupied the key electoral positions in municipal government, worshipped together in the same churches, vacationed at the same beaches along North Carolina's Atlantic coastline, and lived in the same communities' most exclusive neighborhoods."⁷⁹ In short, the same class of Pitt County citizens who rejected Moore's resort in favor of destinations along the Pamlico Sound and Atlantic Ocean endorsed both Greenwreath Park's suitability for blacks and its necessity in the local economy.

Despite the parasitic relationship between buyers like Monk, merchants like Pittman, and growers like Moore and Peele, all were

⁷⁷ J. M. Satterfield, J. H. Moore, Mrs. J. H. Moore, G. H. Pittman, C. H. Mayo, D. J. Mill, E. C. King, Sam J. Carson, W. H. Tyson, William Peele, D. M. Sellers, C. P. Peirce, J. M. Houes, M. V. Horton, J. Y. Monk et al. to Kemp Plummer Lewis, Dick Lewis, and Ivey Lewis, November 1928, Folder 262, Lewis Papers.

⁷⁸ Manuscript Census Returns, Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920, Pitt County, North Carolina, available online at <http://heritagequestonline.com>; John Lawrence, interview by the author, November 8, 2008 (notes in author's possession).

⁷⁹ Biles, "Tobacco Towns," 180.

dependent on a stable, exploitable labor force familiar with the nuances of tobacco cultivation. As the Great Migration gathered steam in the 1910s, planters and merchants in heavily agricultural districts reacted with alarm to the loss of their workers. As concern over the exodus of black farmworkers spread, many employers began searching for ways to stabilize race relations and make the South more tolerable for its workers without disrupting its Jim Crow foundations. Though Pitt County experienced comparatively little out-migration of African American laborers, planters had more than enough reasons to be troubled by the reports coming from the cotton belts. Tobacco tenant farmers tended the most labor-intensive crop, and lived in the most dire poverty, of all agricultural laborers in the South. Indeed, white planters knew all too well the difficulty (verging on impossibility) of breaking in new tobacco sharecroppers and acclimating them to the crop's year-round demands.⁸⁰

To stem the tide of the Great Migration, some white planters employed blunt tactics, such as hiring local sheriffs to round up migrants before they boarded northern-bound trains, brutally repressing labor agents, and confiscating copies of the *Chicago Defender* and the *Pittsburgh Courier* before they reached the hands of readers. But just as often one finds planters and politicians fumbling around for piecemeal solutions to unrest that they could not fully comprehend and that they invariably rationalized as a product of African Americans' racial proclivities rather than the vicious labor regime under which workers lived. Many white planters operated under the delusion that African Americans left for the North due to an uncontrollable "migratory impulse" and "love of travel" or out of a desire for the types of modern amusements that segregation, poverty, and rural life denied them. As James R. Grossman points out, "Few whites questioned the fundamental social and economic relations that frustrated blacks' aspirations to better their condition." As such, many opponents of migration searched for solutions that "involved only modification of conditions."⁸¹

⁸⁰ Between 1920 and 1930 Pitt County's rural population dropped from 87.3 to 83.1 percent of the county's total population, the largest decrease in rural population the county had yet experienced. See Cheney, ed., *North Carolina Government*, 1245. On work on tobacco farms and the decline in available workers in tobacco-growing regions, see Badger, *Prosperity Road*; and Daniel, *Breaking the Land*. On African American working-class leisure in labor-intensive occupations and industries, see Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 168-86; and Elizabeth Clark-Lewis, "This Work Had a End": African-American Domestic Workers in Washington, D.C., 1910-1940," in Carol Groneman and Mary Beth Norton, eds., *To Toil the Livelong Day: America's Women at Work, 1780-1980* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1987), 196-212.

⁸¹ James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago, 1989), 38-57 (second quotation on 43; first, third, and fourth quotations on 50).

