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Qualitative Research • Museum Evaluation & Interpretive Design • Project Management

PORTFOLIO

This portfolio demonstrates: my museum audience research at public historic sites; my content research & interpretive design; and my experience in spatial & strategic planning that combines landscape, history, and interpretive storytelling. Finished products include public-facing interpretive materials, professional reports for site staff, website language updates, conference presentations, and peer-reviewed articles establishing me as a leading voice in the study of historic sites and place.

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Evaluation

Mapping Visitor Emotions at Historic Plantations

August 2021 – June 2022
As more plantation sites work to incorporate stories of enslaved people into tours and interpretive materials, the question of how these stories sit alongside spaces of recreation at the same sites (i.e. walking trails and picnic areas) grows in importance. For my National Science Foundation-funded dissertation research, I collaborated with three plantation sites in North Carolina that intentionally incorporate stories of enslavement while also providing walking trails, picnic areas, and other outdoor recreation opportunities for visitors. I asked visitors to map their emotions using stickers *(Figure 1)* while moving through the sites, then conducted structured 1:1 interviewed the visitors about their maps and the feelings that emerged.

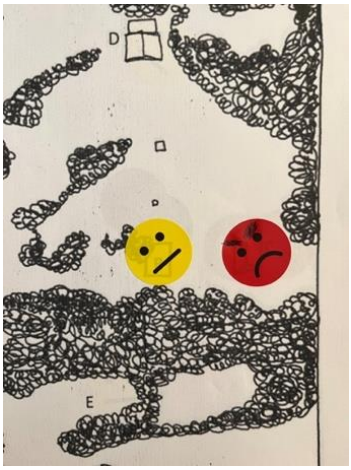
Lessons learned: While some visitors experienced cognitive dissonance between the recreational spaces of the historic sites and interpretive materials on enslavement, others expressed appreciation for how the beauty of the sites allowed them to process tragic and emotional histories. Still others – many of them local to the area of the site – used these historic spaces solely for outdoor recreation, but appreciated how a morning walk could become a space of learning. Historic plantation sites should be cognizant of these dual uses of space (leisure and learning) and seek to engage visitors in both. Furthermore, visitor emotions are an often-untapped, yet important measure of museum evaluation that can be effectively investigated through self-driven sticker maps and subsequent 1:1 interviews.

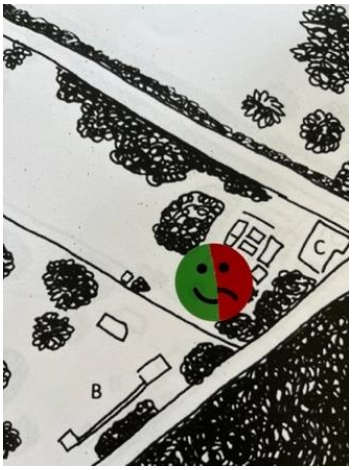
Products:

- **Reports:**
  - Three professional reports – one per site – consolidating visitor responses and drawing out major themes from maps and interviews. These reports enabled site staff to translate my findings into additional interpretive and engagement opportunities for visitors.
- **Peer-Reviewed Articles & Edited Blog Posts:**
  - Biggs, M.T. (forthcoming). Boundaries and boundary-making: Somerset Place State Historic Site and the National Register of Historic Places. *GeoHumanities*.
  - Biggs, M.T. (2023). Public history and outdoor recreation: A landscape perspective. Landscape EXchange. https://lex.landscaperesearch.org/content/public-history-and-outdoor-recreation-a-landscape-perspective/
- **Conference presentations:**
  - "Territorial Entanglements: Memory and Recreation at North Carolina's Somerset Place State Historic Site," presented to The American Association of Geographers annual conference during *Territorializing Memory* (virtual).
  - "'You Are Here': Text, Landscape, and the Rebirth of the Confederacy at Fort Fisher State Historic Site," presented to the Memory Studies Association Annual Conference during *Memory & Geography (III): Racial Justice* (virtual).
- **Undergraduate class presentations:**

- "Landscape management, landscape justice," two class presentations (Fall 2020; Spring 2021) to an undergraduate geography seminar on landscape and justice (virtual).

