

# My Own Park Avenue

Let's build a neighborhood in 1930s Tallahassee!



**Knott House Museum**

**301 East Park Avenue**

**Tallahassee, FL 32301**

**850.922.2459**

## **A Brief History of Tallahassee's Lewis Park Neighborhood**

### **Where are we?**

The Knott House Museum is situated in downtown Tallahassee, along Park Avenue and Calhoun Street. Standing on the front porch of the Knott House, one will be able to admire Lewis Park, part of Downtown Tallahassee's "Chain of Parks." Calhoun Street and Gadsden Street border the park to the west and east. Park Avenue is split by Lewis park itself, forming the northern and southern borders. Park Avenue (formerly known as McCarty Street) was once the city's northern border, when Tallahassee was forming as the capital of the Florida territory in the 1820s. Park Avenue was paved at the time of the 1930s, but many streets in Tallahassee were not. By 1930, records show that Calhoun Street was newly paved, and Gadsden Street was still a dirt road.

### **Lewis Park**

Captain William C. Lewis, whose own home once stood along the northern side of Lewis Park, developed the park in 1885. From a grassy space in a wide road, Lewis Park was landscaped with small pathways and garden plots. It served as an especially historic link in Tallahassee's chain of seven parks. It is home to grand live oak trees, including the May Oak, site of an annual celebration of spring. Union troops camped in this space in 1865, during the federal occupation of Tallahassee that enforced the Emancipation Proclamation in Florida, declaring freedom for all enslaved persons within the state.

### **Knott House**

The Knott House was built around 1843 by George Proctor, a free Black contractor who built other homes for the city's elite during the 1830s and 1840s. The home was constructed for the Hagner family, and used as headquarters by Brigadier General Edward M. McCook during the Union occupation of the Florida capital after Confederate surrender in 1865. After the Civil War, the house was used as doctor's offices and boarding house. In 1928, the house became home to a family. William and Luella Knott moved into the home with their youngest son, when William began his term as State Treasurer of Florida. A two-story portico with columns was added at this time to give a grand but reverential appearance of the colonial revival style. William Knott walked to work at the State Capitol, and the family was within walking distance Tallahassee's downtown stores, churches, offices, and entertainment venues. They were able to enjoy the evening breeze and shade of the live oak trees from the home's front porch and east side porch.

## **“Witness Tree”**

This tree stood along Park Avenue, between the Knott House and Wood House. The Witness Tree fell during a storm in June 2020, but it witnessed centuries of events and memories. The tree stood when Florida became an American territory, and guns were placed here at Tallahassee’s northern border, creating a buffer zone during the Seminole Wars. It witnessed a neighborhood of homes being constructed along the roads and stood when Florida became a State of the Union. The Witness Tree’s lifespan included Florida’s secession from the Union, and its return after federal troops camped under its branches during occupation in May 1865. It experienced every May Day celebration, held annually in Lewis Park for over a century, and it witnessed a frontier town become a modern city.

## **Wood House**

The Wood House was built around 1904 for Henry O. Wood and Henrietta O. Wood. It is the newest of the historic homes surrounding Lewis Park, being the only home built after Florida’s territorial period. The Wood family represented an early example of the “snowbird,” a person that travels from northern regions to live in Florida during the winter months. The Wood family lived in Ohio, building this home as a winter residence. Mr. Wood was a lumber merchant who had ornately carved fixtures installed throughout the home. After Mr. Wood’s death in 1924, the house was sold to the First Presbyterian Church and served as a parsonage for twenty years. William Knott purchased the house in 1946, while he still resided in the Knott House next door.

## **Murphy House**

The histories of the Murphy House and the Knott House are closely connected. They were both probably built by George Proctor, with the Murphy house built first around 1838. In May 1865, military officers were quartered in both houses when Union forces occupied Tallahassee at the end of the Civil War. In the post-war period, both buildings were used as doctor’s offices by local physician George Betton. William Gunn, who worked here as a driver for Dr. Betton, would become one of the first African American men to earn a medical degree and open his own practice in the state of Florida.

This house was built around 1838, deeded to Elizabeth Weeks in 1891, and to her daughter Josie Weeks Murphy in 1928. The structure is still owned by the Murphy family.

## **Chittenden House**

The Chittenden House was built in the late 1830s for Captain R. A. Shine. The house is believed to have been built from materials taken from the original territorial capitol, the capitol building that was in Tallahassee before Florida officially became a state. Several windows throughout the house, including the big multi-paned window at the entrance, were originally used in the territorial capitol. In 1847, a Mr. Flagg purchased the house after winning the exact amount of the house’s listing price from a Louisiana lottery ticket.

The home was sold in 1884 to Hattie W. Dickenson and was purchased by Simeon D. Chittenden in 1894. The Chittenden family added the mammoth Dutch-style front door with its brass handles, latch and lion-headed knocker. He also installed the beautiful floating staircase. Mr. Chittenden also had steps and a low wall built from ballast, which are stones used to balance sailing ships that came to Florida ports. Mr. Chittenden was General Manager of a railroad connecting Tallahassee to the Gulf harbor at Carrabelle.

