

# Highway Expansion and Landscape Change in East Tennessee

by  
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U. S. Highway 321 meets Interstate 40 near the economically troubled town of Newport, Tennessee.<sup>1</sup> A short cut through the decaying downtown avoids the congested interstate interchange and the expected cluster of fast food joints and chain hotels. Several stoplights and a bone-jarring ride over two railroad tracks later, Highway 321 crosses the Pigeon Forge River and narrows as it winds northeastward along the periphery of the Great Valley of East Tennessee. On a clear day, the rounded, forested Smoky Mountains are visible to the east, although the curvy, hilly, and narrow road (often without shoulders) is not conducive to landscape appreciation.

Only a few tiny crossroad towns sit between Newport (population 7,242), county seat of Cocke County, and Greeneville (population 15,198), county seat of Greene County. The 25-mile drive between these cities takes at least 30 minutes on the mostly serpentine road. For many years, tobacco and corn patches, beef cattle, and a few dairying operations were common on both sides of the road (Figure 2).

However, amidst the worn but well-kept farmhouses and unpainted wood barns that line the road are a growing number of shiny new houses and mobile homes, many on five to twenty acre lots. People occupy most of these new structures, but seasonal residents inhabit a noticeable number too.

Two landscapes are visible in this transect of East Tennessee and each tells observers much about the past and potential future of the region. The dominant one is the traditional landscape of small-scale family agriculture where people live on and earn a living from the land. However, the secondary landscape constructed by lifestyle migrants and business interests emphasizes economic progress and is rapidly influencing the place personality of the region. Recent plans to expand U.S. Highway 321 from a winding, narrow two-lane road into a four-lane divided highway have exacerbated this divide as urban and suburban residents, recently moved retirees, and small-scale, long-term farming families have reacted to the construction in vastly different manners.

Coupled with changes to national tobacco policy, the highway project has undermined the region's historic cultural landscape while promoting increased accessibility and economic development. Like other American regions, East Tennessee has evolved into a location where residents compete to either shape a modernized landscape of progress and technological efficiency or maintain a predominantly agricultural landscape in hopes of supporting a greater degree of traditional place identity.

## Tradition

Abundant water supplies, fertile soil, and readily available timber attracted Native people to the southern Appalachians. Early Mississippians lived and farmed in the region's floodplains before European contact. After Hernando de Soto explored the Pigeon and French Broad river systems of present-day East Tennessee in 1540, disease and famine dispersed the surviving Mississippians throughout the area. More recently, the Overhill

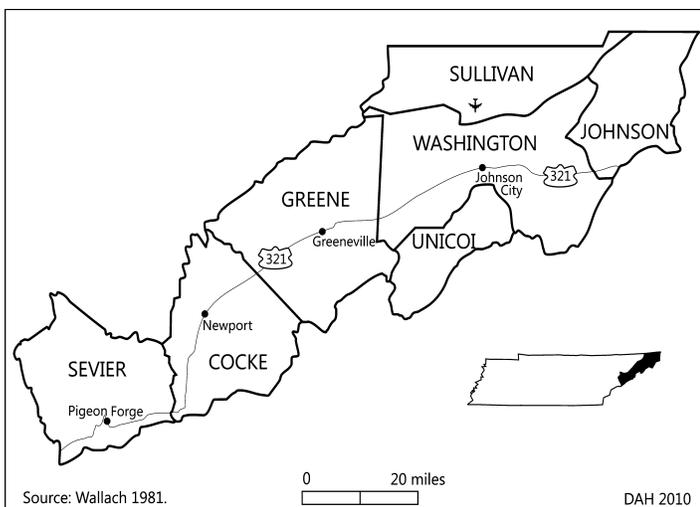


Figure 1: Location of the U.S. Highway 321 corridor in East Tennessee. Map by author.



Figure 2: Great Valley of East Tennessee landscape in Cocke County. Photo by author, 2006.

Cherokee lived, farmed, and hunted in the forests and river valleys of the region before their removal to Indian Territory beginning in the 1820s (Dykeman 1955; Davis 2000; Williams 2002).

