There Will Be Floods:
A Material Remembrance of Presidents Island, Memphis

by

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Abstract

In the wash of the Mississippi River just south of Memphis, Tennessee, lies President's Island, the largest island in the Mississippi. It is now no longer an island, as it was annexed in 1947 by a growing Memphis in search of land for aggressive industrial expansion. It was connected by a dredged land bridge that rendered a bizarre polygonal piece of the island immune to the regular flooding that haunts the River. Within a few years, the last permanent resident of the island had left, leaving behind a rich history literally buried in the soil.

This island, known now only as an industrial park and sometime hunting ground, was at times a place of refuge for formerly enslaved people during the Civil War; a penal farm administered by the first leader of the KKK; a vice-filled island full of gamblers, cockfighters, and moonshiners; a constellation of sharecropping plots; a famous picnicking ground for Memphis residents; a dangerous shoreline pockmarked by wrecked steamboats; and the home to a quarantine station for those fleeing the devastating 1878 yellow fever epidemic. This history is now no longer present on the island, consigned only to fragmented archives throughout Memphis and the United States.

This project seeks to reify the archive of this island's history into its shifting soil, to build a new agricultural cooperative on the island that operates as a kind of living memorial to those who came before, and to begin a process of reparations through land reclamation on the part of the descendants of those families who once labored there. A loose collection, or 'family', of spaces for work and production are arrayed across the site, marking it with some combination of formal intention and ecological determinism. These spaces produce goods -- food, timber, water, land, and knowledge -- to be shared between them in common. The day-by-day, season-by-season, and flood-by-flood cycles of agrarian life structure this semi-nomadic community as it moves and shifts across the landscape, building and unbuilding itself, and suggests a way to occupy ecologically and historically contested landscapes with a kind of permanent impermanence.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

A HISTORY

Just outside of Memphis, Tennessee, in the middle of the Mississippi River, is President's Island, a sandy, forested island, so named because it was once the largest island in the river. It is now not even an island. In 1947, it was attached to the Tennessee side of the river by dredging activities to create safe harbor for shipping and high ground for an industrial park. Now, it is a semi-private natural preserve and hunting ground with a small postage stamp of heavy industrial buildings along the southeast edge of the island-turned-peninsula.

But this relatively benign present conceals a rich and complicated history for the low spot of mud deposited here by the vagaries of the Mississippi River. The island itself is a recent addition to the river, in a geological timescale. Islands form and disintegrate capriciously in the Mississippi, as sediment is deposited and picked up in turn by seasonal floods. President's Island is built of stream-transported alluvium of recent transportation. There is no clear answer for why the Mississippi, in its serpentine logic, chose this place for its largest island, but old steamboat men once claimed that a submerged chain of rocks spanned the eastern fork of the River as it passed the Island.[1] It may be that the presence of rocks in the area coerced suspended sediment and mud to accrete here, and not elsewhere, leading in time to an island spanning miles in each direction. But there are no final answers.

Before western inhabitation, there is no record of settlement on this island. It is possible that it was at one time occupied by Middle Mississippian mound builders, as two mounds have been discovered on the Eastern shore of the Mississippi very nearby President's Island. This method of building was common in the Mississippi River Valley, in part because it provided relative security from floodwater and from the ever-shifting Mississippi itself. It first entered the written record as a brief and apocryphal aside in the journals of Jacques Marquette, a French priest who came south

1 "Presidents Island Was Built By River," The Commercial Appeal, December 27, 1952.

Figure 1: Presidents Island, Pre-History

Figure 2: Presidents Island, The Mound-builders

in an expedition on the Mississippi River in 1673.[2] It was described as Island 45, "a noble island [...]"[3] in a pocket guide to the Mississippi River entitled Cramer's Navigator, published in the first decade of the 19th century.[4] The Chickasaw Nation, one of the descendants of the mound-builders, controlled this area prior to the Jackson Purchase of 1818, a negotiation conducted for the United States by Tennessee resident and future president Andrew Jackson. Before then, the Chickasaw had likely treated most of Shelby County as more of a hunting ground than a residence.[5] Soon after this purchase, Memphis was founded. Andrew Jackson, who had transacted the land purchase, apparently purchased and set up a farm on a portion of the island. He did not himself take up permanent residence on the island; instead, he contracted with Irishman Paddy Meagher, a future tavern-owning Memphian, to manage the farm. [6] Meagher and his daughter, Sally, managed the farm in Jackson's absence.

2 James Phelan, History of Tennessee: The Making of a State (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and company), 6.

3 The Commercial Appeal, January 19, 1947.

4 Zadok Cramer, The Navigator: Containing Directions for Navigating the Monongahela, Alleghany, Ohio, and Mississippi Rivers: With an Ample Account of These Much Admired Waters...and a Concise Description of Their Towns...: To Which Is Added, an Appendix Containing an Account of Louisiana, and of the Missouri and Columbia Rivers, 6th Ed.(Pittsburgh: Zadok Cramer, and Sold at His Bookstore, 1808), 102.

5 Goodspeed's history of Hamilton, Knox, and Shelby Counties of Tennessee (Nashville, TN: C. and R. Elder Booksellers, 1974), 799

6 Federal Writers' Project of the Work Projects Administration for the State of Tennessee, Tennessee: A Guide to the State (New York: The Viking Press, 1939), 220.

Sally's presence on the island apparently ensured Jackson's regular visitations to his island farm.[7] A 1902 paper in the American Historical Magazine published the recollections of Memucan Hunt Howard, one of Shelby County's earliest residents, who recalled "a man named Robards" who had settled President's Island around 1820.[8] A few years later, the German naturalist and explorer, Duke Paul Wilhelm of Wurttemberg, encountered President's Island during his transit of the Mississippi River, and noted that "[i]t is one of the largest in the Mississippi, being more than twelve miles long and three to four miles wide. Its banks, however, are flat, despite its great size, and the ground, subject to inundation by the river, is swampy and overhung with dense virgin forest."[9] Charles Sealsfield, an Austrian journalist, wrote, in a description of his voyage on the Mississippi:

"[...] we saw the mouth of the Wolf river; the beautiful President's island, ten miles long, which with its colossal forests presents an imposing sight, with several small islands in its train. Among these is the Battle island, taking its name from a battle fought here between two Kentuckians, who compelled their captain to land them, and returned after half an hour, the one with his nose bitten off, the other with his eyes scooped out their sockets!"[10]

Between the time of Jackson and Robards' settlements and the Civil War, few records

7 Robert Talley, "Unsolved Mystery: Who Named It Presidents Island, When and Why?," The Commercial Appeal, January 19, 1947.

8 "RECOLLECTIONS OF MEMUCAN HUNT HOWARD," The American Historical Magazine 7, no. 1 (1902): 58.

9 Paul William, Duke of Wuttemberg, Travels in North America, 1822-24 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974), 144-45.

10 Charles Sealsfield, The Americans as they are: described in a tour through the valley of the Mississippi (London: Hurst, Chance, 1828), 112.

exist that refer to President's Island, except as a regular hazard for steamboats traversing the Mississippi River.[1112]

In May 1863, faced with the prospect of caring for and protecting many of the approximately 275,000 formerly enslaved refugees of the Civil War, General Ulysses S. Grant assigned Chaplain John Eaton to the task of establishing a camp. One such camp, the Dixie Camp, was established on President's Island, one of four in the Memphis region.[13] It was an advantageous position for these so-called contraband camps, as it could be easily protected by nearby Fort Pickering. Many such communities were built on islands and isolated peninsulas across the South, both in the Mississippi River and along coastlines, as they were more easily defensible and isolated.[14] The reason for this isolation was clear, as many white Southerners seemed to take particular offense at Eaton's mission. One Presbyterian minister remarked, "I don't conceive that any Southern man is under the least moral obligation to help the negro-stealers plan how they shall take care of them."[15] Eaton survived one assassination attempt, losing an associate in the process.[16] But the task of living on this low, sandy island in the Mississippi was also a difficult one. In a letter to superiors in the Freedmen's Bureau, one district official from Memphis wrote:

"The huts on President's Island have been located without the slightest regard to regularity, convenience or neatness. The streets, where there are any, are crooked and narrow and yards and fences are so placed as to render any respectable system of policing impractical. All this must be changed. It

11 Memphis Eagle, October 24, 1846

12 Memphis Enquirer, March 22, 1839

13 Paul David Phillips, "Education of Blacks in Tennessee During Reconstruction, 1865-1870," Tennessee Historical Quarterly 46, no. 2 (1987): 95.

14 Joel W. Shinault, "Camp life of contrabands and freedmen, 1861-1865," Master's thesis, Atlanta University, 1979, ETD Collection for AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library (3127), 6.

15 John Cimprich, "Slavery's End in Tennessee, 1861-1865," Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2009, 48-49

16 John Cimprich, "Slavery's End in Tennessee, 1861-1865," Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2009, 48

will be found impossible to educate the race to habits of neatness, thrift and industry amid such surroundings."[17]

Even at this early stage in the island's inhabitation, the physical form of the settlement and its remoteness were proving inimical to oversight, control, and regularization. Nevertheless, a police force run by a black resident named Stephen Wright, sprang up to fill the need for justice.[18]

The island, a refuge for more and more freedpeople from the surrounding areas of Memphis, suffered from protracted periods of rationing when national authorities limited supplies to contraband camps in 1863 and 1864.[19] With building materials and resources low, the island turned into a half-settlement, half-military encampment, with donated military tents and hastily-built log cabins forming the most regular shelter many of the island's new residents could enjoy.[20] At one point, nearly 1000 able-bodied young men left the island, mustered into the Union army, many never returning to families and wives they had left behind on President's Island. The island also played host to the first orphanage within the constellation of Contraband Camps in the Mid-South, run by 'Aunt Maria', a black resident of the island[21], with assistance from Eliza Mitchell, a white volunteer for the Freedmen's Bureau from the North. The orphanage housed fifty children in the best available building on the island.[22]

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17 National Archives, Letters sent by the Memphis District Offices of the Superintendent, the Rental Agent and the Subassistant Commissioner, June 30, 1865-March 21, 1868, Microfilm T-142, Roll 17, 82.

18 Chandra Manning, Troubled Refuge: Struggling for Freedom in the Civil War (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016), 132.

19 John Cimprich, "Slavery's End in Tennessee, 1861-1865," Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2009, 57

20 John Cimprich, "Slavery's End in Tennessee, 1861-1865," Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2009, 56-57

21 John Eaton, Report of the General Superintendent of Freedmen, Department of the Tennessee and State of Arkansas, for 1864 (Memphis: s.n., 1865), 88.

22 John Eaton and Ethel Osgood Mason, Grant, Lincoln, and the Freedmen; Reminiscences of the Civil War with Special Reference to the Work for the Contrabands and Freedmen of the Mississippi Valley (New York [etc.]: Longmans, Green, and Co.,

Figure 3: Presidents Island, Camp Dixie

Despite these pressures, critical social elements for permanent settlements developed: a church, a school, and a hospital were built, providing solace, education, and rudimentary healthcare to the rapidly fluctuating populations of freedpeople.[23] President's Island was a preferred location for refugees from other endangered Contraband Camps,[24] especially the most indigent, because of its isolation, size, and proximity to Fort Pickering, just across the Tennessee Chute. Levi Coffin, a Northern Quaker and one of the key figures in the Underground Railroad, visited a "large and interesting" religious meeting held in the shade of the massive trees on the island.[25] The musical lineage on the island at this time was rich. Songs recorded on the island spoke of the release to eternal paradise that death offered, as in "Brother, Guide Me Home," a song documented by a man named William Allen in "a praisehouse at the "Contraband Camp" on President's Island near Memphis in September, 1864."[26]

"When William Allen visited President's Island one Sunday, he joined freedpeople

1907), 201-202.

23 Chandra Manning, Troubled Refuge: Struggling for Freedom in the Civil War (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016), 134

24 John Cimprich, "Slavery's End in Tennessee, 1861-1865," Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2009, 50

25 Levi Coffin, Reminiscences of Levi Coffin, the Reputed President of the Underground Railroad; Being a Brief History of the Labors of a Lifetime in Behalf of the Slave, with the Stories of Numerous Fugitives, Who Gained Their Freedom through His Instrumentality, and Many Other Incidents (Cincinnati: Western Tract Society, 1876), 638.

26 William Allen, Charles Ware, and Lucy Garrison, Slave Songs of the United States (New York: A. Simpson &, 1867), 86.

in worship and listened to them sing a hym about both death and survival. The hymn was fitting, because camps at Memphis held both death and survival in intricate choreography, neither one able to predominate over the other permanently, and neither disappearing, either."[27]

Residents on the island kept common gardens and worked in the island's sawmill, providing food for themselves and lumber for their own construction projects and for the use of the Army on the mainland.[28]

During these critical wartime years, death rates on the island and across many other contraband camps were astronomically high[29] due both to the poor living conditions on the island and the Union's decision to stop sending supplies to camps. One anecdote from the island concerns the twenty-six white soldiers detailed to the island, whose negligence earned them the ire of one of their inspecting officers. "'Here is no such amount of work as you white men alone ought to have shown, if you had been employed by the month. You are very comfortable; but here are these people in a terrible condition.' And I referred to the place where we had found a dead child that morning – just four stakes stuck up, and blankets thrown over them."[30] A soldier's cemetery was established on the south end of the island and a black civilian's grave-

27 Manning, Troubled Refuge, 134.

28 Joseph Warren, Extracts from Reports of Superintendents of Freedmen. 2d Series - June, 1864 (Vicksburg, Miss., 1864), 37-38.

29 John Cimprich, "Slavery's End in Tennessee, 1861-1865," Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2009, 57

30 Ira Berlin, Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation 1861-1867: Selected from the Holdings of the National Archives of the United States. Series 1..Vol.2. The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor: The Upper South, 494.

yard on the North side[31], but both have long since been claimed by the vagaries of the Mississippi.[32]

In 1863 and 1864, John Eaton, the chaplain in charge of the Department of Freedmen camps, made efforts to promote General Ulysses S. Grant's vision of a "'Negro Paradise' – places for black agrarian self-determination – in two places: Davis Bend, Mississippi, and President's Island, Tennessee.[33] The Davis Bend experiment was an extraordinary but short-lived success.[34] President's Island suffered from a lack of follow-through, funding, and devastating floods in the growing season of 1863, and was never able to fulfill its promise.[35]

Even at this early stage, Eaton identified the imposition of a lessee system, whereby private interests managed the land that newly freed blacks worked, as a threat to the enterprise[36], but a resumption of managerial authority by the Freedmen's Bureau under the guidance of General N.J.T. Dana reinvigorated the program, especially at Davis Bend, for at least a little while longer.[37] Apparently, between 1863 and 1864, the control of the land and farming operations on President's Island was taken over by the Treasury Department, until Dana's intervention.[38] His order in full made it clear that control of President's Island was vital for the operations of the Freedmen's Bureau:

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31 Alisea McLeod, "Island Residents Confirmed," President's Island, June 22, 2012, https://presidentsisland.blogspot.com/2012/06/island-residents-confirmed.html

32 Federal Writers' Project of the Work Projects Administration for the State of Tennessee, Tennessee: A Guide to the State (New York: The Viking Press, 1939) 228

33 Eaton, Grant, Lincoln, and the Freedmen," 165.

34 Janet Sharp Hermann, The Pursuit of a Dream (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981) v

35 Gary M. Fink and Merl Elwyn Reed, Race, Class, and Community in Southern Labor History (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994), 103

36 Col. John Eaton Jr. to Maj. Gen. N.J.T. Dana, February 24, 1865, filed as C-115 1865, Letters Received, ser. 1920, Civil Affairs, Dept. of the Gulf, RG 393.

37 Eaton, Grant, Lincoln, and the Freedmen, 165.

38 Alisea Williams McLeod, "Eaton-Bailey-Williams Freedpeople's Transcription Project: an Update," HASTAC, June 21, 2012.

"The exigencies of the service rendering it absolutely indispensable, President's Island, in the Mississippi River below Memphis, Tennessee, is hereby reserved and set apart for the purposes of the Freedmen's Department, and is placed under the exclusive control of Col. John Eaton, Jr., General Superintendent of Freedmen, and such officers as he may place in charge of camps, farms, mills or other interests. All white persons not directly connected with the military service will be required to leave the Island before the first day of January, 1865, and after that date no white person will be allowed to land on any part of the same without written permission so to do, either from these Head-Quarters, the Head-Quarters District of West Tennessee, the General Superintendent of Freedmen, or the Provost Marshal General of Freedmen, and none other."[39]

It was this executive order which extended the life of the agricultural experiment on President's Island. Pursuant to this goal, "[...] the federal government purchased the property from G.W. Seward and George Wells in December 1864 for four thousand dollars"[40] Soon after, the land was divided into family plots, or 'home farms', to promote subsistence farming for the black residents of the island, and to support timber harvesting to support the war effort and for building projects in Memphis. Unfortunately, however, the spring flood season in the early months of 1865 was particularly devastating. Flooding forced the evacuation of many of the new home farms on President's Island and precluded planting and timber gathering in the critical spring months. Disease, another side effect of the spring floods, devastated the already impoverished population.[41] Anthropological evidence from a Black cemetery discovered on the island demonstrates a high rate of trauma and pathology, indicative of childhood stress. One of the small and admittedly unrepresentative sample of seven skeletons also showed a cranial gunshot wound. Curiously, the children in the cemetery were buried with special artifacts – coins,

39 Eaton, Report of the General Superintendent of Freedmen, 37.
40 Gary M. Fink and Merl Elwyn Reed, Race, Class, and Community in Southern Labor History (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994), 102.
41 Ibid.

Figure 4: Presidents Island, Penal Servitude

clay, and glass beads – not typical of Black cemeteries in the area.[42] The powers that be claimed that the failure of the President's Island experiment to be not due to lack of effort, but the decision to stop trying was firmly in the hands of the Freedmen's Bureau.[43] In the end, Eaton's long-term plans for large-scale cooperative farming at President's Island fell to bureaucratic mismanagement, conflicts over administration, and the re-enfranchisement of white Southern property owners.[44]

As the war dragged on, the military authorities governing Memphis increasingly viewed President's Island as a place to warehouse all blacks not mustered into regiments, viewing this separation as necessary both for the moral uprightness of the black troops at the nearby military encampment and to minimize distractions for the married soldiers whose wives and children lived on the island.[4546] Captain Thomas A. Walker "[...] reported in a January 1865 letter that "the people are unwilling to be moved, and will give no assistance themselves, but lock their doors, and run to their husbands in the various military organizations for protection—the husbands swear their families shall not be moved to the Island and in some instances have come out in arms to prevent it."[47] This activism apparently won

42 M. Marks and A. Kroman, "African-American Biohistory at President's Island, Tennessee," American Journal Of Physical Anthropology (2004): 142.

43 Fink, Race, Class, and Community, 102-103.

44 Rick Beard, "Grant's Contraband Conundrum," The New York Times, November 14, 2012.

45 Manning, Troubled Refuge, 133.

46 Shinault, "Camp life of contrabands and freedmen, 1861-1865" **PAGE#**

47 Kevin R. Hardwick, "'Your Old Father Abe Lincoln is Dead and Damned': Black Soldiers and the Memphis Race Riot of 1866," Journal of Social History (Fall 1993): 112.

some concessions from military authorities in Memphis, because an order was later issued which declared that all legitimately married black troops could present their marriage certificates to avoid their family's deportation to the island or elsewhere.[48]

President's Island also served as a safe rural place from which to draw supplies. In one extraordinary action, a nurse working in the Memphis hospitals named Mother Bickerdyke, hearing that the supply of milk and eggs in Memphis was low, begged a month's leave and rounded up 150 cows and 1000 chickens, which she installed at President's Island in the charge of the residents.[49]

The camp's status as refuge was solidified after the war in 1866, when the Memphis Riots, wherein gangs of white residents and policemen terrorized and killed black residents in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, likely drove more of its now-free African American urban residents to the comparatively safe shores of the island. The island, in the immediate aftermath of the Memphis Riots, also became a kind of safe haven for celebration for Memphis' black community. "On July 4, 1866, the black community celebrated the revival of freedom by marching in the city parade—against the wishes of the Irish-controlled city government, giving a picnic at Caldwell's Hall on 3rd Street, chartering the steamer R.M. Bishop for an outing on President's Island (old contraband camp Dixie), and presenting a dance at Dennison's Grove on Vance Street."[50] There is evidence that, during this transitional time, President's Island remained a farming community. One of the island's residents, Daniel Walker Williams, a former assistant to John

48 Barrington Walker, "'This is the White Man's Day': The Irish, White Racial Identity, and the 1865 Memphis Riots." Left History 5, no. 2 (1997): 32.

49 Mary Livermore, "Mother Bickerdyke," The Woman's Journal, July 31, 1886.

50 Bobby L. Lovett, "Memphis Riots: White Reaction to Blacks in Memphis, May 1865-July 1866," Tennessee Historical Quarterly 38, no. 1 (1979): 9-33.

Eaton, had experience in farming from his time as a slave in Virginia, and led the black farming efforts on the island from 1865 to at least 1879.[51]

The prematurely-ended efforts to establish a black farming community on the island eventually came to fruition after it, with bank and Freedmen's Bureau records indicating that at least three thousand souls lived on the island between 1865 and 1870. The community itself was not monolithic. "While President's Island is a diverse community in 1870, including recent immigrants from Denmark, Sweden, Ireland, England, and Italy, 79 percent of residents were African American, 70 percent of residents were farmers, and 83 percent of farmers were African Americans."[52]

The island at this time began to build its reputation as the most treacherous impediment in the Mississippi River. Engineers from the United States Army in 1875 had already begun plotting ways to improve navigation through the bend, with one report calling for extensive dredging and damming operations[53], a prescient recommendation, considering President Island's later history.

Also in 1875, General Nathan Bedford Forrest, a famed cavalry officer in the Confederate Army during the Civil War and the first Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, acquired the island and established a farm there in an attempt to build a source of income after several failed business ventures.[54] All reports indicate that the island's soil is legendarily rich, and as such it was well-suited for the cultivation of crops.[55] Forrest contracted with Shelby County, of which Memphis and President's Island are a part, to provide inmates from its prisons for slave-style farm labor.[56] In the spring of 1876, a newspaper reporter

51 McLeod, "Eaton-Bailey-Williams Freedpeople's Transcription Project."
52 McLeod, "Island Residents Confirmed." President's Island, June 22, 2012, https://presidentsisland.blogspot.com/2012/06/island-residents-confirmed.html
53 United States Army, Report of the Chief of Engineers, Vol. 2 (1875): 515-516
54 Jack Hurst, Nathan Bedford Forrest: A Biography (New York: A.A. Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 1993), 374
55 Talley, "Unsolved Mystery."
56 Hurst, 368.

visited the island and reported that 117 prisoners, including 60 black men and 18 black women, worked on the 800 cultivated acres Forrest had developed as a last-ditch scheme to regain wealth he had had before the war.[57] Forrest's penal colony was called "an admirably conducted institution"[58] by the author of the article, a Public Ledger correspondent, who had been tipped off that a grand jury was conducting a 'raid' on the island to spot-check its conditions. The complex, described from the water as having a "cosy [sic], inviting kind of look that is often irresistible"[59], consisted of an old fashioned double log house, a main apartment building, office, dining room, kitchen, bakery, laundry, and stable, enclosed by a strong fence. The conditions of the buildings were described as in "admirable"[60] condition and the prisoners as in excellent health and well-fed. It is not clear how much of this sudden review was staged and how much was written and conducted with true disinterest. The Public Ledger was described in an 1887 publication as a "conservatively Democratic"[61] paper, suggesting that its readers would not object to a rosy portrayal of their Rebel hero. The article notes that Forrest was acquainted with every single one of the grand jury members (as a Memphian, this may be expected of him) and the reporter seemed enamored by the "magnetism in his superb presence even in his shirt sleeves and slouch hat that impels obedience..."[62] This is the only extant record of conditions on the island under Forrest, and his contradictory record – both of a shameful massacre of black Union soldiers on his watch at Fort Pillow and his (possibly editorialized) attempts, in the period where he began to be held to account for the actions of the Ku Klux Klan, to strike a position as a racial moderate, points in different directions. Regardless, he managed, as so many of his fellow Southern gentry did after the Civil War, to profit from the free or undercompensated labor of subjugated black men

57 Hurst, 374.
58 Public Ledger, May 5, 1876.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
61 Goodspeed's history of Hamilton, Knox, and Shelby Counties of Tennessee (Nashville, TN: C. and R. Elder Booksellers, 1974), 906
62 Ibid.

and women, and was lauded for his shrewd business sense on President's Island.

It is likely that the unowned portion of the island, some 4500 acres, was lightly settled by those remnants of the refugees who had fled to the island during the Civil War and after the Memphis Riots. Forrest lived only for a few years longer, dying in 1877 to what many claimed was an illness brought on by the unhealthy atmosphere he lived in on the island.[63] About a month before his death, his cabin on President's Island and most of his letters, papers, and memorabilia burned in a structure fire.

On July 27, 1878, word reached Memphis that yellow fever had been found in New Orleans. On that same day, the mayor of Memphis ordered the re-occupation of a quarantine station on President's Island downstream of the city that had been originally been built in 1874 but was not used.[64] The island was seen as a gateway to Memphis, and an important bulwark against the encroachment of the disease from the south.[65] A cannon, presumably to enforce shipwide quarantines on the river, was placed at the quarantine station a few days later.[66] These preparations nowithstanding, a man ill with yellow fever escaped a quarantined steamboat outside of Memphis at the height of the summer and found his way to the restaurant of Kate Bionda, who soon after became the first of many victims of yellow fever in Memphis that summer.[67] The man was quarantined to President's Island, but the disease spread quickly, aided by the mosquitoes who thrived in the low, hot, marshy areas surrounding Memphis and the Mississippi River.

63 Tamara Williamson, "A history of President's Island from moonshiners to manufacturing," High Ground News, November 30, 2017.

64 G.B. Thornton, "Six Years' Sanitary Work in Memphis," Public Health Pap. Rep., 12 (1886): 117.

65 Joseph Shapiro, "Lessons from America's Tropical Epidemic," NPR, February 26, 2008.

66 John H. Ellis, Yellow Fever and Public Health in the New South (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), 42.

67 "1878: First victim of Memphis yellow-fever epidemic dies," This Day in History, History.com, https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/first-victim-of-memphis-yellow-fever-epidemic-dies (accessed***)

About half of Memphis' population of 50,000 evacuated the city within a week. Some fled to President's Island, which was more sparsely populated and operated as an effective quarantine.[68] But the human toll was devastating. In September, at the height of the epidemic, an average of 200 Memphians died every day. The first frost of the season, in October, tamped down the mosquito problem, but the damage was done, and it took many years for Memphis to fully recover from this epidemic. As a result of its extraordinary depopulation, the state government temporarily revoked its charter, paving the way for a municipal rebuilding led by the working-class whites and blacks who hadn't had the financial means to withdraw to a greater distance. Incidentally, it was also this municipal reorganization which ushered in one of the first modern sanitation systems in the United States, designed by George Waring, a sanitary engineer and appointee of the National Board of Health, setting up a sanitation department that would, in the 1960s, employ the black workers who went on strike in a galvanizing moment for the civil rights movement. The National Board of Health, in the immediate aftermath of the yellow fever epidemic, took federal control over the inspection station on President's Island,[69] and were invited back during the fever season in 1880 amid concerns that the epidemic could return.[70]

In that same year, 1878, the late Nathan Bedford Forrest's penal colony had passed into the hands of his son William Forrest, his wife Mary Forrest, and Ed Richardson, its original owner, who continued to run it as a penal farm. In that winter, the first complaints of cruel conditions at the President's Island prison plantation began, with an investigation reported as soon as January 30.[71] Continual reports of cruelty continued throughout the late 1870s and 1880s. In 1879, a grand jury investigation concluded "[t]he general treatment of the prisoners is disgraceful and inhuman, and unless some radical change can be prompt-

68 "Famed Owners, Infamous Activity Color Island's Past," Memphis Press-Scimitar, January 7, 1969

69 "Public Health Papers and Reports, Volume VIII," American Public Health Association, 1882.

70 Ellis, "Yellow Fever & Public Health in the New South," 119.

71 Memphis Daily Appeal, January 30, 1878.

ly inaugurated the whole work-house plan should be immediately abolished."[72] William Forrest claimed in reply that the grand jury's evidence was fabricated.[73] The next year, a report by Attorney General G.P.M. Turner confirmed the original report, saying "I think that a proper sense of justice and humanity demands that this cruel and inhuman barbarity stop [...] I earnestly, in the name of humanity, protest against continuing Presidents Island as a workhouse."[74] The county criminal court's judge ordered the prisoners returned to a traditional county prison while a full investigation was completed, to the protests and lawsuits of the attorneys representing the lessees of Forrest's plantation.[75][76]

A bevy of lawsuits alleging over one hundred thousand dollars in damages were brought by former inmates on the island against the Forrests and Richardson in 1880[77], but by 1881, William Forrest's legal efforts had prevailed and the county workhouse was re-opened. Another county court committee report found that conditions had improved in some senses – the food, for example, seemed to be better – but that the general treatment of Black prisoners, the conditions of their segregated living quarters, and the use of illegal corporal punishment against them, seemed to still be present.[78]

At the end of 1882, the contract with the plantation owners on President's Island ended, with a Shelby County's Legislative Council member stating that "he was tired of the whole matter."[79] Elsewhere, in the local paragraphs, the Memphis Daily Appeal lamented that "Presidents Island will no longer excite the distrust of tramps and vagabonds."[80] Local tramps and vagabonds, however, could keep their distrust.

72 Public Ledger, June 25, 1879.
73 Memphis Daily Appeal, January 22, 1879.
74 Memphis Daily Appeal, July 17, 1880.
75 Memphis Daily Appeal, July 18, 1880.
76 Memphis Daily Appeal, July 21, 1880.
77 Memphis Daily Appeal, August 10, 1880.
78 Memphis Daily Appeal, April 5, 1881.
79 Memphis Daily Appeal, December 29, 1882.
80 Ibid.

Faced only weeks later with the expense and difficulty of reabsorbing the hundreds of prisoners on President's Island into other county prisons, the County Court adopted a resolution to study the feasibility of appointing the county sheriff as superintendent of the prison and continuing its operation as a government workhouse.[81] The island became, in these years of abuse and coerced labor, a bogeyman for Shelby County prosecutors to use, and was referred to as if sentencing to the island was a kind of terrible exile. 'Sent to the Island' became shorthand for newspaper writers in this time for the full penalty of law.[82][83] Further complaints of mistreatment were lodged in 1888, but the county work camp continued its work for some time, until the practice of using forced prison labor was outlawed at the state level, much to the ire of the wealthy landowning families who had constructed a close simulacrum of the free labor they had once enjoyed.[84] The kind of work that happened at the work camp was largely the same labor enacted by blacks both when slavery was legal and when the Union Army paired freedpeople with the abandoned plantations of their former masters, with the Memphis Daily Appeal remarking that President's Island prison labor was well-adapted to the task of raising cotton.[85]

It is important to note that, even at the

81 Memphis Daily Appeal, January 10, 1883.

82 Memphis Daily Appeal, July 27, 1881.

83 Memphis Daily Appeal, August 9, 1881.

84 Michael P. Mills (2018). ARTICLE: DRY SEPTEMBER REVISITED. Mississippi Law Journal, 87, 339. "Janice Boatwright Adams, The Merideth and Boatwright Families (2006) (unpublished work) (on file with author). "The Swiftwater plantation was one of the many plantations owned by Col. Ed Richardson. At one time, the Swiftwater plantation was one of the largest cotton plantations in the world. One of Richardson's partners was General Nathan Bedford Forrest who ran Richardson's plantation on President's Island in Memphis. Richardson and Forrest used convicts leased from the State for a pittance to provide labor on their plantation. This practice continued until it was abolished by the fascist Governor James K. Vardaman, not out of any concern for the welfare of the prisoners, most of whom were black, but because he despised the elites who had benefited from this practice."

85 Memphis Daily Appeal, August 9, 1881.

Figure 5: Presidents Island, Sharecropping

time when the penal farm had its greatest population of inmate workers, the majority of the island remained a wilderness. Newspaper records regularly referred to President's Island as a sort of diluvian jungle paradise, covered in wildflowers[86] and, in summer months, with adventurous trespassing picnickers and "fast women and their friends".[87] It was frequently home to unauthorized excursions and picnics[88] and to clandestine fishing trips[89]. Indeed, the island became a kind of metaphor both of lush beauty and of hidden terror and danger. William Clark Falkner, a forebear and inspiration to the Mid-South author William Faulkner, used President's Island as a set of book-ends to his most famous work, White Rose of Memphis. Early in the story, the island brought steamboat passengers delight: "It was but a few moments until the boat passed round the bend below President's Island, and shut off from view the tall domes of the bluff city; but the fresh green foliage with which the tall trees were clothed presented a scene of beauty on which the beholders gazed with delight."[90] But by the end of the book, in the style of the classic Southern Gothic narrative, the body of a man driven to suicide was found floating at the head of the island.[91] It was at least once used for more nefarious purposes, as when the murdered body of George Noon, a prominent Memphis businessman, was discovered on the island. Though certainly a wilderness, the island was also partially cultivated by black farmers under the management of white landowners at this time. One of those landowners, W.S. Brown,

86 Public Ledger, July 5, 1883.
87 Memphis Daily Appeal, July 5, 1881.
88 Memphis Daily Appeal, July 12, 1881.
89 News-Scimitar, April 3, 1920.
90 William C. Falkner, The White Rose of Memphis, a Novel (New York: Coley Taylor, 1953), 20.
91 Ibid., 484.

brought in a 1897 Christmastime harvest of 17,000 watermelons, much to the delight of his local newspaper.[92]

The head of the island, known to river pilots to be part of one of the most treacherous stretches of the Mississippi River, caused many steamboats to wreck[9394] before modern navigational systems and the efforts of the United States Army Corps of Engineers made the passage much smoother. Indeed, at least one steamboat was decommissioned and left to sink into the mud at the head of President's Island.[95] As early as 1885, engineers with the Mississippi River Commission were already proposing the closure of the Tennessee Chute (the eastern branch of the Mississippi as it passes President's Island) by dikes, in order to improve the Memphis Reach and harbor.[96] As if to remind these engineers of the futility of predicting the river's changing course, the primary flow of the river switched by 1888, temporarily transforming the Tennessee Chute into the mighty Mississippi itself[97] and alerting the engineers to the possibility that the river could, at any time, switch back to the Arkansas side of President's Island and upset any long-term plans they had set in motion.[98] Even at this early time, island residents and Army engineers alike made incursions into the land in attempts

92 Sequachee Valley News, December 30, 1897.
93 News-Scimitar, February 2, 1919.
94 Carroll County Democrat, February 8, 1918.
95 Emma K. Meacham Collection, Memphis and Shelby County Archives, 63 (1927)
96 United States, Mississippi River Commission, Report of the Mississippi River Commission, United States War Department, Vol 2, Pt 2, (1885): 2772
97 United States, War Dept., Annual Report of the Secretary of War, Vol 2, Pt 4 (1888): 2517.
98 Ibid., 2520.

Figure 6: Presidents Island, The Floods

to stabilize it. George Butler, a riverboat pilot who lived on the island in the early 1900s, recalled to the Press-Scimitar in 1937 that, spotting a packetboat in flames and abandoned, floating past the island, he pushed the wreck to a weak point of the island to serve as a break wall.[99]

The mode of living for residents on the island would, from the turn of the century until well after the island's transformation and industrialization, remain the same: a living hard-won from the rich, silty island soil by black sharecropping families, with a constant awareness of the risk of floods and the necessity of retreat. In 1912, six hundred families, more or less permanent residents on the island, were forced to flee inland in the face of floodwaters which covered the surface of the island to the depth of one foot.[100] But these resilient families remained committed to the social structure of this bizarre and unlikely place, receiving R.A. Kirk as the Island's African Episcopal Methodist minister in 1913.[101]

It's isolated, remote recesses were also a place of refuge for moonshiners from the prying eyes of revenue officers, who nonetheless raided the island regularly.[102] President's Island was only one in an extensive network of isolated, densely forested islands up and down this section of the Mississippi River that played host to illicit moonshining activities.[103] These islands, difficult to reach and therefore perfect for moonshining, provided the riverine backbone of the booze trade for the Mid-South

99 Bob Mitchell, "President's Island," Memphis Press-Scimitar, November 2, 1937.
100 Columbia Herald, March 29, 1912.
101 Nashville Globe, December 12, 1913.
102 The Commercial Appeal, January 19, 1947.
103 Columbia Herald, November 14, 1913.

in the Prohibition era.[104] The stills on President's Island, whose smoke could be seen all the way from the Bluff City, was the primary provider of moonshine to the thirsty denizens of Beale Street.[105] It may be no coincidence that in 1919 a Memphis man by the name of Joe Sailors purchased 395 acres of President's Island from Captain J.A. Couch[106], only one year after running a gauntlet[107] of legal trouble[108] for violating the Reed Liquor Amendment[109] ; though he was ultimately acquitted in this initial case[110], he apparently continued to run into trouble for dry laws violations for several years[111]. This did nothing to decrease his stature, however. Sailors became known as the uncrowned king of President's Island, and ran a sharecropping plantation in the center of the island that by 1937 was home to three hundred Black men, women, and children. Sailors described the island as a kind of carefree paradise for himself, a place to escape his fussing wife and fish and hunt. Brick Woods, the manager of the plantation, was more blunt. "[I]t is a womanless paradise for white men."[112] As much as it can be believed, the Black families living on the land owned by Sailors

104 Covington Leader, December 12, 1920.
105 Margaret McKee and Fred Chisenhall, "Beale, Black and Blue: Life and Music on Black America's Main Street" (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 26.
106 News Scimitar, October 7, 1919.
107 News Scimitar, November 9, 1918.
108 News Scimitar, November 16, 1918.
109 News Scimitar, December 12, 1918.
110 News Scimitar, December 14, 1918.
111 Memphis Daily Appeal, April 21, 1922.
112 Mitchell, "President's Island."

were described as "happy and carefree."[113] One Black resident was quoted saying that, when services at the island church were held, "members come out of the bushes like bees out of a honeysuckle vine."[114] Only two years later, a Works Progress Administration history of the state of Tennessee described President's Island as home to small farms, primarily owned and operated by Black Memphians. It is not clear whether this description elides the state of labor relations on the island, as property records from 1911 indicate that a small number of large land-holders controlled the majority of the land on the island,[115] and an article suggesting future development on the island in 1944 referred to the island as being owned by 12 to 15 parties and home to five hundred Black families.[116] It is more likely that these small farms were tenant farms, leased in small sections, as was common in the day.

The island was also internationally known as a gamblers' paradise. It endured regular, though ultimately unsustainable, incursions from local law enforcement, who attempted to break up the roulette gambling and cockfighting that President's Island became known for among even Cuban and Mexican fighting cock owners.[117] The island's intractability notwithstanding, the police also managed to use the island in the pre-war times as a place to enforce a thuggish kind of justice, as when one night a gang of police and company supervisors found and beat Thomas Watkins, a black dockworker, labor organizer, and corporate bogeyman, for his attempts to organize black dockworkers at the downtown Memphis port.[118]

The blessing of President's Island as an agricultural paradise – its rich soil – derived from the same source as its curse: the ever-changing waters of the Mississippi.

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113 Ibid.

114 Ibid.

115 "Map of Shelby County, Tennessee," Memphis, Tenn.: The Memphis Abstract Co. 1911, Shelby County Archives.

116 Marcia Drennen, "President's Island a Deep-Sea Port?" Press-Scimitar, April 26, 1944, 10.

117 The Commercial Appeal, January 10, 1924.

118 Michael K. Honey, Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights: Organizing Memphis Workers (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 100.

Lying as it does, a flat muddy disk in the middle of the river, President's Island has benefited from the accumulation of some of the richest soil for agricultural land in the region. This may be why, despite all of the Mississippi's efforts to wash away the desperate human settlements on the island, humans kept returning in search of the extraordinary agricultural yields available to whoever could brave the floodwaters. Few of the island's white landowners lived there, however, and so the brunt of the cyclical retreating and rebuilding was shouldered by the black sharecroppers who lived in a small community on the island. Floods in 1916, 1927, and 1936[119] forced evacuations of the entire island until floodwaters subsided, when black families could look forward to assessing the damage and making repairs. The legacy of farming on President's Island was the legacy of farming in the New South: white landowners hosting black sharecropping families and profiting again from their cheap labor, but under a different economic schema.

In 1944, while the Second World War lumbered on, an enterprising businessman named R.M. Hammond from the Memphis Realty Company managed to interest a journalist at the Press-Scimitar with a roving interview discussing his theory that President's Island could be turned into a deep-sea port and industrial area after the war's conclusion. He was quoted saying:

"Why not develop the island with federal funds, city or county aid, or financing by an organization set up for that purpose? Build a retaining wall around the island. As the river bed is channeled, throw the pumpage on the island. Make it flood-proof. What if it would cost $10,000,000 or more? Waterfront property today is selling from $5000 an acre up. President's Island's 12,000 acres would be worth an estimated $60,000,000 if fully developed."[120]

Hammond died in the months after giving this interview, but his idea did not die with him. Frustrated by a lack of industrial sites on the Memphis riverfront, infamous Memphis boss E. H. Crump received a timely suggestion from Major General Max Ty-

119 Tamara Williamson, "A history of President's Island from moonshiners to manufacturing," High Ground News, November 30, 2017.
120 Drennen, "President's Island a Deep-Sea Port?" 10.

ler, who brought up the transformation of the Tennessee Chute[121], then the inactive branch of the Mississippi River on the east side of the island. It is impossible to tell whether Tyler's idea was formed by reading Hammond's interview, but it was his urging to Crump which spurred the project forward.[122] The Harbor Committee of the Memphis Chamber of Commerce first investigated Lake Ferguson, a harbor alongside an island similarly built from a defunct arm of the River.[123] In October, the Committee sent district engineer Col. Garner W. Miller on an riverboat inspection tour of the Tennessee Chute to assess the feasibility of building a dam at the north end of the Tennessee Chute and dredge-filling the surface of President's Island to make flood-proof land. [124] The organizers expected to seek funding from the federal government, which was at the time cash-poor from the enormous war effort but looking for opportunities to seize economic dominance in uncertain postwar times. The organizers expected the project to cost in the millions, but certainly less than Hammond's high-ball estimate of $10,000,000.[125] Miller was reportedly impressed with the possibility of turning the Chute into a deepwater harbor, and project organizers pressed on. By 1946, this estimate had increased to $17,200,000, by the time a construction authorization bill passed the House.[126]

Locally, the Tennessee Chute project was fueled by Crump, whose decades-long stranglehold on Memphis politics reached its zenith on President's Island, the cornerstone of his economic legacy. It was his continual pressure on the local and state level, supported by governmental and civic leaders from Memphis, that generated the

121 "Vast Project Was Only An Idea In 1945--Here Is How It Grew," The Commercial Appeal, July 26, 1947.