## May Oak

The May Oak was a stately, centuries-old oak tree. It served as the central backdrop for a longtime Tallahassee festival known as May Day. May Day evolved from ancient English traditions that celebrated the arrival of Spring. May Day was celebrated at this tree since at least 1844, and would be celebrated here until 1974. The tree itself collapsed in 1986, but the holiday has since combined and evolved into the local tradition of Springtime Tallahassee. Originally, popular young ladies from the community would be chosen as May Queen, but the May Queen and her court would later be chosen from Leon High School's senior class. During the Jim Crow era of segregation in Tallahassee, African Americans would participate in May Day celebrations, hosted at the historically Black neighborhoods and schools outside Lewis Park.

## BC Lewis House

The B.C. Lewis House stands on the northwest corner of Park and Gadsden. This home was built between 1845 and 1850 for Charles E. Dyke, editor of the *Floridian*. It was purchased in 1850 by Benjamin Cheever Lewis, founder of Lewis State Bank. The house and its residents survived a major fire in 1940, when the home was occupied by the family of George Edward Lewis.



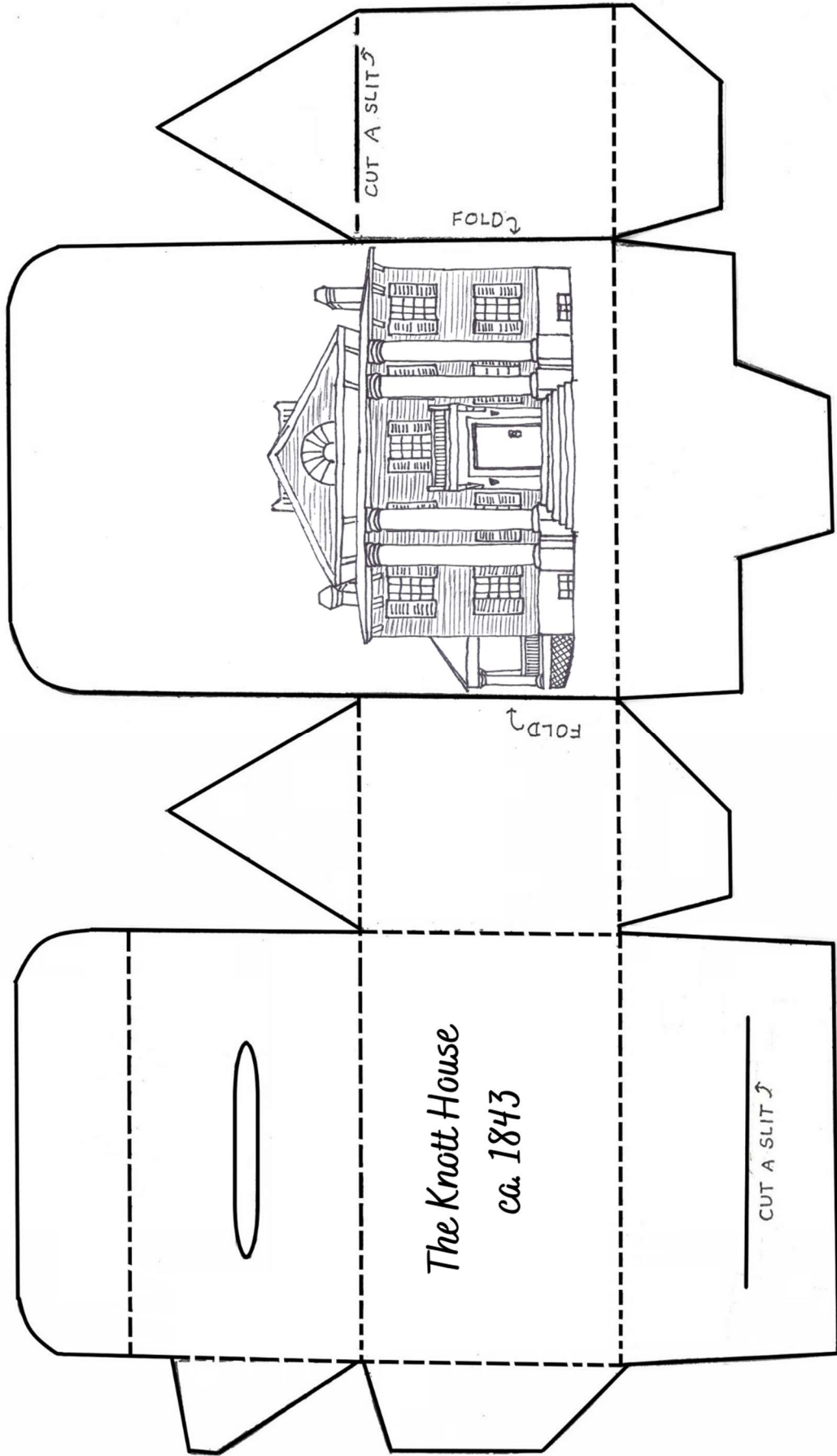
Detail from a 1926 Aero-View of Tallahassee (inverted South to North), Courtesy of the Library of Congress. Lewis Park is circled.