In the 1770s, Euro-Americans, particularly Scotch-Irish and Pennsylvania Germans, began to settle the Valley of East Tennessee as they pushed over the ridges of the Appalachians on the Wilderness Road and followed the longitudinal valley southwestward. After arriving in East Tennessee, these new occupants created small communities like Greeneville and claimed small farms of several hundred acres or less, keeping much of their acreage in forest (Dykeman 1955; Davis 2000). Although mountainous land was not economically viable, valley acreage—even though it was rolling instead of flat—offered multiple agricultural options. Farmers grew crops including corn, oats, rye, and wheat alongside cattle herds, although most agriculture was subsistence in nature (Dykeman 1955; Davis 2000). By 1830, settlers had completed the majority of their initial frontier settlement. Diversified small-scale farming dominated the economy of the area until the 1880s when commercial logging and mining expanded the regional economic base (Wallach 1991; Davis 2000).

As the economy of East Tennessee slowly evolved, the region developed a reputation as an isolated and infrequently changing area. Until the 1820s the Great Valley was “land-locked and mountain-bound,” lacking easy road and water connections with agricultural markets to the

east across the Appalachians or to the Mississippi River Valley to the west (Williams 2002, 147). The remote location of East Tennessee continued to restrict economic development throughout the nineteenth century. Still, some residents of the region worked to overcome the geographic limitations of the area while other locals embraced their isolation. As one historian argued, two worlds emerged in East Tennessee. A small group of wealthy urban business owners and a few commercial farmers pushed for economic expansion to create additional linkages with the regional and national economy while most rural residents ignored efforts at economic development and practiced subsistence agriculture and economic self-sufficiency (Hsiung 1997).

Only one agricultural activity, however, became the “culture-defining crop” for several generations of the region’s residents (Wallach 1991, 72). Farmers had grown limited amounts of dark flue-cured tobacco since the initial Euro-American settlement of East Tennessee. After the Civil War, the regional silt-loam soils derived from limestone favored specialization in burley tobacco (Durand and Bird 1950; Dykeman 1955; Hart and Mather 1961). Beginning in the 1920s burley tobacco acreage dramatically expanded in East Tennessee as demand for cigarettes increased after World War I (Durand and Bird 1950; Wallach 1981; Hart and Chestang 1996)

Subsistence farmers who had not previously grown tobacco began to plant the crop while others increased their tobacco

acreage (Durand and Bird 1950). More farmers acquired the specialized knowledge required for tobacco and then passed it from generation to generation. East Tennessee quickly cemented its role as core of the state’s burley growing and processing. The University of Tennessee Extension Service established a tobacco experiment farm in Greene County and the largest tobacco market in the state, with 15 tobacco warehouses by 1950, emerged in Greeneville (Durand and Bird 1950; Dykeman 1955). By 1950, more than 70 percent of East Tennessee farms grew tobacco (Durand and Bird 1950).

Limited, inexpensive infrastructure and high profit margins negated the downside of tobacco farming—the intensive year-round hand labor required to grow the crop. Cash-strapped family farmers could simply make more money from burley production than from dairy cattle, beef cattle, or other crops. However, because of the exceptional labor demands of tobacco and the region’s rolling topography, farm sizes were small and farmers grew the crop in small patches rotated frequently to preserve soil nutrients. Typically, a family could only work five to seven acres of tobacco without hiring additional labor (Hart and Chestang 1996). Many farmers cultivated a much smaller acreage. Small patches with green linear rows of tobacco and unpainted wooden tobacco barns needed for air curing the crop to a golden brown in the fall became ubiquitous features on the rolling terrain of the Great Valley (Figure 4). Surrounding the small, orderly tobacco patches



*Figure 3: Tobacco acreage in Greene County. Patches of this size were common throughout the region from the 1920s until the end of federal tobacco price supports in 2004. Photo by author, 1995.*



*Figure 4: Cut tobacco air curing in an unpainted wooden barn in Greene County. Farmers will transport the golden brown tobacco to a Greeneville warehouse for sale at auction in late fall. Photo by author, 1997.*



*Figure 5: A newly developed subdivision fronting U.S. 321 north of Parrottsville in Cocke County. Lifestyle migrants and retirees seek the amenities listed on the sign, increasing the population of tiny Parrottsville and other East Tennessee communities and rural areas. Photo by author, 2003.*

were seemingly disorganized fields (often lying fallow) and woodlands on acreage too steep for agriculture.