122 Bill Anderson, "Gigantic Center Of Industry Will Rise On Historic Island To Match Advance Of Memphis," The Commercial Appeal, December 4, 1948.

123 Ibid.

124 Marcia Drennen, "Island Industry a Hammond Idea," Press-Scimitar, October 10, 1945.

125 Ibid.

126 "Land Purchase Begins on President's Island," The Commercial Appeal, June 21, 1946.

will to see the project through.[127] By then, as Shelby County's political leader, he impressed on the Tennessee State Legislature the necessity of annexing the island, then an unincorporated part of Shelby County, into Memphis proper.[128] E. H. Crump, who had helped fuel his political takeover on the back of the votes of Blacks, some of whom he arranged to ferry over from President's Island, benefitted one last time by extracting raw political power from this island.[129] His death in 1954, in the very earliest stages of the project, meant that he never saw the full fruits of this effort. But even he could see the potential of the project, declaring that [w]ith the possible exception of the elimination of yellow fever [...] this is the greatest single thing that has ever been done for this community."[130]

At the earliest stages, the project had gathered significant federal support in the form of Senator John H. Overton of Louisiana, and Senator Kenneth McKellar of Tennessee. Overton was a powerful ally, holding a chairmanship of the Committee on Manufactures and seats on the Committee on Commerce and the Committee on Irrigation and Reclamation.[131] McKellar held even greater stature, as one of Tennessee's two senators, the President pro tempore of the Senate, and the chairman of the Senate Committee on Appropriations.[132] In time, the closed-off Tennessee Chute would come to be known as McKellar Lake, an homage to the powerful politician whose influence and support helped make the project possible. In October 1945, these two senators passed the Resolution directing the Chief of Army Engineers to conduct a study of

127 Robert Alan Sigafoos, Cotton Row to Beale Street : A Business History of Memphis (Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1979) 213.

128 Talley, "Unsolved Mystery: Who Named it Presidents Island, When and Why?"

129 Nic Vrettos, Personal conversation with author, October 1, 2018

130 Jim Cole, "From Moonshine Beginning, City's Heart Pumps Gold," Memphis Business Journal, October 31, 1989: 19.

131 United States, Congress, "OVERTON, John Holmes, (1875-1948)," Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=O000146 (accessed January 4, 2019).

132 United States, Congress, "McKELLAR, Kenneth Douglas (1869-1957)," Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=M000499 (accessed January 4, 2019).

the project.[133] The study proceeded successfully, and was approved at the state and federal level and before the House and Senate. The project was therefore included in a much larger bill, the Flood Control Act of 1946. In July of 1946, the Act was signed by President Harry Truman, but funding for the bill was later revealed to be much lower than would have allowed for the Chute project. In 1947, with the personal intervention of Senator Overton, Truman revised the budget to more than double appropriations for the "Lower Valley" section of the Flood Control Act of 1946, which contained appropriations for the Tennessee Chute project. On July 27, the day after Congress passed the appropriation act, construction was announced for the following Spring.[134]

But preparations, in the form of land purchasing, had already begun the year before. The city and county, through the army of the Memphis and Shelby County Real Estate Department, with specific focus on six large land-owners in the path of the new development.[135]

The project also spawned the Memphis and Shelby County Harbor and Port Commission, which was inaugurated in April of 1947 in anticipation of the passage of the Flood Control Act, with Frank Pidgeon (an industrialist), Abe Wurzburg (a businessman), Jack Carley (editorial writer for the Commercial Appeal), Fred Smith (a regional Greyhound Bus chairman), and Caffey Robertson, (a businessman) forming the commission.[136] The remnants of some of these founding commissioners still remains in the Jack Carley Causeway, which runs along the earthen dam built across the old Chute, and in the Frank C. Pidgeon Industrial Area, which encompasses the whole complex.[137]

133 "Vast Project Was Only An Idea In 1945—Here Is How It Grew," The Commercial Appeal, July 26, 1947.
134 Ibid.
135 "Land Purchase Begins on President's Island," The Commercial Appeal, June 21, 1946.
136 "Harbor Commission Officially Organized," The Commercial Appeal, April 30, 1947.
137 Paul Coppock, Memphis Sketches (Memphis: Friends of Memphis and Shelby County Libraries, 1976), 32.

There is an air of inevitability to the historical record of the Tennessee Chute project, but the project did not proceed without controversy. The consortium of interests arrayed in favor of the project described it as a multi-purpose one, which would assist in navigation and flood control as well as provide a deepwater harbor and upland industrial land for Memphis industry.[138] This was a necessary re-framing of the argument, as the mission-critical closure dam would require federal funding, which was more forthcoming for regional flood control than it was for grand economic expansions. Claims about the Chute project's flood control bona fides are questionable. The Tennessee Chute was an important natural flood relief mechanism, relieving about 30% of the excess flood flow during the catastrophic 1937 flood.[139] Damming it would remove this flood relief and increase pressure on the Arkansas levee across from President's Island and on the head of the island itself. Indeed, at times the Mississippi's main channel had been through the Tennessee Chute, most recently in 1904 and 1920.[140] This added pressure was naturally concerning to the lowland residents of Arkansas, whose only protection from the vagaries of the Mississippi was a massive earthen levee that traverses the western bank. This section of the Mississippi River hugs a series of bluffs on the eastern side of the river, which provide ironclad protection to downtown Memphis and its suburbs, but West Memphis and the pancake-flat lands around it have no such geological advantages. With anxious memories of the devastating floods which regularly inundated Arkansas before the completion of the levee, a group of concerned Crittenden County citizens traveled to Vicksburg, Mississippi, where Army engineers had constructed a scale model of this section of the Mississippi to test flood dynamics after the Tennessee Chute closure. Most of the Arkansas residents were unhappy with the results of the test, which showed a 'Project Design Flood' – a worst-case probable flood

138 Memphis Business, "$18 Million Tennessee Chute Project Will Start in 1948," Volume x, Number 4, August 13, 1947.
139 Alfred C. Andersson, "Huge Harbor Job in City's Front Yard," Memphis Press-Scimitar, October 8, 1948.
140 Ibid.

scenario – overtopping the Arkansas levee and flooding much of Crittenden County.[141] These Arkansas residents dismissed out of hand the argument that this project contained a flood control component. Instead, they saw it as another federal project that would aid Memphis alone.[142] The Mayor of West Memphis, a municipality across the river from Memphis in Arkansas, remarked, "[w]e're not going to let Memphis ruin us. We don't intend to let Memphis build an industrial site and flood us out."[143] Another West Memphis resident, former mayor William H. Hundhausen, noted in a moment of prescience that, since flood pressures would increase so dramatically, President's Island could be cut in half, returning it to its former bifurcation. "That might be good for us," he added.[144]

There was some discontent on the part of unincorporated Shelby County residents, who instinctively distrusted the influx of Northern investment and its focus on manufacturing and balked at the thought of a metropolitan area annexing rural farmland and replacing it with heavy industry.[145] This complaint was destined to fail, though. Crump's stranglehold on Memphis power, his county government seat notwithstanding, greased the wheels of the annexation push in the Tennessee legislature and ensured that Shelby County's future would be an industrial one.

Disgruntled Shelby County agrarians were not the only parties who questioned the annexation of the land of President's Island into the metropolitan area of Memphis. Well into the 1950s, when the causeway had already been built and ample upland was available for sale, the question of whether President's Island was even part of Tennessee came into question. Certainly, in contemporary maps, the boundary between Arkansas and Tennessee ran down the west

141 Clark Porteous, "Arkansans See, and Dislike, model of Harbor Project," Memphis Press-Scimitar, January 14, 1949.

142 Ibid.

143 Ibid.

144 Ibid.

145 D. Eric Setterlund, "NOTE: Two Claims, Two Keys--Overcoming Tennessee's Dual-Majority Voting Mechanism to Facilitate Consolidation Between Memphis City and Shelby County," University of Memphis Law Review, 41, 933 (Summer, 2011) LexisNexis Academic

side of the island, along what was then the main channel of the Mississippi River.[146] But industrialists, wary that Memphis could not guarantee a legally secure title of the land they had wrested from the river, demanded further proof, sending George Houston, an agent of the Mid-South Title Co., on a protracted historical investigation to determine whether President's Island had been part of Andrew Jackson's 1818 acquisition of Tennessee from the Chickasaw Nation, or whether the land had been purchased by then-President Thomas Jefferson from Napoleon in 1803. If the latter were true, the land would arguably still belong to the federal government and would therefore not be for Memphis to sell. Curiously, satisfactory proof came in the form of two maps, from 1765 and 1796, which showed the tiny dot of President's Island closer to the bluffs of West Tennessee than to the flatlands of Arkansas.[147] This proof-by-proximity was sufficient to ease investors' worries, and land sales proceeded.

Memphis officials also made claims about the recreational potential of the enormous land-making operations. Memphis Mayor James Pleasants made a speech at a dinner meeting of the Knights of Columbus in the last months of 1948, claiming that McKellar Lake and the newly-created Treasure Island would become Memphis' outdoor playground. "You will have there, at no extra cost [...] 1000 acres of sandy beach of the same kind that you go to Florida and spend your money to enjoy—right at your front door."[148] Indeed, McKellar lake was and is still used for recreation. As early as 1950, before the project was really complete, the banks of the chute were already used by picnickers.[149] In 1970, a pageant to crown 'Miss McKellar Lake' was held, crowning the lucky winner in part on her water skiing acumen.[150] But McKellar has also played

146 Harold N. Fisk, "Mississippi River Meander Belt," Mississippi River Commission, 1947

147 Laurence McMillin, "Star Witness—An Old Map—Paves Way For Industry to President's Island," Memphis Press-Scimitar, June 5, 1954.

148 "Vacation Island In the Making," Memphis Press-Scimitar, December 3, 1948.

149 Alfred C. Andersson, "Chute Shapes Up Well for Both Business and Pleasure," Memphis Press-Scimitar, October 31 1950, 11.

150 "Leisurely Lovelies of the Lake," Memphis Press-Scimitar, June 22, 1970.

host to raw sewage spills both in its early stages[151] and more recently,[152] and illegal discharges of industrial waste,[153] and Treasure Island is now a lush, but inaccessible, visual barrier between a waterfront park in Memphis and the heavy industry on the opposite bank. There has always been tension between the Lake as a port for heavy industry and as the Lake as a place of recreation. In the words of one riverside resident in 2016, "[w]e want to go out and play on the water. We want to know when we're going to get to do that. Are they going to come down here and clean up?"[154]

Engineering and delivering the project itself was a Herculean task, spanning several years and undergoing many revisions in final cost. The original estimate, judged to be less than $10,000,000 in 1945,[155] became $17,200,000 in the eyes of the U.S. House of Representatives in 1946.[156] Only two years later, when construction had already begun, news reports began referencing a $22,000,000 figure.[157] At the triumphal moment when the closure dam finally spanned the Tennessee Chute, the quoted amount reached $50,000,000, when the $28,600,000 expected to be provided by the city and county were added to the federal total.[158]

The project called for building truly flood-free upland out of the shifting sands of the President's Island coastline. Engineers

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151 "Black Sewage Pours Into Chute Harbor," Memphis Press-Scimitar, May 3, 1952.

152 Tom Charlier, "Crews halt sewage spill into Cypress Creek, McKellar Lake," The Commercial Appeal, April 7, 2016.

153 "Mid-South Pleads Guilty To Illegal Discharges Into Mississippi River," Department of Justice, FDCHeMedia, Inc., February 15, 1999.***

154 Kristin Leigh, "Residents: McKellar Lake still needs major cleaning," FOX 13 Memphis, April 20, 2016.

155 Drennen, "Island Industry a Hammond Idea."

156 "Land Purchase Begins on President's Island."

157 Anderson, "Gigantic Center Of Industry Will Rise On Historic Island To Match Advance Of Memphis."

158 "Engineers Close Tennessee Chute And Create Great New Industrial Harbor," Memphis Press-Scimitar, October 9, 1950.

planned to raise the level of the fill above any recorded flood level,[159] to ensure a stable future for whatever companies invested in costly developments in the future. In 1948, work began. A 60-foot-deep cut was made at the north end of the new slackwater harbor for dredge material for the eventual 1100-acre upland area,[160] and was reinforced with an enormous willow mat, a woven structure of cut willow trees that was assembled and then sunk into place to stabilize the new deep cut.[161] Work had to proceed in careful phases, attuned to the temperamental River's seasonal floods and racing against the flood gauges upstream. When the fateful year for completing the causeway came, it would have to be done in one season, before the Spring floods (and the dam's most stern test) began.[162] Dredge boats worked around the clock, pumping a mucky slurry of river-bottom silt up onto the land, while land-movers crawled across the new island surface, preparing for more of the eventual 66,000,000 cubic yards of fill.[163] This fill turned out to be ideal for building with footings, but less ideal for driving piles. The silt, fine as it was, settled into a dense hardpan as water percolated out, making the new ground of the island stable, but unforgiving.[164]

At the beginning of the 1949 dredging season, as the Spring floods subsided, the Army Corps of Engineers began seeking assurances from the federal government that there would be sufficient funds disbursed that year for the Corps to award dredging contracts. It was critical that, if an attempt to close the Tennessee Chute were to be made that year, that maximum effort – and therefore, full funding – would be applied. If the closure was incomplete or weak when the Spring floods came the next year, it would tear apart the dam and wash millions of cubic yards of work down the Mississippi. On July 11, L.H. Foote,

159 Anderson, "Gigantic Center Of Industry Will Rise On Historic Island To Match Advance Of Memphis."
160 Andersson, "Huge Harbor Job in City's Front Yard."
161 Ibid.
162 Anderson, "Gigantic Center Of Industry Will Rise On Historic Island To Match Advance Of Memphis."
163 Ibid.
164 "Sand On Island Good For Placing Footings," The Commercial Appeal, August 3, 1952.

the District Engineer for the Corps, wrote to William Fowler, the City Engineer for the City of Memphis, informing him that he was terminating the contracts the Corps had with two dredging companies.[165] The next day, the new Mayor, Watkins Overton, was informed,[166] and on July 17, Jack Carley, a major journalistic booster for the project at the Commercial Appeal, wrote an editorial announcing the delays. Work would continue on revetments to protect the Arkansas levees, but sufficient funding to tackle the major problem – the damming of the Tennessee Chute – would be left until the following year.[167] The shortfall was a classic problem of a bicameral legislature. The Senate Appropriations Committee, of which Senator McKellar was chair, had incorporated full funding for the project in his $73,500,000 appropriations bill for flood control operations, but the House had not played along, instead passing a bill that allocated $63,000,000 and left the closure funding on the cutting room floor. No agreement could be reached in time, and so work was stopped.[168] But just a day later, a cryptic telegram sent to Mayor Overton by Clifford Davis, a [...], hinted that an agreement could be forthcoming. "There is sometimes a slip between the cup and the lip, so hold steady," he wrote. "But I think I can advise in the next day or two that the harbor project will not be interrupted this season."[169] Something slipped, however. While one dredging contract was eventually retained to continue work on adding fill for the new industrial area,[170] Congressional gridlock was not resolved until the

165 L.H. Foote to William B. Fowler, July 11, 1949, Letter, from the Papers of Memphis Mayor Watkins Overton, Memphis and Shelby County Room, Memphis Public Library & Information Center.

166 William B. Fowler to Hon. Watkins Overton, July 12, 1949, Letter, from the Papers of Memphis Mayor Watkins Overton, Memphis and Shelby County Room, Memphis Public Library & Information Center.

167 Jack Carley, "Tennessee Chute Closure Dam Not To Be Finished This Year," The Commercial Appeal, July 17, 1949.

168 Ibid.

169 Clifford Davis to Hon. Watkins Overton, July 18, 1949, Western Union telegraph, from the Papers of Memphis Mayor Watkins Overton, Memphis and Shelby County Room, Memphis Public Library & Information Center.

170 "Progress On New Memphis Harbor," Memphis Press-Scimitar, September 14,

beginning of October, far too late in the low-water season for work on the closure dam to proceed, even though the full funding had been made available within that fiscal year.[171]

The following year, work began in earnest. As dredging operations slowly constricted the Tennessee Chute, the river became more and more violent. With a two-hundred-foot gap remaining, the Chute had developed a 'head' – a waterfall – of 2.4 feet, evidence of the effort the River was making to tear apart the slowly growing dam.[172] Only one week later, the Army finally won its protracted battle against this branch of the Mississippi, becoming "another major example of man's increasingly successful efforts to control Ol' Man River."[173] The moments preceding were dramatic. With only twenty feet remaining to fill, the River entered a new stage in its desperation to break through the dam, undercutting the 27-inch dredge pipes. On October 9 at 7:45 A.M., the sand bags, shovels, and the back-breaking labor of the work crew shored up the work and finally prevailed.[174] The work was not done, though. The triumphal trek Lieutenant Colonel Robert Bahr, the assistant District Engineer, had taken across the dam had been accomplished by wading,[175] and the red flag carrying the standard of the Army Corps of Engineers he planted at the opposite side signified only the first step in the long, difficult fill project.[176] Many more feet of fill were still yet to be added to raise the dam to above any recorded flood, and the causeway had to be widened until it was width of one hundred feet of flat surface at the top and 1,340 feet wide at the

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1949.

171 "Harbor Project Hopes Given Big Boost," Memphis Press-Scimitar, October 3, 1949.

172 "Engineers Still in Game, But River Has the Ball," Memphis Press-Scimitar, September 26, 1950.

173 "The Chute Project Takes Shape," Memphis Business, Volume XIII, Number 6 (1950).

174 "Engineers Close Tennessee Chute And Create Great New Industrial Harbor," Memphis Press-Scimitar, October 9, 1950.

175 "The Chute Project Takes Shape," Memphis Business.

176 "Engineers Close Tennessee Chute And Create Great New Industrial Harbor," Memphis Press-Scimitar.

Figure 7: Presidents Island, Mid-century

widest point of the base.[177] But now was a time for celebration. Several Black dredgemen, exhausted from the labor of closing the Chute, dipped their hands into the shallow flow across the tamed Chute, bringing up the catfish and buffalo fish that would doubtless form their celebratory feast that night.[178]

As the dredge project continued, the River found other ways to relieve the tremendous pressure now pressing its way through the President's Island bend, taking out its anger at being constrained on the land on the north side of the island, especially where the old river bed between Vice President's Island and President's Island lay. Incursions from the river turned what had been a high-water cattle pasture on the Brakensiek farm into the mighty Mississippi itself, carving away at the land he owned and forcing the farmer to move his house several times to retreat from flood waters[179] and to haul his barn back from the river's edge at his own expense.[180] In most years, riverside farmers expect the Mississippi to both add to and subtract from their land—indeed, the farmer remarked that "[t]he mud may be troublesome, but it is fertile."[181] In this year, a month after the closure dam first connected, it only subtracted from Brakensiek's farm. In another instance, a lumber company whose timber holdings on the island had been overrun by silt from dredging operations was granted an equally large section of timber on city-county property

177 "Harbor Project Expands," Greater Memphis Magazine, January 1955, 9-10.
178 The Commercial Appeal, October 10, 1950.
179 Tom Meanley, "Harbor Project May Make Farmer Brakensiek A River Man Soon—His Farm Is Caving Away," Memphis Press-Scimitar, November 1, 1950.
180 "Farmer Moves a barn Out of River's Way," Memphis Press-Scimitar, February 16, 1951.
181 Ibid.

further into the island.[182]

The eventual loss of about three hundred of the Brakensiek family's original 2500 acres led them to prepare a claim for the losses, but the U.S. Engineers pre-empted legal action near the end of the 1951 work season by building a long revetment along the north bank of the island that stabilized the banks until the 2011 floods.[183] The massive articulated concrete mat revetment on the head of the Island[184] became colloquially known as Brakensiek's Revetment.[185]

By 1951, the causeway was secure and dredging operations to prepare new industrial upland was well underway. By October, 160 acres came available for development, with hundreds more acres scheduled to be completed in the next few years. Engineers also planned to extend Nonconnah Creek, a waterway which discharged sewage into the Tennessee Chute, far enough downriver that it would again dump into the primary flow of the Mississippi. Plans also called for work to begin in another section of the larger industrial project, in the Ensley Bottoms, a low area of land immediately south of the Island.[186] The first use of the island, began in 1952, was a curiously humble one. In a joint venture, Commercial Barge Lines and United Transports, Inc., poured blacktop over the hard-packed silt of the new President's Island upland

182 "Presidents Isle Lumber Rights," Memphis Press-Scimitar, November 19, 1952.

183 "Truck Farms Plan For Presidents Isle Tract," Memphis Press-Scimitar, March 10, 1955.

184 Alfred C. Andersson, "Presidents Isle Getting Blanket Of Masonry," Memphis Press-Scimitar, November 15, 1951.

185 Andersson, "Presidents Isle Getting Blanket Of Masonry."

186 Harry Woodbury, "Tennessee Chute Project Is A Gigantic Enterprise—It's Really Just Under Way," The Commercial Appeal, May 20, 1951.

and stored cars that had been transported up the river, a parking lot at an industrial scale.[187] Around the same time, a sewer overflow at the Nonconnah Creek sewer discharge spilled foul black water into the brand-new harbor, spurring the city engineer on a personal crusade to Washington, D.C., to implore Congress to immediately release the funds it had marked aside for the sewer extension.[188] Local funds were easier to come by. In June of that year, construction began on Channel Avenue and Harbor Avenue, the twin tines of new road the city and county had promised as part of its infrastructural extensions.[189] At the end of the summer, amid the road-building, sewer-fixing, and car-storing, the city and county threw a dedication gala for the Tennessee Chute project. Ten thousand Memphians turned out, festooning the overlooking bluffs of Riverside Park, to watch the water carnival, fireworks, and to hear the amplified speeches of Mayor Overton and Senator McKellar, two of the powerful men whose wills had brought the project into being. It was at this ceremony that Mayor Overton formally dedicated the Harbor with its new name, McKellar Lake.[190] For the Senator's sake, it may be hoped that the residual stench of sewage had migrated to the Gulf in the two months since the Nonconnah Creek discharge, to avoid his political enemies making any joke at his expense.

The 1952 autumn proved to be another destructive one for the northern edge of President's Island, as the river claimed dozens more acres of fertile farmland in retaliation for the harbor closure dam. In response, the Memphis District Engineers ordered another miles' length of articulated concrete mat to stabilize the island's battered northern bank.[191]

It only took a few years for the port to come alive. Under the supervision of Port Director Clark Kittrell, thirty companies took up residence on 213 of the approximately

187 "Rapid Progress Shown by Photo of Presidents Island," Memphis Press-Scimitar, May 2, 1952.

188 "Black Sewage Pours Into Chute Harbor," Memphis Press-Scimitar.

189 "Presidents Island To Get Two Streets," Memphis Press-Scimitar, June 5, 1952.

190 The Commercial Appeal, August 2, 1952.

191 "Uncle Sam Coming to Aid of President's Island," Memphis Press-Scimitar, November 29, 1952.

800 saleable acres in the Industrial Area, including Sinclair Refining Company, Norris Grain Company,[192] and Cargill, Inc.[193] Critical to this rapid development was the completion of a public river-rail-truck terminal to serve the port and industrial area.[194]

The island was not merely a residential suburb of Memphis. It operated very much like a self-contained community, so necessary because it was so disconnected from the metro area. In 1947, while postwar Memphis was catapulted into the industrial boom that characterized the United States economy at the time, life on President's Island changed little. There were no phones, cars, or any real roads at that point. Residents described a good life, where farmers raised their own ducks, turkeys, corn, and honey for food, played baseball, went swimming and fishing, rode on horseback through the woody bottomlands, and harvested pecans.[195] During this time, the community, built on stilts to stay free of floods, boasted a community building that doubled as one-room schoolhouse and Missionary Baptist church, which hosted many of the island's 300 remaining Black residents and 35 Black students.[196] These families, who formed the core of the workforce which worked the rich island soil, relied on battery-operated radios, boats, and the occasional ferry trip to maintain contact with the outside world.[197]

The annexation of President's Island into the metro area of Memphis was an economic boon to the city, but the city also had to inherit the one-room schoolhouse and charge of its upkeep from Shelby County,

192 "Presidents Island Is Busy Place," Memphis Press-Scimitar, December 27, 1956.
193 "10 Industrial Sites Are Sold Or Leased," The Commercial Appeal, October 30, 1956.
194 Emmett Maum, "Presidents Island Enhances Transportation, Industry; Terminal Proving Big Help," The Commercial Appeal, October 7, 1956.
195 "Presidents Island One Room Schoolhouse: Oral Transcripts," May 17, 2010 and May 24, 2010, oneroomschoolhouseeasthighschool.blogspot.com (accessed January 16, 2019).
196 Talley, "Unsolved Mystery: Who Named it Presidents Island, When and Why?"
197 Ibid.

a responsibility it took on reluctantly.[198] After this community building finally collapsed[199], the Board of Education of the Memphis City Schools, Milton Bowers, directed the construction[200] of a curious relic both of school segregation and of the oddity of a deeply rural area within the limits of a metro area, a small, primitive, one-room schoolhouse on stilts in the silty sand of the island. Opened in 1953, the school survived many successive floods in its tenure and has, since it closed, been a standalone historical exhibit at the Memphis Fairgrounds and at East High School[201] and a strangely stubborn piece of history, existing now in a back corner of a government lot.[202] Kenneth Starck described it in the Commercial Appeal 1964, writing that "[i]t consists of one room. There is no electricity. Restrooms are two tiny outhouses that flank the main building, which stands above the countryside on six six-foot concrete pillars [...] Access in dry weather is via a dusty, twisting dirt road. In wet weather, access depends on a person's determination."[203] At the time, the school was host to only eleven students and one teacher who did seem to have that necessary determination, a Black woman named Elnora M. Devers, who drove every day across the new earthen causeway through the traffic bringing goods and workers onto the island, picked up a few of her eleven remaining students, and taught them all in this one small building.[204] She had taught on President's Island since 1947, before the new school had been built, and taught many successive generations of President's Island students. Her determination and sanguinity are clear in her statements to Starck in 1964. Serving as de facto janitor, principal, guidance counselor, and bus driver, her sheer will and

198 Kenneth Starck, "One Room Relic: Is Still Part of Memphis School System," The Commercial Appeal, March 1, 1964.

199 Ibid.

200 January 30, 1953, Letter, from the Papers of Memphis Mayor Watkins Overton, Memphis and Shelby County Room, Memphis Public Library & Information Center.

201 Lizzie Steen, "Pres Island Schoolhouse," Memphis Heritage, 2011.

202 Mark Scott, Personal conversation with author, October 1, 2018

203 Starck, "One Room Relic: Is Still Part of Memphis School System."

204 Ibid.

her mantra, "We make the best of it,"[205] as well as the ascension of many of her students to mainland high schools, testifies to her capability.

The island's Missionary Baptist church, hosted in the multi-purpose church building and then later the one-room schoolhouse, was overseen only on a part-time basis by Bishop Theo W. Wofford, an itinerant preacher of the church denomination, whose remit included remote congregations on other Mississippi River islands.[206]

Records from the United States Geological Survey shows continual, but scattered, habitation across the island in 1916 and 1927, a more organized network of roads and buildings in 1936, and a shrinking, but still present, rural-scale pattern of settlement in 1960, after the island had been connected to the mainland and the industrial park had begun to be built.[207] Indeed, as late as 1955, there were plans reported to turn large plantations like the Brakensiek farm into a series of small 'truck farms' – market gardens that could be planted and tended by tenant farmers.[208] Oral histories of the island, compiled by students at East High School in Memphis in 2010, indicate that most residents of the island left for Memphis between 1960 and 1965,[209] when the industrial expansion on the island had reached one of its most aggressive phases.[210] Despite the modernization of the eastern side of the island, the remainder appeared much as it always had. Describing a 3,000 acre horse pasture on the island, run by a cattleman named John McKnight, William Thomas remarked that "[i]t could have been a scene on the plains of Texas or the cow country of Wyoming. But [...] this land of boots, saddles and horses is actually a remote corner of Memphis where real

205 Ibid.
206 "Report 'Jungle Cat' On Presidents Island," Memphis Press-Scimitar, May 23, 1953.
207 See, e.g., "Tennessee-Arkansas Memphis Quadrangle Grid Zone "O"," War Department, Corps of Engineers, 1939
208 "Truck Farms Plan For Presidents Isle Tract," Memphis Press-Scimitar.
209 "Presidents Island One Room Schoolhouse: Oral Transcripts."
210 Charles A. Brown, "Presidents Island Facing Its Most Explosive Year," Memphis Press-Scimitar, January 13, 1964.

cowboys ride a real range."[211] This range, so constrained by the dynamism of the Mississippi River's seasonal shifts, was at times legally contested, as well. In 1967, the city filed suit against McKnight for back taxes, arguing that he had deliberately undercounted the acreage he owned. McKnight countered that it was the Mississippi that owned many acres of his land, and contended that, since the city and county did not provide water, electrical, or infrastructural services to the section of the island he ranched, he should not be expected to have the standard tax burden.[212] Other residents, like Crawford Key, who lived in a beached houseboat on oil company property, seemed similarly wild and independent, traits which made life on the island more palatable. A loose collection of seven squatter families lived on the shoreline at one point. But Key, who built boats, chicken coops, and furniture out of driftwood he fished from the river and lived off of his chicken's eggs and his social security check, was the last of his kind.[213]

In the 1960s, President's Island reached its maturity. Land on the upland fill sold to industry at a steady clip, enabling the City and County Commissions to gradually increase prices to help defray the cost of running municipal services to the new sites.[214][215] While the Port Commission waited for services to extend to the further reaches of the completed upland fill, it leased the over two hundred acres of barren land starting at $1 per acre in order to be farmed.[216] It was not long before this arrangement was ended, when in the autumn of 1964, the Port Commission announced that the city would extend sewers and drains by another 1,500 feet down the length of the dredge

211 William Thomas, "Skyline Acts As Backdrop As Untamed Horses Graze," The Commercial Appeal, December 15, 1964.

212 Jack Martin, "City Will File Island Tax Suit," Memphis Press-Scimitar, April 13, 1967, 10.

213 Gregory Jaynes, "Presidents Island Is 'Home' For Last Of The Squatters,' Memphis Press-Scimitar, July 16, 1967.

214 "Bargain Prices Lure Buyers To Presidents Island Lots," The Commercial Appeal, February 7, 1962.

215 "Harbor Land Price Hiked," Memphis Press-Scimitar, June 29, 1967.

216 "He Rents 226 Acres 'Under City's Nose'," Memphis Press-Scimitar, January 3, 1964.

fill, making a significant amount of additional land available – reportedly, there was no diminishment in demand for land even after the price increase, spurring officials to expand the area quickly.[217] By 1965, in the midst of an industrial fervor in Memphis, a shopping complex with a much-needed restaurant, a wider causeway to accommodate the new island traffic jams, a new bus line for island workers,[218] and wider-reaching proposals, including one to dig another channel through President's Island to build more filled land for the industry[219] were set in motion. Even this early expansion was fraught with growing pains. Poor drainage, worn-down roads, and no post office sent Presidents Island industrialists to the newspapers to lobby the city, county, and Port Commission.[220] The response was swift. Within a month, the government began construction on a local post office branch,[221] and Joseph Hanover, then the chairman of the Port Commission, acknowledged the serious infrastructural problems already present in the new industrial area and put in motion work to repair it.[222]

Brick Woods' declaration, years before the establishment of the Industrial Area and harbor, that President's Island was a womanless paradise for white men,[223] may have also been predictive. It was not long before it was rumored that an off-the-books hunting club, running out of a business on the island and operating with the permission of a large landowner, was flaunting city law and Port Commission policy on the island. Controlling hunting on the island, a place teeming with game, was proving intractable. Neither the ample police presence on the island nor the profusion of warnings

217 Charles A. Brown, "Mighty Leap Westerward For Presidents Island," Memphis Press-Scimitar, October 10, 1964.
218 "Island Buses Start Monday," Memphis Press-Scimitar, June 5, 1965.
219 Brown, "Presidents Island Facing Its Most Explosive Year."
220 "Rescue Presidents Island!," Memphis Press-Scimitar, May 23, 1966.
221 "Presidents Island to Get Post Office," Memphis Press-Scimitar, June 16, 1966.
222 Brown Alan Flynn, "Presidents Island Is Promised Help," Memphis Press-Scimitar, June 23, 1966, 14.
223 Mitchell, "President's Island."

against hunting seemed to control the problem.[224] Many hunters, accustomed to hunting the wild parts of the island, may have simply been ignorant of the island's new administrative schema, as discharging firearms was illegal within the Memphis city limits.[225] The City Commission undertook a study of the problem, frankly admitting that there were sections of Presidents Island and the nearby Ensley Bottoms, another recently-annexed area, where it was virtually impossible to enforce gun regulations.[226] After a meeting to discuss the question, the City Commission announced that it would not attempt to enforce laws prohibiting hunting, and would instead rely on the good will of individuals to stay away from the island.[227] There was still some threat to life, the island's sparse inhabitation notwithstanding. The matriarch of the Munn family, one of the last residents on the island, and one of the only Black landowning families, was nearly shot on the opening day of dove season, one week before the City Commission's deliberations.[228] This uneasy détente continued for many years, until in 1991, the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency and the Port Authority decided to attempt to enforce hunting regulations again, after receiving complaints from birdwatchers and construction workers, who were afraid of being caught in the crossfire.[229] "Some people say there are days when it sounds like the Vietnam War in the area."[230] But Ronnie Shannon, an official with the TWRA, admitted that it would be impossible to fully enforce regulations on the island, owing to its size and wildness. After only two years, the Port Authority and TWRA proposed to the city and county that the undeveloped portion of the island be designated a wildlife management area, allowing for scheduled and controlled hunts to manage the teeming population

224 "Hunting On Island Is Illegal As Property Is Within City," The Commercial Appeal, January 6, 1966.
225 Ibid.
226 "Island Hunting Faces Study," Memphis Press-Scimitar, September 6, 1966.
227 "Island Hunters Placed Under Honor System," The Commercial Appeal, September 8, 1966.
228 Ibid.
229 Larry Rea, "Gunfire prompts watch on island," The Commercial Appeal, May 10, 1991, D3.
230 Ibid.

of deer and turkey who called Presidents Island home, although Port Authority director Donald C. McCrory maintained that putting a complete stop to poaching on the island would be impossible.[231] This attempt would require modification of the city's firearms discharge law, and was ultimately withdrawn from consideration.[232] In 2001, the Port Commission and TWRA resubmitted a plan that was substantially similar to the 1993 proposal, calling for organized events that would constrain all hunting to a few discrete times per year, and fleshing out the claim that such hunting events could help manage the uncontrolled expansion of the deer population.[233] The licenses would be handed out by lottery, anticipating a greater demand for hunting on the game-rich island than there would be supply.[234] This turned out to be the case, as Presidents Island is popularly considered the place for the best lottery ('draw') hunts in Tennessee.[235]

Since the completion of the President's Island industrial area, proposals for what to do with the rest of the Island have appeared regularly. But the proposals often forgot those who still lived there. In 1959, in response to lobbying from the Memphis Junior Chamber of Commerce for a riverfront park on the undeveloped north edge of the island, the Port Commission came out unanimously opposed to the idea. Jesse Wooten, the chairman, was quoted declaring "[...] that the island was created for industrial development, that bringing in holiday park facilities could hamper industrial development of the island. The island is now a completely industrial area, completely free of the kind of pressures that the other industrial areas face when they are in residential or recreational areas."[236]

231 Tom Charlier, "Plan poses wildlife management and hunting on Presidents Island," The Commercial Appeal, February 1, 1993.

232 Tom Charlier, "Agency proposal creates wildlife area on Presidents Island, with deer hunts," Memphis Business Insider, March 10, 2001.

233 Ibid.

234 Ibid.

235 Larry Self, "Tennessee's Best Draw Hunts For Deer," Game & Fish Magazine, October 4, 2010.

236 Tom Meanley, "Port Board Is Against Riverfront Park Plans," Memphis Press-Scimitar, August 27, 1959.

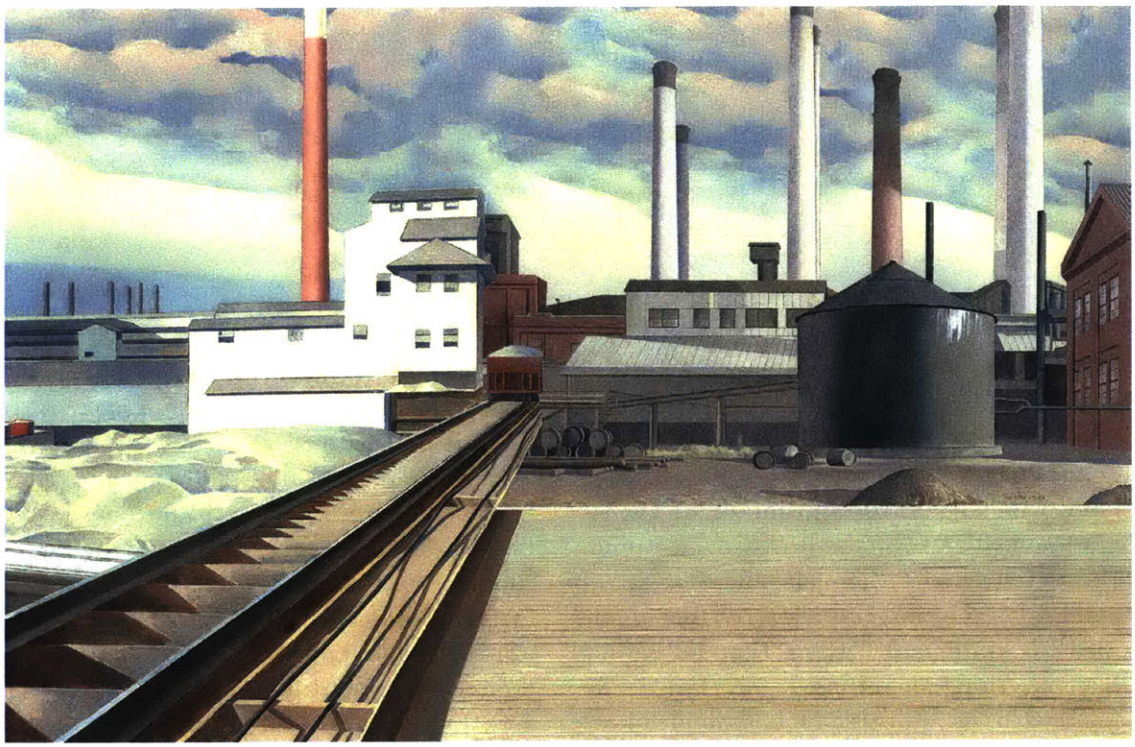
Figure 8: Presidents Island, Industrial Sublime

Of course, the island was not created for industrial development – a small portion of it was modified for that use. The remainder, far from being 'a completely industrial area,' was instead still home to many families who worked the forgotten back acreage of the island, worshipped at its small, part-time church, and went to school in a one-room schoolhouse that would have been just as at home in the 1850s as it was at the time.

In 1968, Arkansas Governor Winthrop Rockefeller, who had purchased the McKnight horse farm only recently, surprised the Army Corps of Engineers with a proposal to develop his 2,500 acres. Rockefeller had been playing his cards close to the chest, spending part of 1967 having UCLA architecture professor Henry C.K. Liu and his graduate students develop a truly breathtaking proposal for the bottomlands: a university for 20,000 students, 6,500 waterside housing units, 6 million square feet of office space, 1.2 million square feet of commercial space, 1,000 acres of new industrial land, and over one million square feet of research buildings. The buildings, elevated as many as twenty-five feet on stilts to avoid floodwaters, would be linked by canals and public transit and would have rail links to Arkansas.[237] Army engineers did state that they could not allow levees, sea walls, or anything else that would alter the velocity of the Mississippi River, but (perhaps because of the high-profile source of the plan) the Corps agreed to study the plan and release a report in 1969.[238] A week gave the Corps more time to accommodate themselves to the idea. District engineer Col. Charles Williams told the Memphis Press-Scimitar after the initial announce-

237 Jefferson Riker, K.W. Cook, James Killpatrick, and Carl Crawford, "Bold Vision Grasps Presidents Island," Memphis Press-Scimitar, January 7, 1969.

238 "Presidents Island In Expansion Plan," Memphis Press-Scimitar, January 7, 1968.



ment: "We're quite excited about this [...] It would add a lot to Memphis and there would be spinoff in the form of increases to what you might call the gross city product. It's real long range thinking. I hope Governor Rockefeller and his people will work closely with us."[239] Williams reiterated the offer to study the proposal with another experimental hydrological model at the Vicksburg Waterways Experiment Station. Liu, the architect who led the project design, was lauded for the plan's bold vision, winning a Progressive Architecture Design Award on the merits of the Presidents Island project that year.[240]

Ruth Davis, the woman who had made the initial attempt to build a park on the northeastern corner of the island in 1954, saw another opportunity to plead her case to the city upon reading of the ambitious Rockefeller plan, intuiting that if millions of square feet of development seemed unreasonable, a park with a few picnic tables would certainly be more attractive.[241] But although the Memphis Harbor and Port Commission had dropped their objections to a park in the intervening fifteen years,[242] it is not clear that Davis' idea ever came to fruition.

It was only a few years before the speculation of another powerful man set off a new flurry of opinions, studies, and the bemused inputs of the Army Corps of Engineers. In 1971, Shelby County Commissioner Lee Hyden, in response to a question about what to do with county prisoners when the county's penal farm was phased out, remarked that Presidents Island would be the perfect place, due to its proximity to Mem-

239 Jefferson Riker, "Weakness Is Strength In Presidents Island Design," Memphis Press-Scimitar, January 13, 1969.
240 Ibid.
241 Orville Hancock, "Long-Sought Island Park Is Due for This Summer" Memphis Press-Scimitar, February 21, 1969
242 Ibid.

phis and to industrial areas for work-release programs.[243] A few weeks later, doubling down on his idea, Hyden was more specific – the prison would require 1,000 acres of land, which could be built inland of the island and filled to make it less flood-prone. District Engineer Colonel John Parish replied favorably in general terms, but qualified his statement, saying that he hadn't seen anything definitive from Hyden. As for Hyden, he admitted he had no idea how much the complex would cost, but hoped for state and federal funds.[244] Interview preparation notes from Alfred C. Andersson, a Press-Scimitar journalist, fleshed out objections to the project that, the document suggested, could be developed in a forthcoming interview. Most importantly, "[i]f raised, this ground would obstruct the flow-way; if not raised, it would flood. [...] Thus the Hyden vision of an island prison is unworkable on a dollar basis; not advisable on a river basis."[245] It's not clear what became of this interview, but in 1972, the Shelby County Commission authorized a $2,350,000 appropriation to purchase Governor Rockefeller's large property holdings, provided the state approve the plan. This raised eyebrows, as it authorized a price of around $900 an acre on land that the Governor had successfully devalued to $200 an acre to reduce his tax burden.[246] Hyden admitted the discrepancy, but stressed that the figure was merely an option that would be negotiated.[247] These reservations notwithstanding, the proposal went to the state, with the argument that the land could jointly house both a county and a state prison.[248] Plans for the prison facility called for a minimal filled area of five acres, with the remainder of the land remaining low, and with all buildings raised

243 Memphis Press-Scimitar, April 3, 1971.

244 "Island Prison Would Risk Flooding—O.K., Says Hyden," Memphis Press-Scimitar, April 22, 1971.