## Instructions for building houses:

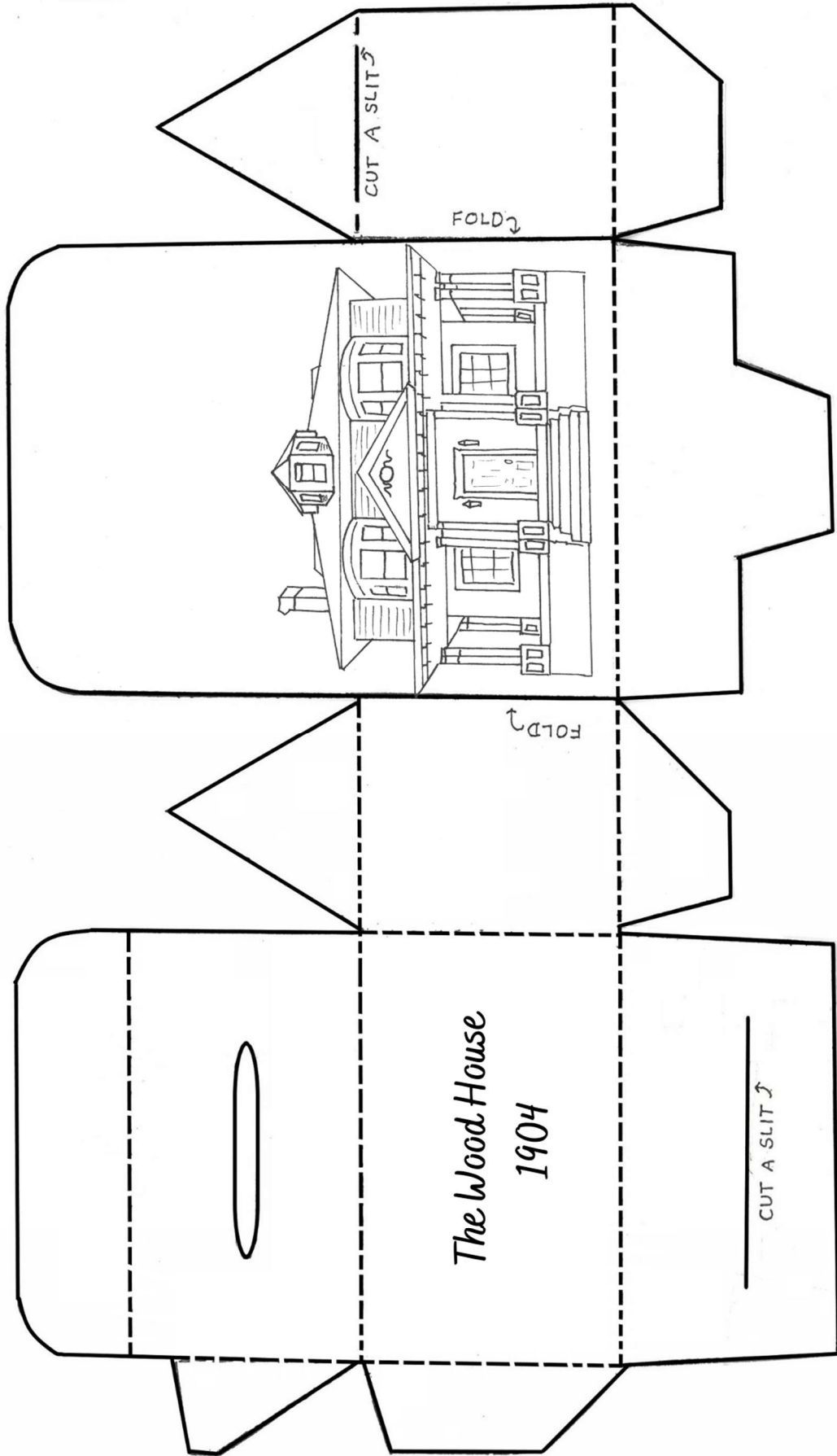
1. Use an extra sheet of paper as a work station. Work over it to catch any stray glue or coloring streaks.
2. Use colored pencils, crayons, or markers to color the houses.
3. Cut a slit (according to the template) by pinching the paper at the slit line and make a small cut with your scissors. Flatten the paper, then cut the rest of the slit by starting at the small cut made at the pinch.