The federal quota and price support system created by the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933 (and subsequent legislation) preserved this landscape. Thanks to federal regulation, the only way to grow tobacco beginning in 1933 was to purchase or lease land assigned a quota that allowed for a specific number of pounds of tobacco to be grown. In exchange, the federal government guaranteed a minimum payment for the crop through the Burley Stabilization Corporation in an attempt to balance supply and demand for tobacco (Durand and Bird 1950; Birdsall 2001). Warehouses in Greeneville stored tobacco until inspectors graded the crop and auctioneers sold it to the highest bidder, typically cigarette companies who used burley in all forms of tobacco products except cigars (Hart and Mather 1961).

Thanks to price supports, the federal government kept the price of tobacco artificially high. Economic stability resulted and the region's tobacco landscape changed slowly.

Not surprisingly, visitors to East Tennessee regularly noted the ubiquitous small family farms and their agricultural patch landscapes. While researching Southern cultural-agricultural islands in the early 1940s, Walter Kollmorgen (1941) found a distinctive cluster of approximately 200 Pennsylvania German families between Newport and Greeneville. Migrating to the Valley of East Tennessee around 1800, these families constructed a reputation for self-sufficiency, thrift, stability, and for growing high-quality tobacco (Kollmorgen 1941). Several decades later, John Fraser Hart (1977) discussed the patternless and random nature of agricultural land use in East Tennessee and southern Appalachia. Although regional agricultural

decision making and land rotation confounded many outsiders, Hart noted one constant—"tiny tobacco patches" planted on "more or less level land" (Hart 1977, 148). For more than one hundred years amidst the rolling hills of the region, small family tobacco farms were the foundation of the traditional cultural landscape of East Tennessee.

#### *Progress*

As Paul Starrs and John Wright observe, "growth is the universal solvent of historic cultural landscapes" (1995, 433). For generations, economic and population growth in East Tennessee was slow and traditional agricultural landscapes provided regional continuity. Even as lifestyle refugees seeking improved quality of life in a scenic location, seasonal residents, and real estate speculators transformed neighboring western North Carolina in the

1970s and 1980s, East Tennessee remained insulated from major change (Wallach 1981). However, beginning in the early 1990s, newcomers brought differing landscape perspectives to East Tennessee. Drawn to the dramatic mountain vistas, moderate climate, inexpensive cost of living, and small-town quality of life in the region, a steady influx of outsiders from New Jersey, New York, Florida and other East Coast states began migrating to East Tennessee in increased numbers. Other visitors who enjoyed vacations to the region purchased rural property to hold for retirement, as land increasingly became a non-agricultural commodity. These lifestyle-seekers only sporadically visited, waiting to sell their overpriced suburban housing elsewhere upon retirement when they planned to relocate to East Tennessee and construct their dream hilltop home. Part of a larger process transforming rural north Georgia and the western Carolinas at the same time (see Hart and Morgan 1995), newcomers constructed new non-farm residences along the main highways of East Tennessee, particularly U.S. 321. Although population change was not explosive as in other American regions like the Mountain West, this incremental population growth greatly influenced East Tennessee.

In particular, Greeneville, the largest community in the two-county area, began to recruit retirees and lifestyle migrants who sought a respite from a more hectic, stressful urban lifestyle. By the mid-1990s, national publications including *The 100 Best Small Towns in America*, *America's Most Charming Towns & Villages*, and *The 50 Best Small Southern Towns* began to feature Greeneville (see Crampton 1993; Sweitzer and Fields 2001; Brown 2003). Typically, these publications highlighted Greeneville's historic downtown district, year-round art and cultural festivals, Smoky Mountain views, affordable housing, and inexpensive land prices for hobby farmers. An influx of migrants seeking to live on, but not have a livelihood dependent on, the land followed. Although some outsiders settled in Greeneville, many sought rural locations with amenities including mountain views, river access, and city utilities in southern Greene County or northern Cocke County, creating quasi-urban nodes in a previously rural landscape.

Between 1990 and 2008 population increase in Greene County far outpaced growth within the Greeneville city limits thanks to the influx of more than 8,000

new residents (TDS 2001; USCB 2009). While current residents generally viewed these transplants as good neighbors, they believed that not all newcomers were interested in strengthening the traditional sense of community in the region. Long-time residents perceived some newcomers as wanting to remake and enhance their new locale, reshaping their new landscape to be more convenient and offer amenities they had become accustomed to in their old hometown. Yet, they were here to stay. As one experienced farmer said with a hint of sarcasm, "if you bring a tour bus of northerners here and they see the mountains, you can't ever run them off."