245 Alfred C. Andersson, compiled notes, April 16, 1971, Press-Scimitar Archives at the University of Memphis.

246 Roy B. Hamilton, "$1 Million Profit In New Jail Site?" Memphis Press-Scimitar, March 16, 1972.

247 Wayne Chastain, "Merits of Prison Sites Discussed," Memphis Press-Scimitar, April 8, 1972, 7.

248 Johnny Vaughan, "Building of Regional Prisons On Presidents Island Studied," Memphis Press-Scimitar, March 29, 1972.

on stilts.[249] Amid objections from Arkansas river engineers and business owners on the island, Tennessee Correctional Commissioner Mark Luttrell noted that the state had not committed to the Presidents Island plan, and that it was merely a personal project of Hyden's.[250] It was at this point that the project seemed more well-thought out than it did at first. The city and county favored the project strongly, arguing that the site was isolated and secure, but close to jobs, medical facilities, psychiatric resources, and drug abuse treatment centers, all core necessities of modern prisons. From the point of view of local government, this plan was also politically favorable, in comparison with other plans to put a prison north of Memphis nearby a state forest. [251]

The Presidents Island Industrial Association replied the next week with a formal resolution arguing that all remaining land on the island be dedicated to industrial use. In particular, they were concerned that the placement of a prison and farm would preclude any future expansions into the interior of President's Island. At this time, the Industrial Area was nearly fully utilized, with only 70 acres remaining. Any further industrial expansion in Memphis would have to take place either in the Ensley Bottoms to the south or in a new development on Presidents Island. The Army Corps of Engineers was urged to re-double their efforts to test the feasibility of such a new development, in an attempt to bolster the Industrial Association's counterargument.[252] A week later, Hyden wrote the Industrial Association, acknowledging that state officials, including the Governor, were also in opposition to the Presidents Island plan,[253] and a little more than three months later the county announced that it was placing a bid on another piece of land, for one-fifth the optioned cost of the Presidents Island

249 Johnny Vaughan, "Luttrell Favors Regional Prison North of Memphis," March 31, 1972.
250 Ibid.
251 Chastain, "Merits of Prison Sites Discussed," 7.
252 "Island Group Urges Land For Industry," Memphis Press-Scimitar, April 15, 1972.
253 Roy B. Hamilton, "Hyden Withdraws Plans For Presidents Island Jail," Memphis Press-Scimitar, April 21, 1972.

tract.[254] Governor Rockefeller, sensing that there was now no immediate way to profit from the land he held on Presidents Island, donated the tract to Vanderbilt University, a school at which the Governor was a trustee. Vanderbilt intended to hold the land as an investment property, under lease as farming at the time,[255] and sell when land for development was needed.[256] Vanderbilt later sold the land—not for development, but certainly for profit—to a hospital supply company, which also planned to use the land as an investment property.[257]

One of the most persistent and long-lasting theories for how to use the island has been to cut a channel along the western edge of the upland fill and to create another fill area on the opposite side, effectively creating a harbor cul-de-sac out of the woody Presidents Island bottomlands, an idea which first surfaced in the public record in 1964.[258] It is likely that economic interests in Memphis considered this a way to assuage the greater-than-anticipated demand in Memphis for industrial sites, outstripping even the Port Commission's milestones.[259] The true fork in the road for further Memphis industrial development was hinted at as soon as 1972, when the Port Commission, in opposing Hyden's prison plan, described the tradeoff between the development of Ensley Bottoms and further development of Presidents Island.[260] It was these two plans that eventually came to a head in 1974. The city favored the development of Ensley Bottoms, a low area now called Frank C. Pidgeon Industrial Park, into an

254 "County Groups Ready Offer Of Land for Regional Prison," Memphis Press-Scimitar, July 29, 1972.

255 "Rockefeller's Vanderbilt Gift Revives Penal Site Issue," Memphis Press-Scimitar, December 21, 1972.

256 "Rockefeller Gives Vanderbilt Presidents Island Tract," Memphis Press-Scimitar, December 21, 1972.

257 "Firm Pays $2.5 Million To Vanderbilt for Farm," Memphis Press-Scimitar, January 15, 1981.

258 Brown, "Presidents Island Facing Its Most Explosive Year."

259 William Thomas, "Island Whipped To Greatness In A Taming by The Shrewd," Commercial Appeal, December 17, 1964.

260 "Island Group Urges Land For Industry," Memphis Press-Scimitar, April 15, 1972.

area with a lock, canal, and constant-level harbor for access to 2,000 waterfront acres and 2,500 acres of land for other development, for $105.4 million. The Port Commission wanted a second harbor, cut through Presidents Island, and 1,000 acres of waterfront land, for $65.2 million total.[261] The Pidgeon Park proposal's primary champion was Frank Palumbo, the city engineer, who argued that the key advantage of the Ensley Bottom development was that, by virtue of the lock system, it would guarantee a constant-level harbor. The Port Commission leaned heavily on the success of the Presidents Island development – only four acres remained available for development, and the idea to use old branches of the Mississippi River for harbor development had since been copied up and down the river. One other comparison favored the Port Commisson's plan, at least in the eyes of marketers: while Pidgeon Park was considered 'flood-protected' land – land that was lower than a flood stage level, but ringed by levees – Presidents Island's industrial fill was raised to a 'flood-free' level. A Corps project engineer also cast doubt on the idea of putting a lock off of the main Mississippi River channel, pointing out that while the Corps built and maintained many locks along the River, they were used for navigability, not for port and harbor management. Precedent was critical. As the plan would go before Congress, the project with the most solid precedent would likely be the victor. The Port Commission's plan, standing on its own shoulders, stood to win out on that score.[262] Palumbo's counterargument was one of innovation and scale. He argued that the conservatism of the Presidents Island expansion was its downfall, and that the much larger-scale and more ambitious Pidgeon Park development was more appropriate to a forward-thinking industrial city like Memphis.[263] Furthermore, he pointed out that, while a more expensive project, the Pidgeon Park expansion, should it receive federal approval, would cost less locally[264] and would provide more acreage per dollar than the Presidents

261 "Opposing Port Plans Argued At Hearing," The Commercial Appeal, November 20, 1974.

262 Terry Keeter, "New Harbor Needed, But 'Where' Starts Flak Flying," The Commercial Appeal, December 23, 1974.

263 Ibid.

264 Ibid.

Island expansion.[265]

At a public hearing the next year, the District Engineer for the Corps, Colonel Albert C. Lehman, recommended the Presidents Island expansion over Palumbo's Pidgeon Park plan. A witness for Palumbo, the industrialist and builder Thomas C. Farnsworth, countered that a constant-level harbor would open up new economic possibilities for Memphis that had not been available in the river-level Presidents Island harbor and would allow Memphis to compete with Arkansas River and Tennessee-Tombigbee. Palumbo aggressively condemned Col. Lehman's opinion, believing that it was absent a detailed study. It is more likely that he considered the District Engineer's support critical to the political viability of any plan brought before Congress, and therefore despaired of Pidgeon Park's chances.[266]

While this debate raged, Presidents Island's industrial park continued maturing. A joint venture between Niles Grosvenor III, descendant of a long-time island landowner, and fellow farmer Robert McCarter, planned a business airport on Presidents Island. The project had been approved by the Federal Aviation Administration, Memphis International Airport, and the Air Line Pilots Association. By May 1975, the wheat field that would become the runway had been cleared, and several planes had already landed. As eighty-five planes were owned by the collection of businesses represented on the island, it was thought that this airport would be of service to them, as well as to farmers in the region who also had planes and who relied on island businesses for farm machinery and replacement parts.[267] This consortium of landowners and lessees still managed to make do, by this and other schemes. One woman, who leased 2,250 acres from the Port Commission, had found that the value of her land was twice what she paid the Commission, and therefore had for years sublet it to a farm chemical supply company for a tidy profit, leading the Commission to reconsider its method for leasing

265 Orville Hancock, "Col. Lehman Wants to Expand Presidents Island Facilities," Memphis Press-Scimitar, February 25, 1975.
266 Ibid.
267 Orville Hancock, "Memphis Has Another Island Airport," Memphis Press-Scimitar, May 19, 1975.

the bottomland it held.[268]

It was several years before the preferred port expansion plan was brought up again in the public record, when in 1979 Port Director Paul Sheffield accused the Carter administration of delaying approval of the port expansion. It was no question that the Port was by this time an economic cornerstone of Memphis. It employed 6,000 industrial workers, including at several other developments throughout the city, and moved $625 million in goods through the port annually.[269] The harbor expansion never came to fruition, and the economic impact of the port remained flat for a time; two studies of direct and indirect job creation actually showed a slight decline from 1979 to 1995, from 12,475 to 12,310.[270]

It was during this time that the negative externalities of industrial development began to show themselves. In particular, Presidents Island was a firefighter's nightmare. Although the businesses on the island were relatively transparent about the hazardous chemicals and fuel they stored in large quantities on their properties, the very fact of their proximity, the poor condition of the rail lines used to transport the fuel, and the single, easily-blocked access to the island made the island a powder keg in the eyes of the firefighters who worked the island district. The still-fresh memory of chlorine fumes, ammonia leaks, and a chemical fire on the island likely gave voice to these fears.[271]

This made the island particularly dangerous for workers, as well. In 1974, a harrowing explosion at a grain elevator trapped four men above the fire for more than an hour before they could be rescued, including Riley Williams, who was taken to St. Joseph Hospital in serious condition. Eleven men in total were injured in the disas-

268 "Bids Are Best," Memphis Press-Scimitar, March 3, 1976.
269 Ed Dunn, "Director Says Port Expansion Being Stymied in Washington," Memphis Press-Scimitar, April 27, 1979.
270 "The Economic Impact of the Port of Memphis On the Memphis & Shelby County Economy," Prepared for The Memphis and Shelby County Port Commission, August 2014, Younger Associates, Memphis, TN.
271 Leonard A. Novarro, "Presidents Island Firefighters 'Sitting on a Powder Keg,'" Memphis Press-Scimitar, October 10, 1980.

ter.[272] A couple of years later, a Velsicol chemical tanker's safety valve failed and sent a toxic cloud of hydrogen chloride gas sweeping across the island, forcing an evacuation.[273] In 2004, two Kinder Morgan River Terminal employees were suffocated in a crush of ammonia sulfide fertilizer while trying to clear a clogged chute in a rail car.[274] Predictably, industrial culture carried with it dangers to the surrounding environment. Accidents carried with them the threats of exotic chemical spills, as in 1980, when chlorine and ammonia were released into the air.[275] Puzzling groundwater contamination also gave regulators and industry fits. In 1975, a then-legal method of hazardous solvent disposal—burial—caused later problems for groundwater contamination two hundred and fifty feet from the original burial site, indicating a leak. Wastes of unknown types and origins were found oozing from the ground, and regional officials speculated that, as they continue investigations, they would find more unknown and undisclosed contaminated sites.[276] Although these contaminations did not threaten the Memphis drinking water supply, they did cause enough concern to recommend a comprehensive study of the island's soils to determine if contamination was more widespread.[277] The harbor was also treated as a kind of catch-all for waste by at least one company. In federal legal action under the auspices of the Clean Water Act,[278] Mid-South Terminal Company was found to have allowed thousands of tons of scrap metal and debris to freely dump into the harbor and its banks during its

272 "Grain Explosion Victim Rescued," Memphis Press-Scimitar, May 23, 1974.
273 "Workers Flee Toxic Cloud," Memphis Press-Scimitar, May 13, 1976, A1.
274 Bill Dries, "2 die as fertilizer shifts in rail car," Commercial Appeal, December 2, 2004.
275 Novarro, "Presidents Island Firefighters 'Sitting on a Powder Keg.'"
276 Tom Charlier, "Concern increases over island waste," The Commercial Appeal, July 25, 1988, A1, A5.
277 Ibid.
278 Department of Justice, "Mid-South Pleads Guilty to Illegal Discharges Into Mississippi River: Case Part of Comprehensive, Coordinated Effort To Stop Pollution of Treasured River," FDCHeMedia, Inc., February 15, 1999, LexisNexis Academic***

scrap loading and unloading operations.[279] Few systematic studies of environmental quality in southwest Memphis have been completed, but one such atmospheric study in 2013 referred to the zone as a 'hot spot' for air toxins, with both cumulative cancer risks and adverse health risks possible at the levels measured.[280]

But another force multiplier for environmental problems haunts Presidents Island. The New Madrid Fault, a nearby seismic zone, puts Memphis directly in the ring of worst possible outcomes should the zone become active. Criss-crossed by oil and gas pipelines, dotted with hazardous chemical containers, and without the stringent seismic building codes that have become commonplace in California, Presidents Island is the location of one of the worst potential fallouts from a catastrophic earthquake.[281] In 2014, when the U.S. Geologic Survey upgraded the threat of an earthquake from the New Madrid Fault, it identified Memphis within the most severe zone of threat,[282] scientific debate about the geological evidence notwithstanding.[283] Floods and earthquakes are similarly difficult-to-predict, and predictions typically intersect percentage chances with severity. To counter this unpredictability, the designers of Presidents Island built the industrial fill up to the point where it would be considered 'flood-free', but no similar escape is possible from the constant, low-grade threat of a catastrophic earthquake. Seismologists in

279 United States v. Mid-South Terminal Company, Case No. 98-1-037 (W.D. Tenn.), 1999.

280 Chunrong Jia and Jeffrey Foran, "Air toxics concentrations, source identification, and health risks: An air pollution hot spot in southwest Memphis, TN," Atmospheric Environment 81 (2013): 112-116.

281 Pama Mitchell, "Quake could devastate South Central states," The Atlanta Constitution, June 28, 1994, A3.

282 M.D. Petersen, M.P. Moschetti, P.M. Powers, C.S. Mueller, K.M. Haller, A.D. Frankel, Yuehua Zeng, Sanaz Rezaeian, S.C. Harmsen, O.S. Boyd, Ned Field, Rui Chen, K.S. Rukstales, Nico Luco, R.L. Wheeler, R.A. Williams, and A.H. Olsen, Documentation for the 2014 update of the United States national seismic hazard maps: U.S. Geological Survey Open-File Report 2014–1091, (2014): 243.

283 Richard Monastersky, "Seth Stein: the quake killer," Nature 479 (2011): 166-170.

1994 gave a 6.0 Richter quake a 90% likelihood within the next fifty years.[284] From the point of view of a geologic time-scale, it is only a matter of time before Memphis is shaken apart.

A more modest plan for port expansion was broached in 1988, when the harbor commission publicized a plan to fill some 170 acres on the south side of the island to extend the polygonal sandbar it already occupied. It was made possible—and necessary—by the continual need to dredge McKellar Lake to maintain its depth. The Corps, which maintained the harbor, was running out of places to put the sand and silt from their and the River.[285] There was a wrinkle, though. The Navy, which had recently purchased a 300,000 square foot building at the very end of the island's industrial fill to use as a ship and submarine test facility, was concerned that intensive operations so close to its facility would interfere with the delicate fluid dynamics tests it would run in the new Large Cavitation Channel. In addition, the EPA, Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency were concerned that the project, which would fill in 30 acres of wetland habitat, would degrade the semi-aquatic ecosystem a wide variety of species depended on.[286]

In the end, it was Palumbo's Ensley Bottoms plan which won out, in a way, although it had an ironically greater effect on wetland areas. In the 1990s, plans for a harbor, rail line, steel plant, and new wetland infill were inaugurated, forcing a tricky tit-for-tat wetland restoration program. The Port Commission was tasked with transforming a soybean field at the southern tip of Presidents Island into a 182-acre bottomland hardwood forest, mimicking not only the cross-section of plant species which would be found in such a place, but also the literal topographic cross-section of a woody wetland. The project required the cooperation of the Mississippi River, very precise slopes, depths, and soils, and a lucky series of successional growth stages to become a

284 Mitchell, "Quake could devastate South Central states."
285 Tom Charlier, "Harbor's island plan sees ultimate industrial gain," The Commercial Appeal, February 26, 1988, A1.
286 Tom Charlier, "Local plan for island is studied," The Commercial Appeal, August 18, 1988, B1-B2.

sustainable and successful wetland.[287]

The industrial culture of the island in its latter years called back to the reputation it had before its merger with Memphis as a wild, beautiful, isolated place. Nic Vrettos, owner of the Port Restaurant and unofficial Presidents Island mayor, likened it to a small town hidden within a big city in a 2003 interview with the Commercial Appeal. The island was still home to enormous flocks of deer, lush wilderness, and an overpowering feeling of isolation, exemplified in the only residents of the island, the Griffins, who lived in a double-wide trailer near the center of the island without running water.[288] In 2010, seeking to learn more about the way life was for the Black residents of the island before industrialization and during its early years, high school students from East High School, led by history teacher Mark Scott, focused their efforts on the preservation of the one-room schoolhouse.[289] Since its construction in 1953 and after the last student had left the island in search of a better education, the building had been lifted and repurposed by the county into a first aid shelter at the local Mid-South Fairgrounds. Students intended to move the one-room schoolhouse to the grounds of East High School, setting up a potentially uncomfortable juxtaposition between a grand neo-Gothic building and a small shed, built in the same generation by the same school board, a last gasp of Plessy v. Ferguson's separate-but-equal allowances.[290] While the school never followed through with the student-led plan, Scott was awarded the 2010 Preserve America History Teacher of the Year for Tennessee, chiefly for his leadership on the historical research and preservation project.[291]

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287 Tom Charlier, "Presidents Island gets 182 acres of green," The Commercial Appeal, November 23, 1997, A1, A9.

288 Stephen Price, "Bustling Presidents Island also has a serene, soft side," The Commercial Appeal, October 26, 2003.

289 Jason Weise, "The voice of the youth in Preservation," The Keystone, March 2010, 2.

290 Nicholas Shanks, Jhmarkus Simpson, Tiara Austin, and Dominique Wein, "The Importance of Education to Memphis Told From a One Room School," The Keystone, March 2010, 2.

291 "East High's Mark Scott is State History Teacher of the Year Leading Students in Efforts to Preserve Historic One-Room School House," Memphis, Tennes-

Figure 9: Presidents Island, Upland Today

2011 proved to be one of the most eventful in Presidents Island's modern history. Heavy rains throughout the Mississippi River Basin topped up the spring snowmelt, causing record crests and straining the Army Corps of Engineer's billions of dollars of river control infrastructure.[292] This catastrophic flooding also brought a strain on Presidents Island that it had not felt in some time – the urge to split again into two islands. For significant periods of its history, Presidents Island had been two—its smaller, northwestern twin had been variously called Vice Presidents Island, Bray's Island, and Sam Morrow Island throughout its history. The decision to split was historically one which the river made, and it had decided that Presidents Island would become two again. The patchwork quilt of the Corps' revetments on the north bank of the island failed along a half-mile section, as the Mississippi cut over a mile inland. If the Mississippi River completed its work and cut the island in two, it would throw up new banks across the mouth of the McKellar Lake harbor, making it costly and difficult to keep a vital artery of Memphis

see: Targeted News Service, LLC., on behalf of Memphis City Public Schools, July 12, 2010.

292 "Mississippi flood: Southern states brace for crest," BBC News, May 11, 2011.

Figure 10: Presidents Island, Lowland Today

commerce open.[293] One retired hydraulics engineer, quoted in 2011, summarized a river engineer's preferred attitude toward the Mississippi: "[w]e don't control the river. The river is the control [...] The works of the corps can tickle it a little bit and keep it manageable."[294] The Corps estimated that more than $750 million would be needed to undo damage, fix levees, dredge, and restore spillways along the length of the River. $32.1 million of that was spent to reinforce the north edge of the Island. The first phase, comprising a structure of 255,000 tons of stone, was finished before the next high-water season, as any further incursions by the Mississippi could irreversibly change the River's primary channel. By 2014, a total of over one million tons of stone and two million cubic yards of dredge fill was placed.[295] The result was sublime in scale and affect. A field of stone, over one mile long and four hundred feet wide, now stretched across the breach the River had carved, built to withstand floods at least as catastrophic as the one faced in 2011.[296]

293 Tom Charlier, "Mississippi River tried changing course during flooding, leaving huge bill," The Commercial Appeal, September 6, 2011.

294 Ibid.

295 United States, Army Corps of Engineers, "President's Island."***

296 Ibid.

In 2017, As Memphis slowly emerged from the 2008 recession, it began a soberer study of the future of Presidents Island, with an eye to repurposing and reinvigorating its aging industrial buildings.[297] The master plan, conducted by engineering consultants Pickering, was presented to a joint meeting of the Port Commission and Memphis' Economic Development Growth Engine on October 17, 2018. The master plan continued to vindicate the supporters of the expansion of the Frank C. Pidgeon Industrial Park in the Ensley Bottoms. The 4,500-acre site was only half-occupied and benefitted from a rail connection. Expanding the industrial fill portion of Presidents Island, arguably the conservative choice when the question of port expansion was broached years before, was now dismissed by Pickering for being too risky and costly. Instead, they recommended that Presidents Island's aging industrial properties be upgraded and consolidated to make them more attractive to potential new investors.[298] The island now sits at this critical crossroads, its very existence as an industrial center owing to the extraordinary feat of engineering required to connect it to the mainland, but its future constrained by a revanchist approach which looks inward to the resources it has already developed. The dogged insistence that the island remain merely an industrial zone has precluded all sorts of other uses the island could have been put to, foregoing parks, prisons, and a fantasy-world Venetian research university in favor of what it has since been—a wide, flat, zig-zagging bar of hard-packed silt, stubbled with aging industrial properties. Perhaps its future could look to its past—its pre-1947 past—for nudges toward a more imaginative, and more complete, future.

297 Wayne Risher, "Port of Memphis master plan looks to future of Presidents Island," The Commercial Appeal, March 28, 2017.

298 Wayne Risher, "Port master plan envisions heavy capital investment, big rewards," Daily Memphian, October 18, 2018.

LAND FOR WHAT?

Every second, nearly five hundred thousand cubic feet of water flow between West and East Memphis, crash against President's Island, and continue to the south. The name of this river, the Mississippi, descends from the Ojibwe word 'Misiziibi', "a river spread over a large area". This name and its meaning are familiar to residents of the Mississippi Flood Plain, where the constant, low-grade threat of inundation is a part of daily life. Of course, this threat has existed for as long as the Mississippi Flood Plain has been inhabited, most of it without modification or supervision -- thousands of years, if archaeological records are to be believed. The earliest inhabitants of the Mississippi River were mound-builders, constructing enormous earthworks inside flood plains for cultural and sacred purposes, but also to keep away from flood waters. In Memphis itself, the so-called Desoto Mounds, named after the Spanish explorer who first discovered the Mississippi River for himself at this point, formed the basis of a civilization that occupied the flood plain in present-day southwest Tennessee. After crossing this river in search of gold and silver, de Soto returned to its banks a year later and died of a fever. He was buried under cover of darkness in the Mississippi River so as not to damage claims to deity he had made to the indigenous population.

The complex Middle Mississippian culture which bracketed the river successfully for years neither resisted the river nor fled it. This accommodative mode of occupation it modeled hints that our fraught occupation of the Mississippi Alluvial Plain is an aberration, not a new normal, and suggests ways to move forward.

This powerful river was the natural outworking of an extraordinarily subtle topographical shift. The watershed of the Mississippi River, stretching from the Rocky Mountains to the west to the Appalachian Mountains to the east, encapsulates 41% of the land mass of the modern contiguous United States, and funnels that water to a kind of valley, carved from hundreds of millions of years of this inexorable water flow. Along its course, it is joined by two large rivers, the Arkansas and the Ohio, which widen and intensify it. Water bodies have at one time or another covered most of the lower portions of this flood plain.

European occupation of this river followed

a different, and more Western, mode of living. Rivers were -- and are -- conduits of trade, shipping, and industry. Indifferent to the presence of these new settlements built right along its banks, the Mississippi continued moving, swelling, and flooding. In 1927, a catastrophic flood devastated the vibrant industrial corridor of the Mississippi, made so intense by the uncoordinated infrastructural investments made by various states and municipalities to protect its land. In some places south of Memphis, the Mississippi, in ordinary times no more than 3 1/2 miles across, reached 60 miles in width. The human toll exacted on the poorest and most vulnerable residents of the flooded areas accelerated the Great Migration and displaced over 600,000 residents.

It was this event which galvanized Congress to pass the Flood Control Act of 1928, which gave the US Army Corps of Engineers the funds and authority to construct an enormous and complicated system of flood control and diversion structures across the length of the Middle and Lower Mississippi River. These changes and modifications, driven as they have been by both political and ecological exigencies, have profoundly altered the ecology and society of the human and non-human inhabitants of the Mississippi River.

"Some years ago, the Corps made a film that showed the navigation lock and a complex of associated structures built in an effort to prevent the capture of the Mississippi. The narrator said, "This nation has a large and powerful adversary. Our opponent could cause the United States to lose nearly all her seaborne commerce, to lose her standing as first among trading nations. . . .We are fighting Mother Nature. . . .It's a battle we have to fight day by day, year by year; the health of our economy depends on victory.""[1]

This war cannot be eternal. At some point, the costs will be too high to continue it. The Corps has been tasked to stop time, but "[Mother Nature] has nothing but time."[2] The history of the Mississippi in the United States is a history of this slow, protracted struggle, fought out over tons of concrete and millions of sandbags and enormous, relentless silt-filled water. But the river will survive this fight, and outlive every engineer who seeks to contain it. Floods are its ways of restoring order, and it does so without regard for the unique forms of the new, anthropogenic boundaries in its way.

1 John McPhee, The Control of Nature (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1989), 7.
2 Ibid., 24.

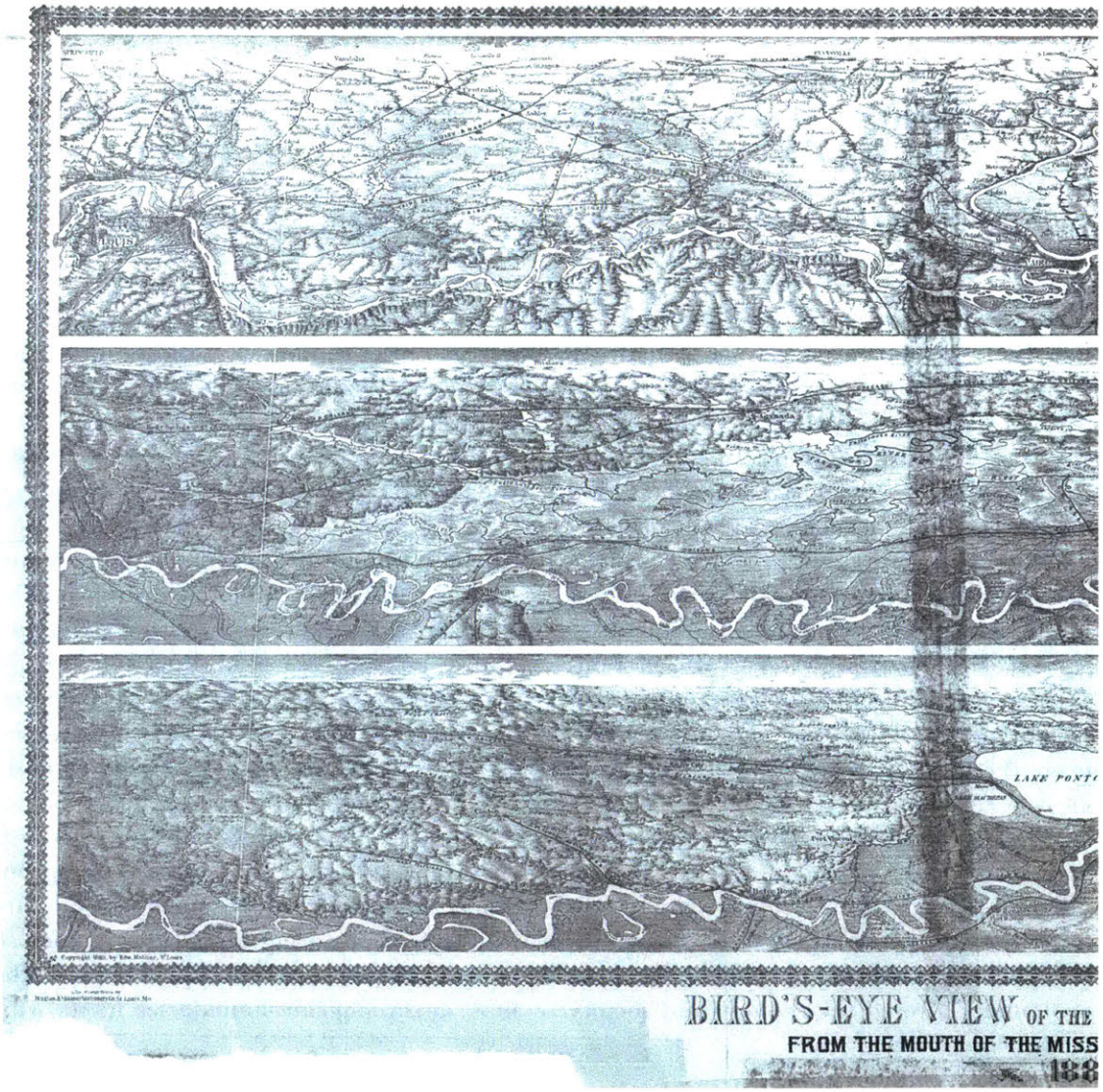
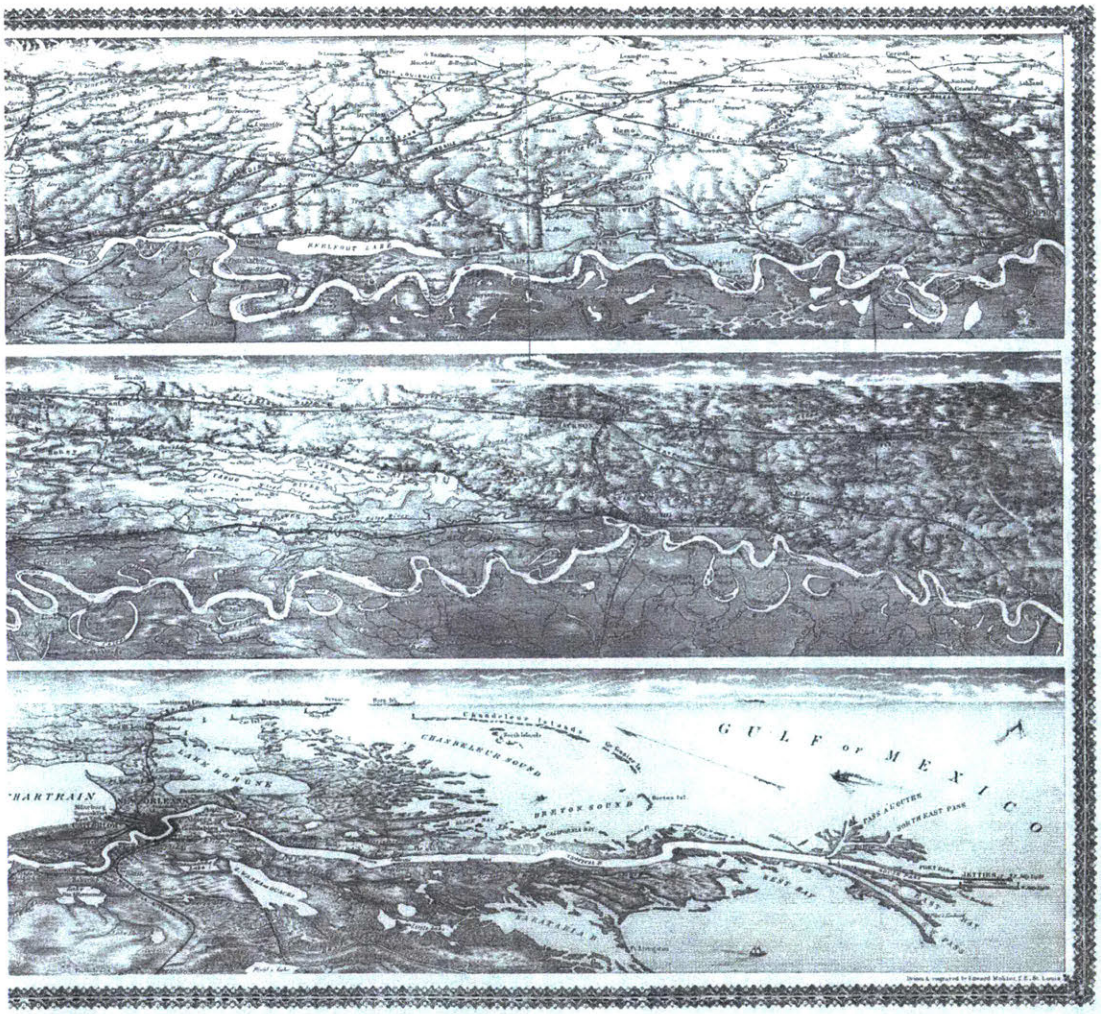


Figure 11: Edward Molitor, "Bird's-Eye View of the Mississippi River," Cleveland, OH: Brooks & Co., Publishers (1884)



MISSISSIPPI RIVER

OURI TO THE GULF OF MEXICO.

CLEVELAND O
BROOKS & CO
PUBLISHERS

The victims of this war and the political and economic strictures which make it necessary are, as they always have been, the people without means living within its alluvial sway. In 1927, African American plantation workers were doubly victimized by the floodwaters devastating their low-lying communities and the casual indifference of aid workers and government agencies to their plight.[3] In 2018, those unfortunate enough to live downstream or downwind of the powerful industries which make this time-stopping enterprise an economic necessity suffer in their own way, with cancer, disinvestment, and malnutrition.[4]

3 TODO: McPhee info on this flood?***

4 TODO: Cancer Alley writeup***

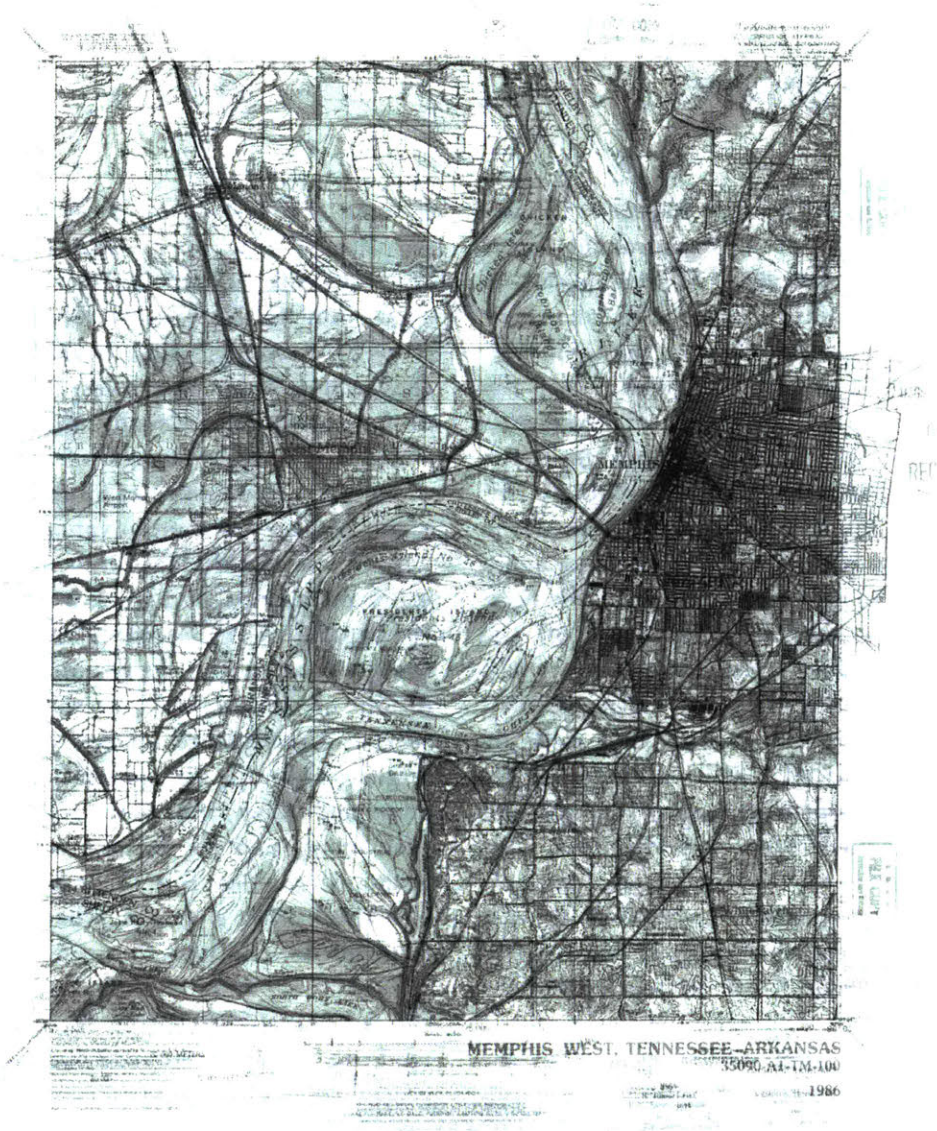


Figure 12: Presidents Island, Composite Mapping

LAND FOR WHOM?

The island is also a local chapter in the nationwide history of the disenfranchisement of black landowners. Sharecropping, a method of profiting from cheap labor that landowners pivoted to after the Civil War, found use on this island as well. When the original white landowners of President's Island received their land back from the Treasury Department and Freedmen's Bureau, the black farmers who worked the land suddenly found themselves once again in the thrall of white landowners for their livelihood or were literally burned off the land as squatters. Ever after, this was the sort of land that was called a plantation. Those farmers who stayed, in a state of quasi-independent isolation, were never in a contractual relationship that allowed them to control their own destinies. This suggests that any future proposal for this island must consider reparations to, the re-enfranchisement of, and the re-establishment of the roots to the island that faded.

Proposing an agrarian community in the American agricultural context imposes several immediate difficulties. Farming at a small scale is deeply precarious, tied as it is to the season-to-season vagaries of weather, blight, pests, and international economies. Small farmers, including sharecroppers, historically relied on "cash crops" -- products which could be sold for the greatest value, regardless of their value for subsistence. Usually, this cash crop was sown on top of the rest of the farmer's other crops, and served as a subsidy for less value-adding -- but more valuable -- products. These smallholder farms are economically precarious, tied as they are both to the vagaries of the international market for that product and to the unpredictable conditions of weather and disease, season by season. Monoculture factory farming has largely made this distinction between cash crops and other kinds moot -- all crops are cash crops, and all farms are single-duty economic engines. But there is a potential to rethink what a crop is, what smallholder farms do, and how to meaningfully and reliably profit from land. If land were considered valuable not only for the sellable food products it could yield but also for the ecosystemic and infrastructural services it provided -- especially if those services are ongoing -- the prospect for economically

stable smallholder farms improves.

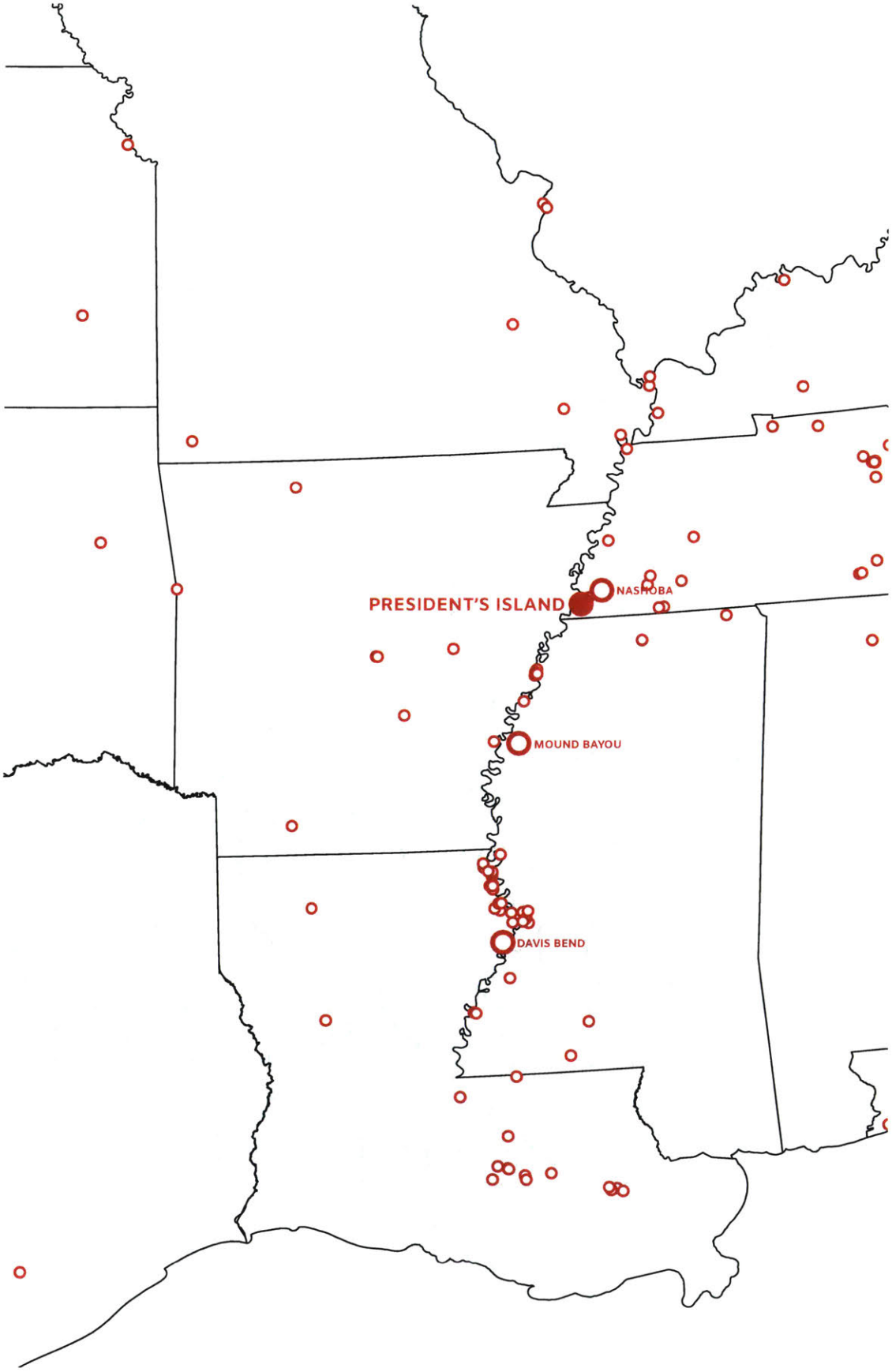
The location of this proposed agrarian communities presents another difficulty at the outset: the ever-present, low-grade risk of flooding. Floods are a thorny problem in statistics, resolved by abstract nomenclature like the '100 Year Flood'. With these floods, it is a question of when, not if. Unlike the flash floods that can devastate valley communities in seconds without warning, Mississippi floods are the product of enormous, slow-moving aggregations. The catchment basin on the Mississippi River encompasses 41% of the landmass of the contiguous United States. Each spring, when the network of thousands of streams and rivers that empty into the Mississippi swell with melted snow, the waters of the Mississippi slowly rise, taking days to move from their origins in the Midwest and the Rockies to the Delta region in Louisiana. Outrunning these floodwaters is simple, as advance warning is always available. But living productively within these floodplains requires thinking about occupation as temporary, cyclical, and permanently impermanent.