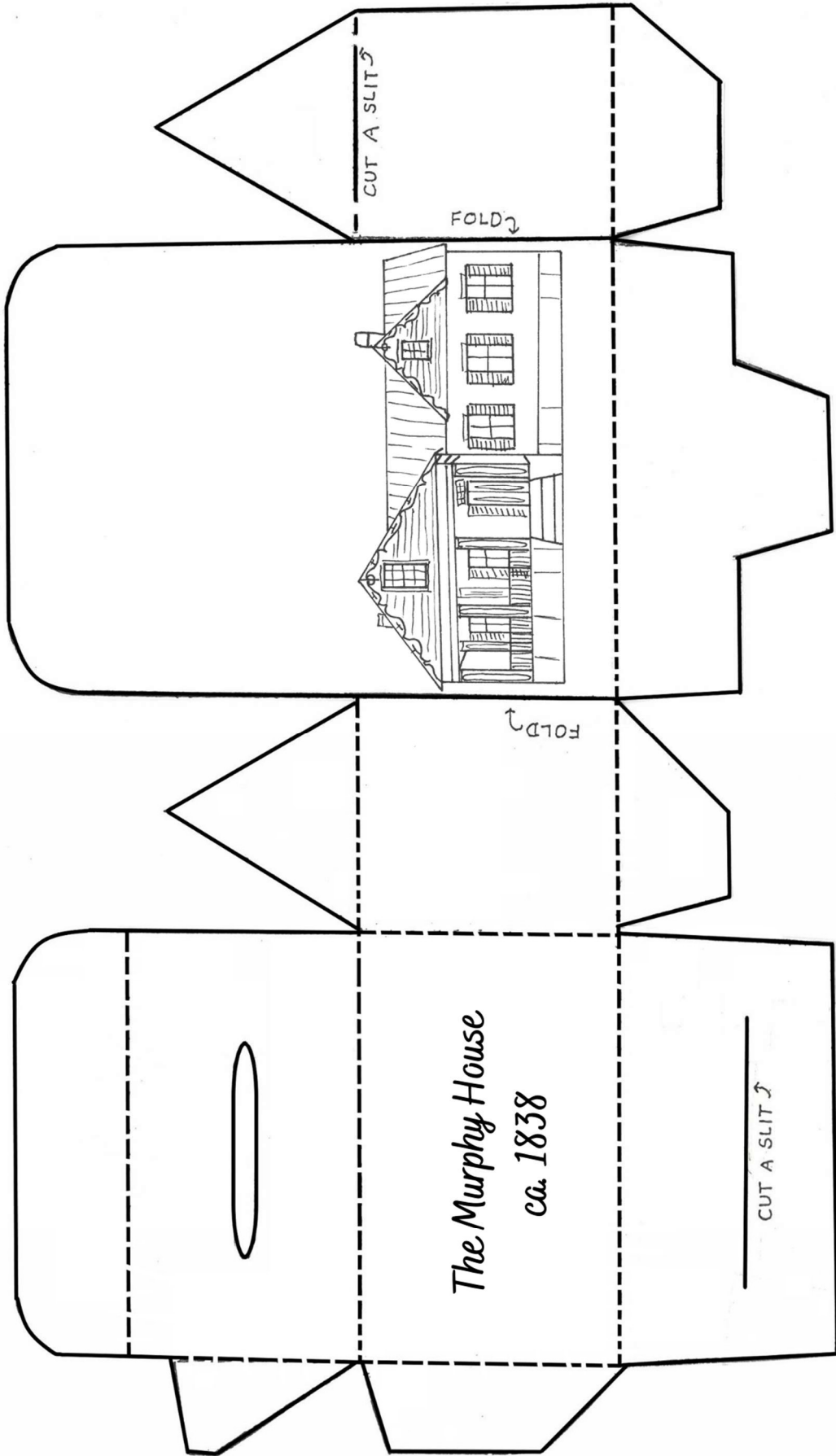
Tip: Use the “pinch and cut” method to make a coin slot at the top of the house. The house can then be used as a bank, and the coins will also give weight to the bottom of the box. Alternatively, leave the coin slot uncut to make a traditional box lid.

4. Cut around the outside edge of the template.
5. Fold along the dotted lines and wherever directed. The shape of a box should begin to form.
6. Glue or tape the far left, center tab to the side of the box on the right.
7. Glue or tape the side tabs at bottom of box to the big tab **without** the slit.
8. Push the bottom tab **with** the slit behind the glued bottom tabs, fitting the outside tab inside the slit.
9. Fold in tabs at top of box, fitting tab inside the side slit.
10. Glue box lid to close, or fold in to use as an opening box.

