

Kennesaw Mountain

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Kennesaw Mountain
National Battlefield Park

The Powder Springs Road Community and the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain



Before the Battle of Kolb's Farm, a small community dominated by two large plantations, a large farm, and a church with a nearby brush arbor stood along the southern end of Powder Springs Road. From the 1820s to the 1860s, middle- and upper-class Northwest Georgia farming families lived, worked, and worshipped in this peaceful and thriving agricultural community. There, in June 1864, Confederate and Union armies battled each other in Cobb County yards, farms, and fields, carving a swath of destruction through the lives of its inhabitants.

Cobb County Plantation Owners

Many families who arrived in Cobb County as pioneers during the 1830s built their fortune from the piedmont soil. Although some new residents brought with them money they had earned in other areas of the United States, others arrived with nothing but a deed for land, an ox cart, a feather bed, and some farming tools. Families such as the Kolbs started out in a one-room cabin with a dirt floor, growing crops on land their neighbors helped them clear. Over the next three decades, successful harvests and careful financial management gave them the chance to increase their holdings. Tiny cabins soon became six-room houses, additional wilderness acreage was turned into cropland, and slave cabins

were erected to accommodate new farm laborers.

Slavery in Cobb County

Cobb County's slave population grew 900% between 1838 and 1860. But slaves were expensive – the average slave cost \$1,000 in 1860, not counting food, clothing, shelter, and medicine; therefore, only the wealthiest families became slaveowners. Since the quality of the soil in Northwest Georgia prohibited the widespread growth of cotton, a labor-intensive crop, slavery did not flourish here like it did in some central and southern Georgia counties, where the black population soon exceeded the white population. Slaves comprised 27% of the 18,074 people who lived in Cobb County in 1860.



Female slave at a corn crib, Cobb County, Georgia, 1860

The Appling Plantation – A Profitable Enterprise

The Appling family owned the largest, most profitable plantation in the area. Sixty-five-year-old W.A. Appling, a Mexican War veteran and pioneer settler of Cobb County, resided on 600 acres south of Powder Springs Road. His 54-year-old wife and 21-year-old daughter lived with him in a large four-room wood-frame house with a stone cellar, a detached kitchen, and a smokehouse. Twenty-four slaves lived in cabins spread across the property. A cemetery for the Applings' slaves stood on top of a small hill a quarter of a mile away, while a family burial ground lay northeast of the house. Given the presence of a cellar and a smokehouse, the family probably owned

a sizeable amount of livestock and grew root crops like sweet potatoes.

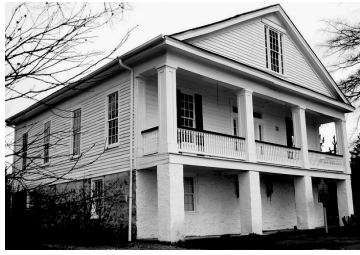
The Applings were the richest family in their neighborhood. Cobb County census records for 1860 valued the family's personal property at \$32,000.

The Appling house and its outbuildings, still standing as of 1941, were considered for inclusion in an early interpretation program by Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park. However, the plan was rejected in order to direct funds toward the restoration of the Kolb farmhouse instead.



A front view of the Appling House as it appeared in 1939

The Oatman House – A Stately Manor



Oatman House, post-restoration

The Oatman House, now fully restored and in private hands, stands on a hill on the north side of Powder Springs Road near the Macland Road intersection. S. B. Oatman, a wealthy marble dealer from Vermont, bought the property in 1864. He referred to it as the “Atkinson House” because the previous owner, Mary Anne McDonald Atkinson, had inherited the estate from her father, Georgia governor Charles J. McDonald (1793-1860). Mrs. Atkinson herself called the house “Melora.” It is most commonly known as the McAdoo House, since William Gibbs McAdoo, Jr., President Woodrow Wilson’s treasury secretary, was born there in 1863.

The Oatman house was built sometime between 1832 and 1850. It exemplifies southern antebellum Greek revival architecture. A first floor made of stone serves

as a foundation for the main wood-frame structure. The second floor consisted of four 18-square-foot rooms with a ten-foot wide central hallway between, and the third floor was partitioned into three medium-sized rooms. The estate did include a 30-acre orchard and a log building containing a distillery. Since the house changed hands several times between 1860 and 1865, it is unknown whether a plantation actually operated there during the war. When troops marched into town in the summer of 1864, they found the house uninhabited and unguarded.

In the 1940s, Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park considered including the Oatman house in its interpretation program. The idea was rejected in order to divert funds to the Kolb farmhouse.