There is a possible irony embedded within a proposal to turn over cheap flood-prone land to the descendants of those divested of it so many years before. But that irony largely ignores possible ways of living with that land that are far more valuable, productive, and stable than the landless or monocultural alternatives.

In another way, this project can be thought of as a kind of allegory for the Black experience in America: as a kind of permanent impermanence; a deep belonging to the place, but an alienation from permanent foundation.

That this land would be agricultural is important to the quest for doing justice with the Presidents Island story. LaDonna Redmond wrote in 2017, "Growing food is not just about the food. Food production is tied to resistance: resistance to injustice, and by default a place of refuge. The theft of land and its underlying water, oil, and mineral resources, is a crime against humanity. On the surface, it's the land that is up for grabs, but what is truly at stake is the dignity of those that live on the land and the destiny of those generations that come after."[1]

1 Eds. Justine M. Williams and Eric Holt-Gimenez, "Land Justice: Re-imagining Land, Food, and the Commons in the United States," Oakland: Food First Books,


PRESIDENT'S ISLAND
NASHOBA
MOUND BAYOU
DAVIS BEND

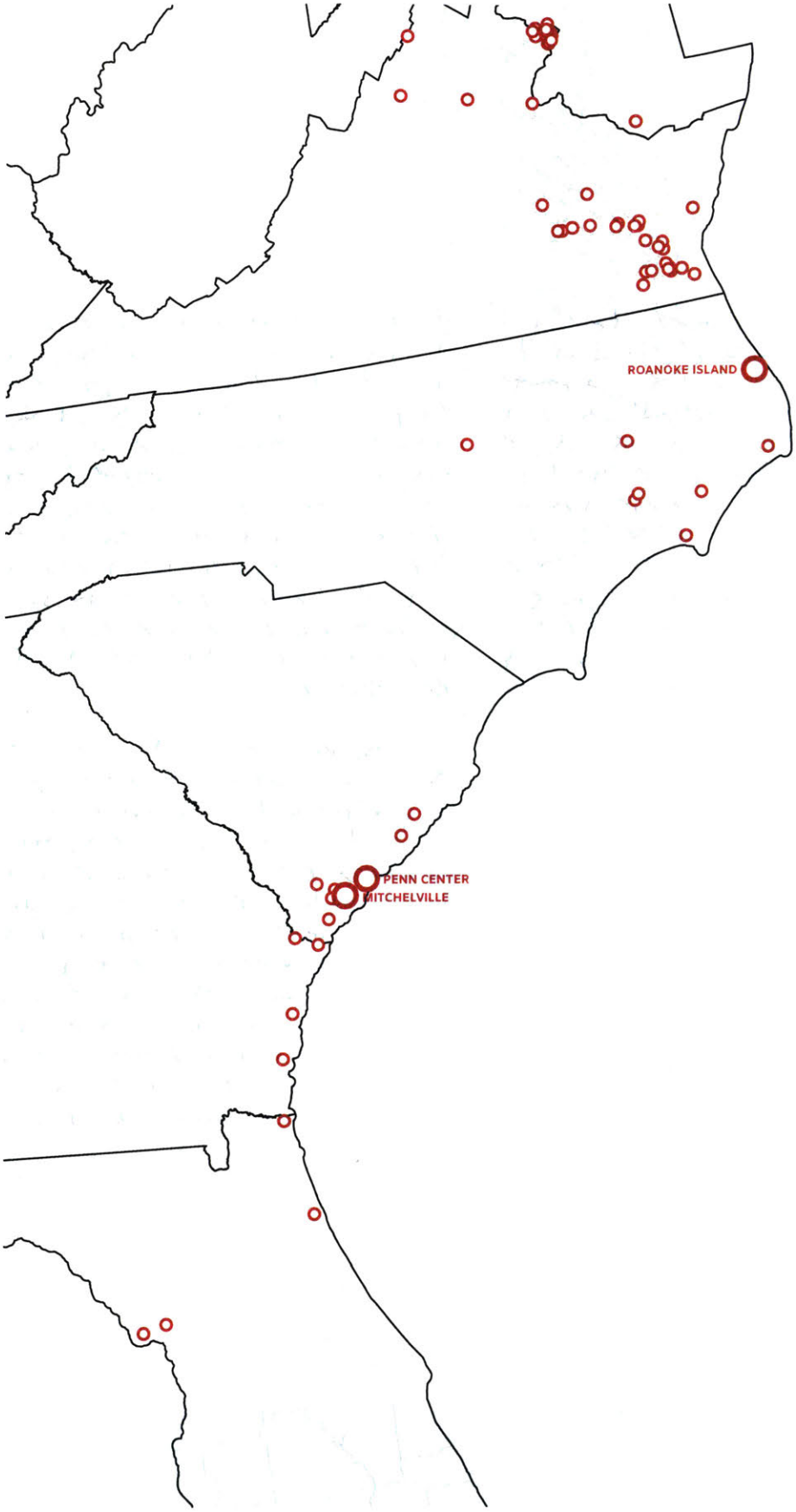


Figure 13: Map of Contraband Camps Locations

New Black agrarianism also offers opportunities to re-imagine Black communities in the 21st century, especially in a fraught context like Southwest Memphis, where divestment, racism, and the deprivation of economic opportunity has marked Black lives there since the community was first established during the rapid urbanization of Memphis during the Civil War. "Today, in response to increasing racism resulting in unemployment and economic dislocation, Black families and communities are once again realizing and taking advantage of opportunities inherent in the land by growing food in cities, building community gardens, and creating alternative food systems for community health and well-being, as well as economic empowerment."[2]

Contraband camps such as the Dixie Camp on Presidents Island often, though not always, transitioned into intentional Black agrarian communities, most notably in the Sea Islands of the Carolinas, where the ircomparative isolation insulated the communities from threats from the outside.[3]

Several of these communities, as well as one pre-Civil War intentional community, bear mentioning here. Nashoba, the nearest to Memphis, was an intentional community founded by a progressive reformer who saw an economic way out of slavery. By having enslaved people work in common to earn their freedom collectively, it was thought that the economic system of slavery could be upended within a generation. The project fell apart after a few years, as most utopian communities do, but was remarkable for its attempt.

Other communities, like Mitchelville, St. Helena Island, and Penn Center, occupied the Sea Islands along the coast of South and North Carolina, built up from former plantations and established near Union forts during the Civil War to afford protection for the newly-freed and for the Union army to profit from the productive potential of the abandoned plantations. Finally, Davis Bend, and its associated community, Mound Bayou, were remarkable for their long-term success, attributable to consistent and thoughtful leadership an unshake-

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2017
2 Ibid, 17-18
3 Ibid, 27-28

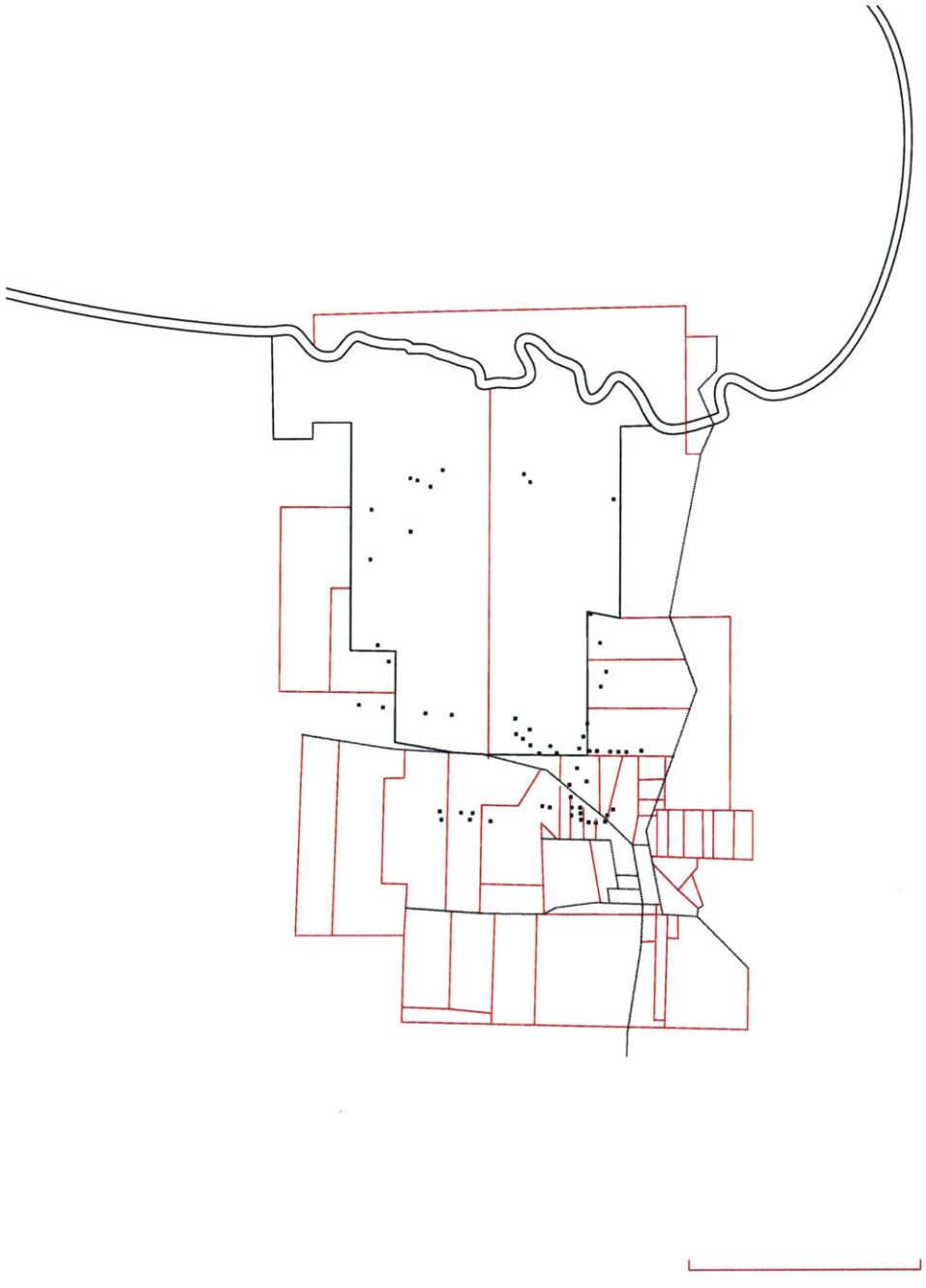

Figure 14: Nashoba, Germantown, Tennessee

Figure 15: Mitchelville, South Carolina

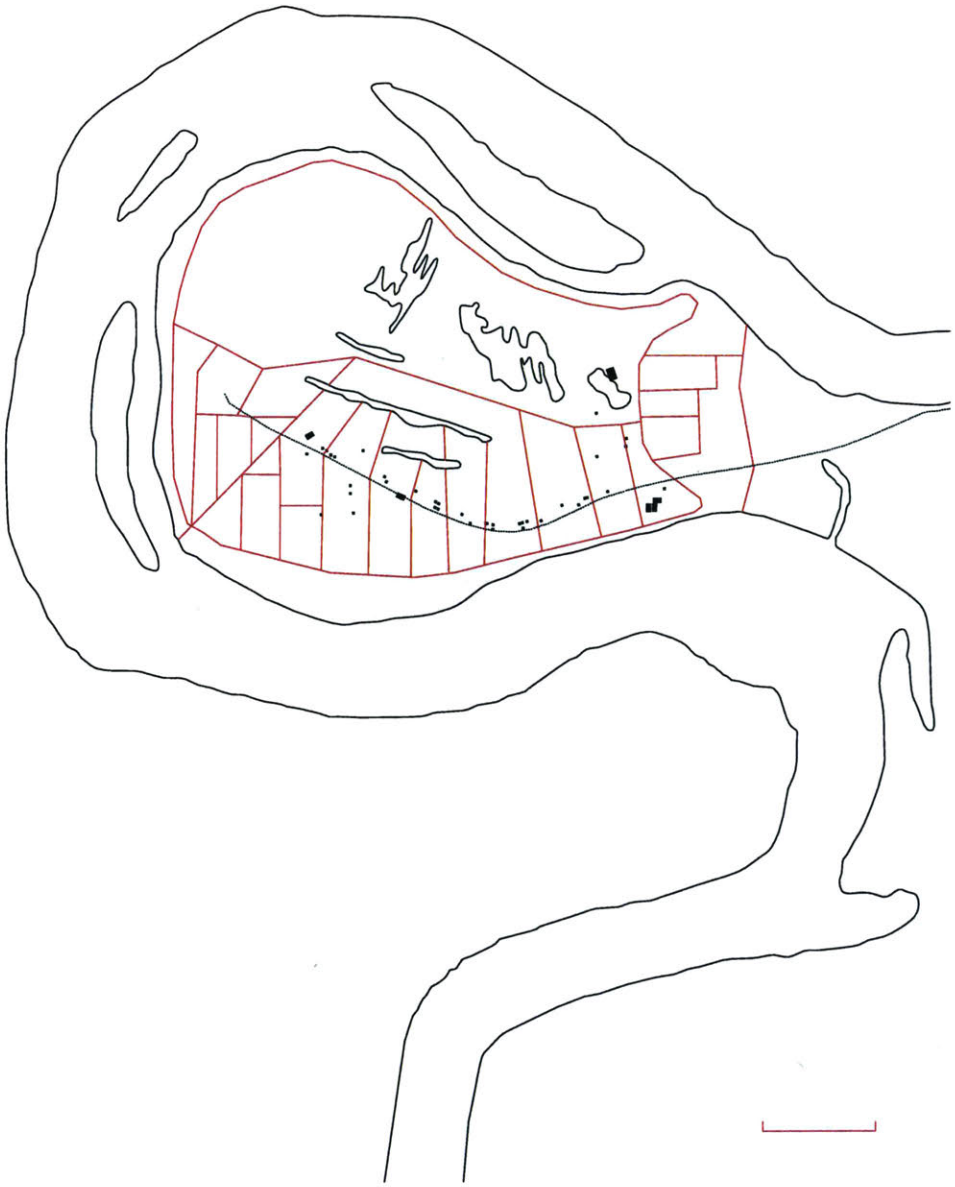

Figure 16: Davis Bend, Mississippi

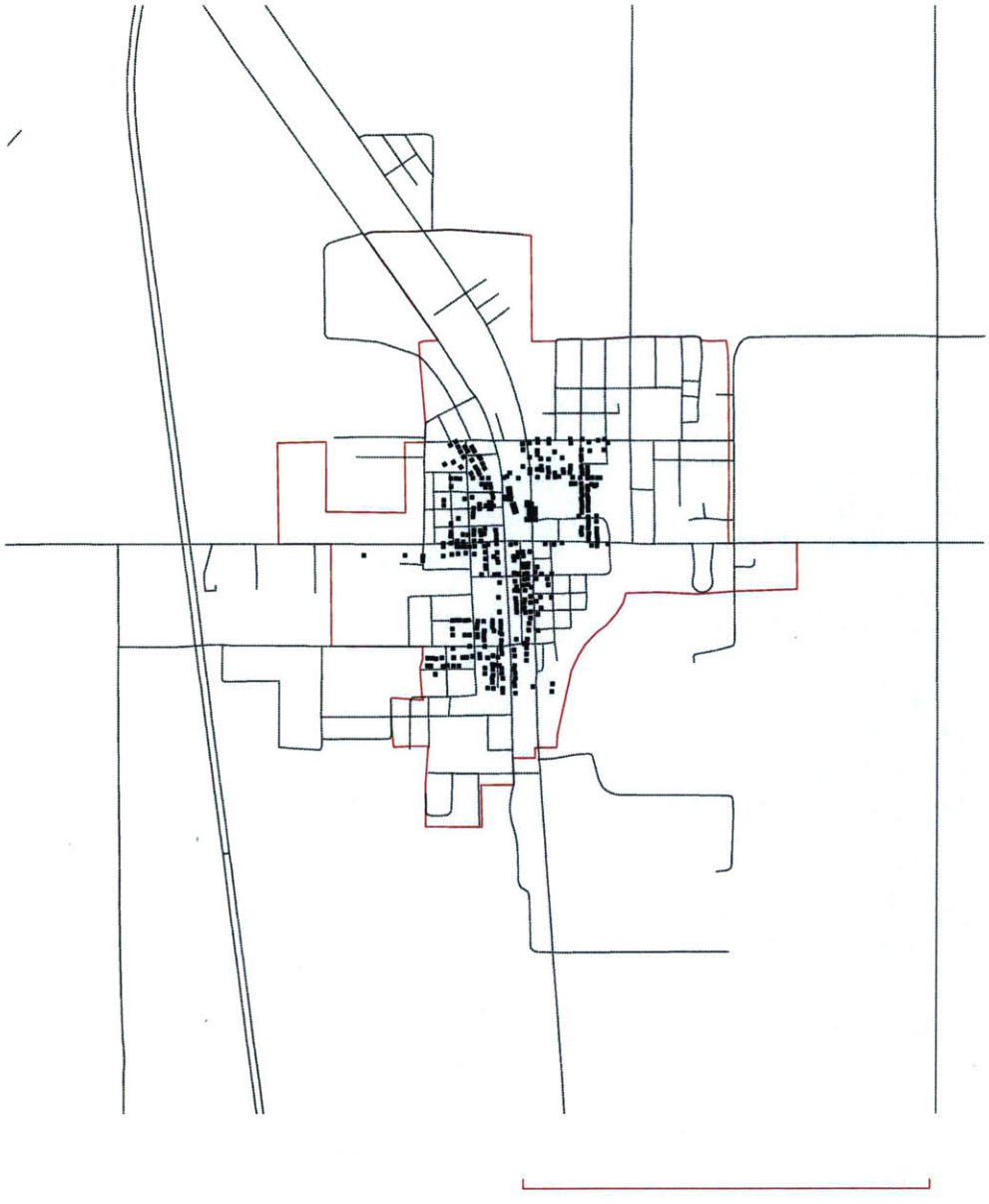

Figure 17: Mound Bayou, Mississippi

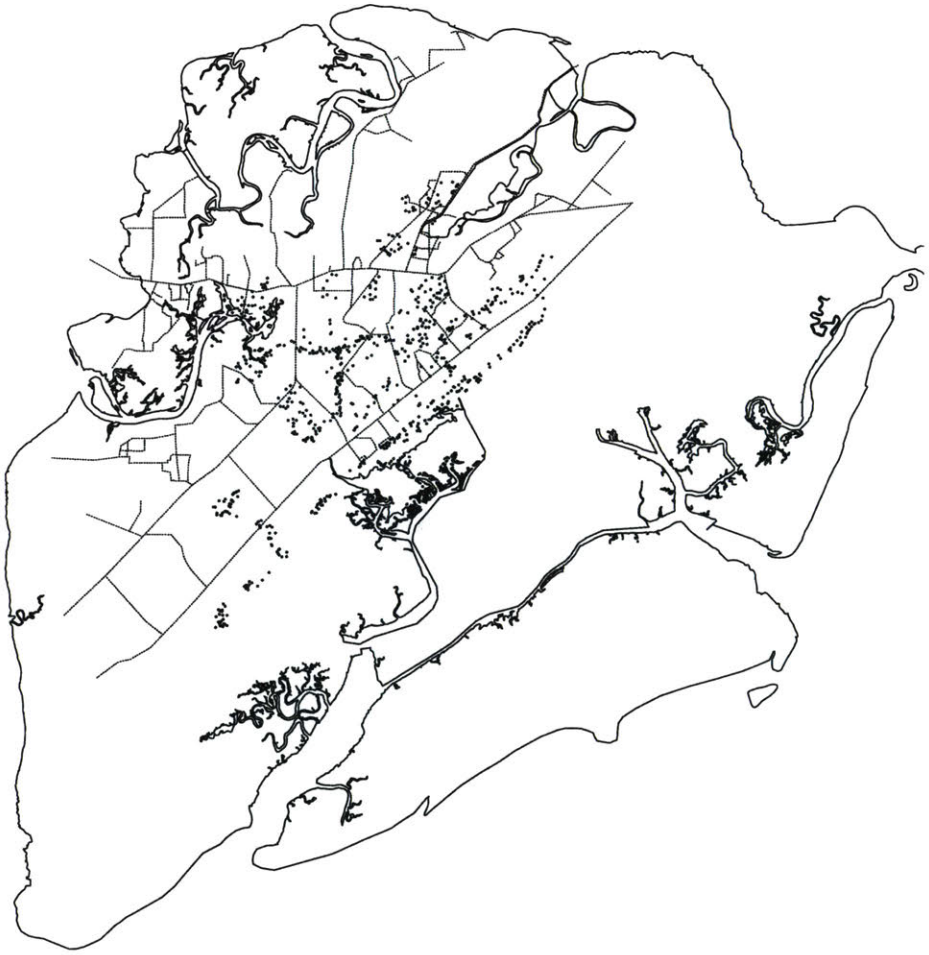

Figure 18: St. Helena Island, South Carolina

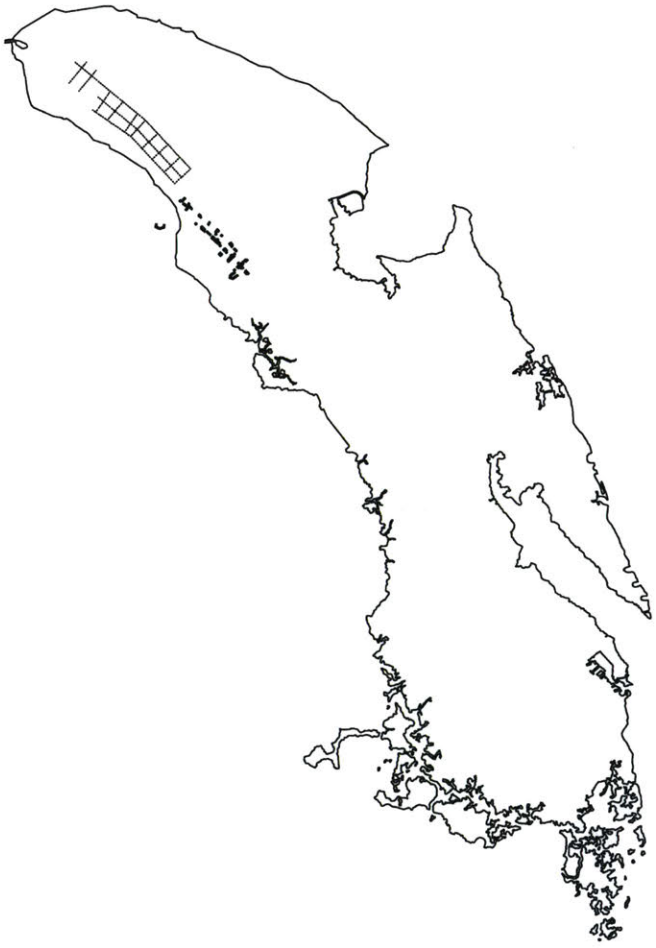

Figure 19: Penn Center, North Carolina

able control of land rights.[4]

Control of land rights is critical for the success of any agrarian project, but is especially important for one focused on ensuring secure and stable land access to a Black population who has suffered brutally under schemes of slavery, sharecropping, rent-seeking, and deplorable landlord-tenant schemes. But there is something unique about the long-term commitment of smallholder farming that makes long-term land commitments even more important: farming takes time, entails high risks, and does not offer easy-to-quantify returns in the short term. Therefore, requiring short-term lease agreements without any security or longevity is disastrous to the viability and sustainability of smallholder farming.

Legally-binding structures that enable long-term control of land enables farmers to invest in soil construction, practice a longer-term crop rotation system without maximizing year-to-year cash value, and to gain a deeper understanding of the vagaries of the land so as to ensure better long-term solutions.[5]

There is also a strong argument to be made for an entirely different legal land-holding schema than private property ownership, especially in contested land like Presidents Island, where the Port Commission may want to retain some measure of control. A nationwide movement for treating agricultural land as a conservation project is underway under the auspices of the American Farmland Trust, which seeks to maintain farmland where it already exists. Other models, like ones where communities hold land collectively in trust, reaches a cooperative agreement that balances the needs of the communty with the individual investment made by smallholder farmers into land improvements.[6] In all of these scenarios, reducing precariousness is critical for the success of intentional agrarian communities in the 21st century American context.

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4 Janet Sharp Hermann, "The Pursuit of a Dream," New York: Oxford University Press, 1981

5 Eds. Justine M. Williams and Eric Holt-Gimenez, "Land Justice: Re-imagining Land, Food, and the Commons in the United States," Oakland: Food First Books (2017), 116-119

6 Ibid, 119

THE ISLAND

As a matter of natural history, Presidents Island arises from a relatively common feature of river course changes. As rivers meander and oxbow, they can pinch off sections into oxbow lakes, and later reconnect with them to split their flow. Alternately, as is suggested in some quarters, the head of Presidents Island is host to loose stone, which could have gradually forced the Mississippi River to split to either side, accreting silt on the downward side of the rock impediments until an island formed. Either way, geologists agree that the accretions forming Presidents Island were of relatively recent deposition.

But Presidents Island gives us a glimpse of the pre-human history of the Mississippi River Valley, as well. As a relatively isolated spot within a fantastically rich and varied environment, sections of Presidents Island are still prime examples of the woody wetlands and bottomlands that used to dominate the Mississippi Alluvial Plain. Peach, pecan, cottonwood, water oak, and gum trees festoon the untroubled outer band of the Island, and over one hundred identified species of birds rule the skies over the island. The island has always been well-stocked with deer, bobcats, and smal mammals, who apparently crossed the sandbars at times of extreme low water and densely populated the island.

The soil of Presidents Island is similarly well-suited to richness. Indeed, the very fact that it has been so diligently farmed for about two hundred years is testament to the legendary richness of its silty soil. Floods carry with them nutrient-rich sediments which, when they encounter the natural floodbreaks that are trees, shrubs, grasses, and topographic variety, deposit these sediments in a new, sandy-silty layer on top of the island. The painstaking process of this continual sediment deposition over thousands of years has made Presidents Island topsoil uniquely suited for farming--and uniquely prone to occasional and catastrophic inundation.

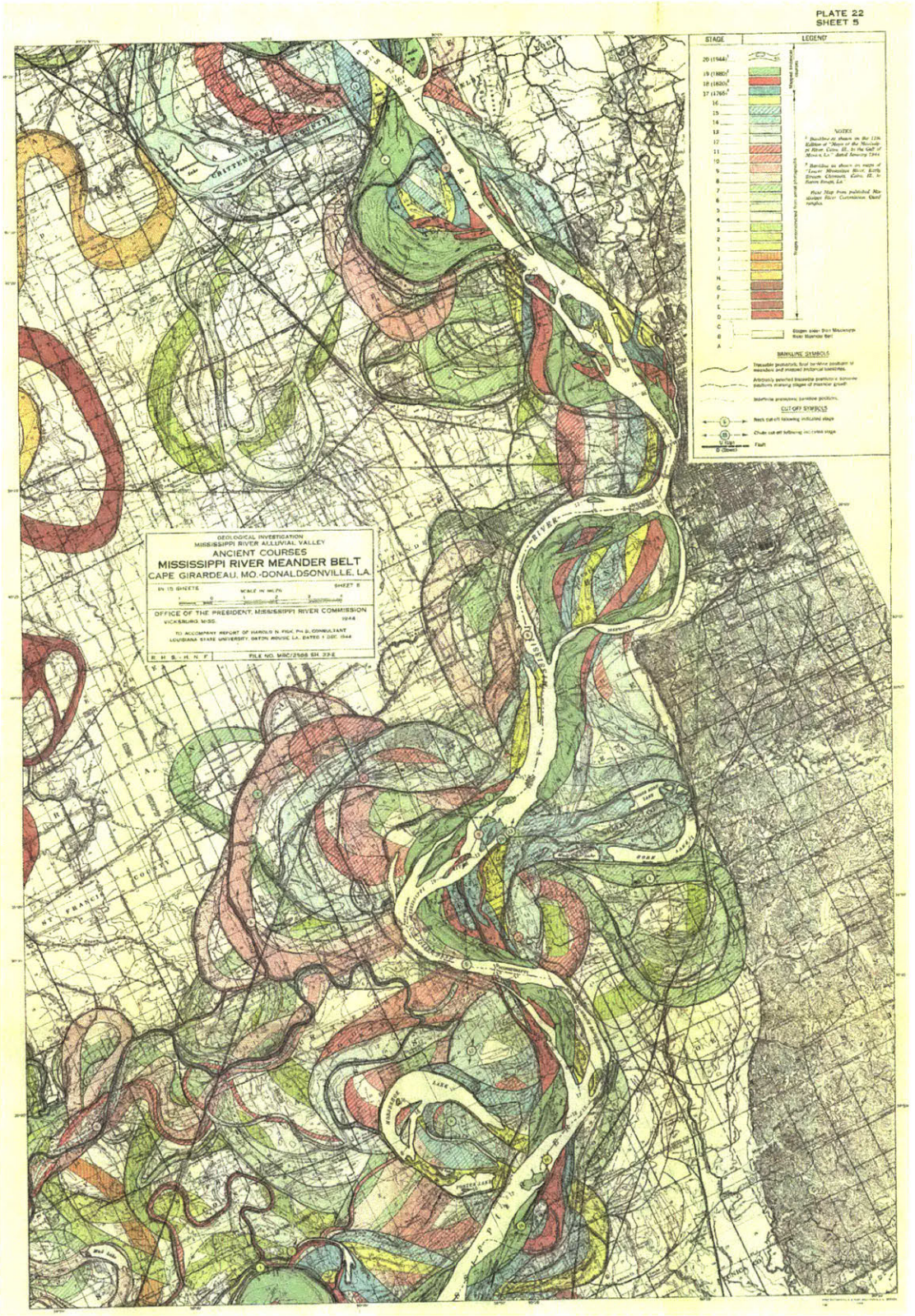


Figure 20: Harold N. Fisk, "Mississippi River Meander Belt," Mississippi River Commission, 1947

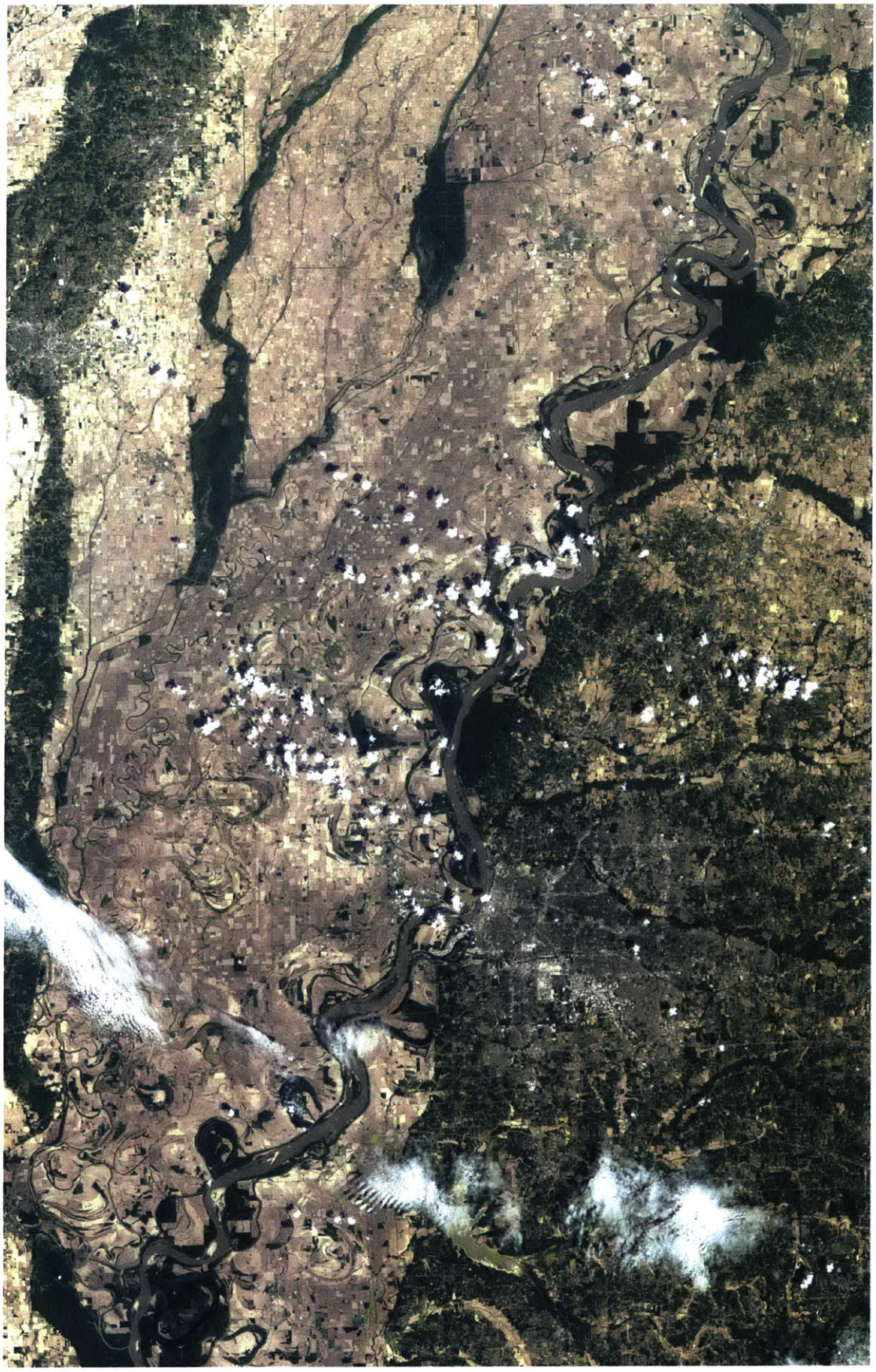


Figure 21: Jesse Allen and Robert Simmon, NASA Earth Observatory, November 1, 2010

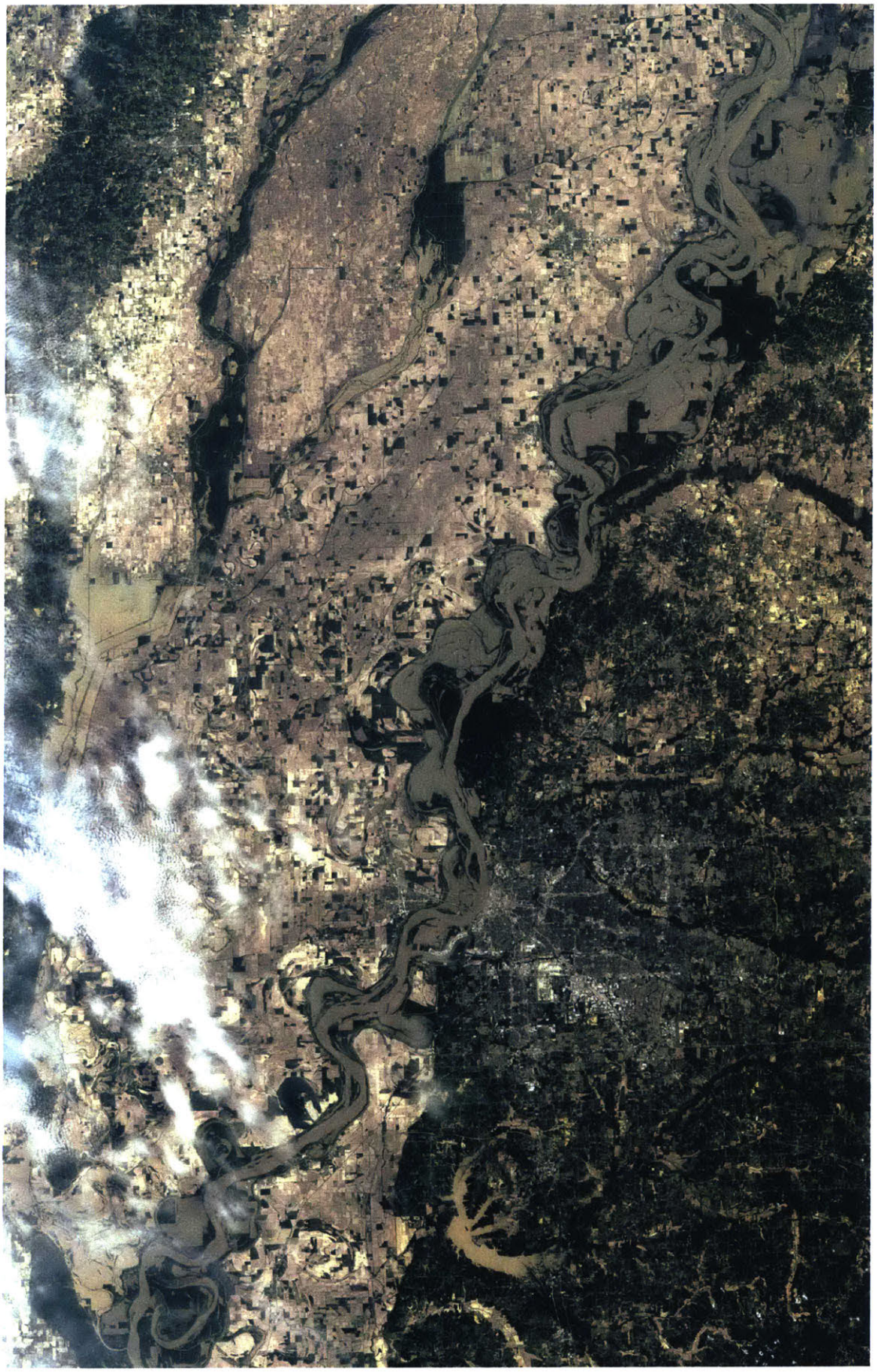


Figure 22: Jesse Allen and Robert Simmon, NASA Earth Observatory, January 30, 2011

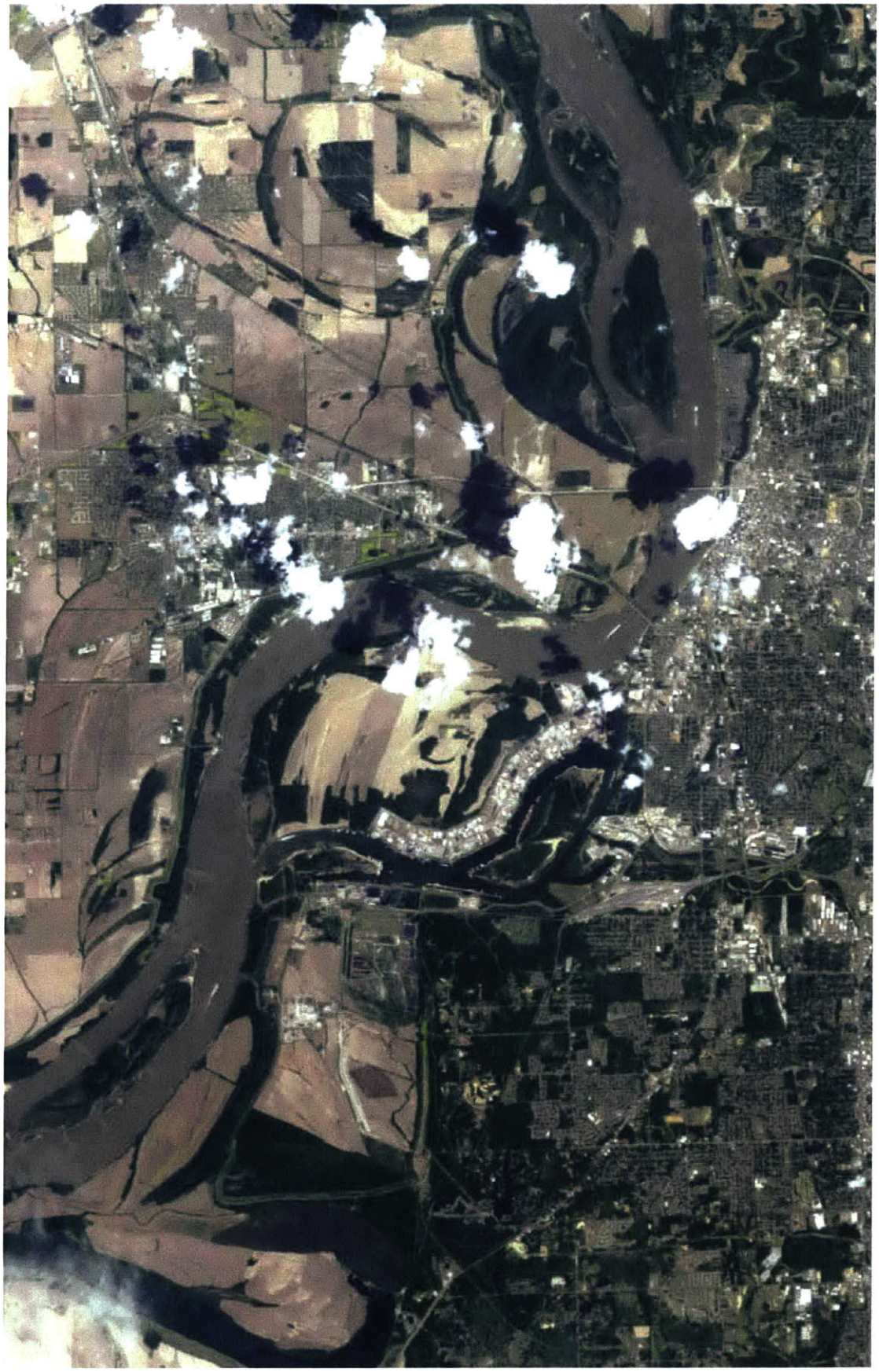


Figure 23: Jesse Allen and Robert Simmon, NASA Earth Observatory, November 1, 2010 (Inset)