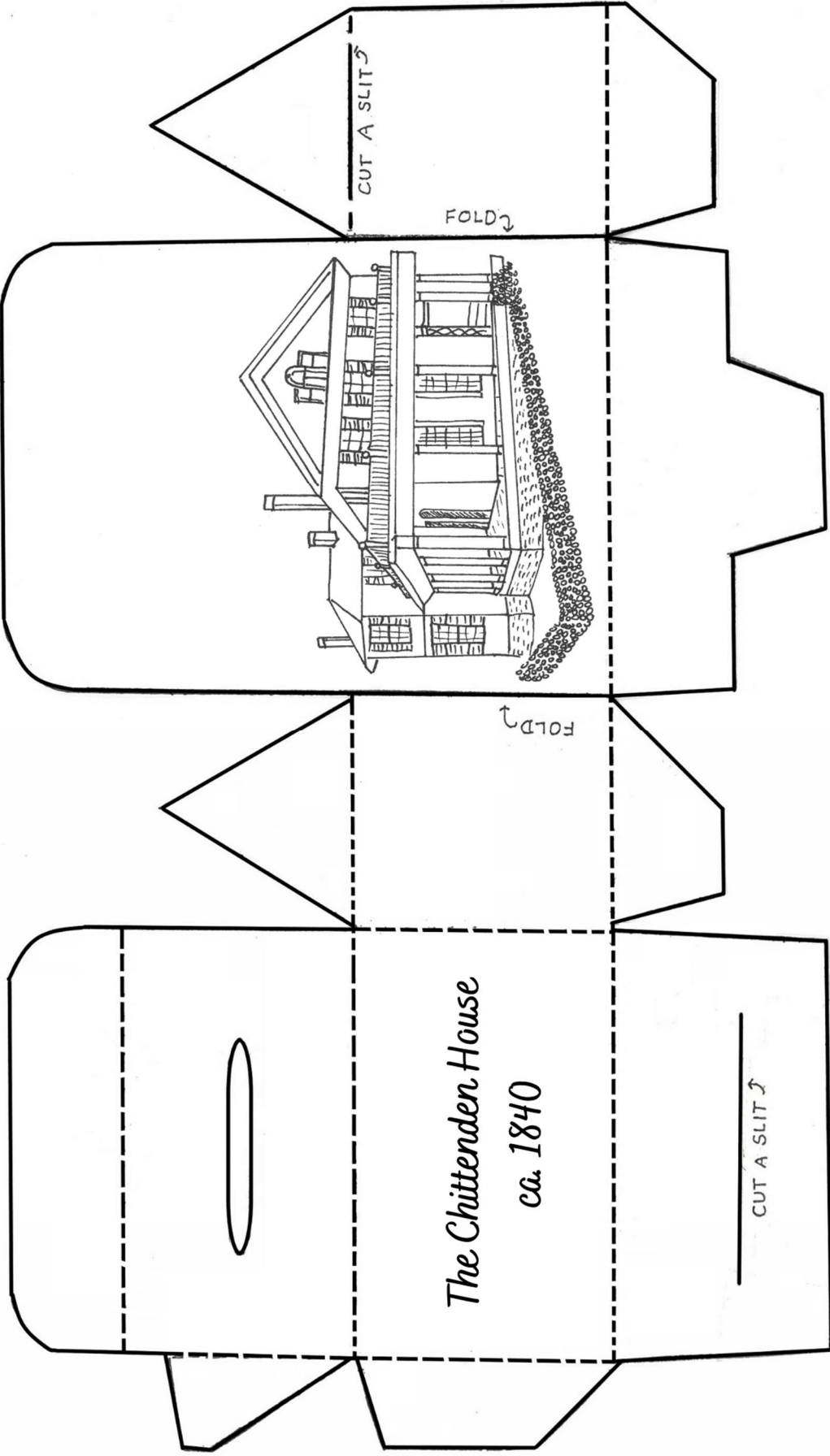












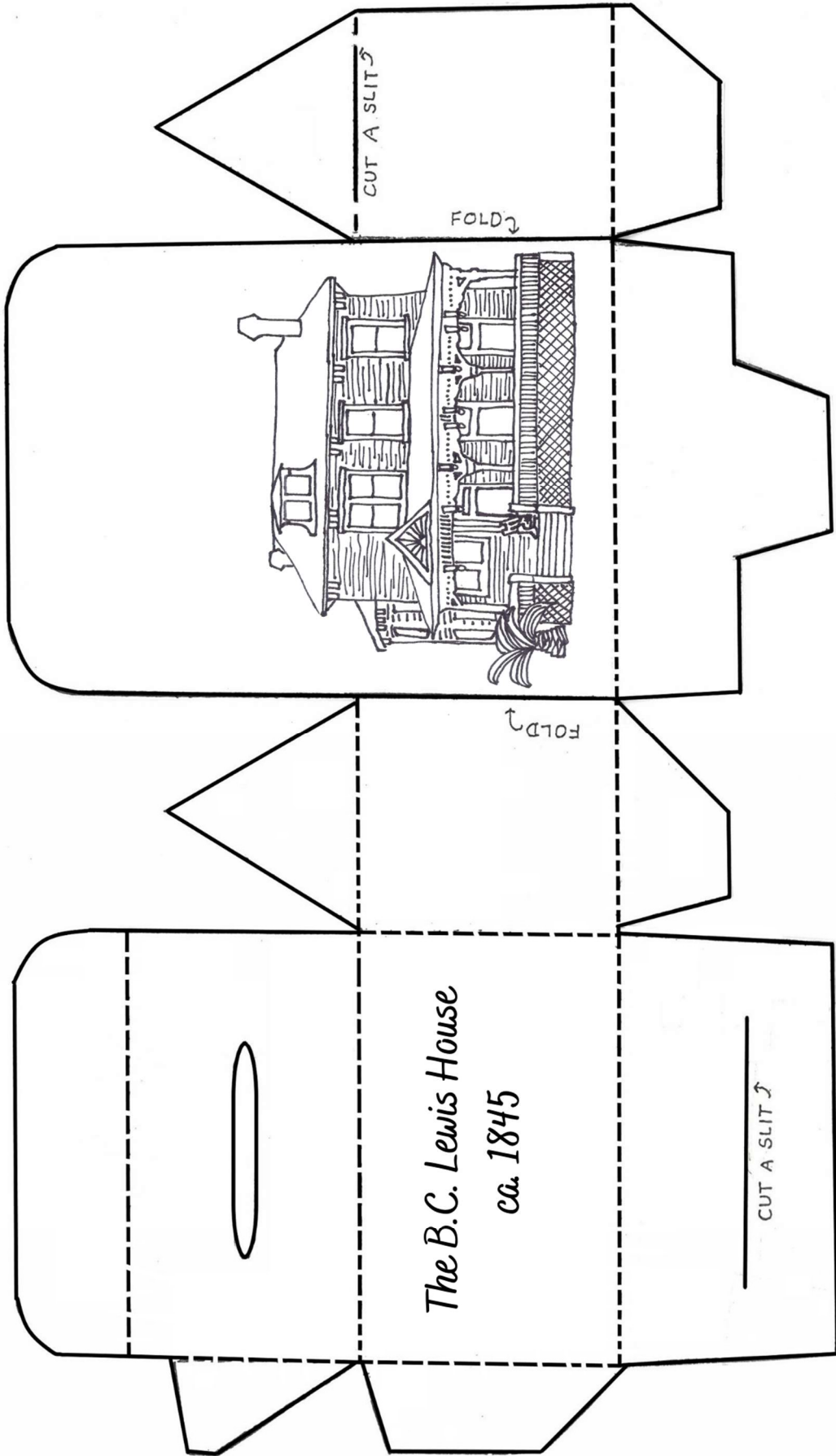
*The Chittenden House*  
*ca. 1840*

CUT A SLIT ↘

FOLD ↘

FOLD ↘

CUT A SLIT ↘



## Instructions for building trees:

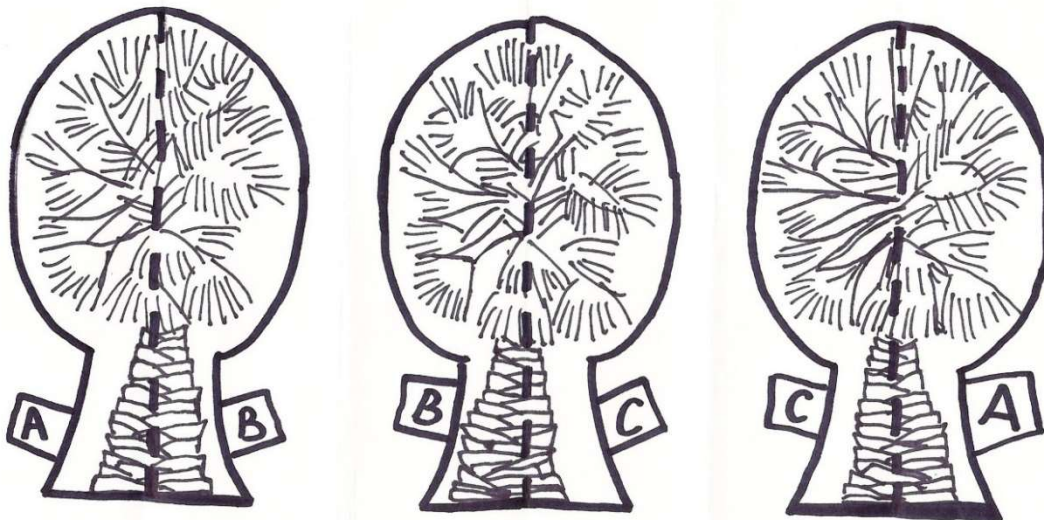
1. Use an extra sheet of paper as a work station. Work over it to catch any stray glue or coloring streaks.
2. Use colored pencils, crayons, or markers to color the tree.
3. Cut around the outside of each tree, carefully including the lettered tabs on each tree.
4. Fold each tab in towards the back of the tree.
5. Fold each tree in half along the dotted line. Fold tree so that the colored sides are next to each other, and the tabs are on the outside.