"The migration made planters more conscious of conditions among black sharecroppers," Pete Daniel argues, which led them to devise ways, as one Mississippi Delta planter noted, "'to make the negroes . . . more contented.'"⁸² In a prelude to the last stand of white southern moderates before the onset of massive resistance in the civil rights era, white politicians in communities hit hard by the Great Migration "strain[ed] themselves," Frank Tannenbaum claimed, "to keep the negro by giving him better schools, better homes, better conditions of life and labor, a better social status."⁸³

Though Tannenbaum exaggerated the extent to which white southern planters put real change in motion, he nevertheless identified a less studied component of their long struggle for mastery. In Greenville, South Carolina, for example, business interests quickly coalesced to provide black citizens with a playground and community center in the mid-1920s as the supply of cheap labor dwindled. White resident Thomas Parker explained, "In Greenville, business men took no active interest [in the black citizenry] until they commenced to feel the pinch of migration." Industrial plants that employed large numbers of black workers, Ernest T. Attwell observed, "recognized the needs of their colored employees for wholesome recreation opportunities" not coincidentally during the very years when the threat of losing their labor seemed most acute.⁸⁴ The prevalence of such instances of soft diplomacy, as opposed to brutal repression on the one hand or fundamental negotiation on the other, helps explain why a place such as Greenwreath could be seen as an asset rather than a liability by local whites invested in the racial status quo. A "Negro park," which in another time and place could be deemed a nuisance that inflated black laborers with dangerous pretensions, could under different circumstances be seen as the perfect tonic for blacks' desire for a taste of modernity, as an antidote to the stultifying conditions of rural life, and as a device that kept many black workers from running toward the nearest train station and saved planters from scrambling to fill their

⁸² Daniel, *Breaking the Land*, 12. The "flexible and locally peculiar" social boundaries that characterized the twentieth-century rural South, Melissa Walker argues, were both a reflection and an instrument of whites' economic control. See Walker, "Shifting Boundaries: Race Relations in the Rural Jim Crow South," in Hurt, ed., *African American Life in the Rural South*, 81-107 (quotation on 83).

⁸³ Tannenbaum, *Darker Phases of the South*, 169.

⁸⁴ Jeffrey J. Pilz, "The Beginnings of Organized Play for Black America: E. T. Attwell and the PRAA," *Journal of Negro History*, 70 (Summer-Autumn 1985), 59-72 (quotations on 68).

fields the following spring.⁸⁵ Hortense Powdermaker found among some of her white southern informants a belief "that 'it pays' to keep the Negroes feeling friendly." Pleasure, Powdermaker concluded, "alternates with . . . fear. The two methods are not incompatible, and probably most Whites implicitly accept both: it pays to keep them content, by certain minor bounties and indulgences, and at the same time to keep them intimidated."⁸⁶

The Lewis brothers did not share these concerns. They were mere caretakers—not cultivators—of the family's historic plantation, and thus the "Negro park" bore, in their minds, only negative implications. "The question is not whether the park is run in an orderly way," Ivey insisted, "but whether running an amusement park for negroes on the Greenwreath farm will or will not affect the value of the place."⁸⁷ Value, to Ivey Lewis, was measured not in immediate returns but rather in the respect that local families accorded the Foreman name. "With farming what it is[,] I do not know whether the white[s] will eventually move out and into the towns," he commented. The land surrounding the Greenwreath plantation—in his mind "a good neighborhood, with large farms run by white people"—could potentially witness a white exodus and the breakup of the old plantations into small, black-owned farms. To his eye, "the maintenance of a public resort for negroes would be a distinct step in that direction and would ultimately bring about or at least hasten a condition which will make the whole property and neighborhood less desirable." "The neighborhood is a good one, and if agriculture ever does come back the farm will command a good price," he added.⁸⁸ Though personal racism undoubtedly informed Ivey's views on the "Negro park," his ardent opposition reflected the cold calculations of a large landowner engaged