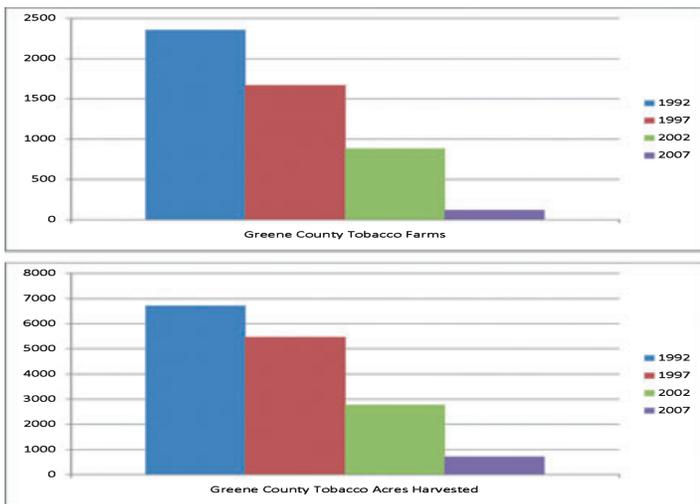
Dramatic agricultural change influenced the region at the same time in movement was creating a new population geography. Thanks to a multi-billion dollar settlement between major cigarette companies and forty-six states, traditional quota and price support systems for tobacco ended in 2004. Federal officials established the National Tobacco Growers Settlement Trust to ease this transition, although uncertainty about the future permeated the region. The Burley Stabilization Corporation began conducting burley auctions in 2005 without the security of federal price supports and with reduced volume of sales. Only large-scale farmers growing the highest quality tobacco maintained hopes of future profitability and observers declared small-scale family tobacco farmers "an endangered species" (Hurley 2000, A1). One family tobacco farmer succinctly summarized his uncertain future. He stated, "I've never seen anything change this fast in my life, and I don't think any of us ever dreamed of seeing this happen to a crop and a marketing system that hasn't changed all that much in a hundred years" (Hurley 2001). Another added, "a way of life that we've always known is ending" (Hurley 2004).

In 2009, new federal regulation of tobacco products through the Food and Drug Administration increased uncertainty about the future viability of the crop. As recently as the late 1990s, tobacco was the leading cash crop in Tennessee with more than 1,600 tobacco farms in Greene County growing more than 5,400 acres of the crop (Hurley 1999; Hurley 2009; USDA 2007; Yancey 2000). Today, experts estimate only 50 to 75 tobacco farms operate in the county, growing less than 700 acres of tobacco as many family farmers have shifted acreage to alternative crops including alfalfa, corn, and soybeans (Hurley 2009; USDA 2007).

As in other traditional tobacco growing regions, former tobacco farmers now struggle to invest in new machinery and infrastructure for more stable crops they hope will offer high per acre returns as tobacco did in its prime (Hart and Chestang 1996). Other farmers have surrendered, selling their land for housing and other economic development projects.

At the same time these changes were buffeting East Tennessee, state and regional officials advanced long-standing plans to transform U.S. Highway 321 through Greene and Cocke counties from a winding, narrow two-lane road into a four-lane divided highway with 12-foot traffic lanes and shoulders, a 48-foot depressed median, and a minimum 250-foot right-of-way (Figure 7). Designated an "Urgent Need Highway" by the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT), engineers designed the road to accommodate 40,000 vehicles a day driving 70 miles per hour (CTR 2003). This proposal was part of a larger six-section, 450 million dollar project originally designed to improve the transportation spine connecting the Tri-Cities Regional Airport north of Johnson City with Pigeon Forge near Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Normally, rural road construction evokes minimal debate and incites few emotional exchanges. Instead, the Highway 321 project became symbolic of the struggle to either shape a modernized landscape of progress and technological efficiency or maintain a predominantly agricultural landscape with a greater degree of traditional place personality. The new population geography of East Tennessee complicated the historic division between urban pro-economic development, pro-tourism advocates and the many rural residents who devalued attempts to link East Tennessee with the national economy, particularly as the importance of tobacco declined (see Hsiung 1997).

The expansion of Highway 321 was part of a larger national trend that established, as J. B. Jackson named them, auto-vernacular landscapes (1997). Designed to promote geographical mobility by accommodating automobiles at all costs, auto-vernacular landscapes replaced agro-vernacular landscapes that promoted stability and responded to the needs of people, not machines (Jackson 1997, 152-153). Roads in agro-vernacular landscapes connected unique places instead of generic locations, were slowly traveled, and allowed social interaction between neighbors and travelers (Snow 1967; Raitz 1998).