Tip: The bases of each tree are symmetrical. This bottom part of the tree should be evenly aligned after folding.

6. Glue the blank, outer sides of each tree cutout.

Tip: Glue stick is recommended, but liquid glue, tape, or staples will also work.

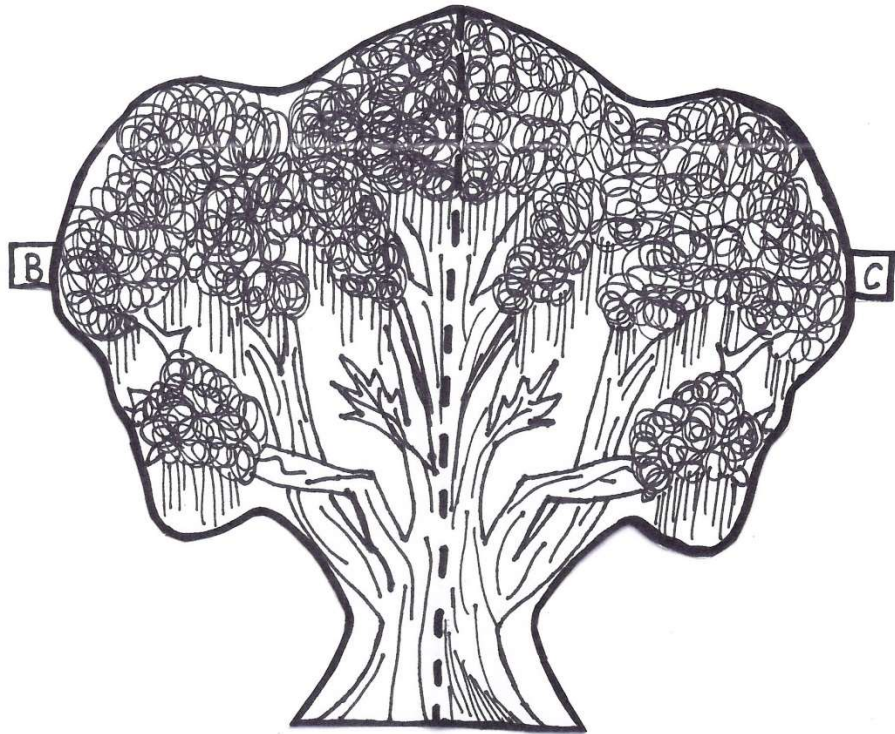
7. Using the letters as a guide, glue the matching sides of the three trees together. Make sure the sides are as evenly aligned as possible. The result should be one three-sided tree that can balance to a standing position.
8. Use scissors to trim along any uneven edges of the tree. This is especially important if the base of the tree is uneven. The tree can be flattened to cut a straight edge along the bottom, to help it stand.