⁸⁵ Similarly, in South Africa's gold mining industry in the 1940s, labor shortages caused by urban migration compelled executives to encourage "activities that were ostensibly more suited to a rural based workforce," using "recreation as a means of maintaining social control over [a] largely migrant labour force." Cecile Badenhorst and Charles Mather contend in their study of these tactics that "the industry's involvement in leisure reflected the Chamber of Mines' attempt to balance direct coercion with subtler methods of control." One analyst recommended introducing the kinds of sports and leisure that promote "self-forgetfulness and escape from the cares of strain, enjoyment of physical powers and a sense of achievement, and . . . the spirit of fellowship." Cecile Badenhorst and Charles Mather, "Tribal Recreation and Recreating Tribalism: Culture, Leisure, and Social Control on South Africa's Gold Mines, 1940-1950," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 23 (September 1997), 473-89 (first, second, and third quotations on 474; fourth quotation on 485).

⁸⁶ Hortense Powdermaker, *After Freedom: A Cultural Study in the Deep South* (New York, 1939), 27.

⁸⁷ Ivey Lewis to Kemp Plummer Lewis, October 15, 1928, Folder 260, Lewis Papers.

⁸⁸ Ivey Lewis to Dick Lewis, February 20, 1929, Folder 272, Lewis Papers.

in a game of position on a shifting rural landscape. The familiar forms of power and coercion that sustained the rural South's agricultural economy were unraveling, while new markets in commercial and residential real estate were showing signs of emerging. At this uncertain crossroads, issues that previously might have merited little concern and only mild opposition, such as the provision of recreational outlets for black farm laborers, suddenly seemed to assume potentially dramatic, and lasting, ramifications. Determined, above all, to maintain his family's power and status in perpetuity, Ivey chose to play it safe.

On this chessboard Greenwreath's neighbors did not enjoy the luxury of seeing several moves ahead. From their position on the ground, they formed a distinctly different understanding of the short- and long-term implications of black leisure space and commercial activity. For example, Sallie Southall Cotten, the matriarch of the neighboring plantation Cottendale, indicated to Moore that "she thought it was a good thing to have such a place in the community for the colored people."⁸⁹ Greenville attorney John Hill Paylor warned the Lewises that they were "making a mistake not to allow the negroes to use" the park: "The people as a rule in the community favor it. In fact none of them have been molested or bothered in any way by the park being operated during the past for negroes. I am also convinced that the operation of the park for colored people does not in any manner tend to decrease the valuation of your lands or effect your holdings in any way."⁹⁰

While Ivey zealously advanced his racist views through his teaching and research, for his landholdings and other investments he and his brothers were more inclined to gauge the changing political economy of race rather than attempt to dictate its trajectory at the risk of personal financial loss. Flummoxed by the written protests of local whites and eager to know if these persons did in fact speak for the community as a whole, the Lewises hired Greenville lawyer J. B. James to investigate the resort, determine whether it was "objectionable to the white people of that community," and assess whether it threatened to "depreciate the value of the farm."⁹¹ In his report James indicated his familiarity with the controversy, related the unanimous opinion of the "property owners in that section of the county . . . that

⁸⁹ W. H. Moore to Kemp Plummer Lewis, November 10, 1928, Folder 262, Lewis Papers.

⁹⁰ Kemp Plummer Lewis to Ivey Lewis, July 22, 1929, Folder 289, Lewis Papers; John Hill Paylor to Kemp Plummer Lewis, July 6, 1929, Folder 288, Lewis Papers (quotations).