**Figure 6:** Declining Greene County, Tennessee tobacco farms and tobacco acres harvested, 1992-2007. Source: United States Department of Agriculture.



**Figure 7:** U.S. Highway 321 before construction. Locals considered this sharp curve near the small community of Salem in Cocke County to be particularly dangerous. Photo by author, 2003.

Auto-vernacular roads were comfortable for travelers and efficient for moving goods but decreased regional solidarity and destroyed past geographies (Relph 1976). As J. Todd Snow stated, in an era of hyper-mobility “the New Road starts everywhere and leads nowhere” as it radically changes the surrounding natural landscape, transforms traditional settlement patterns, and divorces people from the land (1967, 14).

Many recently relocated lifestyle refugees living in Greeneville and pro-business entities were vocal in their support of new road construction. Proponents advocated increased safety, the ability to handle additional truck traffic, reduced travel time to the Tri-Cities Regional Airport, and the need to promote a progressive economic image to outsiders as reasons to expand the highway (Yancey 1998b). As a transplanted resident nebulously argued while supporting the project, “if we’re not moving forward, we’re standing still” (Yancey 1998a). Another road supporter referenced the notion of progress when she argued better roads mean progress in general because “if the pilgrims—when they landed on the big rock—hadn’t built a road, where would we be now?” (Yancey 1999d).

The argument that the new road would boost the regional economy by expanding the tax base as new businesses and industry relocated to the highway was regularly repeated by politicians and economic leaders in Greeneville, including the group Citizens for Continued Progress (Yancey 1998c, 1998e, 1999a). Along with pro-business entities including two Greeneville-based trucking companies Forward Air Corporation and Landair

Corporation, Citizens for Continued Progress argued that enhanced accessibility and future economic growth for industries and businesses had more value than road construction through, what they depicted, primarily undeveloped agricultural land (Yancey 1998e). Greene and Cocke county political leaders also referenced the early 1990s conversion of U.S. Highway 23 (now further improved and designated Interstate 26) in Unicoi County, Tennessee from a winding two-lane road to a high-speed, four-lane highway as a model for the Highway 321 project. The transformation of Highway 23 increased tourism, augmented truck traffic, facilitated relocation of business to the corridor, and infused lifestyle migrants into the surrounding area (Brown 2000). Many pro-road advocates envisioned the same economic progress along a dramatically improved Highway 321.

Many long-time residents viewed changes to Highway 321 as a threat to their traditional rural lifeways. These feelings were particularly strong in southern Greene County where opposition grew quickly. A coalition of family farmers, conservatives, and libertarians emerged with the grassroots organization Citizens for Sensible Roads leading the anti-road campaign. Critics of the four-lane highway argued that road expansion was unneeded as only several thousand vehicles used the road each day and prohibitively expensive when compared to the costs of straightening and widening the existing road. Additional concerns included future unplanned growth and strip commercial development along the highway, alteration of the

region’s unique landscape, obliteration of several thousand acres of productive farmland, and destruction of several dozen homes (Yancey 1998a, 1998b, 1998c, 1998e, 2002). In other words, the new road would irreversibly alter the region’s quality of life while destroying homes and segmenting multi-generational family farms into less useful parcels. One Greene County native who opted to return to the area after college graduation stated that East Tennessee was special to her family. She bluntly added, “I like it here and don’t want it to change so some people can get to the Tri-Cities Airport fifteen minutes faster.”

Some recent lifestyle migrants, particularly those who settled on rural acreage tracts in southern Greene or northern Cocke counties, joined long-time family farmers in expressing strong opposition to the road project. As one retiree from Connecticut remarked, road expansion threatened the rural lifestyle and dramatic scenery that initially attracted him to the region (Yancey 1998b). Another retiree who relocated from New Jersey believed that the new road would “destroy” many family farms and “one of the most scenic routes in the county” (Yancey 1998b). Repeatedly, residents opposing the road discussed the need to preserve the natural landscape of East Tennessee, protect family farms, and avoid future commercial strip development and high-density sprawl along the proposed highway corridor (Yancey 1998d, 1999b, 1999e). A retiree who relocated from Georgia because of the region’s rural quality of life lamented that “the whole complexion of

the area will change" after road construction (Yancey 1999e, A6).