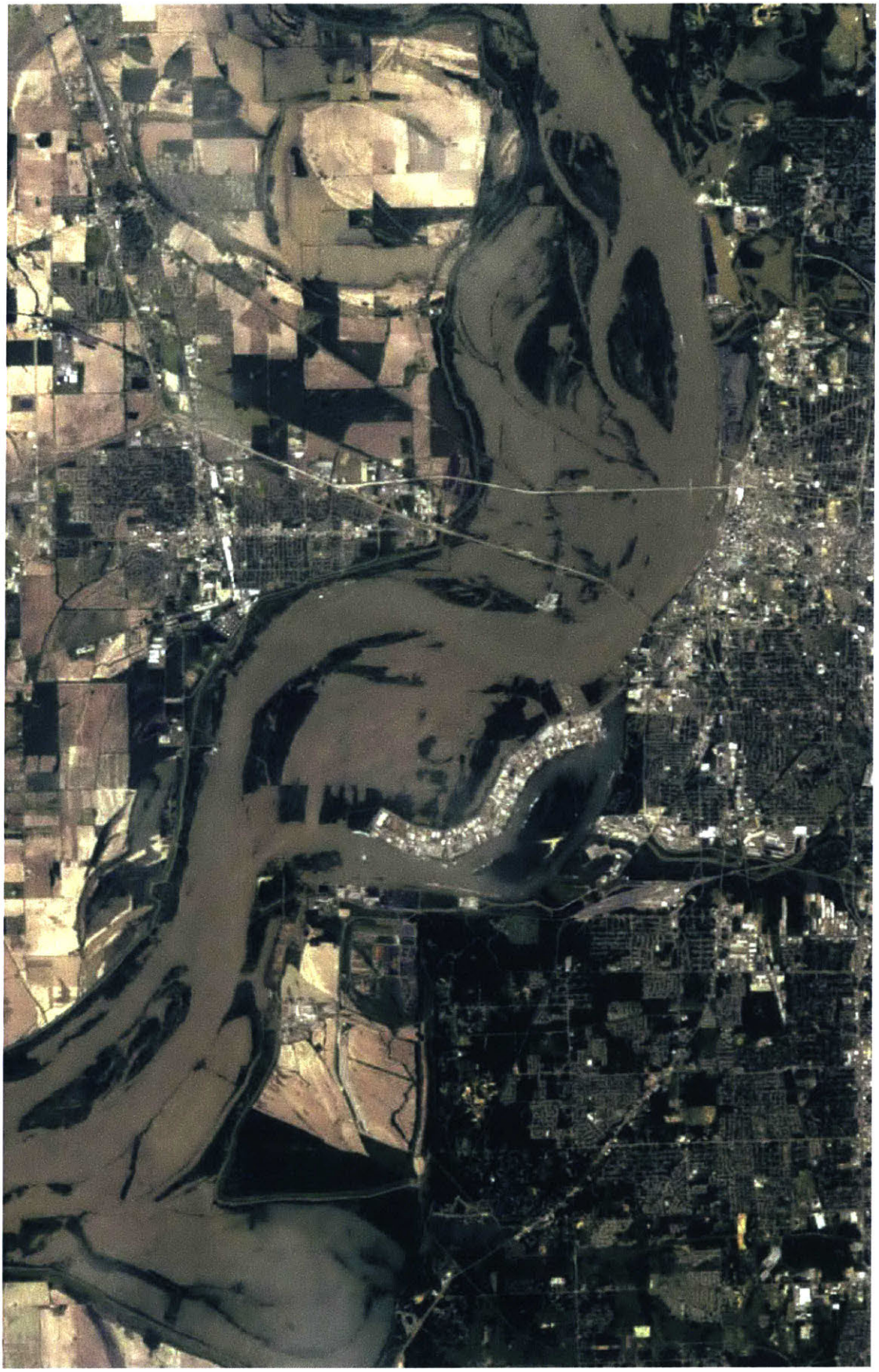


Figure 24: Jesse Allen and Robert Simmon, NASA Earth Observatory, January 30, 2011 (Inset)

Figure 25: Presidents Island, 2018

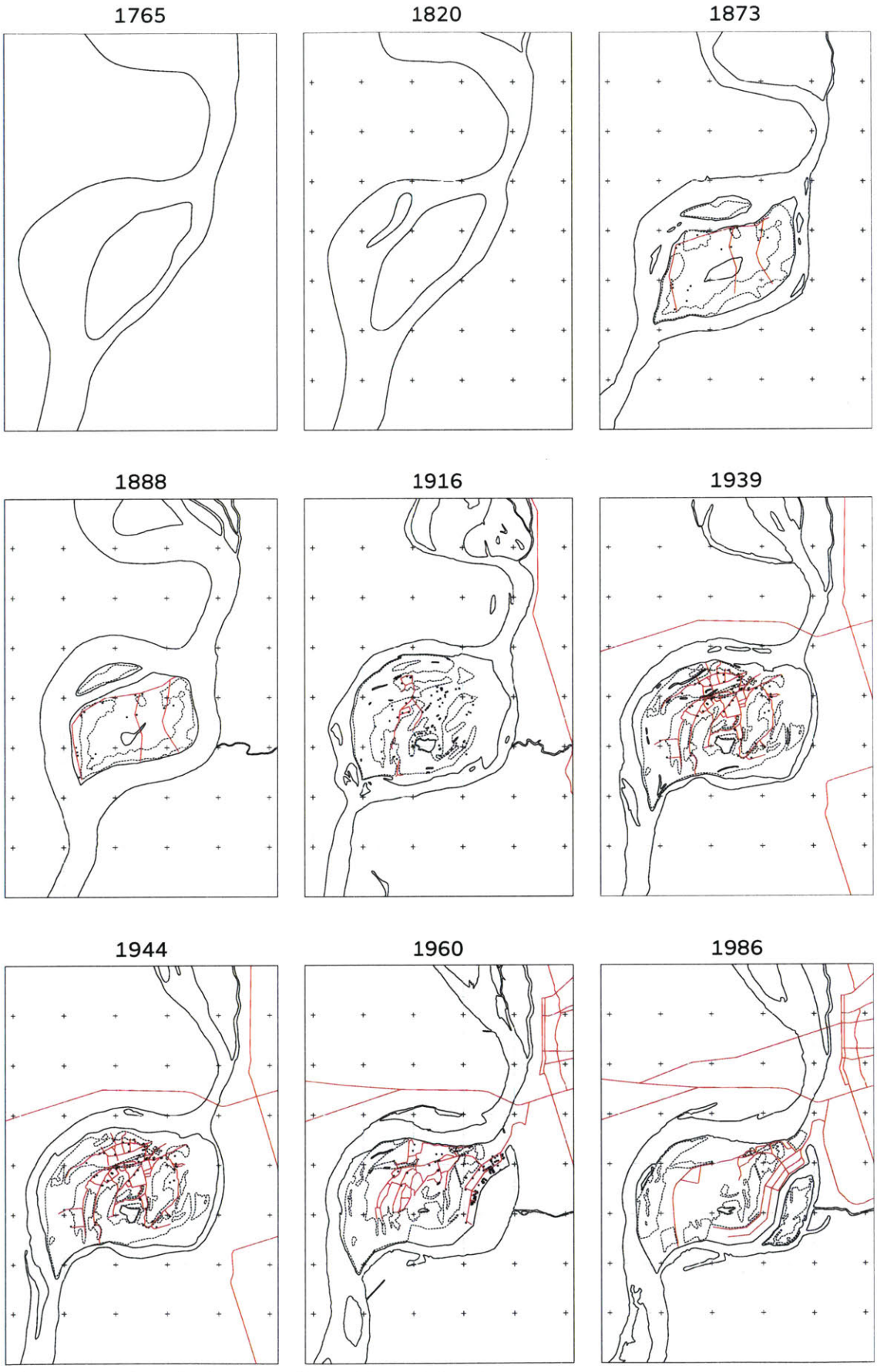


Figure 26: Historical Maps of Presidents Island

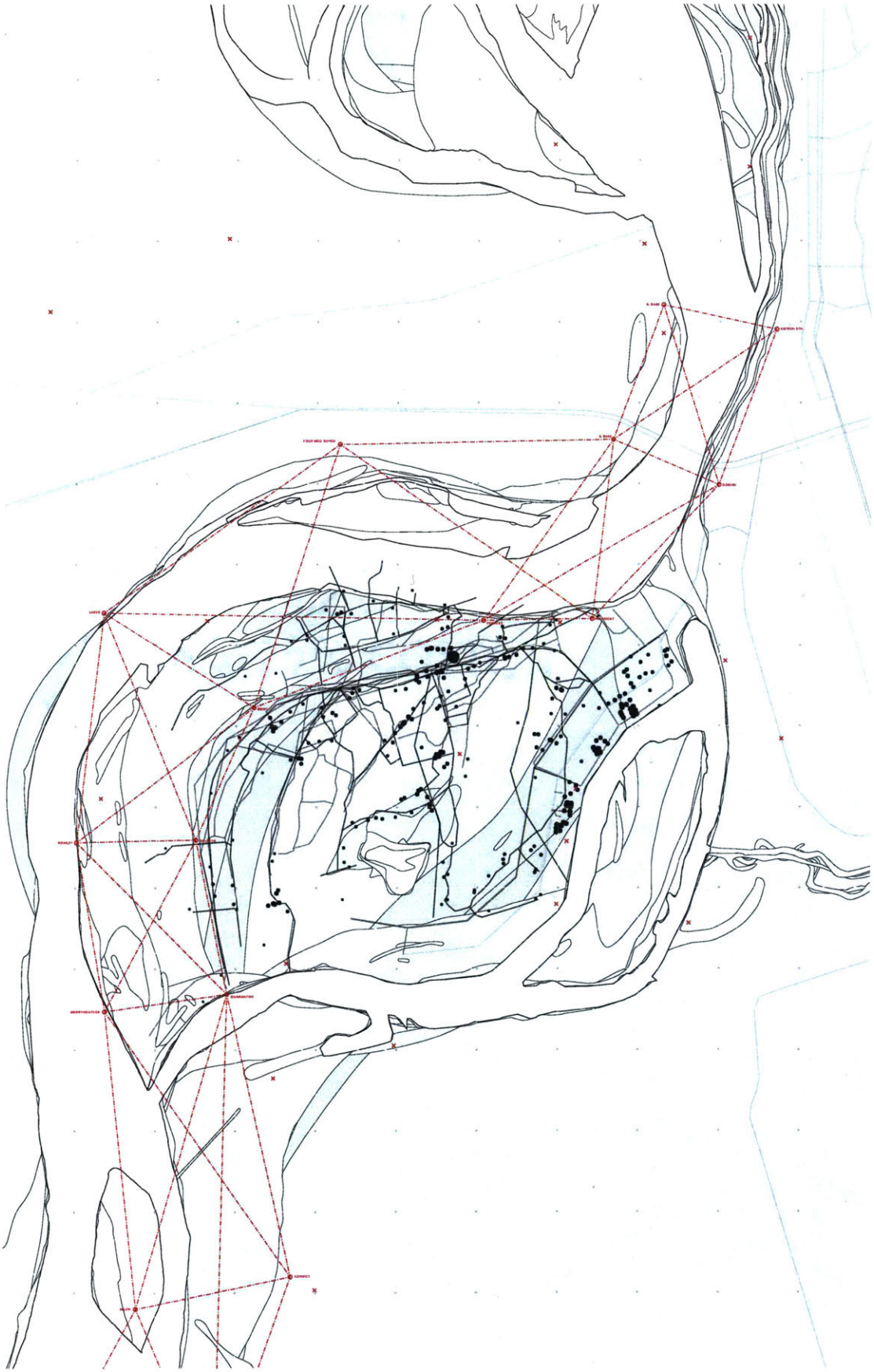


Figure 27: Composite Map of Historical Maps of Presidents Island

Figure 28: Site Map of Presidents Island

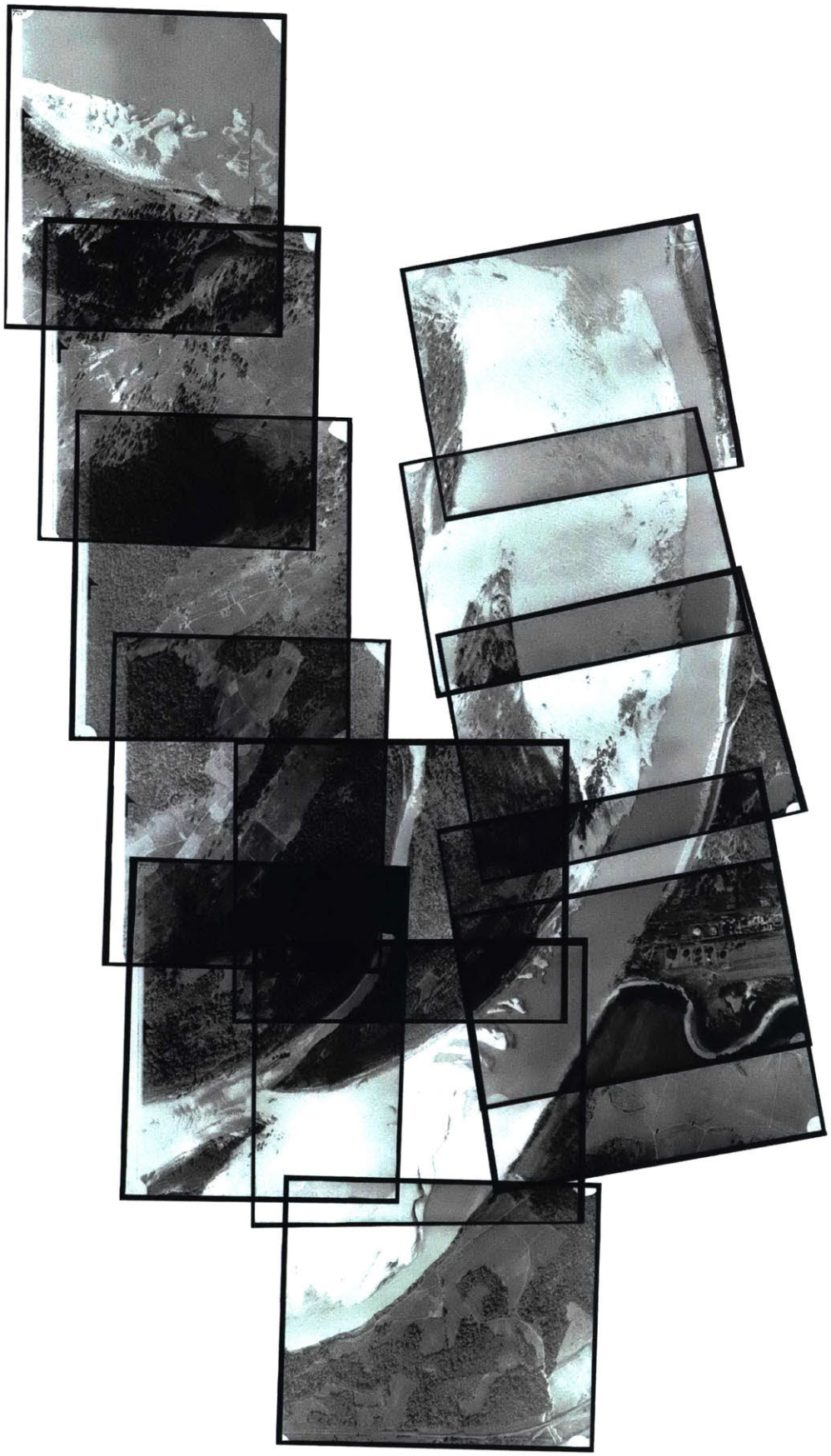


Figure 29: Composite of 1947 Aerials, Shelby County Archives

HOW TO BE, BETWEEN THE LEVEES

The project seeks ways to live in landscapes which are impermanent, ever-shifting, and yet rich with a fraught historical context. It seeks to both rehabilitate the relationship between nature and culture as practiced in farming communities, and the relationship between Black agricultural workers and the profit derived from their labor.

The vision is of a semi-nomadic community who live and work on the land in a variety of temporal cycles – season-to-season, flood-to-flood. Infrastructural and industrial spending can be sources of income, as this community finds ways to use industrial remediation, flood control, and water management as post-agricultural cash crops.

This community would deploy and re-deploy across this landscape, building structures which would productively alter the topography of the island after each flood. Structures placed in the way of floodwater can dig bogs, build up sediment islands, or create networks of channels according to the way these structures are placed.

This suggests a more productive way to live with shifting landscapes, whereby actors operationalize the energetic flows which engage the site. President's Island represents two fraught modes of engagement: total retreat, as when its residents moved to Memphis; and aggressive infrastructures with single points of failure.

The project itself takes this permanent impermanence and the opportunities for topographic manipulation as a starting point. The most critical structure on the island for land-making and land-holding is its extensive forest stand. Indeed, were the forest continuous across the east-to-west axis of Presidents Island, the catastrophic flood of 2011 may not have threatened the mouth of McKellar Lake's harbor. Therefore, the project centers the proposed community directly in the gap between two sides of the forest stand on the north side of the island.

Critically, this place was also the social heart of the Presidents Island settlement, and still boasts the last (and most major) road to criss-cross the western bottomlands. This is where the church, school, cemetery, and the greatest concentration of houses

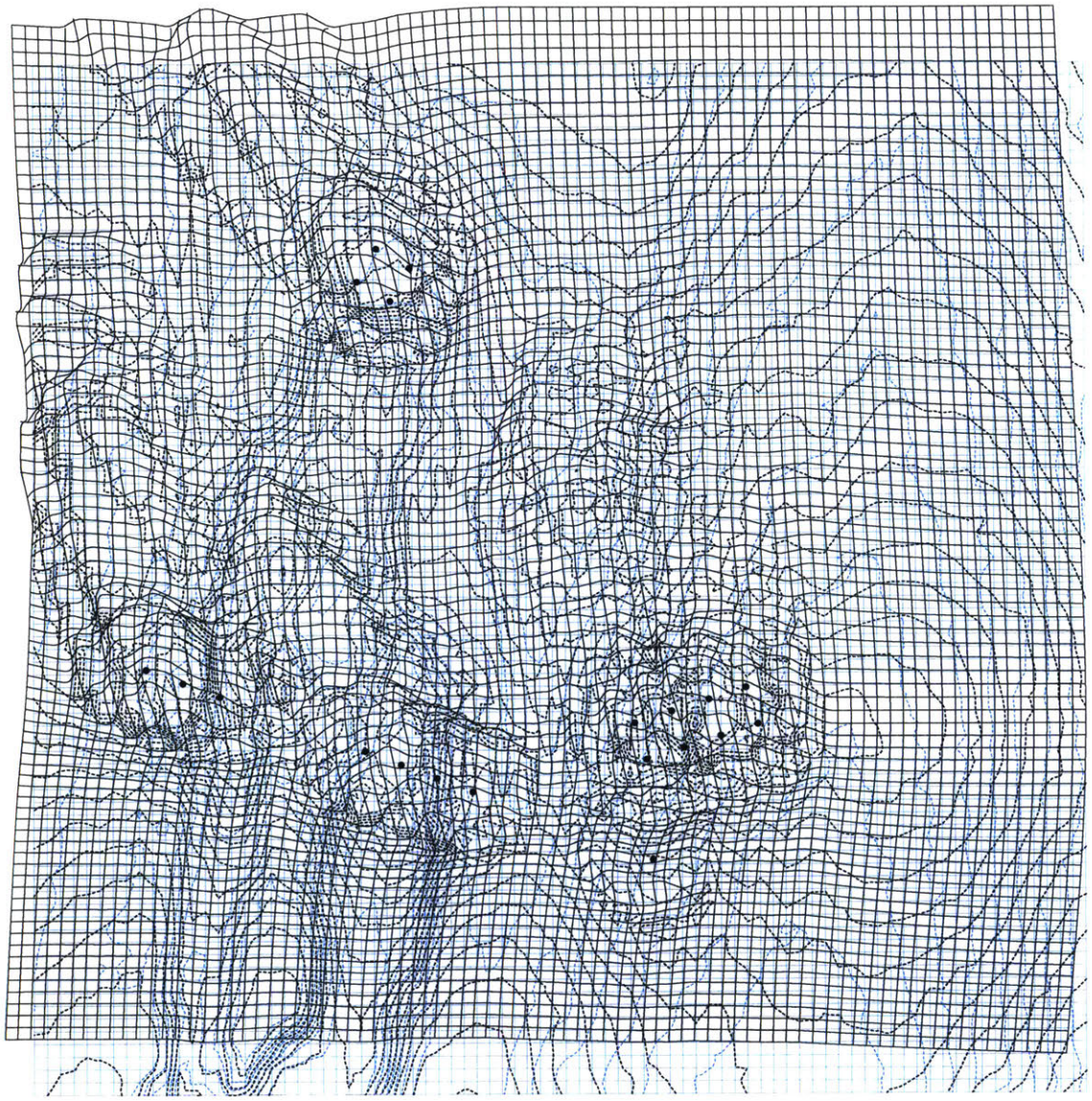


Figure 30: Landscape Flood Morphing

existed. It is likely due to that continual habitation that the forest is discontinuous at this point. A new community would be one which re-planted a forest as a bulwark against future floods within this gap, spanning roughly from where the church once stood to where the Brakensiek farm retreated before oncoming floodwaters. Equally critical are the structures placed in the land themselves. Any kind of permanent structure placed on the ground will tend to accrete soil downstream of it. This tendency can be used to build new upland sections of the island. If farmers wanted a higher section to plant a crop that needed drier soil, they could order their incursions into the ground in such a way that it anticipated this future need and built that ground for them.

In other places, ground remains gouged and sandy from the 2011 flood, especially in the northernmost (in Figure 31, the rightmost) area of ground. This is where the landmaker's house would intervene, building bar dike-like structures across the land to shore up sagging slopes and provide a catchment basin for sediments.

The circular arrangement of smallholder farms marks the ground for human habitation, riffing on the ubiquitous circles found scattered across other agricultural land from rotary sprinklers, but subdividing the land in such a way that each farmer can have a useful plot with upland and lowland areas for a variety of farm uses.

Other structures would be put in place for the water purifier's house, enabling the community to productively use the ample water resources of the island for drinking, bathing, and irrigation.

The community archive would be a place not only of community gatherings, akin to the dual function of the church and school building of Presidents Island's past, but would also house an archive dedicated to the history of the men and women who lived on it.

This project must be a place for the Memphis Black community at large, enabling not only the reclaiming of land lost, but the re-telling of the story of the island in a visible, living, flesh-and-blood way. As a living memorial, this community would move in the patterns of its ancestors, tending the land and cooperating with it for sustenance. Over many years, and over many flood-rebuild cycles, this community could patch this land together, stitch its forests closed, and make full use of the soil's riches.

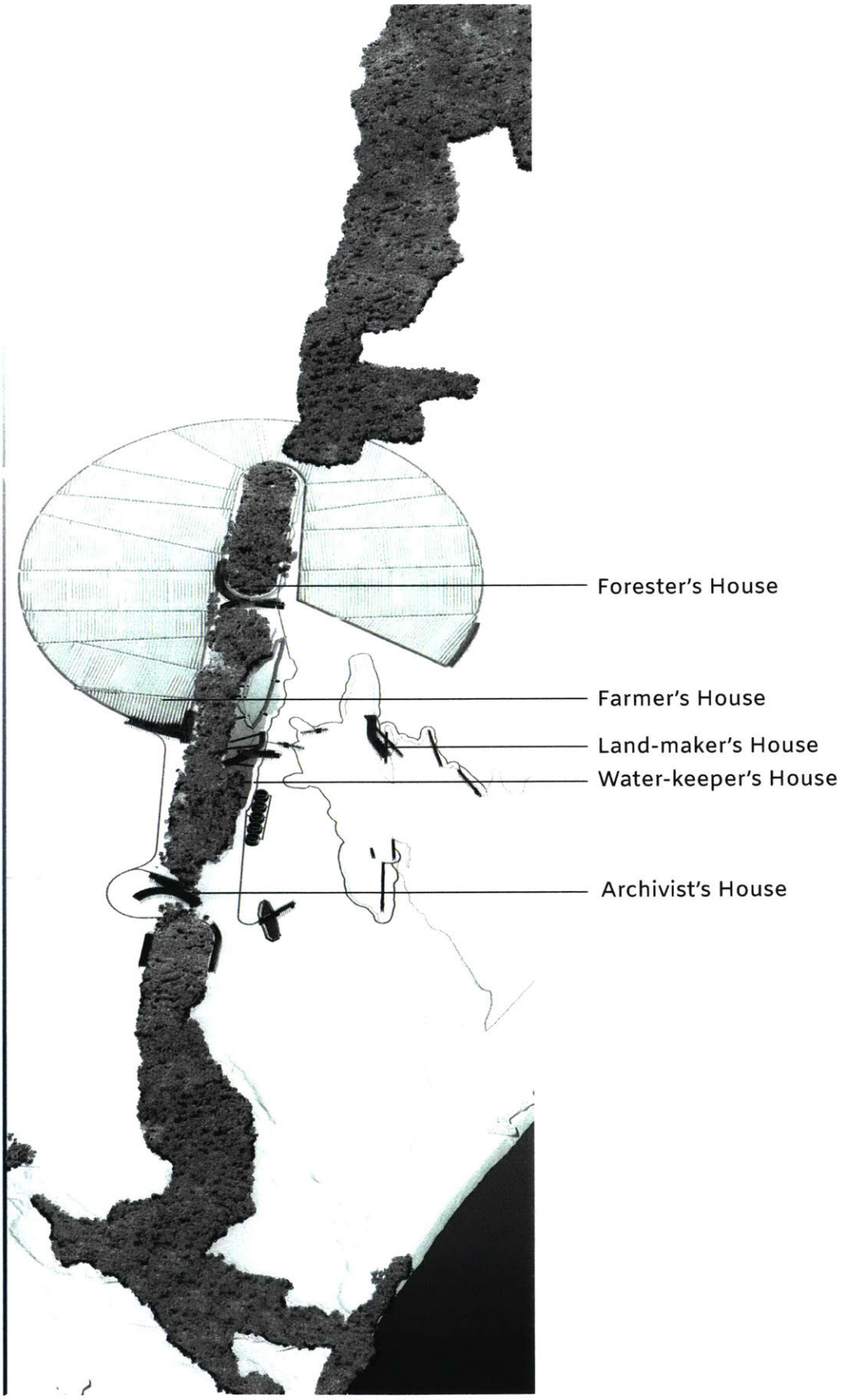


Figure 31: Site Proposal Axonometric

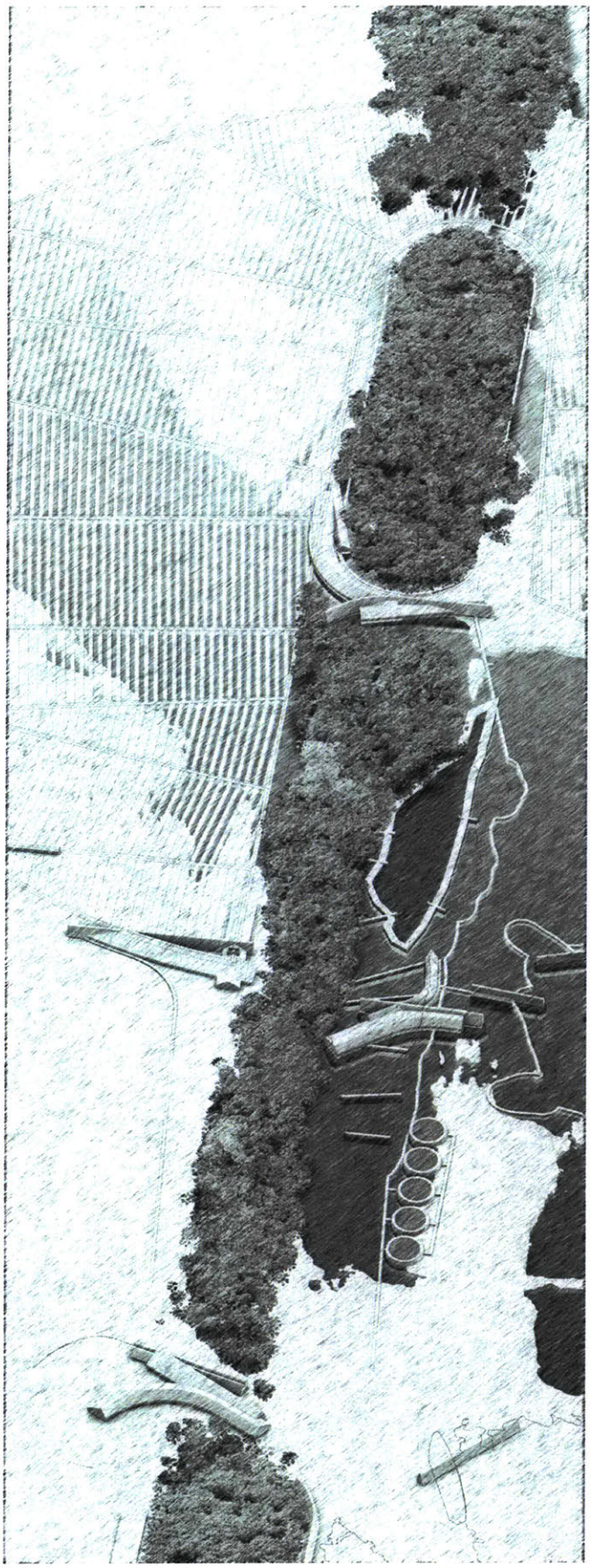


Figure 32: The Community, Flood Stage

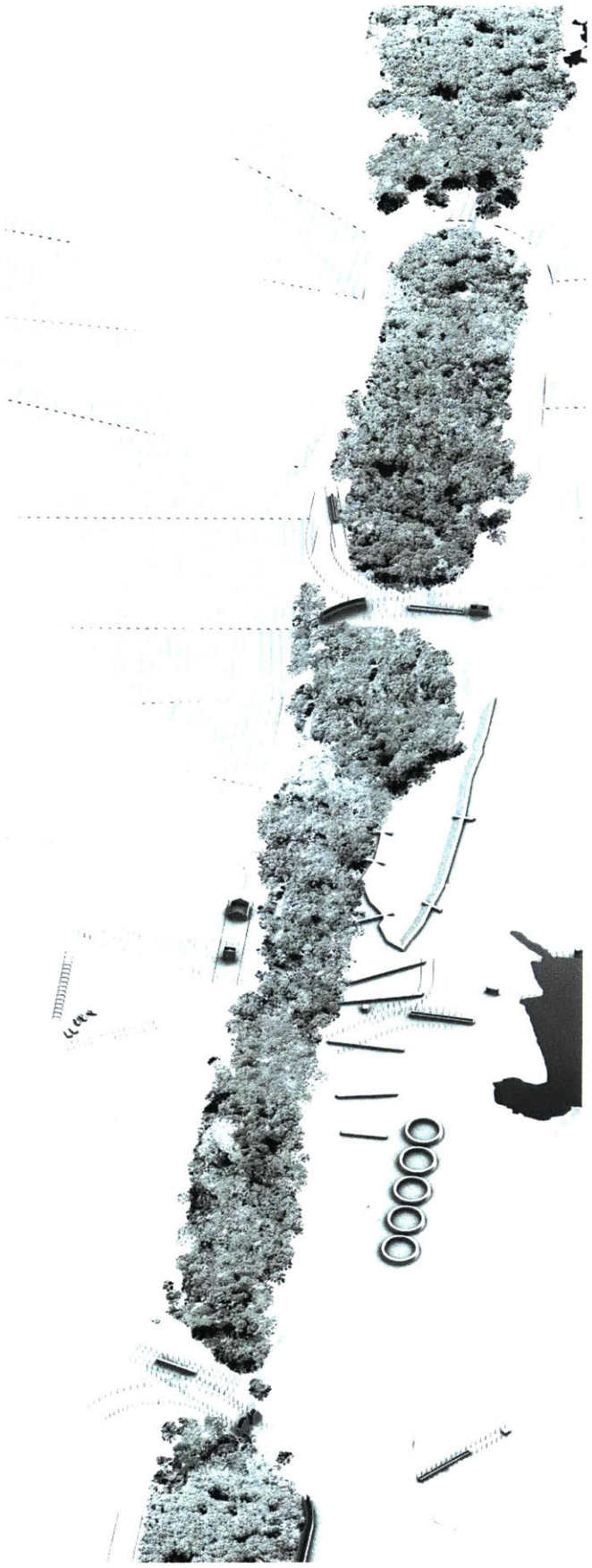


Figure 33: The Community, After Floods

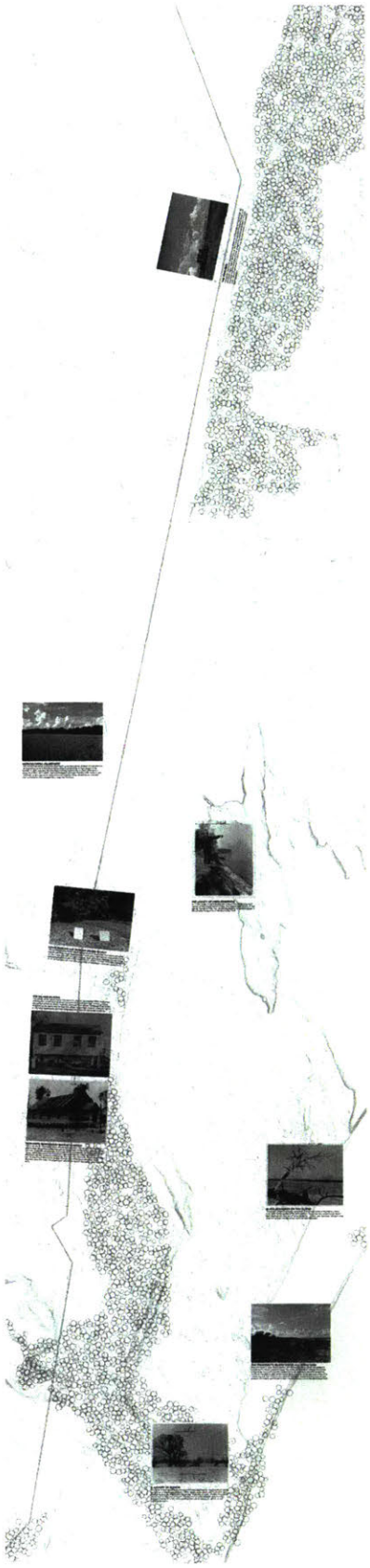


 Figure 34: Marks of History

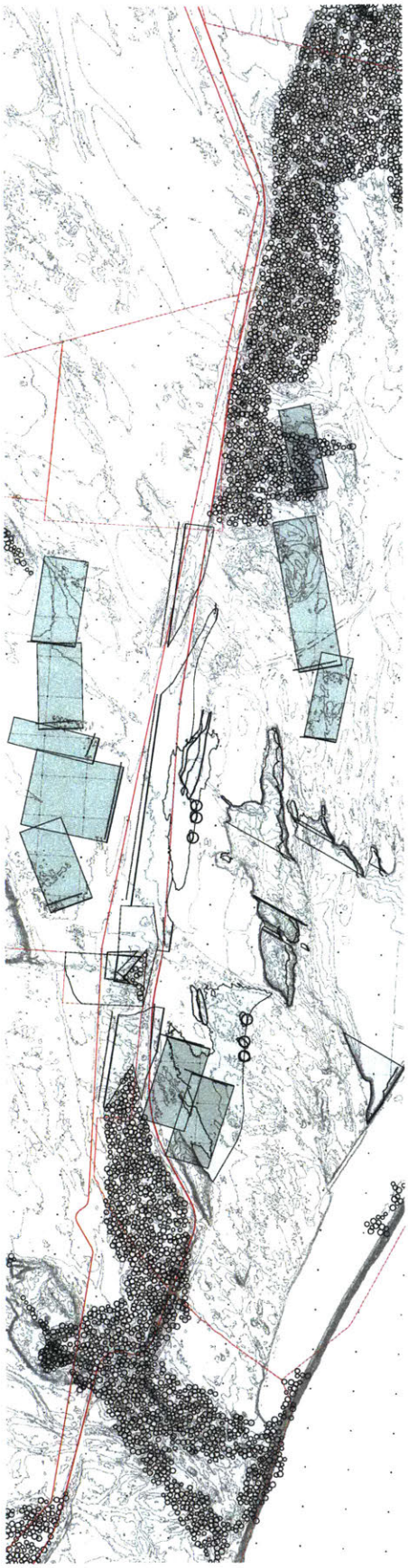


Figure 35: Suggested Zones of Occupation

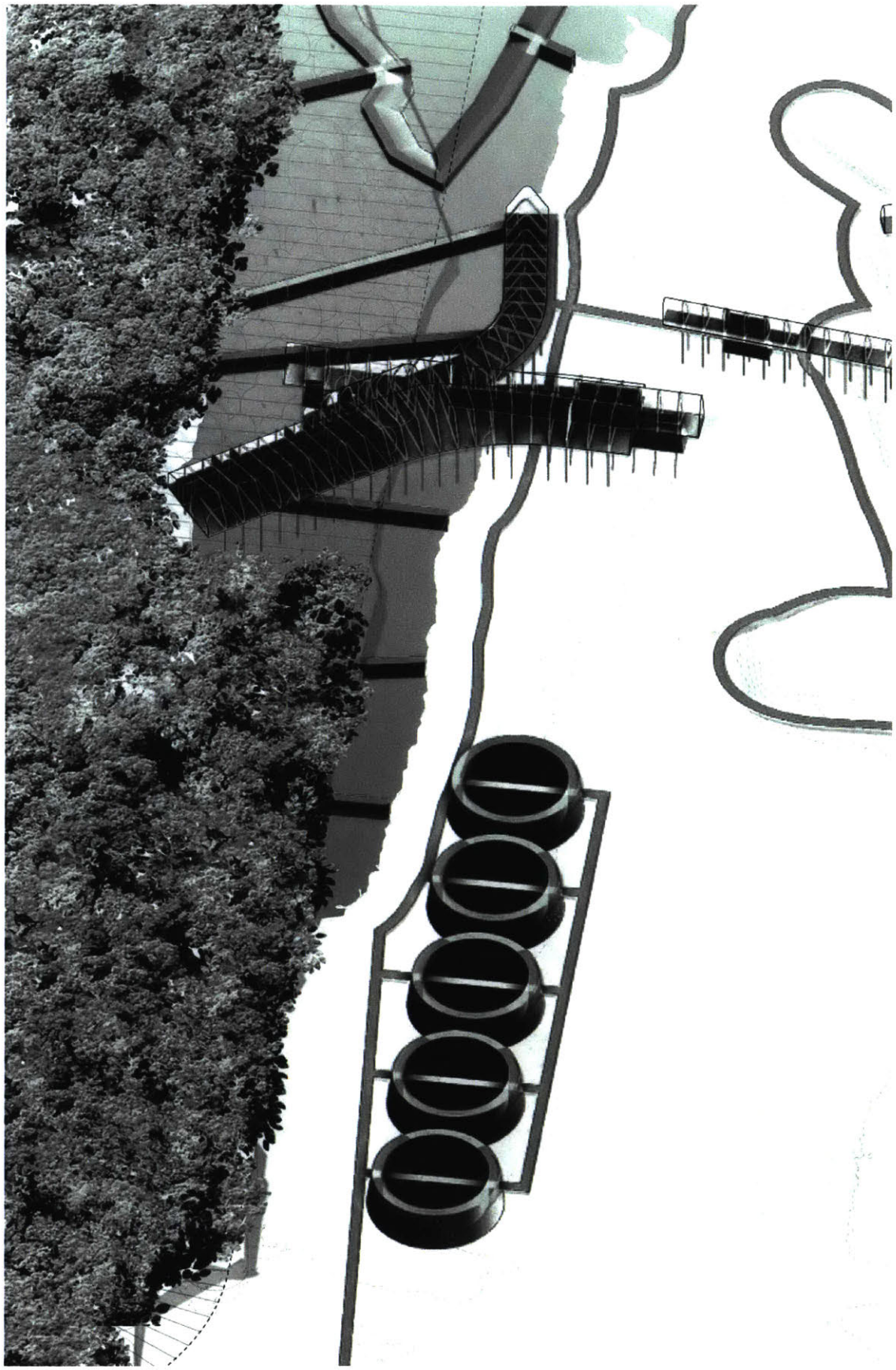
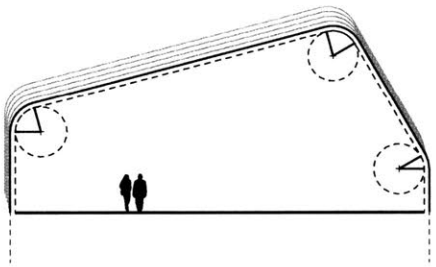
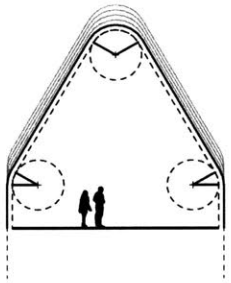