⁹¹ Ivey Lewis to Kemp Plummer Lewis, October 15, 1928, Folder 260, Lewis Papers; Kemp Plummer Lewis to J. B. James, October 20, 1928, Folder 259, Lewis Papers (quotations).

the park be operated" for African Americans, and noted the extent to which concern had spread to the upper echelons of local society. "I recall very well that a few of the prominent men at Falkland signed it [the petition]," he mentioned. As both a Pitt County attorney familiar with the circumstances leading to the community's defense of the African American resort and a white person sympathetic to the qualms of the Lewis brothers and any other similarly situated large landholder, James "cautiously worded" his report and hesitated to render judgment on the park's financial ramifications. "It is rather hard for me to advise," James began, "but only to furnish you with the report that I have." He found no objection to the park and heard only "some little complaint about the conduct on the public road occasioned by the colored population visiting this resort."⁹² The Lewises concluded that James's findings necessitated a definitive stance against the African American park. "It is true we have nothing to do with the misbehavior of the negroes on the road, but at the same time I cannot help feeling that it hurts the neighborhood to have that sort of thing going on," Kemp commented.⁹³

The Lewis brothers' decision to force Moore to resume a whites-only policy ironically had a detrimental effect, in the short term, on both the park's reputation and the types of activities its guests pursued. Compelled to sever his ties with Hopkins and the parties of black families and church groups who frequented the park in 1927 and 1928, Moore, left with no other options, pandered to whites' desire for more illicit pleasures and provided a site for sex, gambling, and alcohol consumption. Forsaking his original intention to maintain a "high class resort," Moore instead succumbed to the late Richard Henry Lewis's fears that "the resort would be of a lower class."⁹⁴ By the summer of 1929, Moore's wife, Susie, who was dubious of the venture from the start, had become so horrified by the den of iniquity her husband had helped create that she surreptitiously penned a letter to Kemp Lewis, without her husband's knowledge, begging him to reconsider the decision. "People who have money are not going to such a place when they can go to much better," she began. As a result,

the people who patronize it are not what I consider they should be. . . . I do not like the way it is used by white people as I do not believe in . . . sneaking in what you do and I must say first the class of people that go there and ever will are that kind. I would a thousand times

⁹² J. B. James to Kemp Plummer Lewis, November 2, 1928, Folder 262, Lewis Papers.

⁹³ Kemp Plummer Lewis to J. B. James, April 19, 1929, Folder 277, Lewis Papers.

⁹⁴ Ivey Lewis to Dick Lewis, February 20, 1929, Folder 272, Lewis Papers.

rather the colored people have it entirely . . . then I think that the class of white people would know they would have to stay away or the public know. . . . I would rather see it swept from the face of the earth than fraternized by white people. The negroes give no trouble and seemed to have more innocent amusements than the white.⁹⁵

Dismissed from his place of business, Nep Hopkins did not return quietly to Farmville. Instead, he threatened litigation against Moore for violating the terms of their contract. Hopkins's pressure compelled Moore to again beg the Lewis brothers to reconsider their previous decision. Perhaps out of sheer annoyance at the extended nature of the conflict, in July 1929 Kemp told Moore that the Lewises would permit Moore to lease the facility "to the negroes for . . . 1929" in order to "avoid a law suit," but that at the end of the year the place must resume its segregated policy permanently.⁹⁶ Just months into its second run as a white resort, Greenwreath was once again a Negro resort.

Despite this somewhat favorable outcome, Moore's financial woes worsened. By December 1929, as a disastrous season for tobacco farmers compounded his losses from the resort, Moore began to fall behind on his rent and, presumably, his debts to area merchants and suppliers. The Lewis brothers found themselves in a quandary. Having contributed so much to Moore's desperate state, they were reluctant to press him for the full rent, lest he simply break the contract and flee the farm. Considering the dire conditions of other farmers in Pitt County that winter, the Lewises knew that, in that event, they would be unable to find a tenant for the following year and would be forced to pay taxes on land for which they had received nothing in return. As a compromise, Lewis and Moore agreed to offer Hopkins the opportunity to remain as manager of the resort, while requiring him to serve only white guests.⁹⁷ Such an arrangement was not unusual. Black small-business owners served white southerners in various capacities, as barbers, restaurateurs, caterers, saloonkeepers, and hotel operators. From the 1930s until Hopkins's retirement in the 1960s, Nep's Place (as Greenwreath Park came to be known) was a place of rendezvous for white men from Greenville and a favorite destination for groups such as Greenville's Hines Insurance Agency, the United States Fidelity and Guaranty Company, and the Pitt County Bar Association, among others.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Mrs. W. H. Moore to Kemp Plummer Lewis, July 4, 1929, Folder 287, Lewis Papers.