Figure 1: Visitors utilized creative methods with the materials at hand to illustrate the complexity and mutability of emotion in place.





Investigating Landscape Management at Public Historic Sites

October 2018 – August 2019
Many public historic sites in the U.S. manage their external landscapes for beauty and visitor recreation, in contrast to the intense commitment to period authenticity in material culture and internal spaces at these same sites. During my MA research, I conducted interviews with site staff and visitors, as well as archival research into the transformation of site landscapes through time, to better understand how historic space is conceptualized and constructed.

Lessons learned: The majority of historic site professionals with whom I spoke do prioritize the authenticity of their site's internal spaces over the authenticity external landscapes. However, site landscapes offer numerous opportunities for additional interpretation and storytelling if utilized appropriately. Furthermore, instead of attempting to exactly recreate the landscape design of a given time in history, there are many creative possibilities for storytelling through place.

Products:

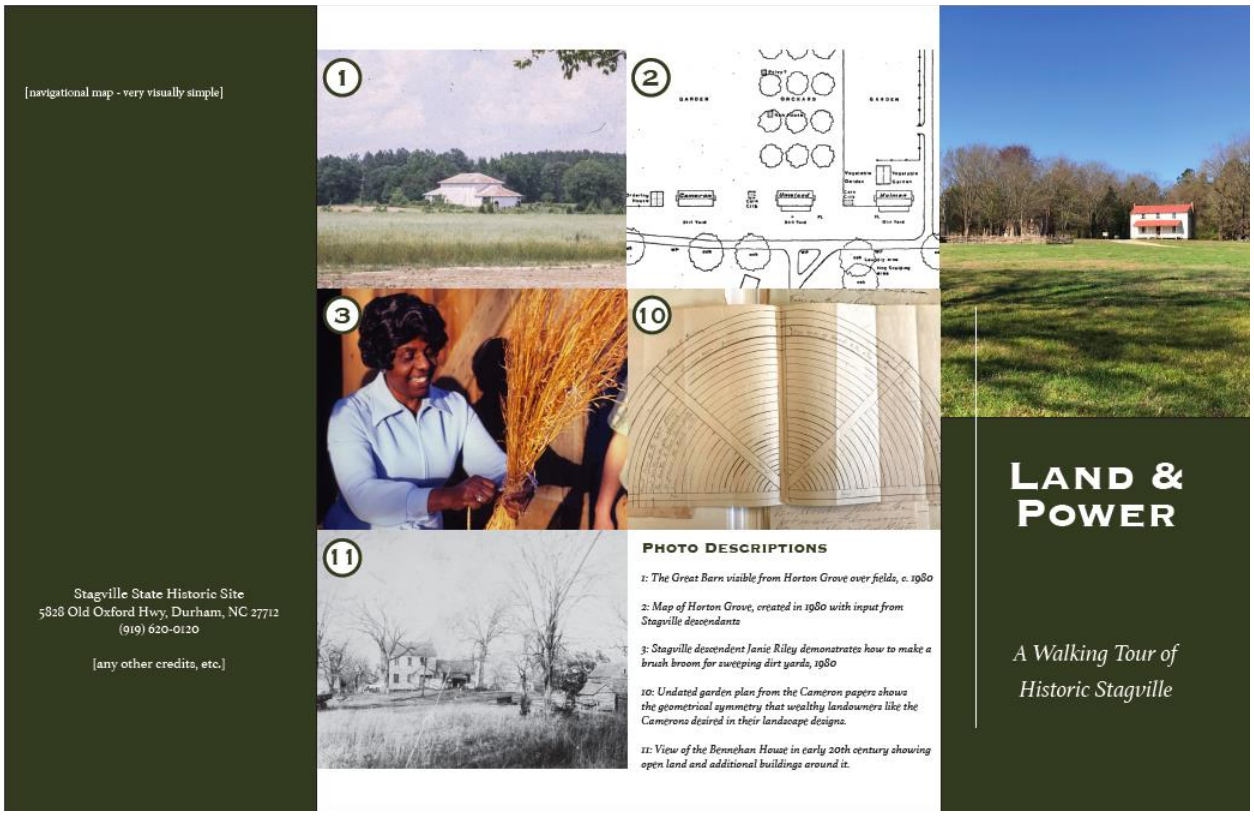
- **Peer-Reviewed Article:**
  - Biggs, M. T. (2022). Sight lines and curb appeal: Landscape, race, and compromise at three North Carolina state historic sites. *Southeastern Geographer, 62* (2), 92-110. https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/856165.
- **Historic Interpretation:**
  - 4 presentations on landscape and history to 45+ children, grades K-12, during 2018 Fall Homeschool Day at Stagville State Historic Site, Durham, NC
- **Conference Presentation:**
  - "'These trees are all new': Unsettling Historicized Landscapes and Re-earthing Marginalized Histories at NC State Historic Sites," presented to the Southeastern