After a rush of campaigning and predictions of a landslide vote in support of road expansion, an August 1998 non-binding referendum brought the issue to voters in Greene County. By a one vote margin—6,093 to 6,092—the road proposal was defeated. The narrow margin concealed the extreme divide within Greene County. Overwhelmingly, urban residents in Greeneville and neighboring Tusculum supported improvements to U.S. 321 while rural inhabitants, particularly in the southern and northern precincts of Greene County, strongly rejected the proposal (GCEC 1998).

After the vote, politicians repeatedly stated that the expansion of Highway 321 was so important to East Tennessee that TDOT would construct the road over the objection of Greene County residents. These announcements quickly squashed the euphoria felt by the anti-road coalition (Yancey 1999e). A subsequent decision by the Cocke County Commission to unanimously support U.S. 321 construction also influenced the project. Although Cocke County never took the issue to voters, politicians frequently cited the County Commission decision to negate the result of the Greene County referendum (Yancey 1999a).

While the road project moved forward, it did so at a dramatically reduced

pace (Figure 8). Surveying, engineering studies, and road design continued as planned, but right-of-way acquisition and road construction were delayed between five and ten years depending on the section of roadway. During this postponement, a sense of resignation permeated the anti-road movement even as protesters continued to organize "speakouts" criticizing the project, circulate petitions against construction, and attend public forums hosted by TDOT. In 2001, anti-road supporters were successful in lobbying the Greene County Commission to defeat a resolution supporting a section of road construction in southern Greene County (Yancey 2001). While the vote was only symbolic and did not influence the completion of the project, widespread discontent remained.

Although opponents continued to protest the scope of the road project, residents who felt betrayed by the political process frequently evoked the issues of morality and government accountability. For example, a Citizens for Sensible Roads member argued that the local and state government response to the Greene County referendum was "arrogant, tyrannical and communistic" as the decision of the majority was ignored and anti-road voices were marginalized (Yancey 1999c, A6). However, a sense of fatalism gripped many people directly affected by the project as they put life plans on hold until TDOT

designated the exact route and informed residents of the impact to their property. As one informant glumly stated, "they're going to take it [my property] for the road, so they might as well take it now and get it over with." Another anti-road advocate simply lamented, "you can't stop progress" (Yancey 2002).

The Highway 321 project also received criticism from professional planners. The Center for Transportation Research (CTR) at the University of Tennessee questioned many aspects of the highway plan in a report on the Greene County section of the road. In particular, the CTR argued that TDOT claims of safety problems with the current highway and the future economic impact of the new highway were unsubstantiated (CTR 2003). The CTR also advised that the current highway plan was inappropriate for future low-volume, local traffic demand and the new road would lead to widespread commercial strip development along the route (2003). Finally, the report stated that TDOT refused to incorporate "meaningful public involvement" into the proposed project and was indifferent to the position of anti-road campaigners and the results of the Greene County referendum (CTR 2003, 19). Even though CTR reviewers scored every aspect of the TDOT plan unsatisfactorily, construction continued, albeit at a slower pace.

The deliberate pace of construction also left road advocates with additional time to influence the process. Local politicians continued to claim that a "broad base of support for the project" was driving the project to completion (Yancey 2003). In particular, government entities in Cocke County and Newport continued to support Highway 321 expansion. Newport officials sought construction in order to promote development in the economically stagnating town (Popeil 2000). As well, Greeneville business interests continued to lobby TDOT, arguing that the roadway should be finished as soon as possible since crews had completed sections of the new highway in Cocke County in 2008 (Morais 2008).

As construction slowly realigns and widens Highway 321 across Greene and Cocke counties, the traditional identity of the region changes (Figure 9). Residents drive the new road at previously unattainable speeds, farmers scale-back their operations or seek to lease nearby acreage to replace land fragmented or lost due to road construction, and even long-time visitors to the region struggle to navigate due



*Figure 8: A new and improved U.S. Highway 321 under construction in Cocke County. This section bisected the farm of a resident who had recently invested several million dollars upgrading his poultry barns (visible on the far right side of the image). Photo by author, 2006.*



**Figure 9:** A completed section of U.S. Highway 321 in northern Coker County. Engineers designed the road to move 40,000 vehicles a day at 70 miles per hour (although the posted speed limit is 55 miles per hour). Photo by author, 2008.