Figure 36: Detail of Axonometric at Water-keeper's House

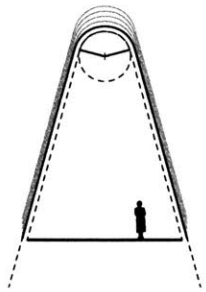
THE WATER-KEEPER'S HOUSE



WATER PURIFIER'S HOUSE
Offices
Bathrooms
Atrium and entry



WATER PURIFIER'S HOUSE
Entry
Viewing platform



WATER PURIFIER'S HOUSE
Pumphouse
Settling tanks
Composter

Figure 37: Plan of Water-keeper's House

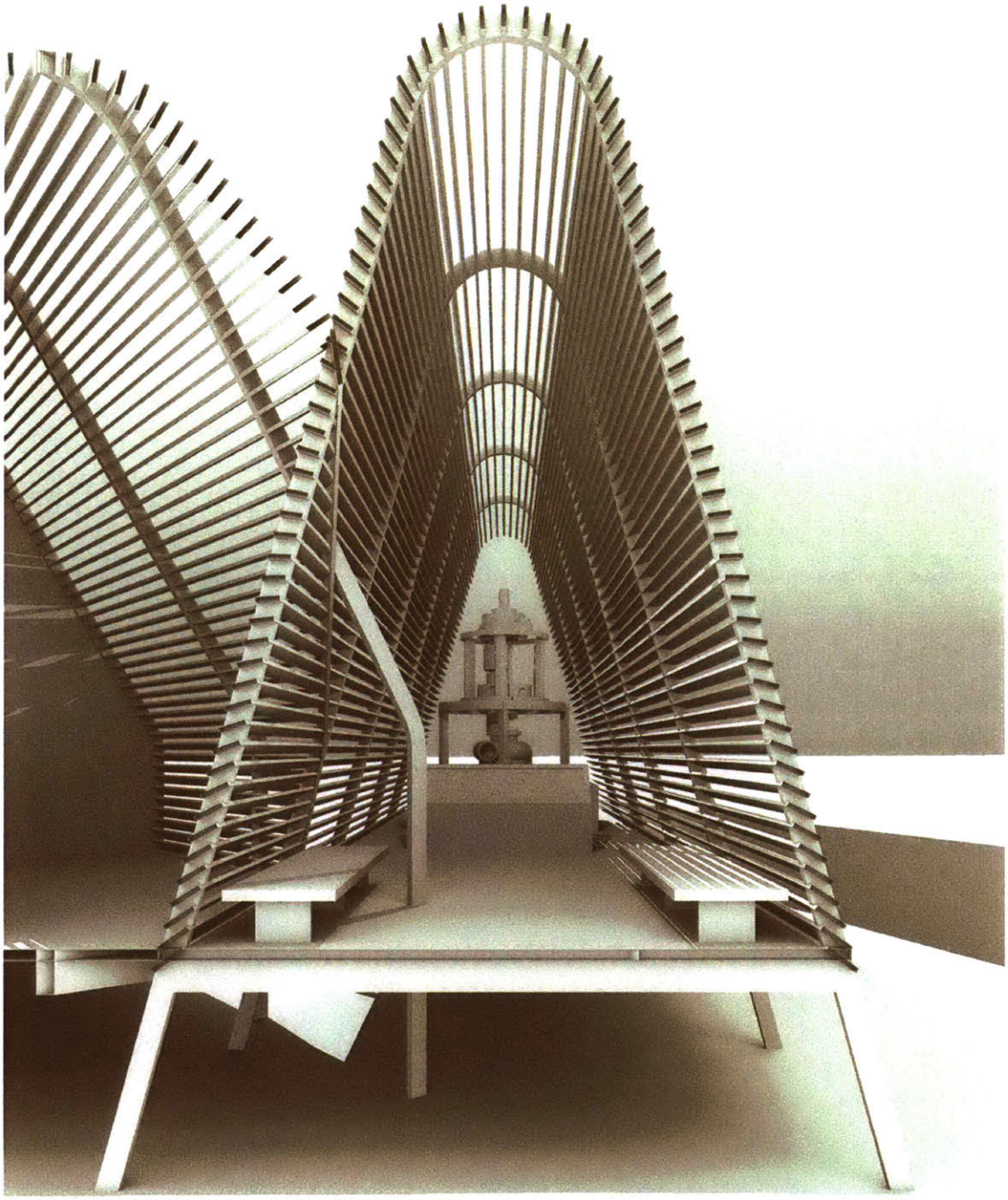


Figure 38: Section Perspective of Pumphouse at Water-keeper's House

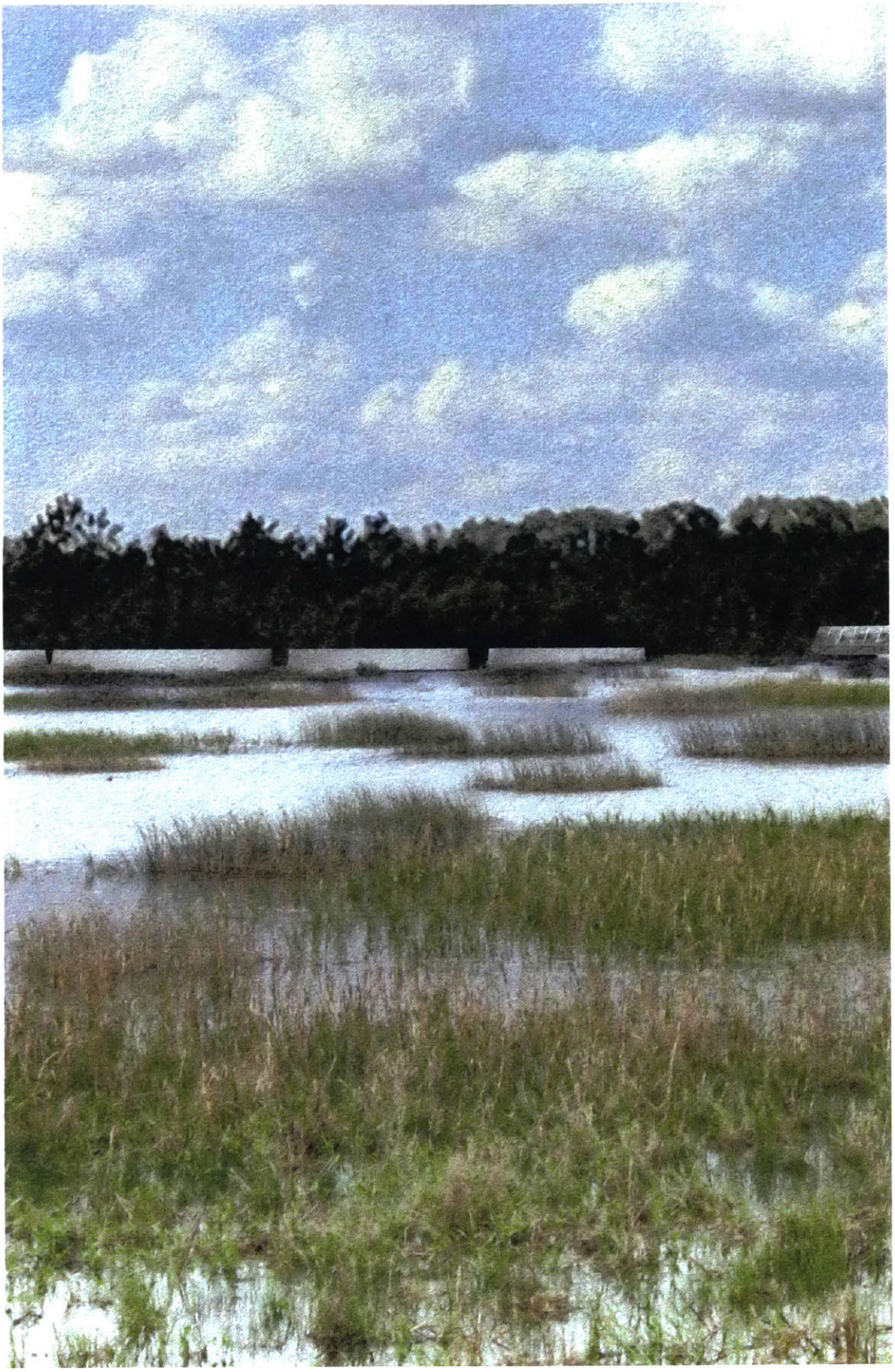
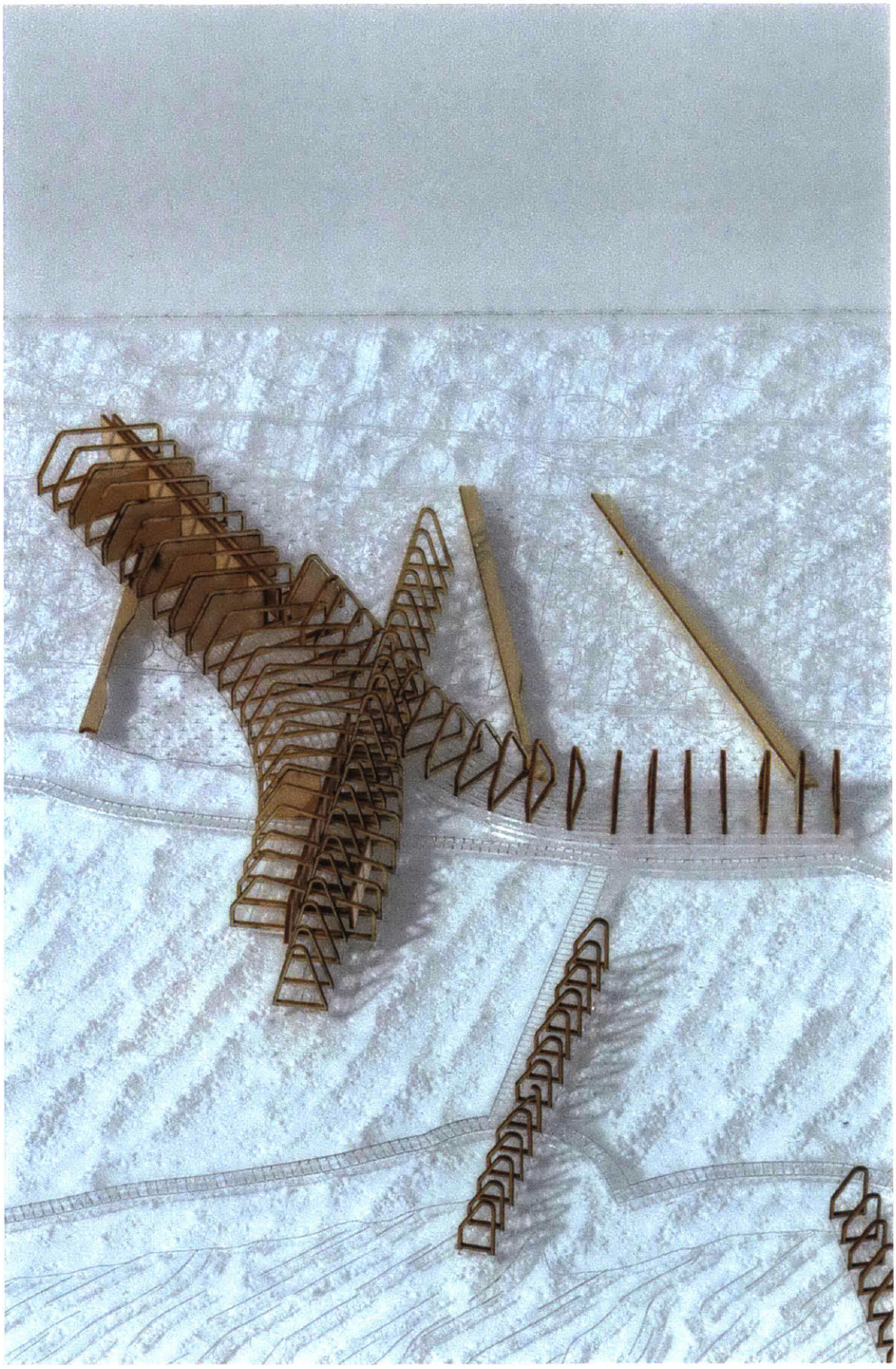


Figure 39: Exterior View of Water-keeper's House

Figure 40: Model of Water-keeper's House, Photo © Andy Ryan



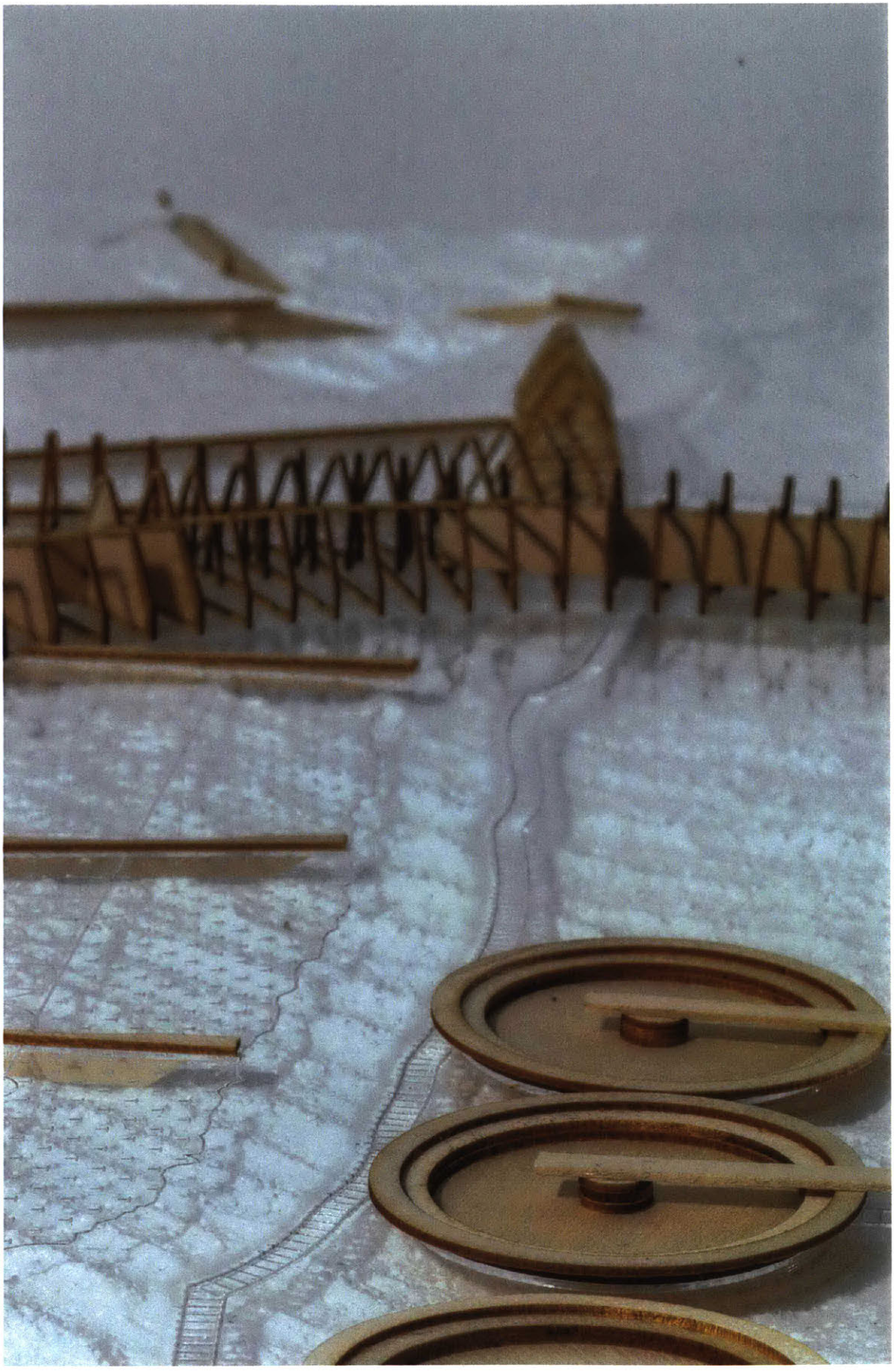


Figure 41: Model of Water-keeper's House, Photo © Andy Ryan

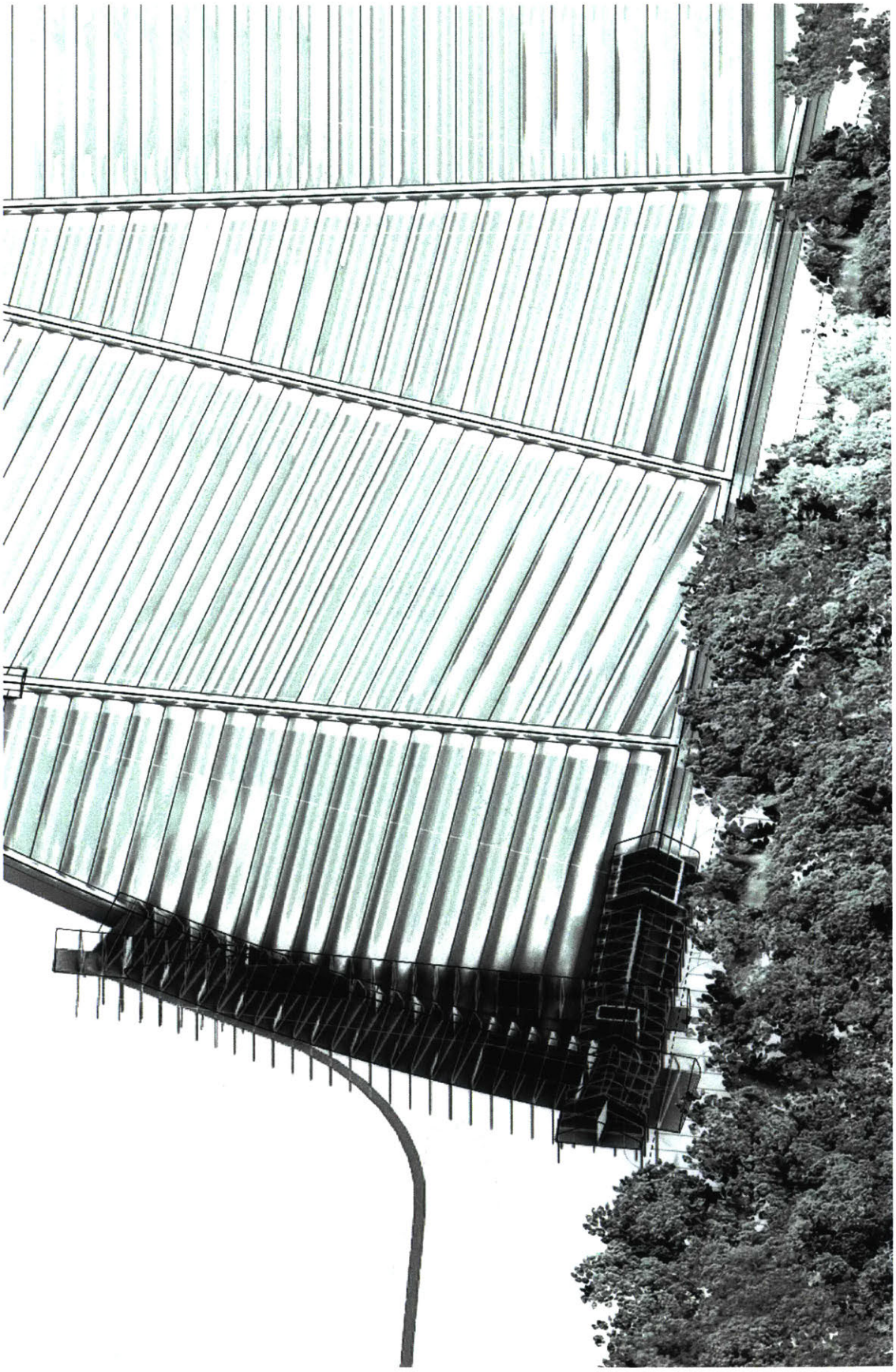
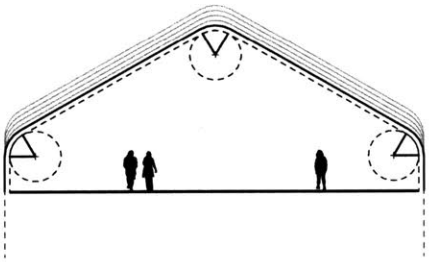
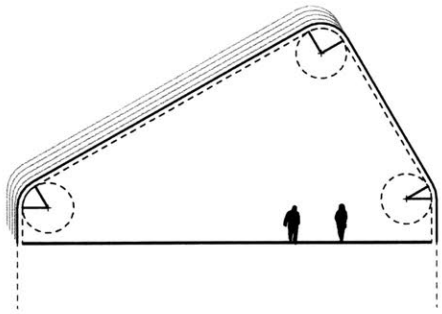


Figure 42: Detail of Axonometric at Farmer's House

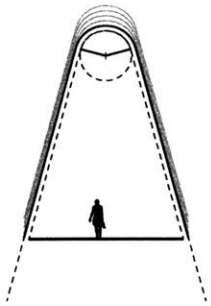
THE FARMER'S HOUSE



FARM BUILDING
Communal kitchen
Cold food storage
Bathrooms
Main entry



FARM BUILDING
Outdoor food storage and barn
Main entry and atrium
Offices and administrative spaces



FARM BUILDING
Compost stalls
Wash stations

Figure 43: Plan of Farmer's House

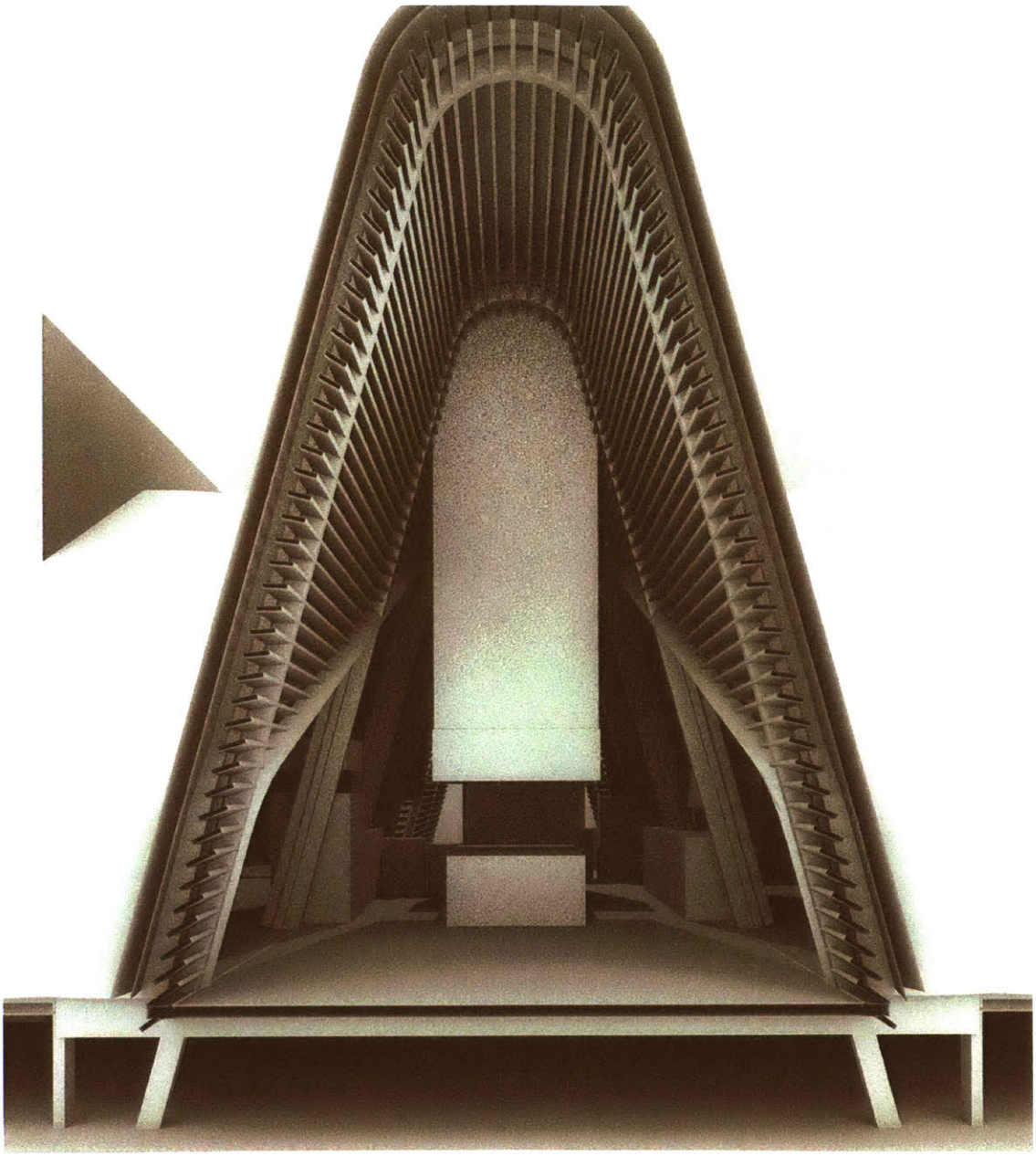


Figure 44: Section Perspective of Farmer's House at Community Kitchen

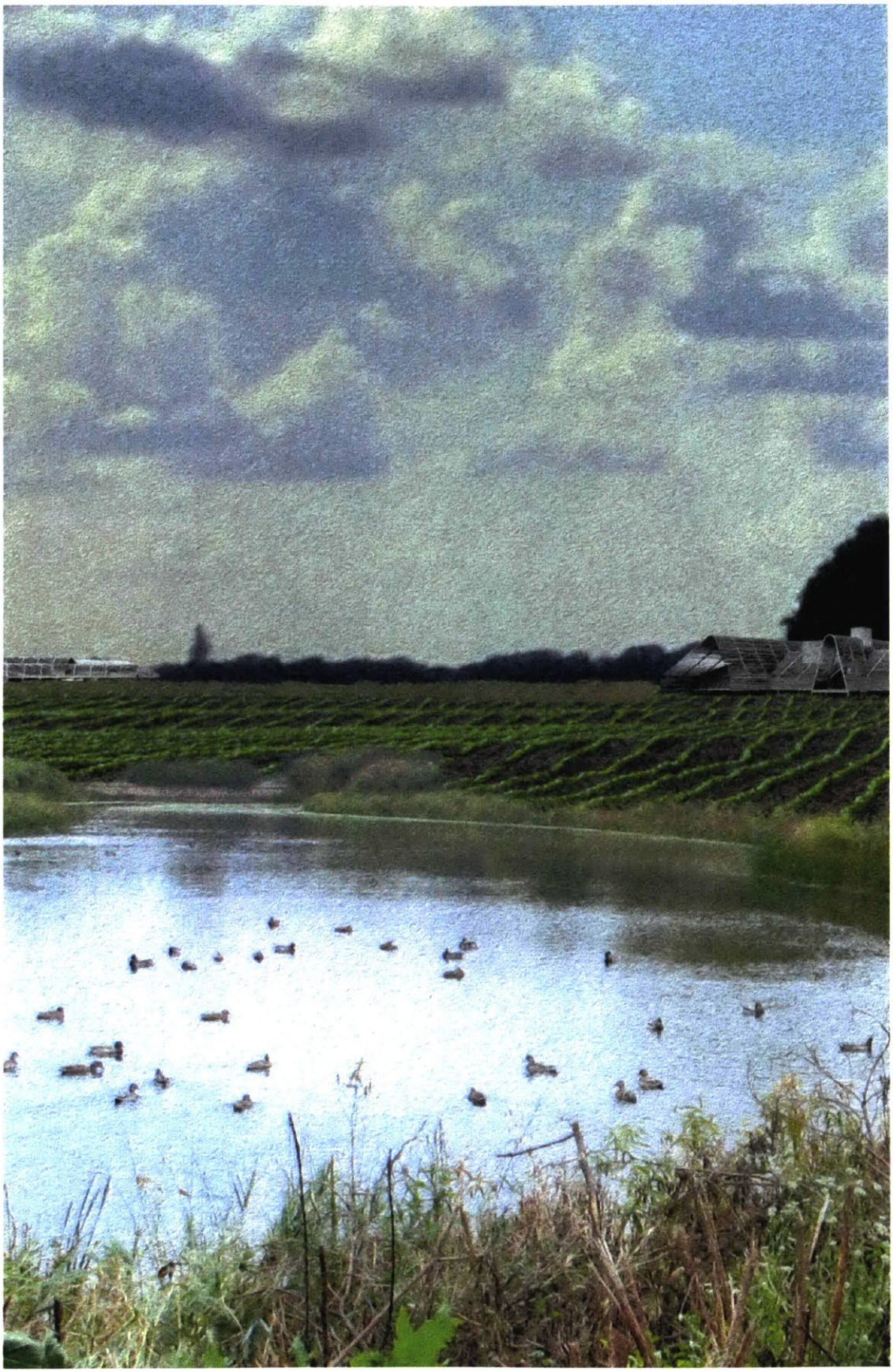


Figure 45: Exterior View of Farmer's House

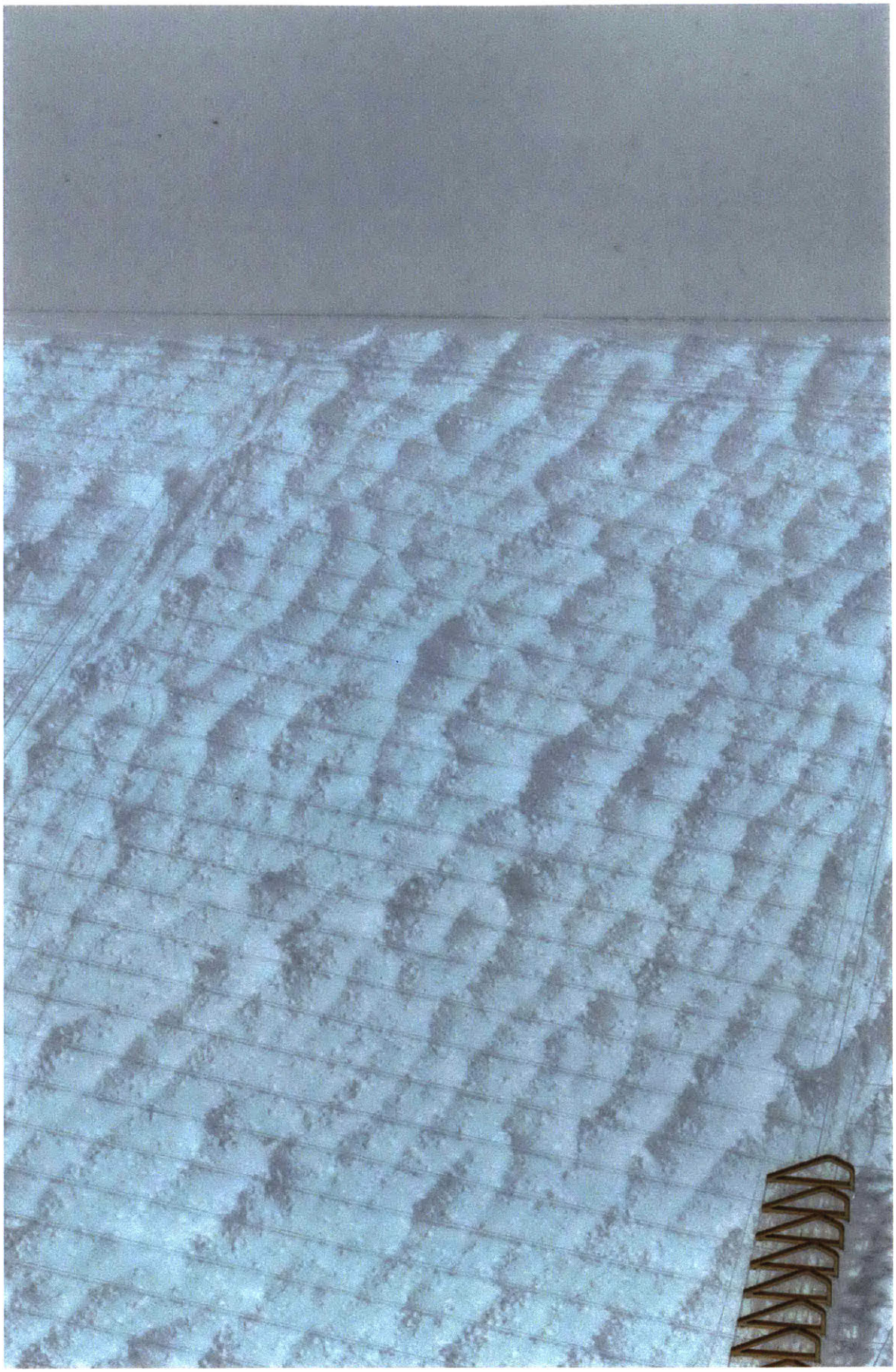
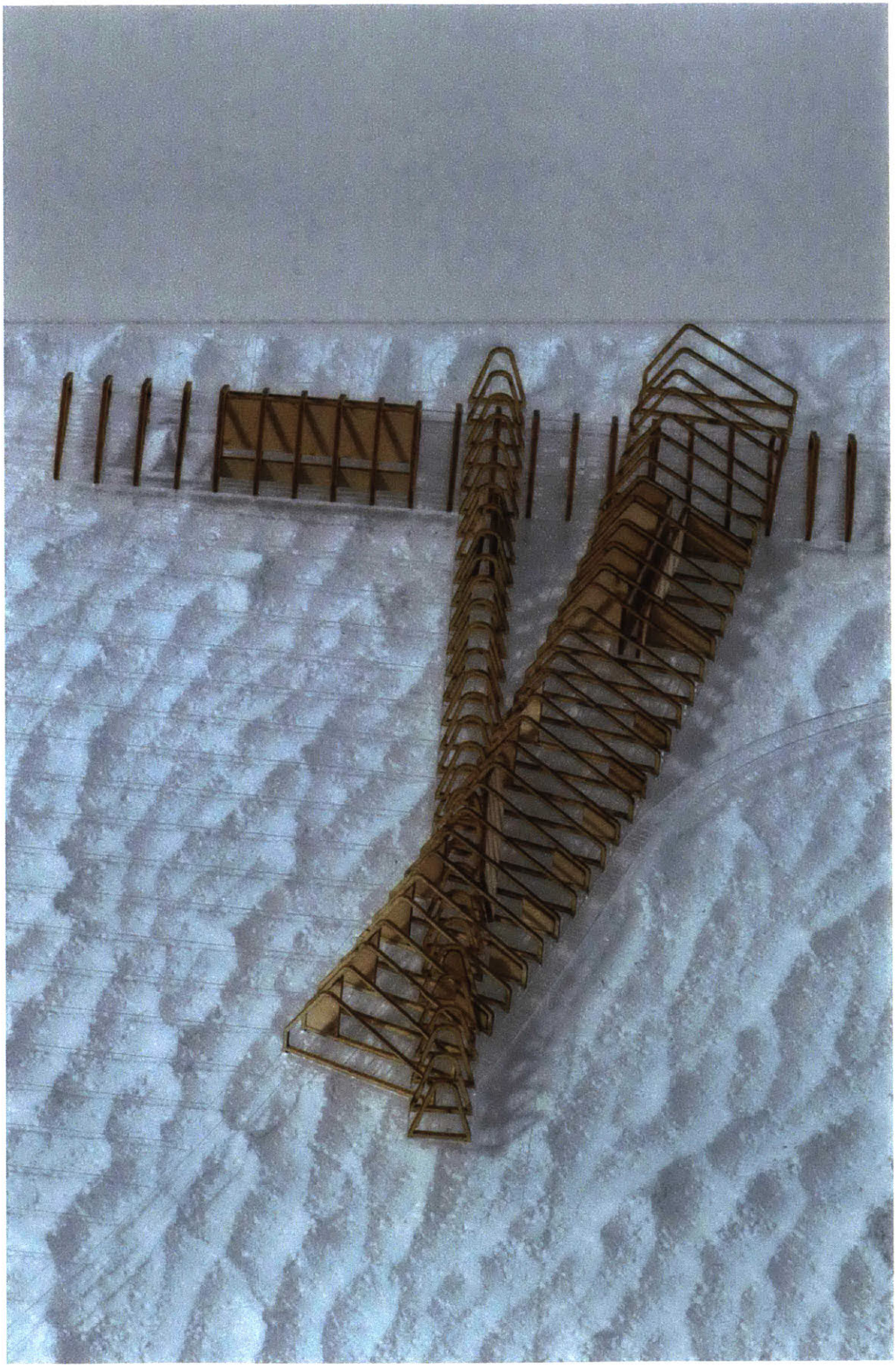


Figure 46: Model of Farmer's House, Photo © Andy Ryan



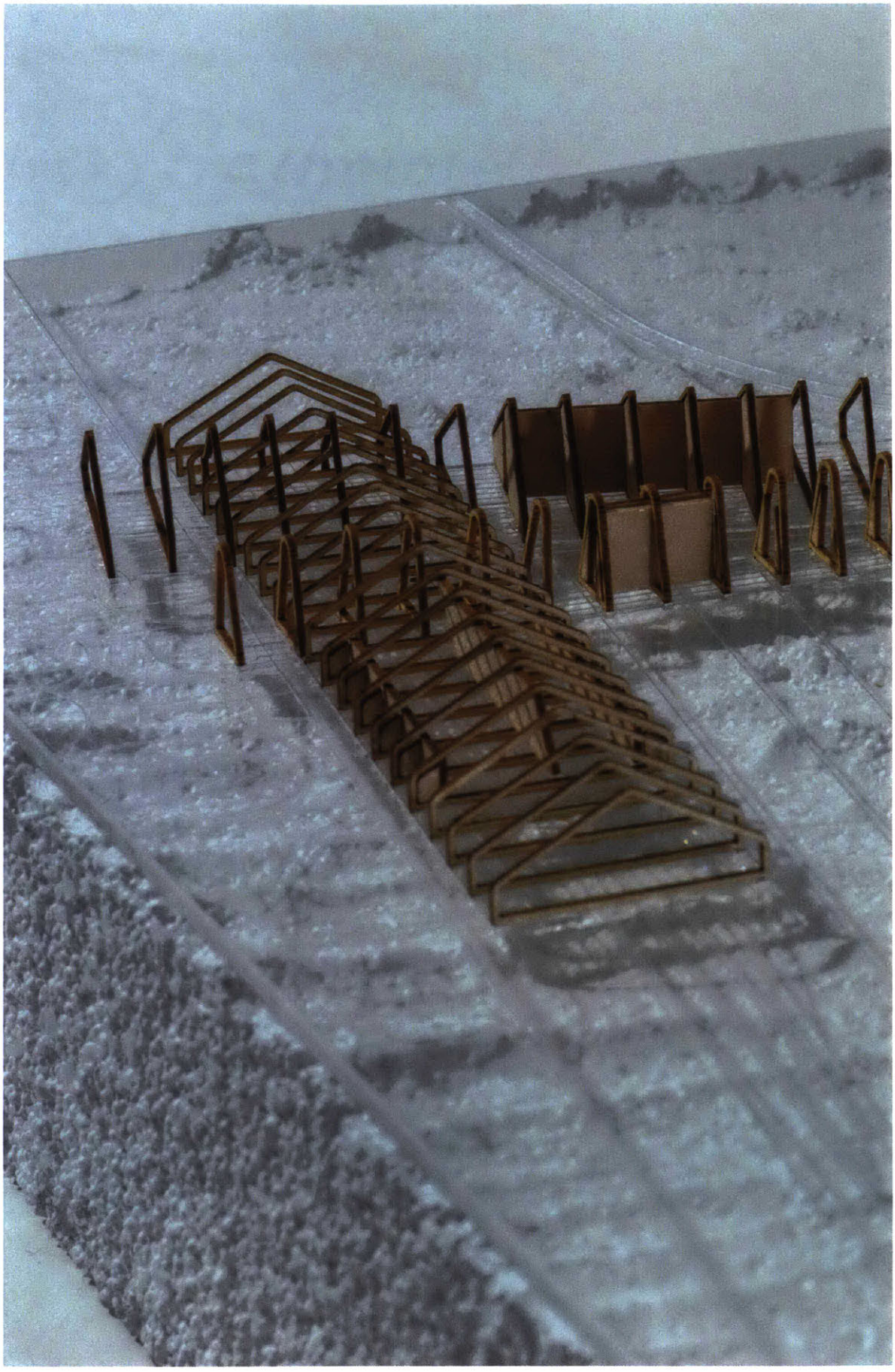
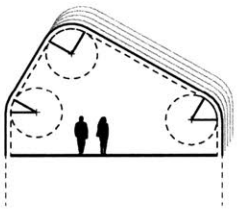


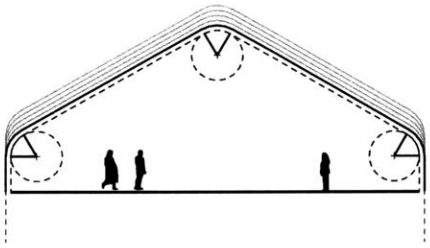
Figure 47: Model of Farmer's House, Photo © Andy Ryan