Division of the American Association of Geographers Annual Meeting during *Political Ecology* (virtual).

Interpretation

<u>"Land & Power: A Walking Tour of Historic Stagville"</u>

May 2020 – August 2020
Building on my evaluation work in **<u>Investigating Landscape Management at Public Historic Sites</u>**, I collaborated with the site manager of Stagville State Historic Site, in Durham, North Carolina, to craft a self-guided tour pamphlet highlighting relationships between the landscape of the former plantation and the lives of people enslaved on the plantation.



How did the enslaving families of Stagville use land to assert their authority? How did enslaved people use land to fight back? Who else has lived on this land through time? Discover the answers to these questions and many more by discovering the land around you.

Stagville's history isn't only in the buildings.

[Close-up map: Horton Grove & Great Barn]

[Close-up map: Bennehan House]

HORTON GROVE

1 By 1852, 100 enslaved people lived in this row of houses. Does this place feel quiet and isolated today? In the 1850s, this row was not private. It was designed by slaveholders to expose enslaved people to surveillance. An enslaved person here was surrounded by the farm fields they were forced to work, with the Great Barn visible above the crops. From the yard of this house, an enslaved family could see the white house of the Bennehan-Cameron family on the high ridge above them. Although this place was designed for white surveillance and forced labor, enslaved people fought to create home and privacy for themselves.

2 Testimony from former residents gives us a glimpse of the yards and gardens at Horton Grove. This map is based on oral histories from descendants of enslaved people, who grew up in these houses in the 1920s. The working yards and gardens they remembered followed the traditions of their enslaved ancestors. They raised kitchen gardens of squash, greens, field peas, beans, and melons. The people who lived here raised everything they needed; Lucille Peaks Turner remembered: "We didn't never have to go to town for nothing 'cause they had everything there."

3 Swept dirt yards were a West African landscape practice that enslaved people preserved through enslavement and after Emancipation. The bare yard was swept with brush brooms to leave a clean, hard-packed dirt surface. "We had to sweep the yard every Saturday," remembered Sally Evans Mitchner, a Stagville descendant born in 1918. The dirt yards were the heart of this community, where enslaved people cooked, washed, and did daily chores. They were places for friends and family to visit, places for prayer and for play, places to teach children, places to marry or mourn together. Dirt yards were adopted by white residents and spread across the South. They remain one of many ways that Black Americans have shaped Southern culture.

4 Horton Grove is built beside a flood plain, with streams flowing nearby. All this water was valuable for agriculture, but dangerous for enslaved people who were most often quartered on low land prone to floods, erosion, stagnant water, and mosquitoes. Epidemics of malaria devastated enslaved families, killing people who were already weakened by forced labor and stress. Black residents later called these places the "low grounds of sorrow." Today, African American historic sites are disproportionately on low ground, no matter what century they date from. The historical marginalization of these Black communities impacts historic preservation today, often making these buildings more difficult to save and more expensive to maintain.

5 Enslaved women and men foraged for edible and medicinal plants in these woods and meadows. This expertise was passed on to their descendants. In the 1930s, Luna Peaks Hicks grew up with elders who gathered wild herbs at Stagville to make teas and other kinds of medicine. Janie Cameron Riley picked blackberries and dewberries in the fields around Horton Grove to make pie with her mother. From these traditions we glimpse how enslaved Black people knew and utilized this land in a way that enslavers did not. Enslaved people used the land and their expertise to feed and heal their communities.