The Kolb Farm – A Harvest of Success



Kolb Farmhouse, post-restoration

One of the most-visited features of Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park is the Kolb farmhouse. Since the National Park Service acquired the property in 1941, its exterior has been completely restored to its original wartime appearance. Today, the house is a private residence, and its interior is not accessible to the public.

Valentine Kolb arrived in Cobb County with his wife, Eliza, in the early 1830s, occupying 600 acres of woodland. The Kolbs’ log house was most likely built before 1838. Family legend holds that a local Cherokee Indian was hired by the family to help saw the pine logs used in its construction. By 1860, the Kolbs and their seven children had turned the surrounding wilderness into a prosperous family farm. They and their 13 slaves worked year-round on 250 acres of cleared land. The farm included a detached kitchen,

a smokehouse, slave quarters, stables, a mule pen, barns, a two-story building housing a cotton gin and a cotton press, a grist mill, and a sawmill. The family’s livestock included 18 cattle, nine horses, eight sheep and 25 hogs, some of which were slaughtered and sold for cash. Large harvests of wheat, maize, butter, hay, oats, peas, beans, sorghum molasses and honey also turned a profit on the market.

The Kolbs lived an upper middle-class lifestyle: 1860 census for Cobb County valued the family’s real estate at \$6,500 and their personal property at \$12,226. The family was legendary in the community for its hospitality. Every Sunday after attending services at Mount Zion Church or its brush arbor, the Kolbs would open their home to anybody – strangers included -- who wanted to stop by for food, drinks and conversation.

The Wartime Experience of the Powder Springs Road Community



General John Bell Hood commanded Confederate forces at the Battle of Kolb’s Farm, June 27, 1864.

Dark days arrived with the events of the 1860s. In March 1862, Valentine and Eliza’s son Wilds Kolb, a soldier in the Confederate Army, died while on duty in Atlanta. In late 1863, under unknown circumstances, Valentine slapped one of his slaves, who then bit him. After succumbing to blood poisoning a few weeks later, Valentine was buried in the Kolb family cemetery.

Before northern and southern armies fought the Battle of Kolb’s Farm in her fields on June 22, 1864, the widowed Mrs. Kolb and her children fled to a safe location east of Atlanta. When they returned a few weeks later, the destruction they encountered staggered them. Hundreds of yards of six-foot-deep earthworks snaked throughout their yard and fields. The building housing the cotton gin lay in pieces, shelled by Federals targeting Confederate sharpshooters hiding inside. Some of the interior walls of the farmhouse, used as a temporary field hospital, had been torn out to make more room for the wounded. Unscrupulous Union soldiers entered the Kolb house, carrying off silverware and destroying furniture. Bullet holes dotted the home’s exterior, and artillery fire carried away part of the roof. The slave quarters, smokehouse, and detached kitchen lay smoldering in piles of charred ruins.

The Oatman house also sustained damage during the battle. A man whose family purchased the house in 1868 claimed that “the upper stories had been occupied by Federal soldiers for hospital purposes.” He

remembered the strenuous work involved in making the house inhabitable again: “Before restoration, we had to clean out the manure from the ground floor, which had been used by the Union Army as horse stables.” The home’s exterior was also in poor condition: “Breastworks extended through the yard on both sides of the house at right angles to and jam-up to each side. There were [also] several bullet holes in the weatherboarding.” Some soldiers had inscribed their names and units on the boards above the floor of the front porch: “One of them gave his regiment as the 70th Indiana.”

Whether the interior of the Appling House suffered damage is unknown, but its yard and fields were ravaged when troops dug in for safety. In 1940, the Battlefield Park’s Junior Historian, B. C. Yates, walked its grounds and noted: “The main line of Confederate fortifications ran just west of the [Appling] house. Just south of the house there was a fort, now destroyed, which probably contained a battery.”

Just before the Battle of Kolb’s Farm, Confederate General John B. Hood took the log-built Mount Zion Church for his headquarters. He assembled his troops in front of the church house before moving westward to assault the Union position. Mount Zion Church burned down before the armies left the area. It was not rebuilt until the late 1890s.

War’s Aftermath

When the fighting finally came to an end in 1865, several factors, including the abolition of slavery, the destruction of farmland, and the poor financial condition of the southern states, forbid many North Georgia planters from restarting their agricultural operations. Cobb County census records for 1870

show that some families who owned homes along the Powder Springs Road in the 1860s, including the Appling and Kolb families, never returned to the area after the war.

Bulletin created by Angela Tooley, Kennesaw State University history student, in cooperation with Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park.