Figure 48: Detail of Axonometric at Forester's House

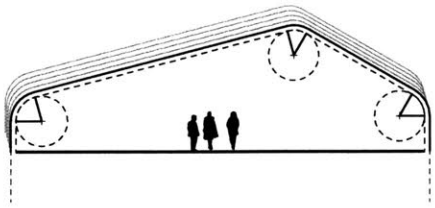
THE FORESTER'S HOUSE



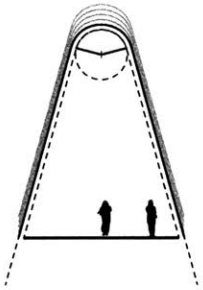
FORESTER'S HOUSE
Sawmill



FORESTER'S HOUSE
Offices
Lumber Storage



FORESTER'S HOUSE
Offices
Changing Rooms
Workshop
Lamination Presses



FORESTER'S HOUSE
Sauna
Baths
Seasoning room

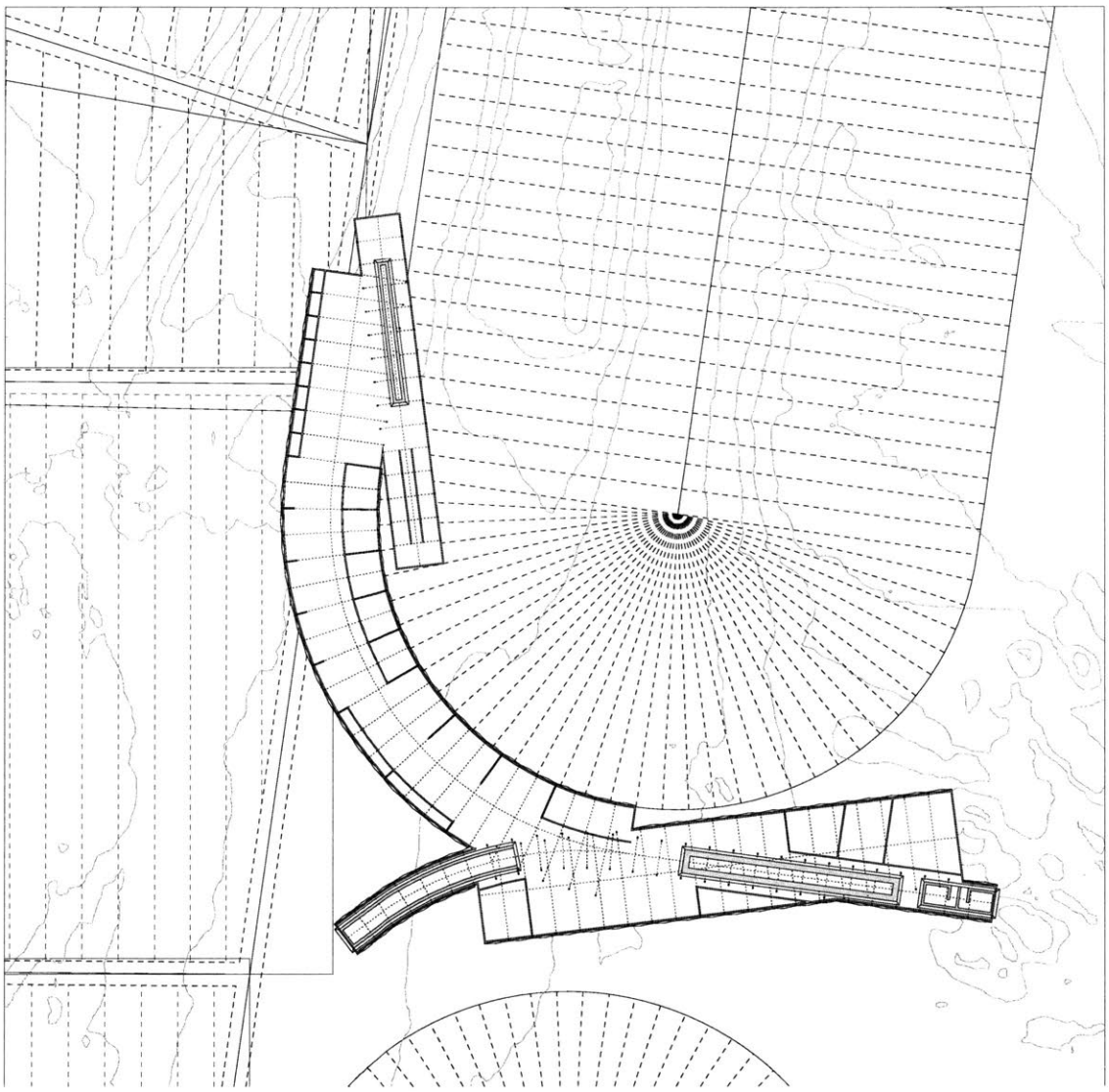


Figure 49: Plan of Forester's House

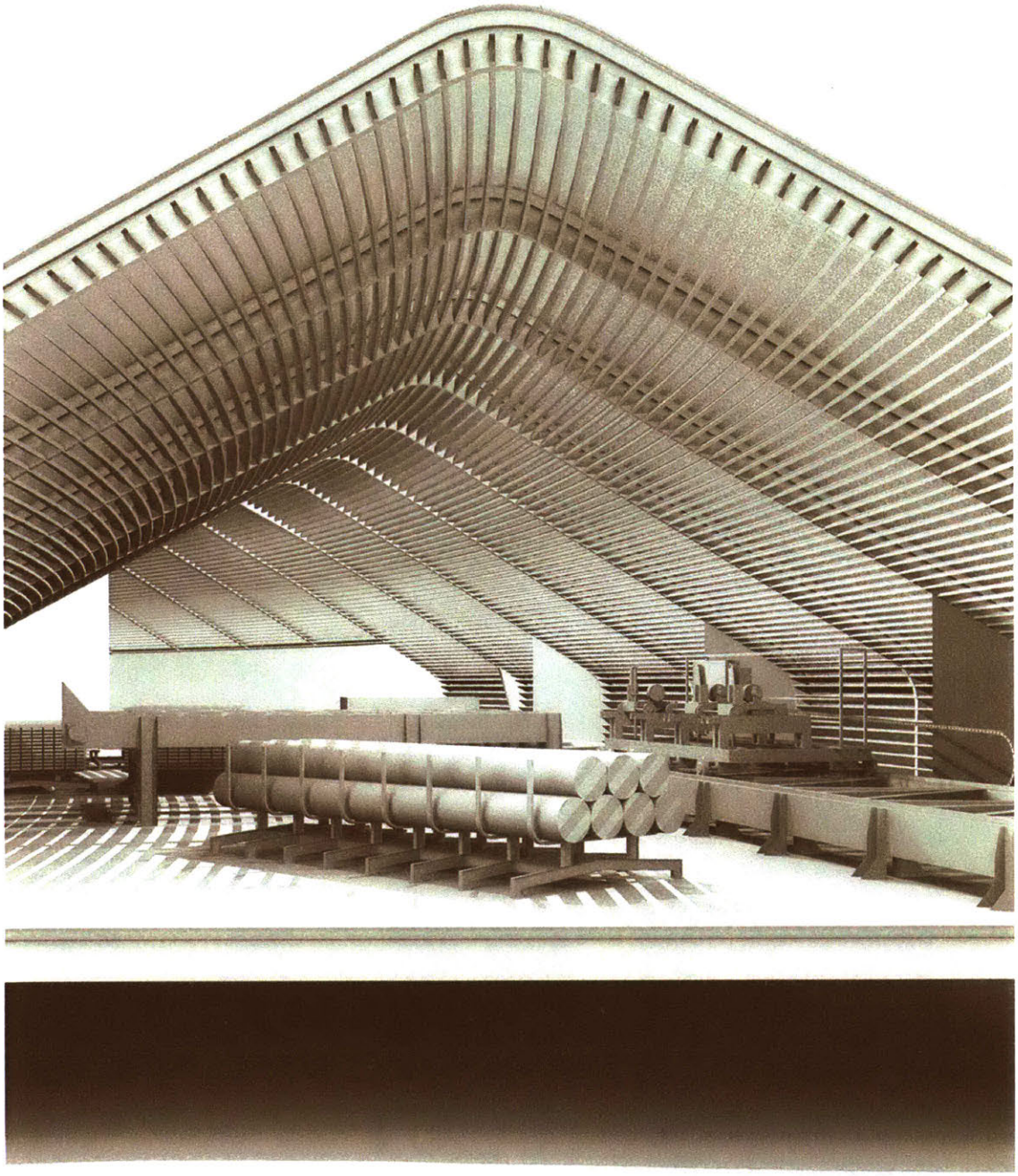
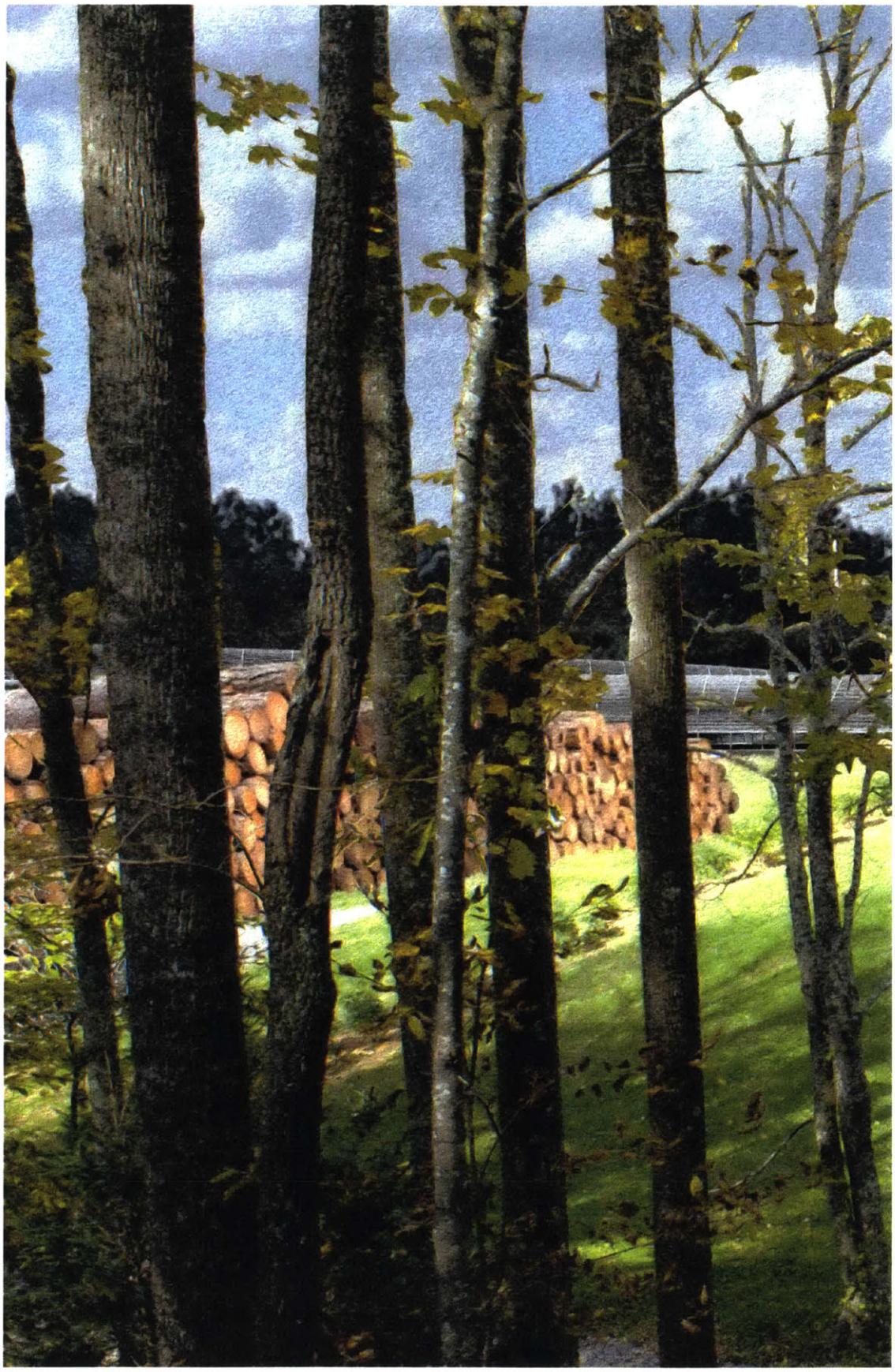


Figure 50: Section Perspective of Forester's House at Sawmill



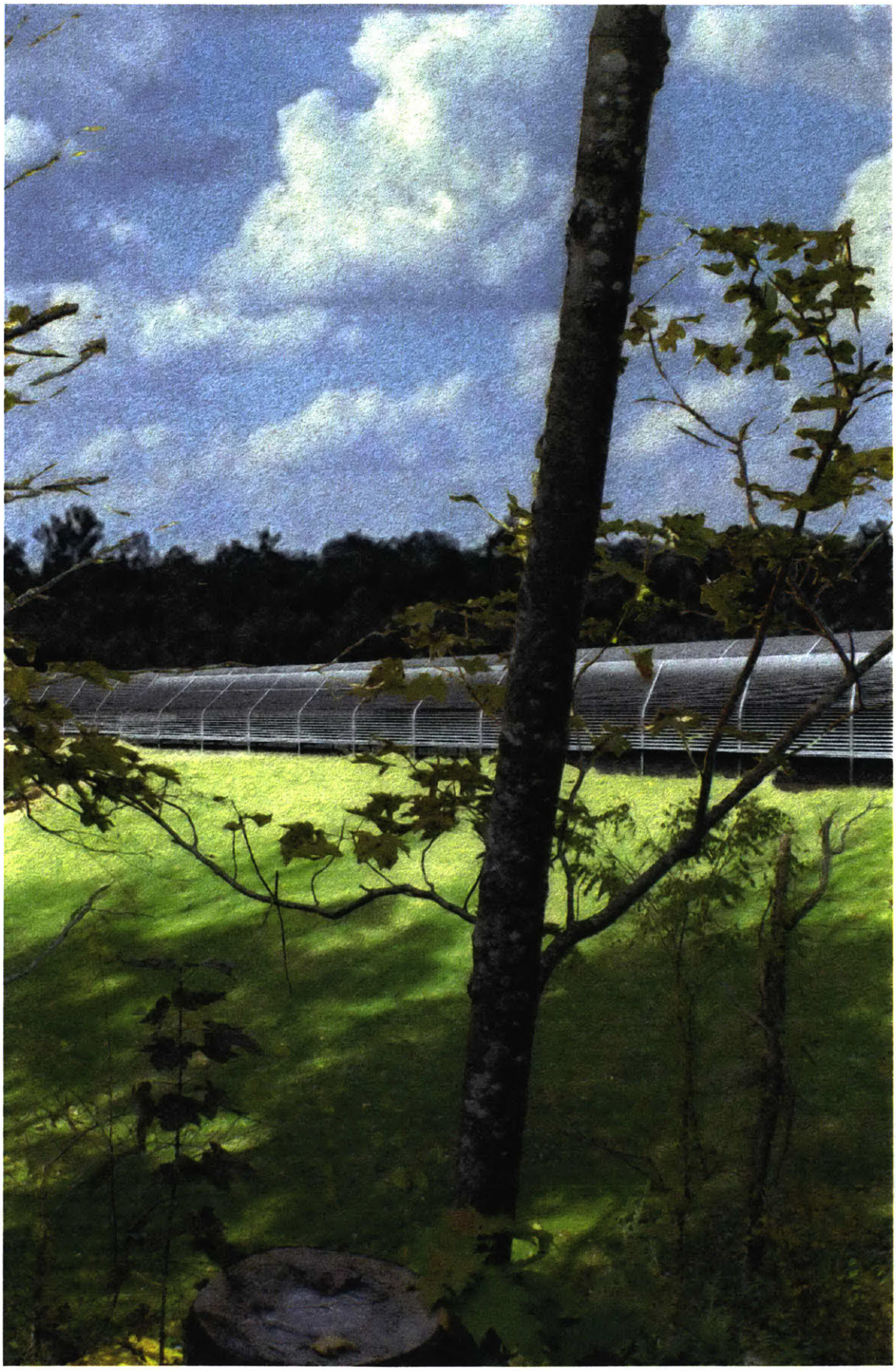


Figure 51: Exterior View of Forester's House

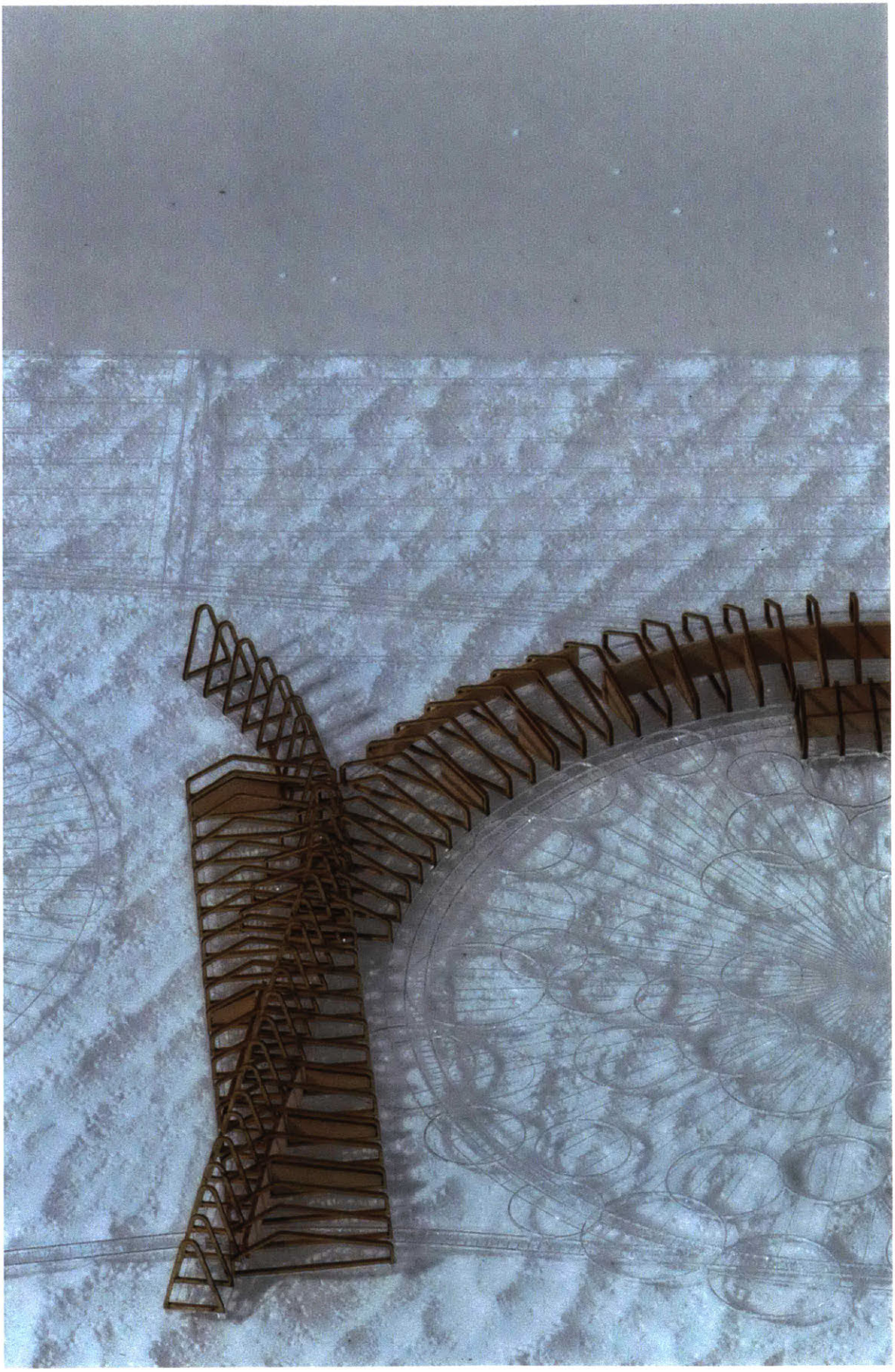


Figure 52: Model of Forester's House, Photo © Andy Ryan

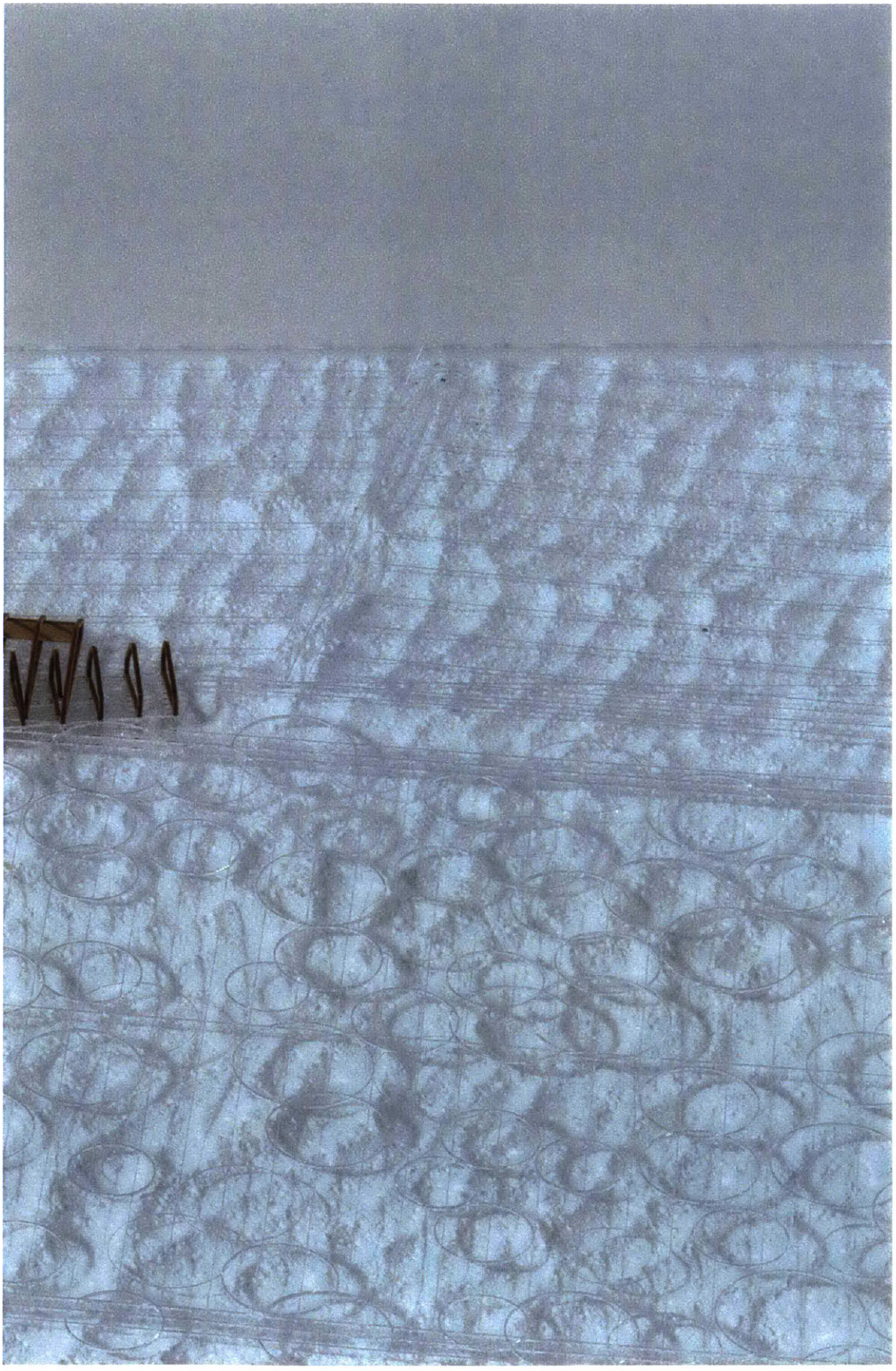


Figure 53: Model of Forester's House, Photo © Andy Ryan

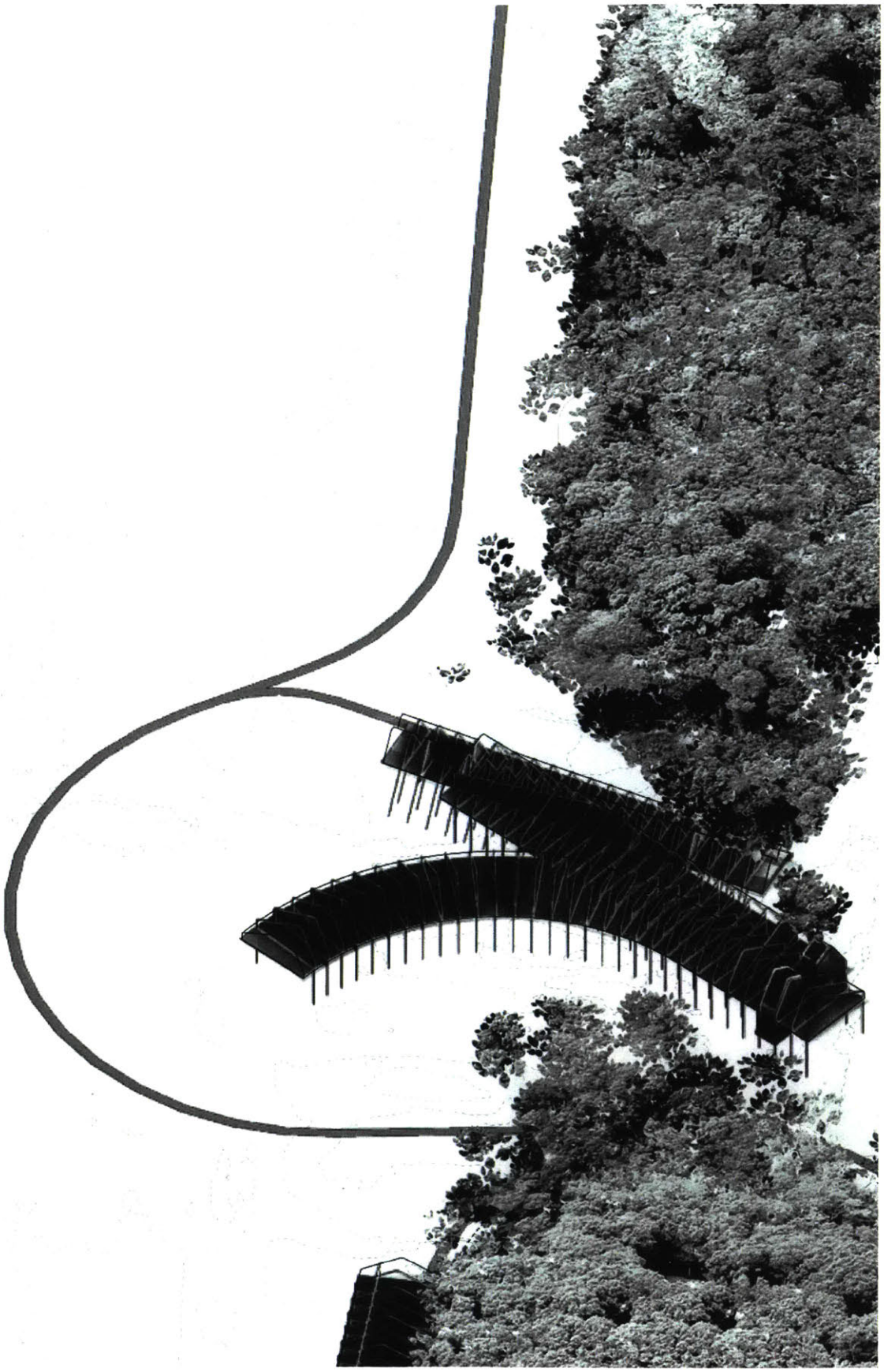
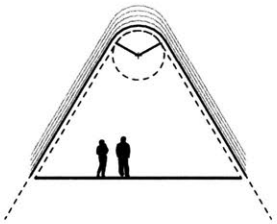
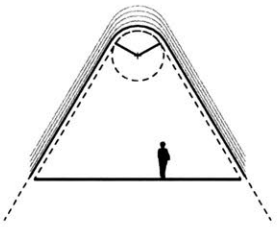


Figure 54: Detail of Axonometric at Archivist's House

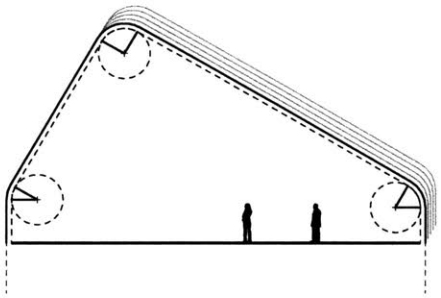
THE ARCHIVIST'S HOUSE



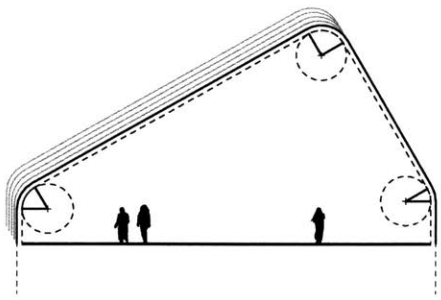
COMMUNITY SCHOOL/ARCHIVE
Community dining room
Bathrooms
Kitchens and food storage



COMMUNITY SCHOOL/ARCHIVE
Community dining room
Bathrooms
Kitchens and food storage



COMMUNITY SCHOOL/ARCHIVE
Communal gathering space
Bathrooms
Offices
Archives
Library
Reading Room



COMMUNITY SCHOOL/ARCHIVE
Communal gathering space
Bathrooms
Offices
Archives
Library
Reading Room

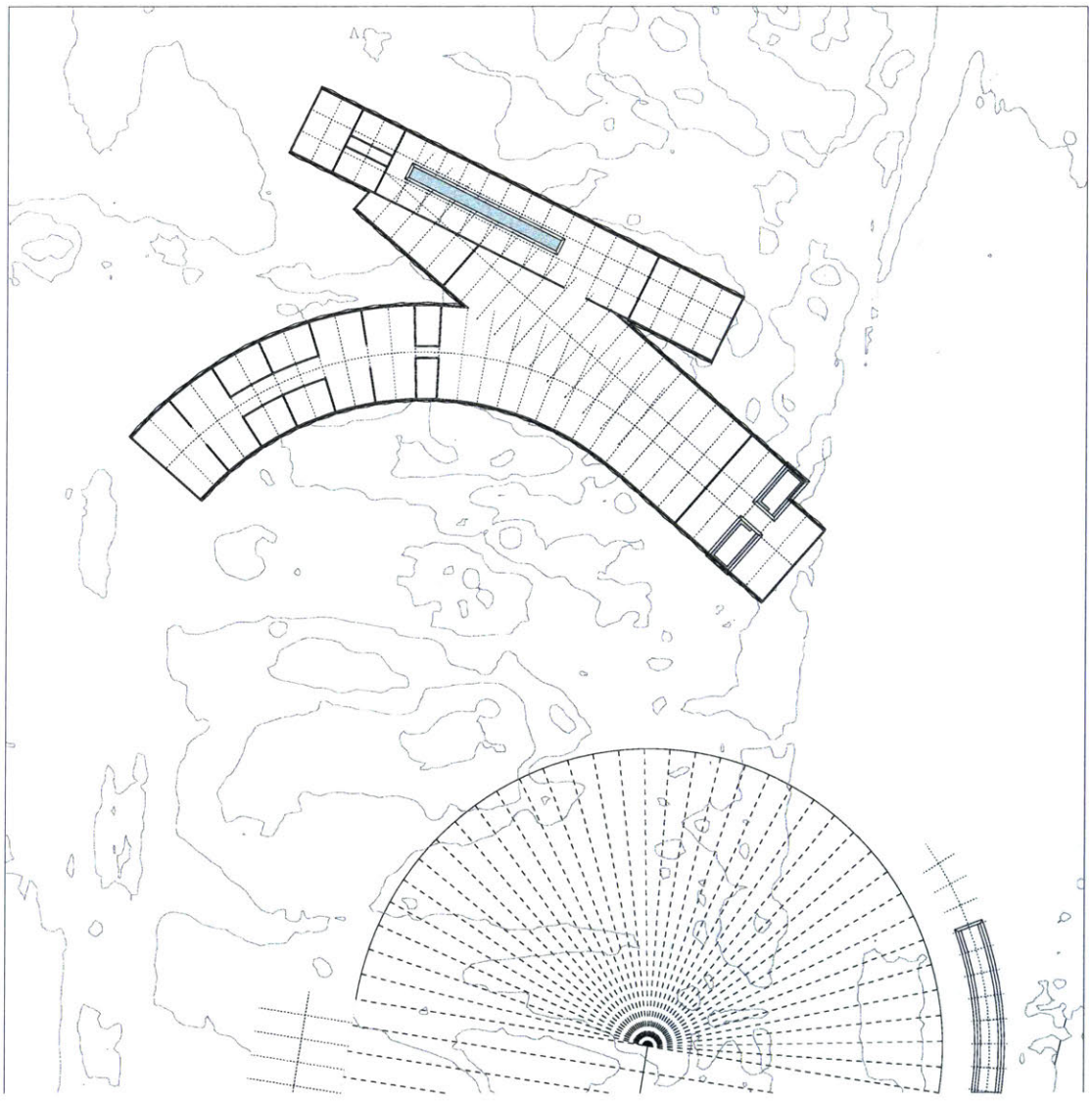


Figure 55: Plan of Archivist's House

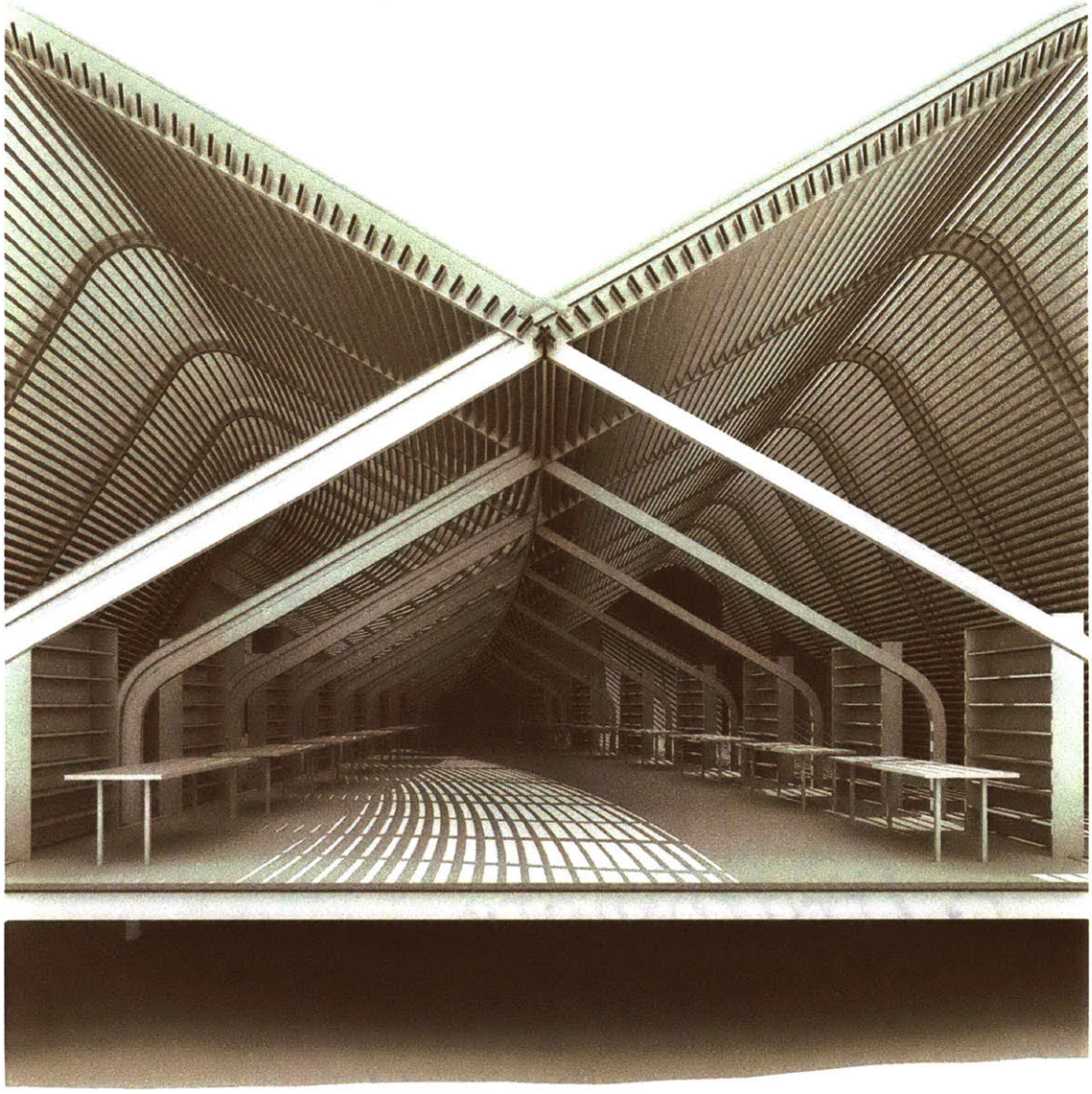
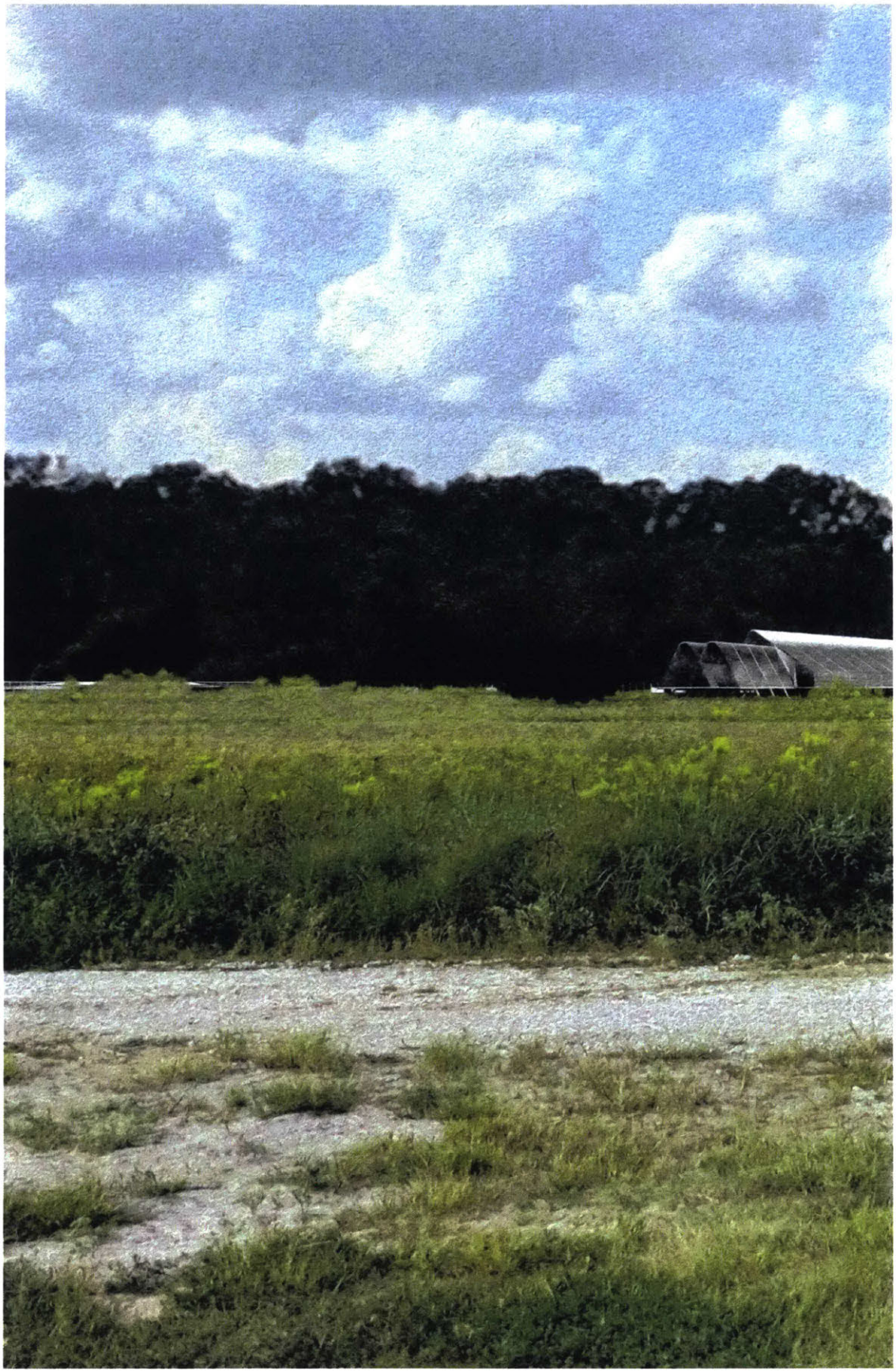