**Figure 10:** After the conclusion of federal tobacco price supports, farmers have replaced tobacco with crops including alfalfa, corn and soybeans. Some farmers, including this operator in Greene County, have sought non-farm employment and only harvest hay several times per year. Photo by author, 2008.

to the removal of landmarks along the old road. Residents continue to subdivide prime agricultural land into multiple-acre residential tracts, particularly when family farming matriarchs and patriarchs pass away or when economic stress forces farm-

ers to sell parcels to raise needed cash. Increasing demand has pushed land prices to \$10,000 or more an acre in many locations. Even though selling small tracts of land rarely disrupts farm operations (see Hart 1997), the newly fractured landscape

is a visible reminder of the changes affecting the region.

Although very limited commercial development has accompanied road construction to this point, changing agricultural land uses present a dramatic alteration to the region's place personality. Where tobacco patches once grew, farmers graze a few cows and cut hay several times per year (Figure 10). Coupled with changes to national tobacco policy, road construction has further narrowed the profit margin of dozens of family farmers astride Highway 321 in Greene and Coker counties, driving many farmers to pick up part-time non-farm work (Yancey 1999e). Even farmers not directly impacted by the road project are concerned about the future impact upon small, family farms in the region. As one farmer surmised, "they [local politicians and TDOT] seem to want to have a commercial area and to push back farmers from the road."

Rural residents of Greene and Coker counties understand that the completion of the Highway 321 project will impose future changes upon the region. A young Greene County part-time farmer in the Highway 321 corridor envisions houses on his multi-generation family farm within fifty years. Although he does not want to see it that way, he surmised that "no one young can afford to farm" because of exorbitant land prices, the diminished profit margin for tobacco, and the hardships and uncertainties inherent in farming. A veteran farmer offered a similar prediction. He believes that after the completion of the new road there will be no large farms of fifty acres or more in the region, only house lots of twenty acres or less. His wife, looking from their front porch at three new encroaching ten-acre hobby farms lamented, "forty years ago I never would have expected to see it this way."

### Conclusions

Progress—or maybe even the threat of impending change—is a source of anxiety for Americans as growth undermines many historic cultural landscapes. As Edward Relph (1976) discusses, observers tend to describe present-day landscapes in negative terms, furthering the idea that past times were inherently better than the present. Even though all landscapes contain elements of both tradition and progress, perhaps people resent that once change transforms historic landscapes they are lost forever. Until Americans balance

their desire for progress with an appreciation for traditional landscapes, tension and conflict will result as these conflicting ideals meet at the local scale.

Nevertheless, the landscapes of tradition and progress tell observers much about East Tennessee. Residents seeking to maintain a landscape of tradition reject increased mobility and the fragmentation of communities that can accompany progress. They question the cost of progress. The promoters of change place their unwavering faith in expanded economic development as a panacea for the region. Improved roads, they say, will reshape the landscape, increase land values, offer rural residents easier access to amenities, and reduce the region's economic dependence upon agriculture. The resolution of these landscape perspectives will shape East Tennessee into the foreseeable future. If not careful, a road that a large portion of the region's residents do not want or need will undermine another American historic cultural landscape. While it is impossible to freeze dynamic landscapes and preserve them forever, observers should question decisions that accelerate the decline of historic landscapes. This is particularly true as additional urban to rural migration increases potential conflict over land use in multiple American regions. In this regard, East Tennessee is not unique. Lifestyle refugees and retirees are also transforming rural and small town geographies throughout the Mountain West, Desert Southwest, and Upland South as they seek scenic locations with an inexpensive quality of life and access to cultural amenities (see Starrs and Wright 1995; Brown and Glasgow 2008).

In-migration and economic development are remaking traditional economic and social geographies in East Tennessee—too quickly for many long-time residents and quality of life advocates who have attempted to cultivate an intimate relationship with their landscape. As one family farming informant stated, “we need good roads, but some people like the land better.” East Tennessee will never be the same and while that is inevitable due to transportation and agricultural changes, one can wish that it was not so.

**Note:** Information not cited and quotations not attributed to a specific source were gathered from multiple informal discussions and field work between 1995 and 2008. I want to acknowledge the tobacco farmers and residents of Greene and Cocke counties who patiently answered my questions and discussed the changes influencing their lives and communities.

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