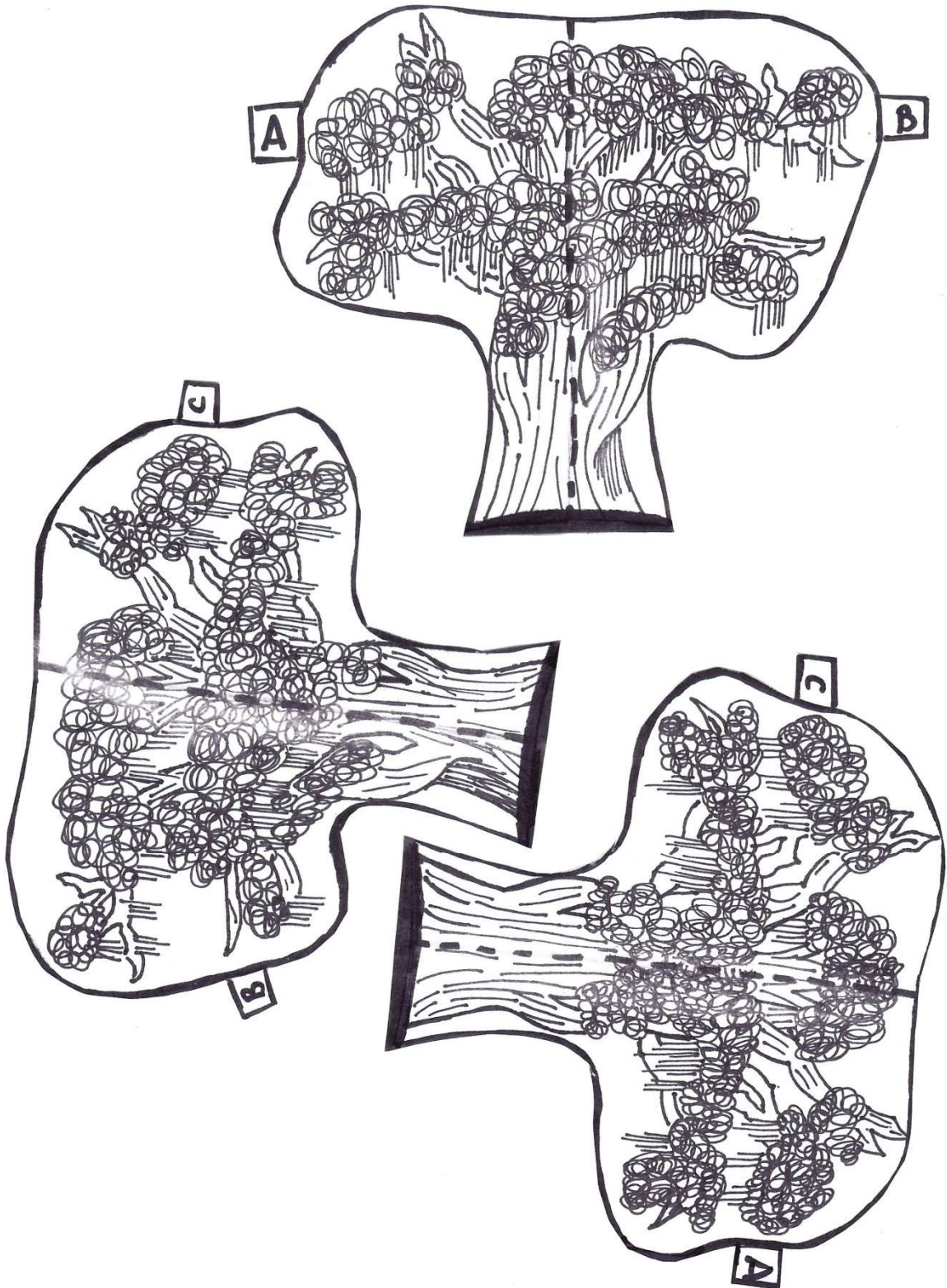
# Tallahassee's May Oak





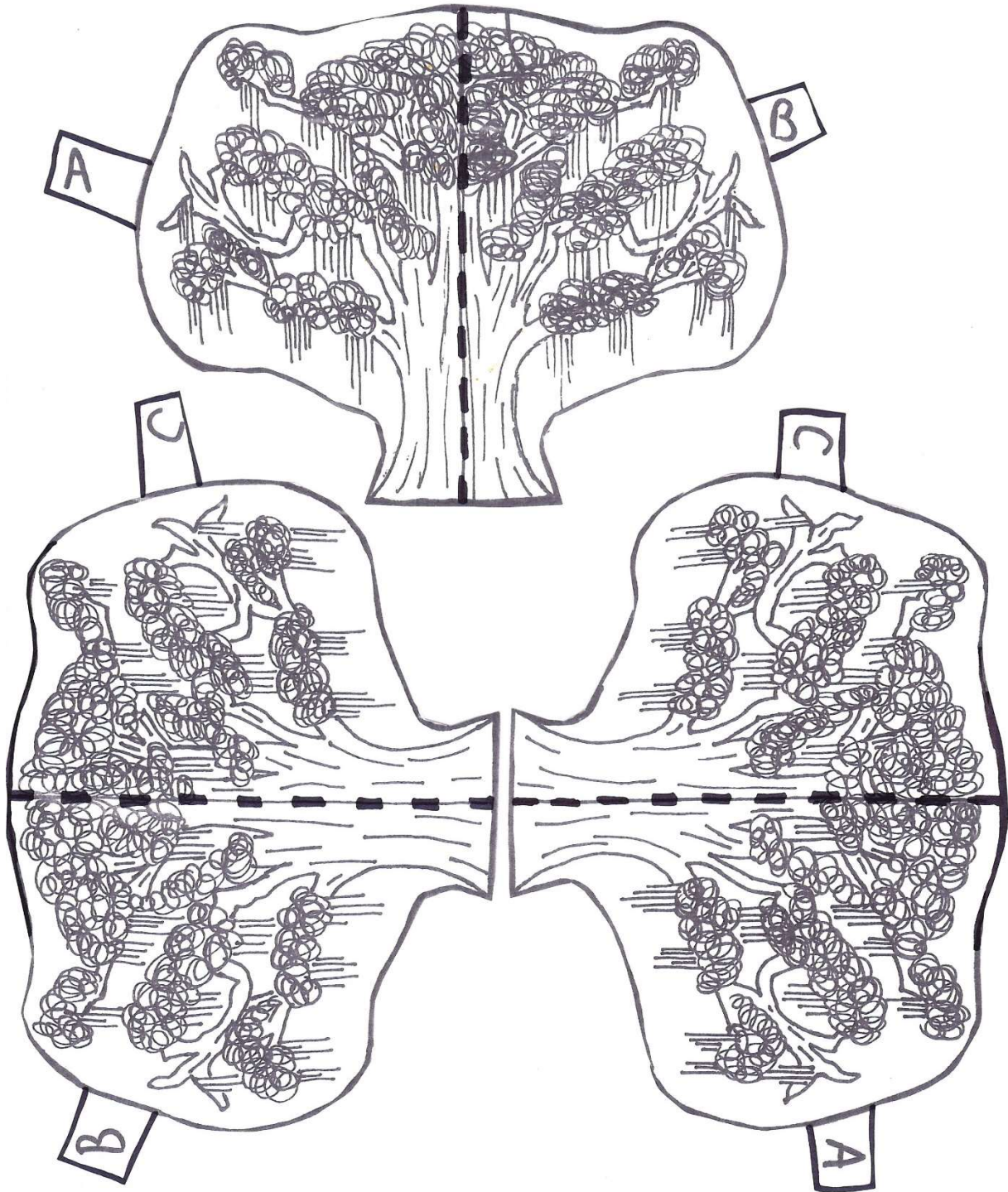


The "Witness Tree"





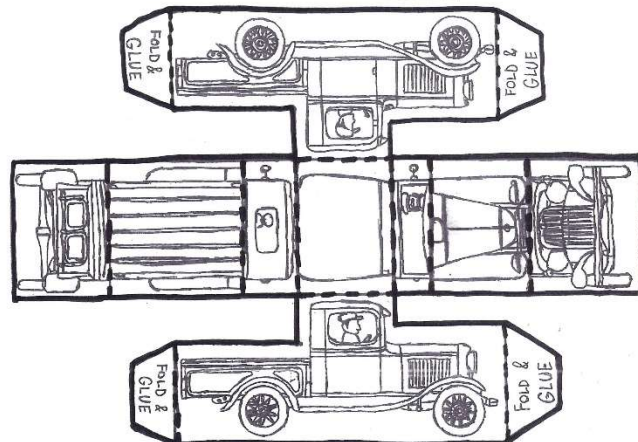
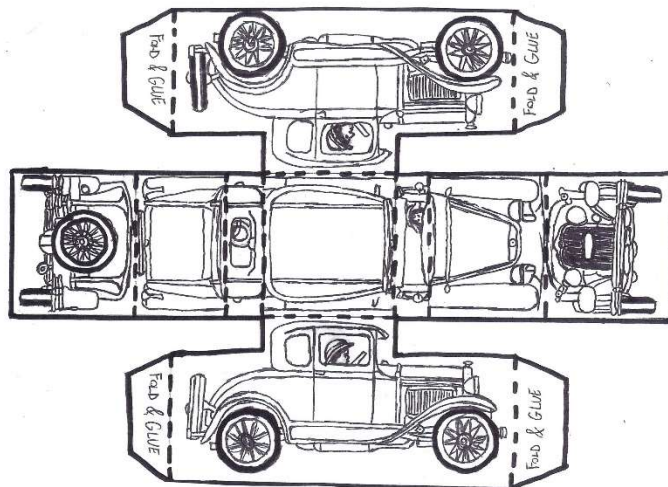
Live Oaks of Lewis Park



## Instructions for building automobiles:

1. Use an extra sheet of paper as a work station. Work over it to catch any stray glue or coloring streaks.
2. Use colored pencils, crayons, or markers to color your car. Black, blue, green, and red were popular colors for 1930s cars, but these autos will look great in any colors.
3. Cut around the outside edge. All parts of the vehicle will be on one continuous cut of paper.
4. Make creases back-and-forth along each of the dotted lines.
5. Fold down the side views of the vehicle, along the dotted lines. The middle section should now be the top.
6. Attach the front and back bumpers to the tabs by gluing the "Fold & Glue" tabs and attaching them behind the bumpers (folded end section in the middle of cutout).
7. While guiding the bumpers to the tabs, adjust the folds of the vehicle top to create the shape of the automobile.
8. Allow glue to dry, then place along your own Park Avenue.

1930 Ford  
Model A  
Coupe



1932 Ford  
Model B  
Pickup Truck



Larger automobile option (not to scale)

