

Unlocking Greenbottom history through photographs

Old photographs are often useful tools in interpreting and understanding history. They yield details not included in other sources.

The graphic artifact often provides corroborative documentation, and it becomes a more valuable resource when it can be accurately dated. It can confirm a structure's existence at a given time, and frequently shows dimensions, building styles, and materials.

Photographs are usually the most accessible visual materials, and with the advent of the Kodak box camera in the 1890s, photography became a popular hobby. Homes became a primary subject.

Recently, Mrs. Gladys Wing provided the Huntington District Corps of Engineers with a photo of Green Bottom, taken in December 1906. Mrs. Wing is the granddaughter of the late Judge Elliot Northcott who

once owned the Albert Gallatin Jenkins home and a portion of Green Bottom.

The print may be the earli-



est accurately dated photograph of the Jenkins homestead. It shows several interesting features confirming several historical and archeological interpretations and altering others.

The Jenkins house is located on the left side of the print. The house faces the river with its back to the highway. In 1906, a porch extended across

the backside.

A detached kitchen was reported to have been located on the right side of the house, and a brick law office was said to have been on the left. Historical accounts said both stood until the flood of 1913 swept them away.

The photograph taken in 1906 reveals only two buildings on the right and no evidence of a structure on the left. The backyard appears to be fenced.

The access road leading from the Ohio River Road is in the same place as it is today.

On right side of the photo is building complex including a barn and machine shop. The area was recorded as a historic archeological site (46CB96) by the Corps of Engineers.

Historical reference had been made to the Green Bottom Swamp or Pond Gut, as it was called.

The 1906 photograph indi-



cates the swamp consisted of agricultural fields beginning near the Jenkins house, extending well beyond the barn and machine shop complex.

In studying the photograph closely, a series of alternating light and dark lines can be seen in the fields. The lines represent the drainage system

installed in the late 1800s which turned the swamp area into prime farm land.

It was not until the late 1920s and early 1930s, when the land was no longer intensively farmed, that the area began to revert back to the swamp land.

The 1906 Green Bottom photograph has given new interpretation to the site, proving that visual documents are critical to understanding the history of a home.

It has helped supplement, clarify, and correct written record.