⁹⁶ Kemp Plummer Lewis to W. H. Moore, n.d. [July 1929], Folder 288, Lewis Papers.

⁹⁷ W. H. Moore to Kemp Plummer Lewis, December 17, 1929, Folder 303, Lewis Papers.

⁹⁸ On the groups who frequented Nep's Place in the 1950s, see Correspondence, 1890–March 1953, Box 1, and Minutes and Membership Records, 1943–1956, Box 2, Pitt County Bar Association Papers #124 (East Carolina Manuscript Collection).

The Greenwreath property never became the promising site for residential real estate development that the Lewis brothers had once envisioned. Following Hopkins's retirement in the early 1960s, Greenwreath Park experienced a long descent into ignominy and decrepitude, slipping into the hands of different, increasingly shadowy, groups and individuals. Sometime in the 1960s, Mack Bunting, the purported Vice Grand Wizard of the local Ku Klux Klan, purchased the resort and renamed it the .007 Club. The former Nep's Place became a retreat for white supremacists and neo-Nazis. One visitor recalled that World War II weaponry, including German helmets and Nazi memorabilia, decorated the walls. In the 1980s ownership changed again; this time, local residents recall, an African American reopened the place as a country disco joint called the B. J. W. Club. After two years, however, the disco folded, and the facility was abandoned.⁹⁹ Meanwhile, the Greenwreath plantation home was listed on the National Register of Historic Places and was fully restored and structurally renovated. The home, with its double piazza and surrounded by well-manicured hedges, stands out along a quiet stretch of highway.¹⁰⁰

As seen through the authoritative, competitive, and collaborative actions of elite white landowners, local white farmers and merchants, and an entrepreneurial black businessman, land use and its regulation were woven into the fabric of rural life and constitutive of race and class relations. In the 1920s, as the rural South experienced the first stages of a long decline in agricultural production and the ripple effects of an emergent Sun Belt economy, the leisure activities of working African Americans and, more important, the location of black leisure space came to play an important role in the Jim Crow political economy. For individuals like Moore and Hopkins, a "Negro park" presented new opportunities to profit from black laborers (and from the land). For their clientele, such a resort offered not only the prospect of pleasure and relief, a chance to lay one's burdens down, but also, and more fundamentally, a new arena of cultural self-definition and a means of social empowerment. To the Lewis brothers, a "Negro park" constituted an affront to their authority over the land and, by extension, their class status. Through determining acceptable uses of

⁹⁹ John Lawrence, interview by the author, November 8, 2008 (notes in author's possession); Woody Wooten, interview by the author, December 10, 2008 (notes in author's possession).

¹⁰⁰ National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form for Greenwreath/Foreman House, online at <http://www.hpo.ncdcr.gov/nr/PT0044.pdf>. A photograph of the restored house is available online at <http://pittcountyhistoricalsociety.com/natreg--B.html>.

their land and asserting their power over the fortunes of persons who lived and worked on it, landowners like the Lewises articulated their place in the Jim Crow hierarchy and reminded white tenants, merchants, and small landowners of theirs.

The story of Greenwreath is the history of the rural South at a crossroads and an example of the remaking of race that accompanied the reshaping of rural economies. It is also a history of land and leisure and of the contests for power and struggles for self-determination that took place in leisure space. These are stories often told in isolation. This article sketches out a different model for thinking about race and leisure in southern history, one that recognizes politics and cultures but is grounded—literally and figuratively—in the land.