Figure 56: Section Perspective of Archivist's House at Reading Room



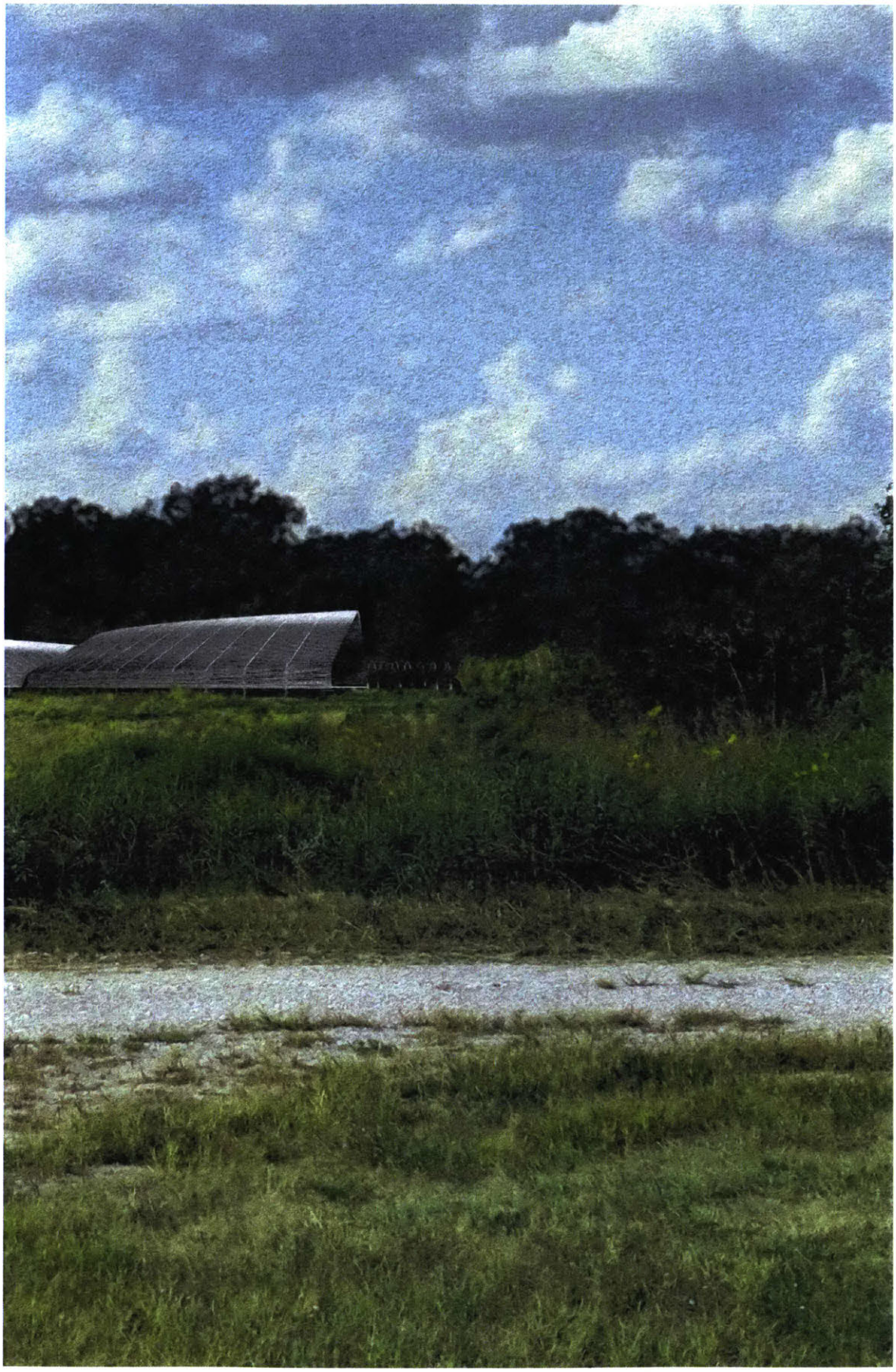


Figure 57: Exterior View of Archivist's House

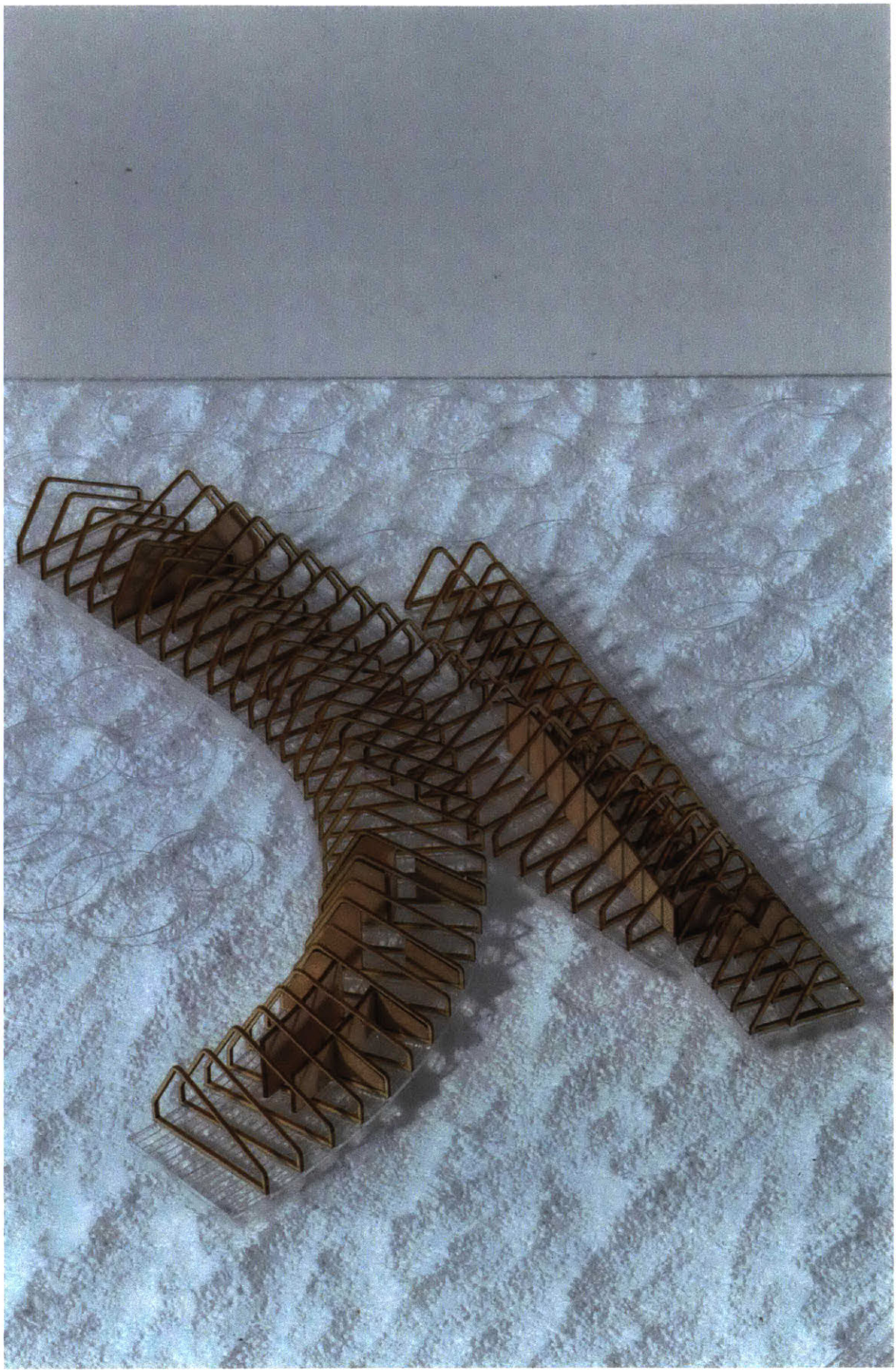
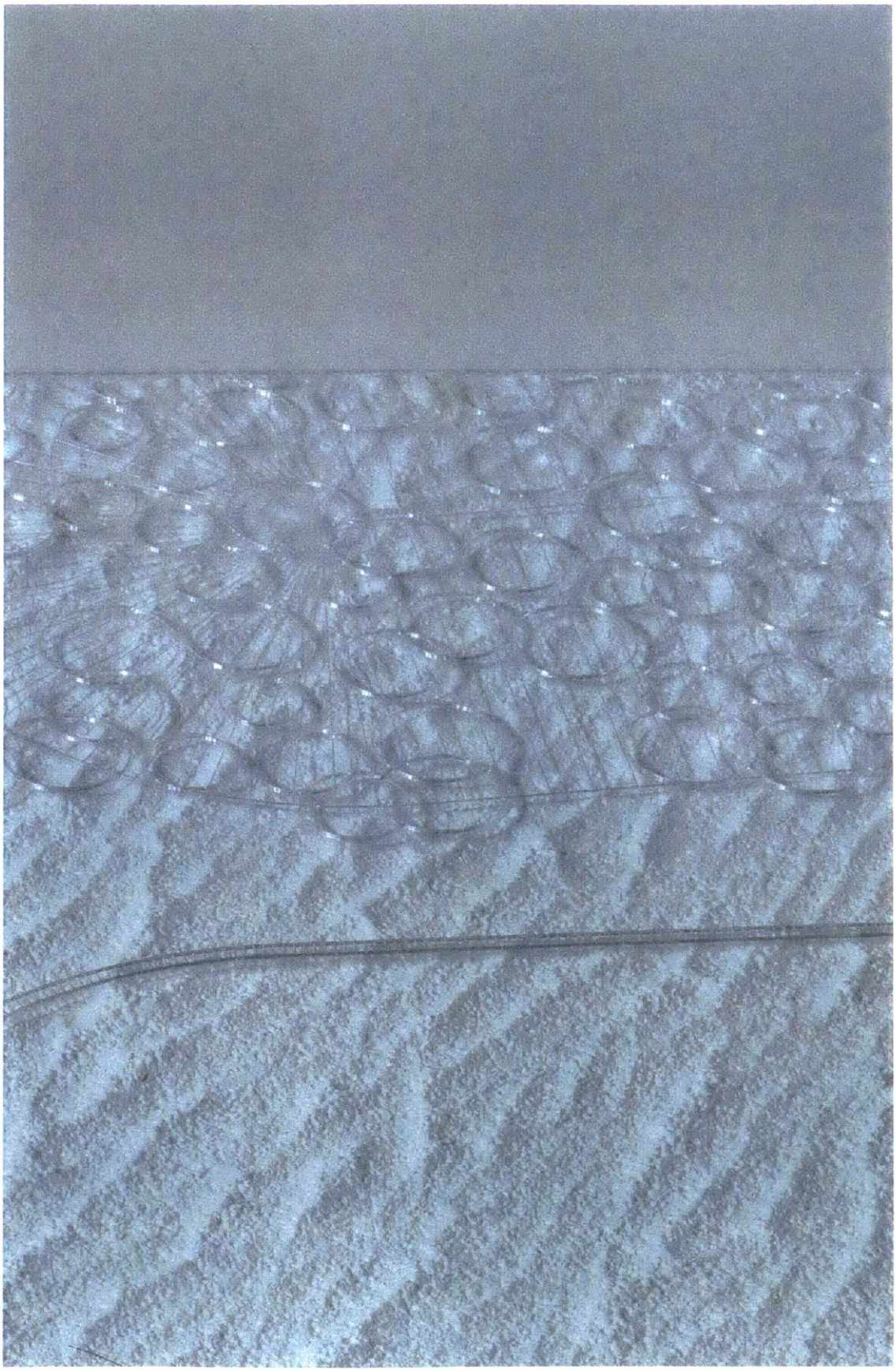


Figure 58: Model of Archivist's House, Photo © Andy Ryan



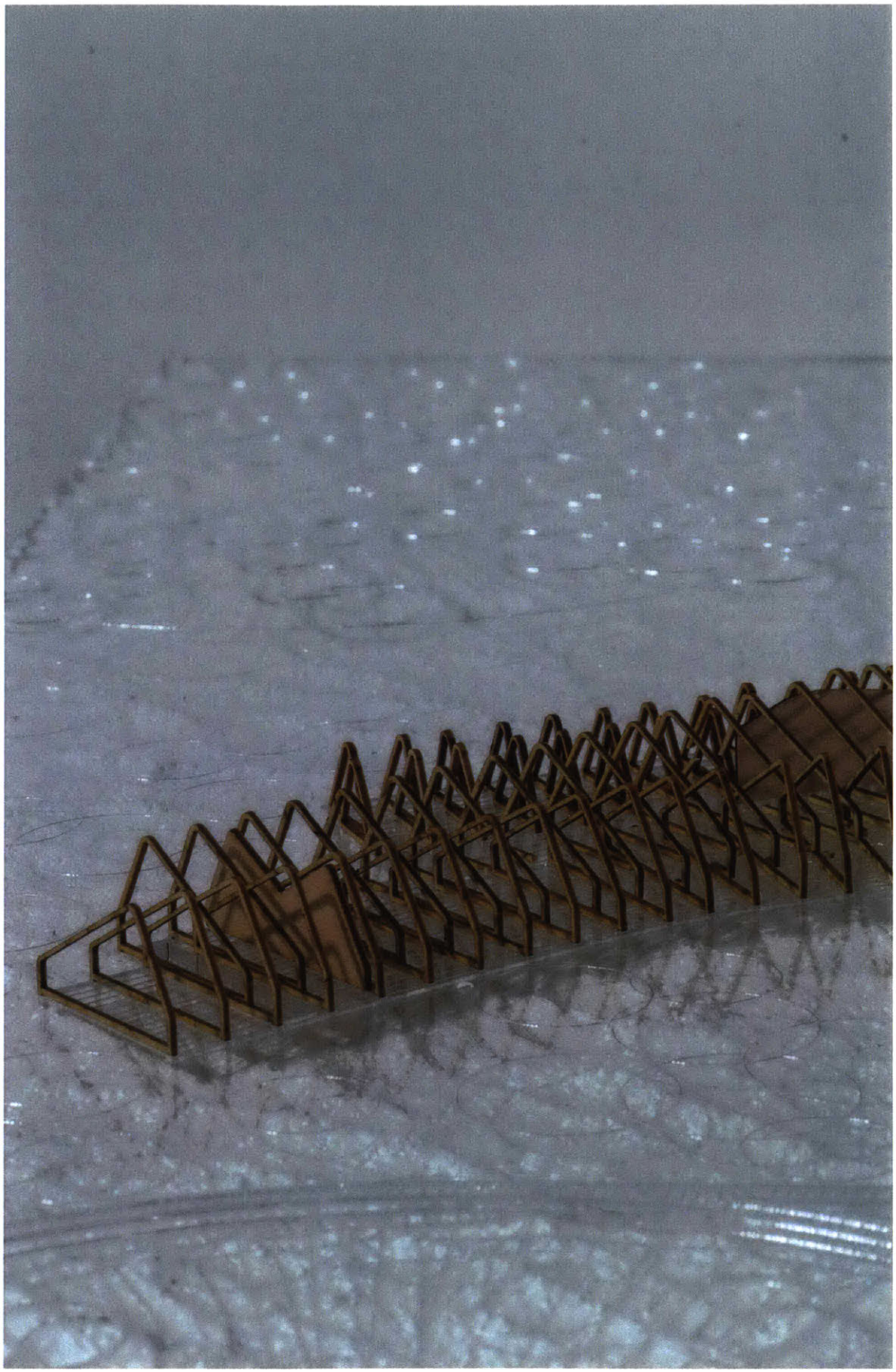


Figure 59: Model of Archivist's House, Photo © Andy Ryan

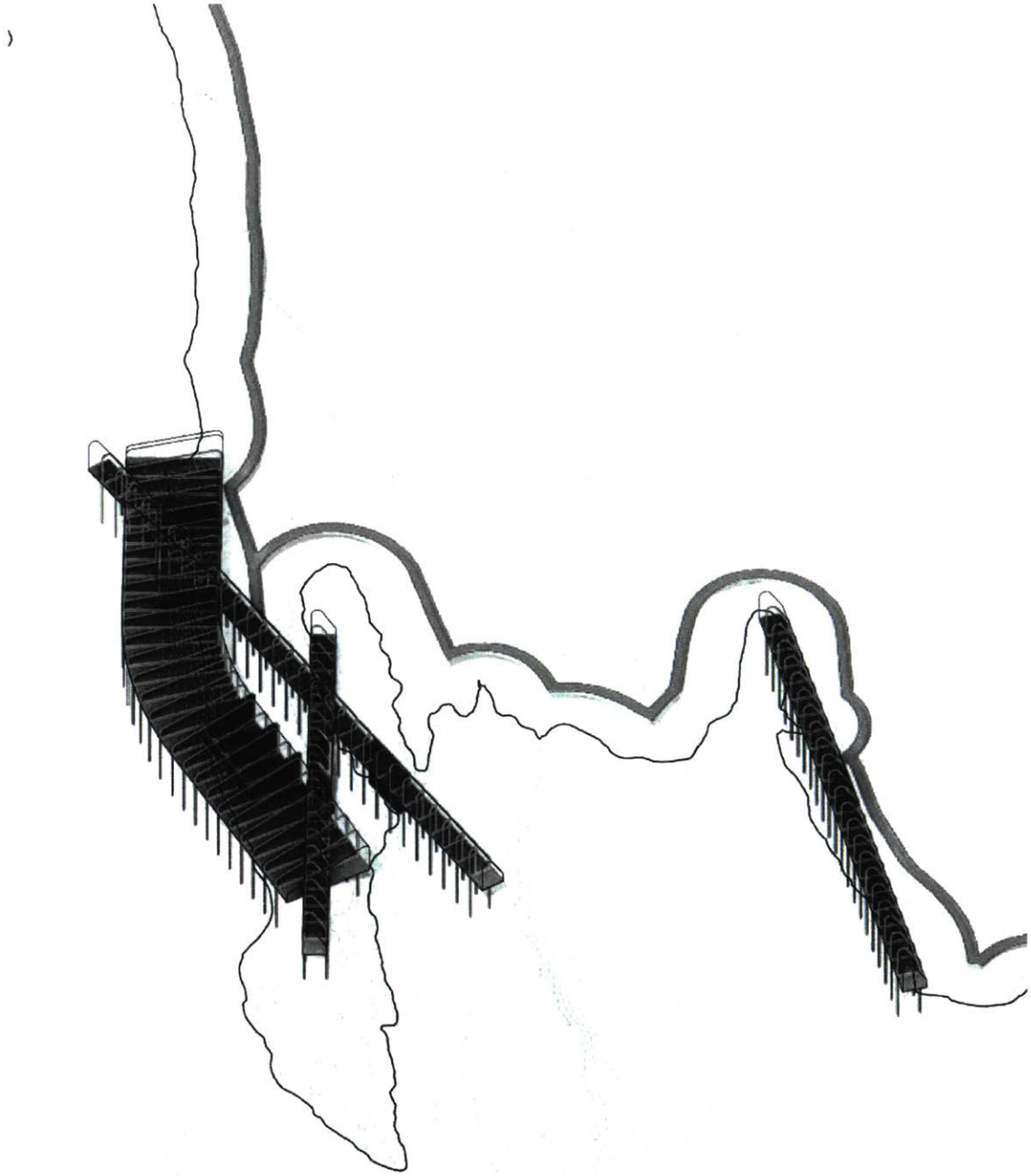
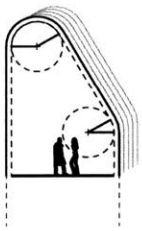
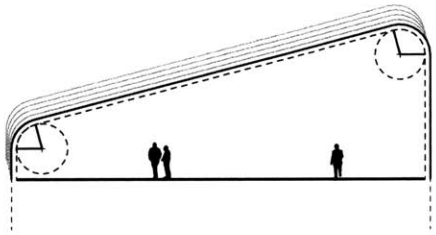


Figure 60: Detail of Axonometric at Land-maker's House

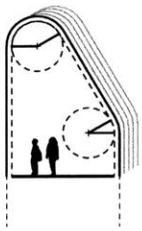
THE LAND-MAKER'S HOUSE



LANDMAKER'S HOUSE
Bar dikes
Observation deck



LANDMAKER'S HOUSE
Gathering space
Dining room



LANDMAKER'S HOUSE
Bar dikes
Observation deck

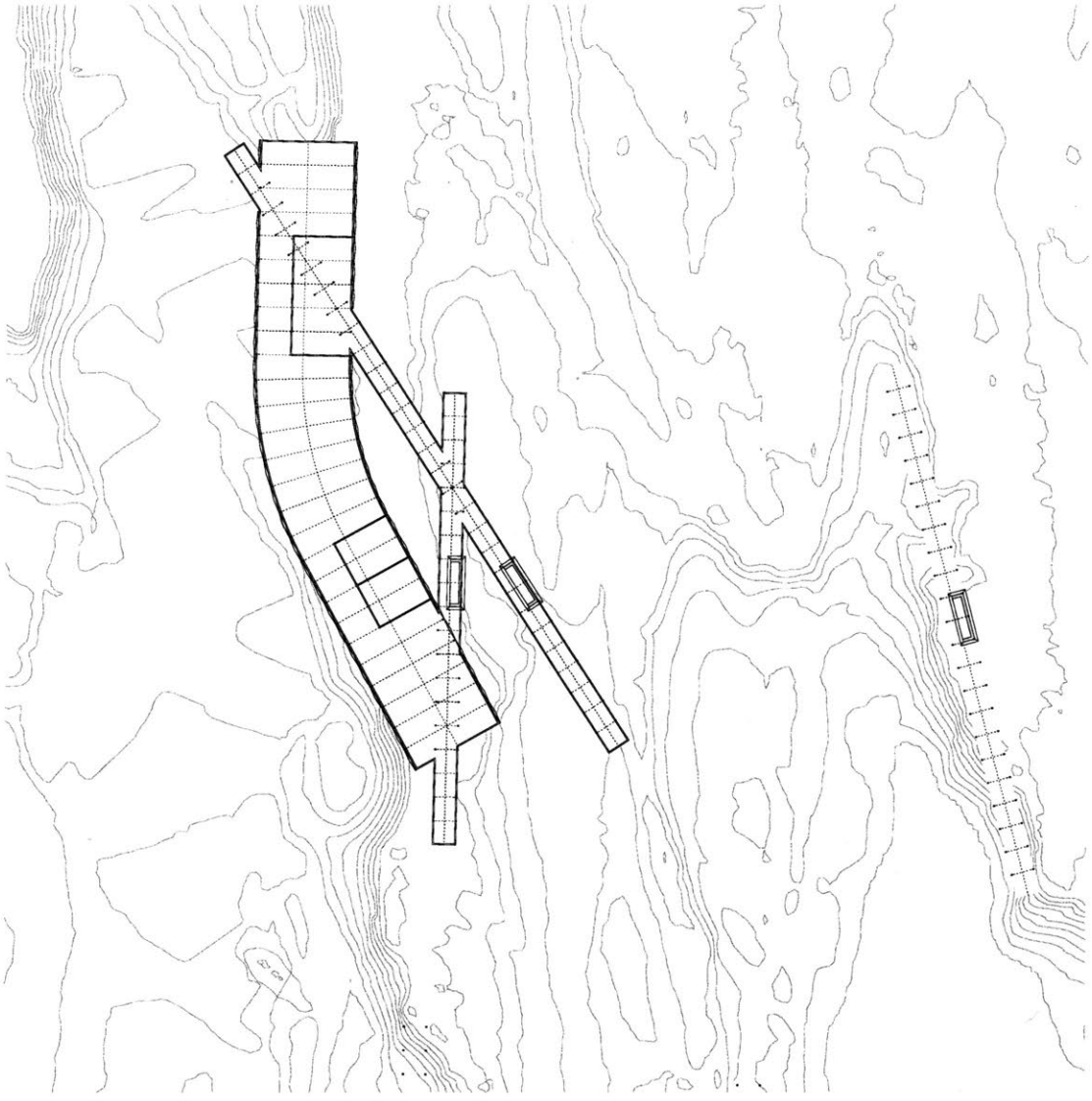


Figure 61: Plan of Land-maker's House

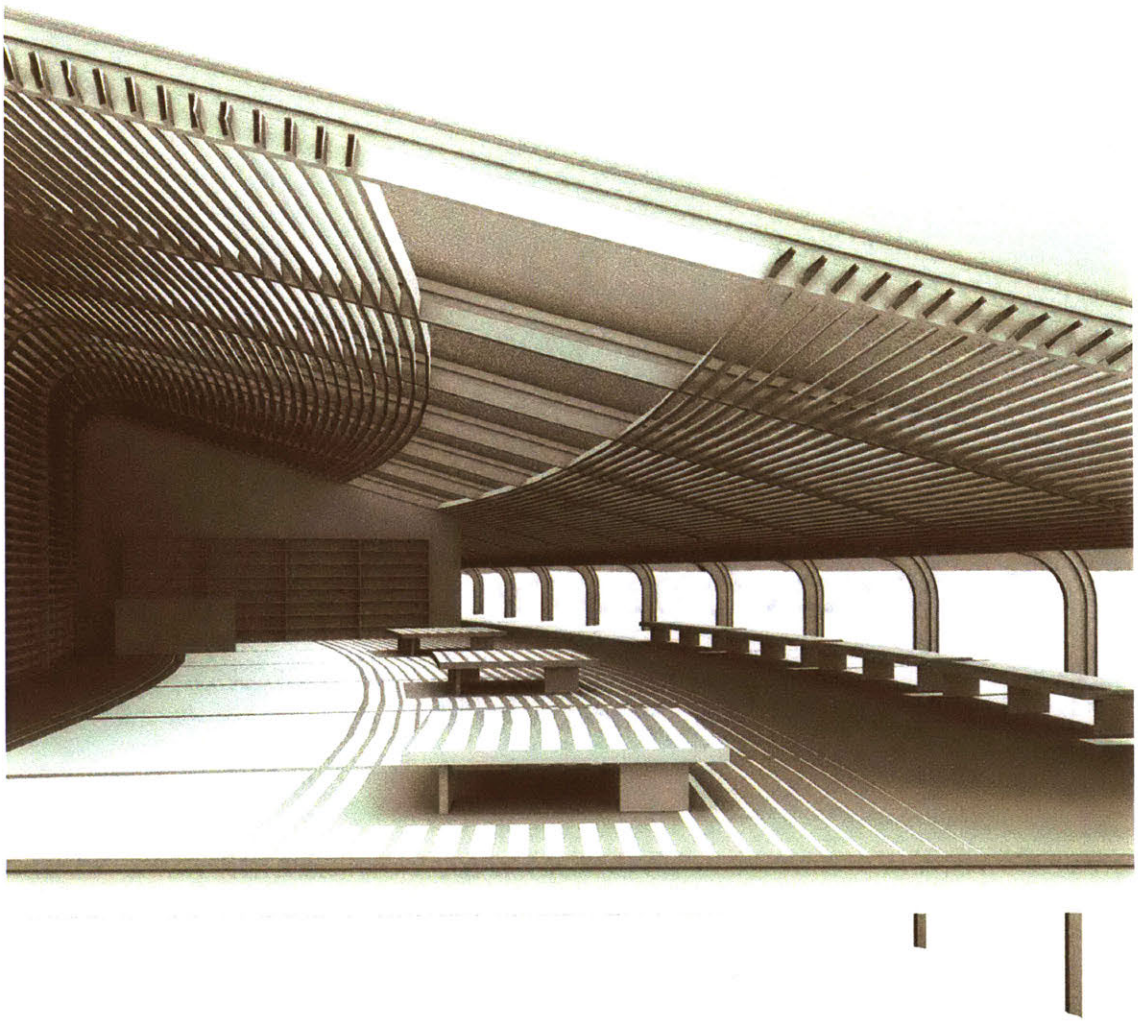
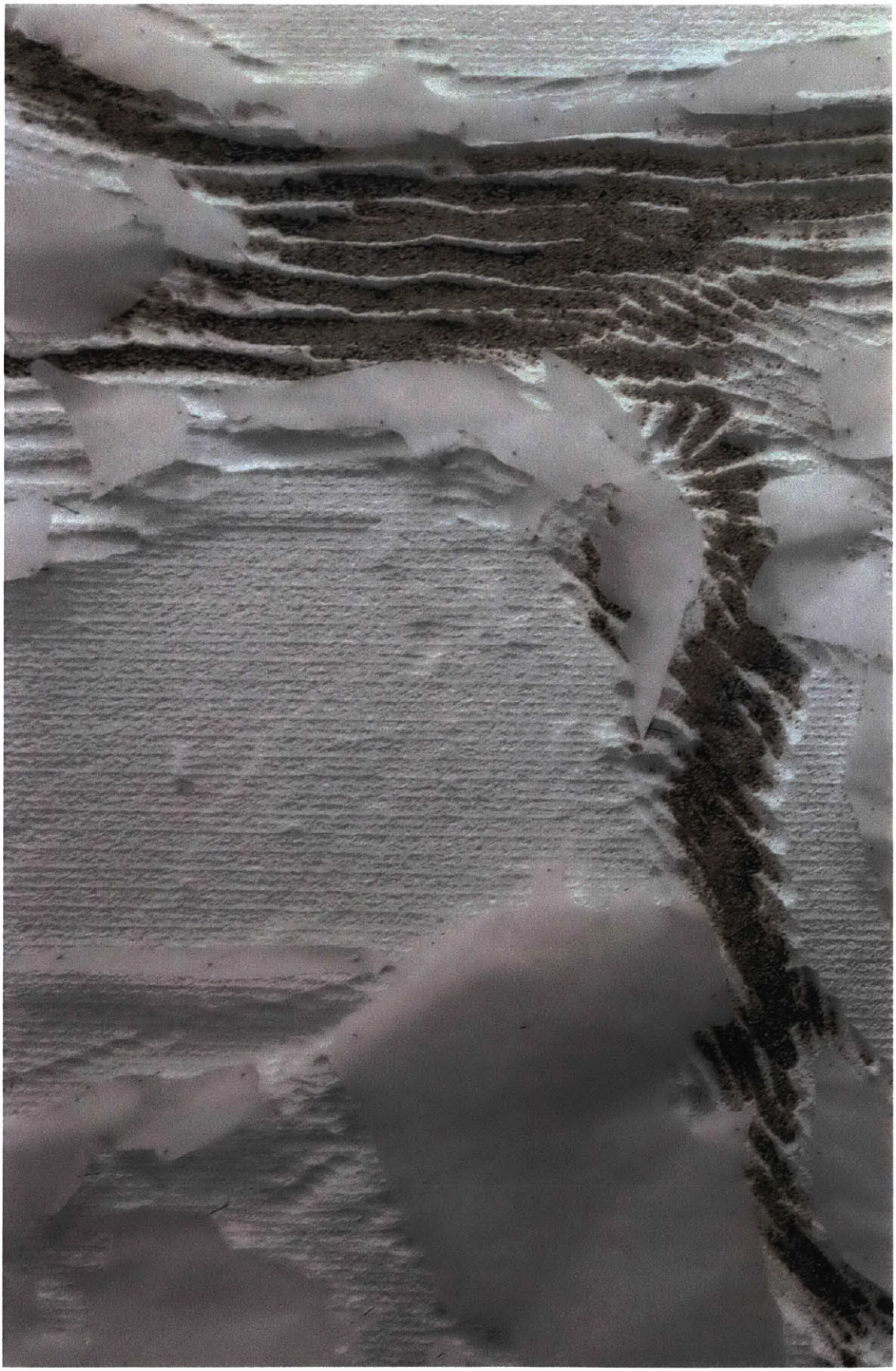


Figure 62: Section Perspective of Land-maker's House at Observatory

Figure 63: Exterior View of Land-maker's House

Figure 64: Model of Land-maker's House, Photo © Andy Ryan

Figure 65: Model of Land-maker's House, Photo © Andy Ryan



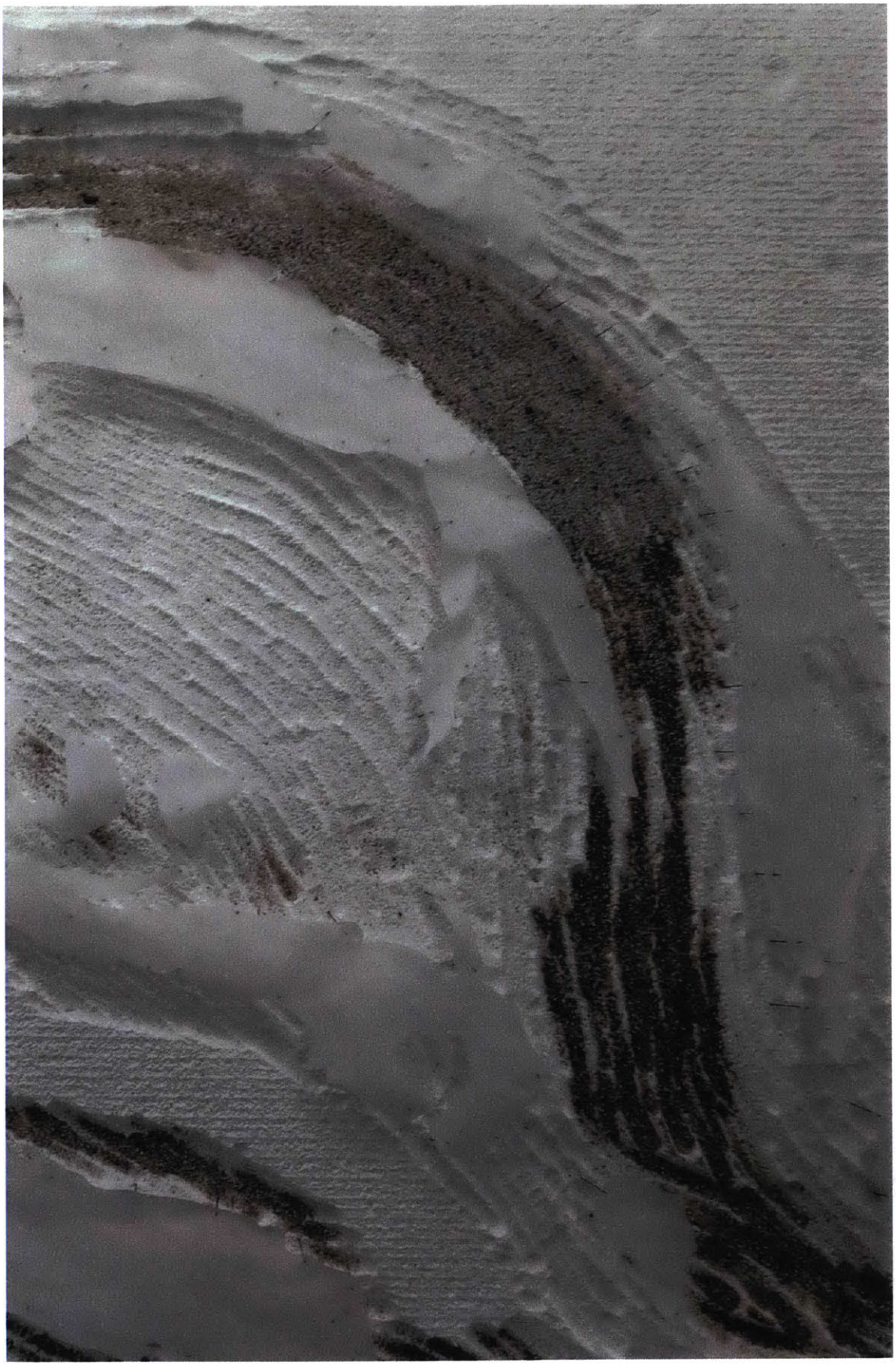


Figure 66: Site Model

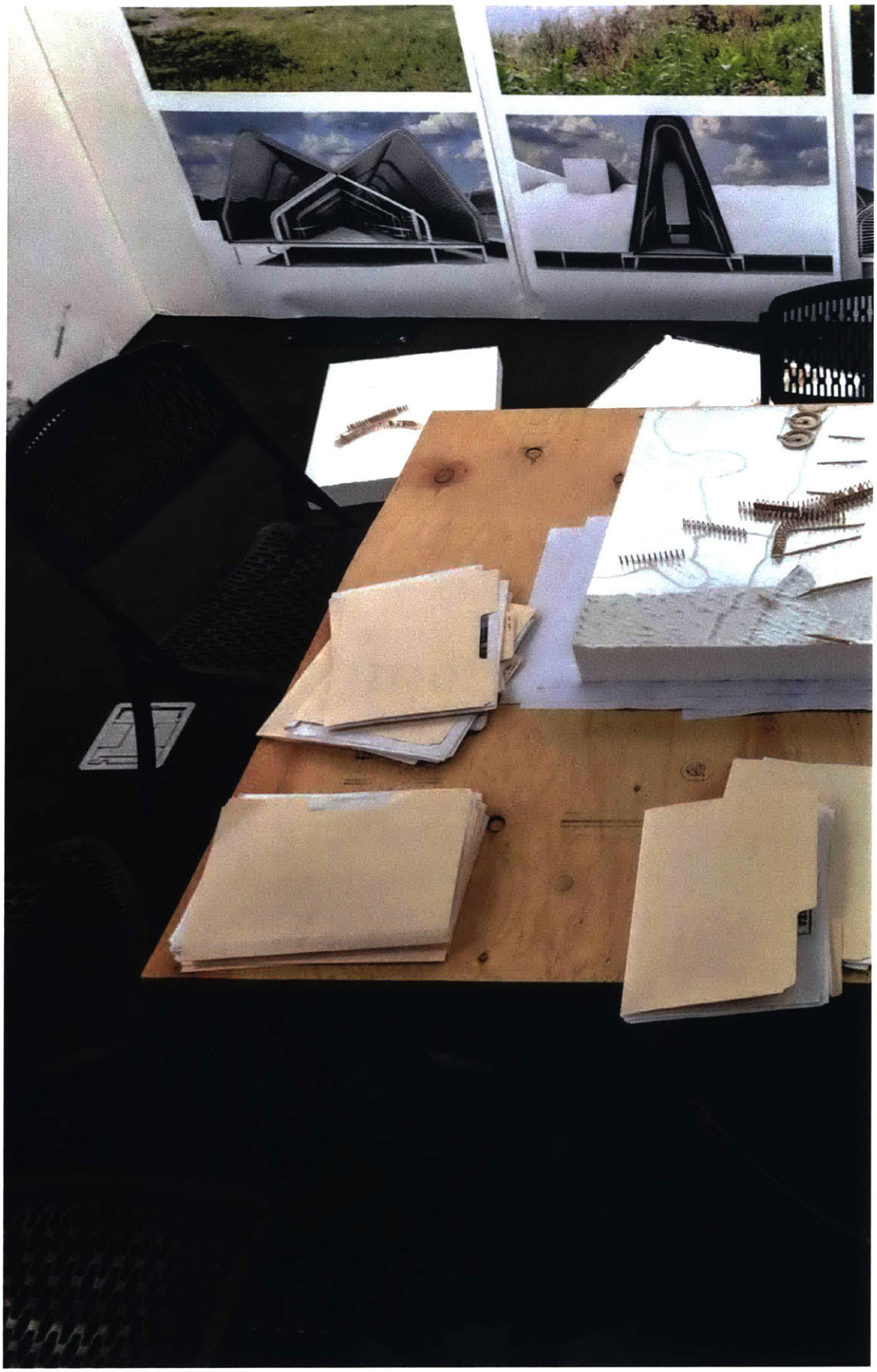


Figure 67: Post-Review Photo; Archive as Strata and Context for Proposal

Figure 68: Sarah Wagner, Final Review, December 20, 2018

Figure 69: Sarah Wagner, Final Review, December 20, 2018

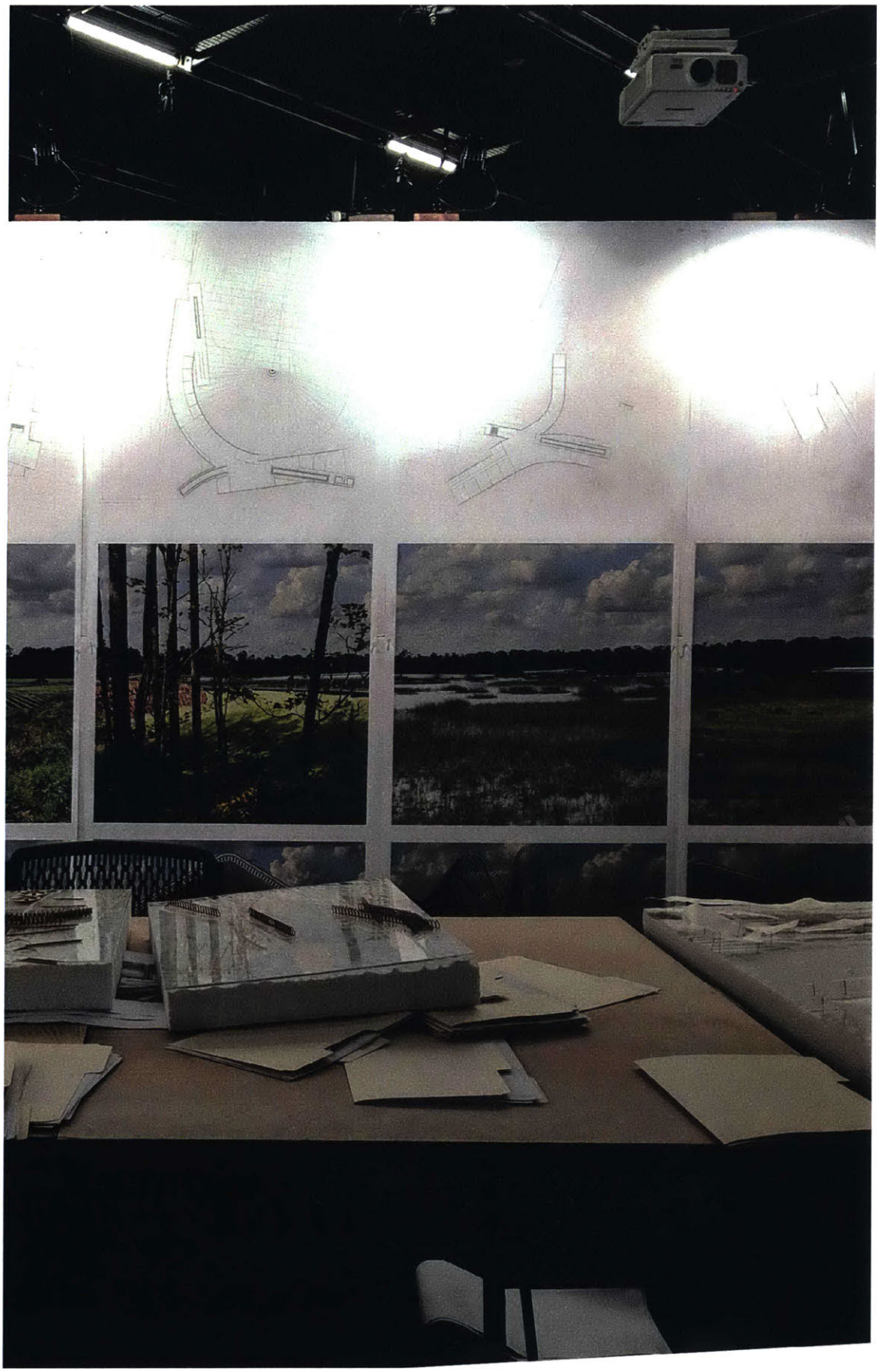


Figure 70: After Final Review

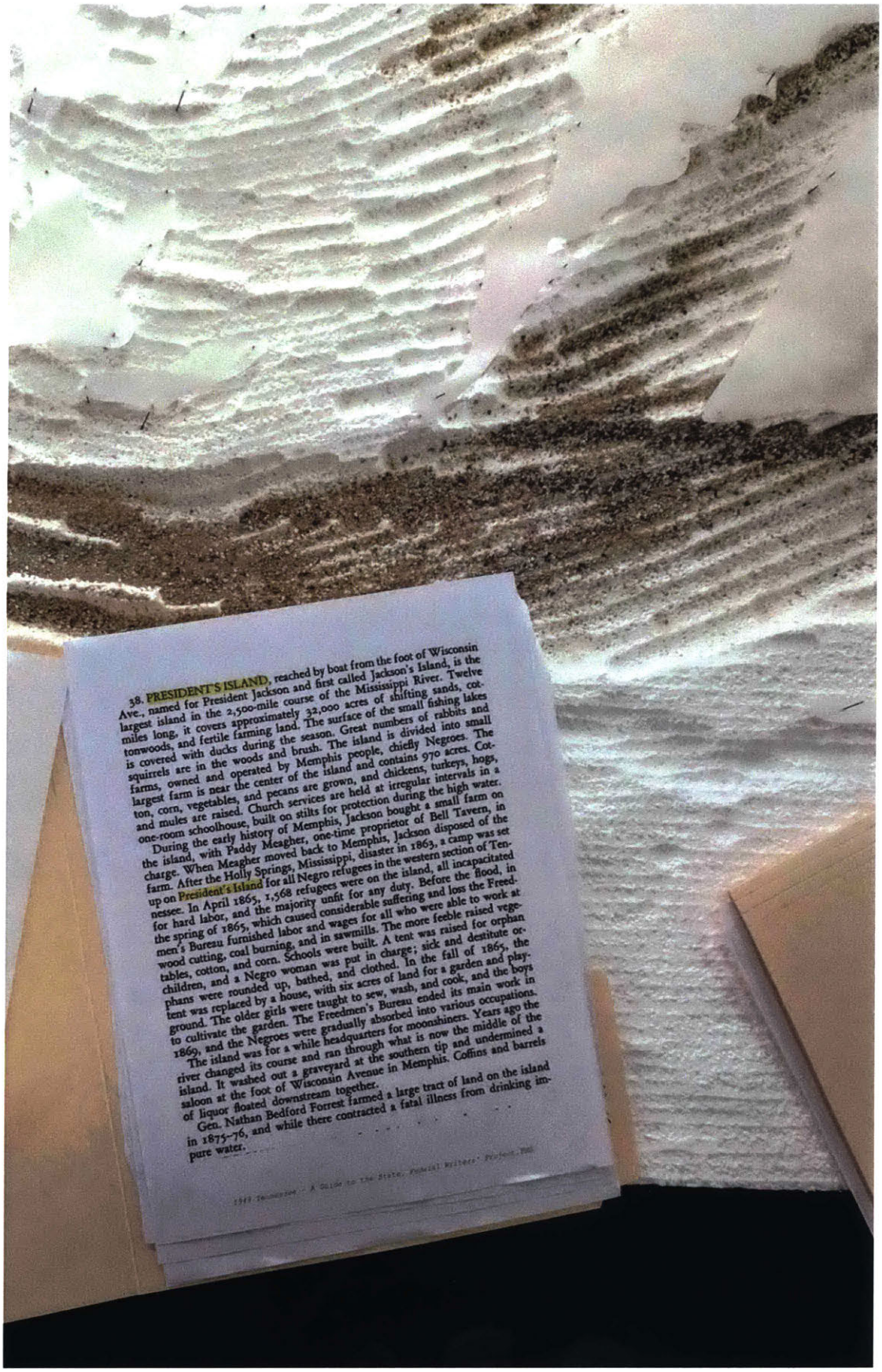


Figure 71: Archive as Foreground to the Island