GREAT BARN

6 This forest evokes the wooded sections of this plantation, where enslaved people took cover from enslavers' surveillance. Dense thickets, steep gullies, and swamps were hidden places of refuge for enslaved people. Free white folks usually avoid these rough places, so enslaved residents claimed these hidden places to gather, worship, rest, and exist, even if briefly, out of the white enslaver's gaze. Some used these routes and knowledge to run to freedom. A young man named Scrub fled Stagville in 1784—did he use wild foods and backwoods paths to survive on his journey to freedom?

7 Paul Cameron often celebrated agriculture as an important foundation of North Carolina. Land, agriculture, and slavery were inseparable at Stagville. When Cameron cheered for agriculture, he was cheering a system of slavery in which he received the profits stolen from the labor of others. Ironically, in 1854, Cameron said, "He who plants a tree, sets an orchard, or builds a stone barn may be longer and better remembered than he who dies a millionaire." Yet he refused to respect or acknowledge the enslaved people who planted the trees, tilled the earth, and built this barn. Cameron died a millionaire.

BENNEHAN HOUSE

8 Plantation history is not the only human history on this land. The Catawba, Shakori, Eno, and Saponi Nations have lived here in the Piedmont for millennia. The Stagville wagon road started as a trading path used by Native people. As European-American settlers pushed in and took land, Native communities faced violence, disease, racism, and forced migration. Today, the Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation claims Stagville as part of their historic hunting grounds. Learn more the modern experiences of Occaneechi people at https://obsn.org/.

9 These stones are the foundation of an enslaved family's house. Look up towards the Bennehan House from here. See how the white house towers over its surroundings? The Bennehan House was built on a high ridge of land. Most of the surrounding land was cleared. The design of this house on the hill was a display of power, standing over the fields, pastures, barns, and slave quarters around it. These grand houses were also used for surveillance—the Camerons moved defiant enslaved people to the "home quarter" near their house so they could monitor them.

10 Hired and enslaved gardeners maintained orchards, kitchen gardens, greenhouses, and formal gardens on the Cameron estates. English-American culture equated a strict, symmetrical landscape with cleanliness, beauty, and racial superiority. To them, neat, orderly gardens embodied their rightful human domination over the wild land. In contrast, the home gardens of enslaved people reflected different cultural understandings—they intercropped companion plants, mixed food scraps into the soil, and allowed medicinal "weeds" to grow freely. These dense, tangled gardens were dismissed by white outsiders, but this "mess" was a deliberate technique to enrich and feed the garden.

11 Look around at the quiet trees and neat grass. Listen to the silence and the birdcalls. In 1810, this would have been a working yard: loud, smoky, dusty, busy, and tense. The main wagon road ran very close to this house, closer than the road is today. Enslaved cooks, servants, laundresses, wagon drivers, and grooms worked here at all hours of the day and into the night. This yard would have been at the heart of a vast complex of slavery and trade. Enslaved people's labor here fed into networks of power that stretched across North Carolina, the South, and the nation.

Website Updates for State Historic Site

February 2023 – January 2024

I was contracted by the North Carolina Department of Natural & Cultural Resources to update and expand the interpretive story at the Governor Charles B. Aycock Birthplace State Historic Site in Fremont, North Carolina. For years, site interpretation has prioritized Governor Aycock's commitment to public education in the early 1900s without reckoning with the white supremacist policies that also defined his life and political career. Working closely with site staff and drawing on original archival and secondary research, I supported updates to the state website for the historic site that more accurately represent Governor Aycock's legacy.

Products:

- Governor Charles B. Aycock State Historic Site home page: https://historicsites.nc.gov/all-sites/governor-charles-b-aycock-birthplace
- Governor Charles B. Aycock State Historic Site "History" page: https://historicsites.nc.gov/all-sites/governor-charles-b-aycock-birthplace/history

Planning

Expanding the Narrative at Governor Charles B. Aycock Birthplace

February 2023 – December 2023

I contracted by the North Carolina Department of Natural & Cultural Resources to produce a content narrative that updates and expands the interpretive story at the Governor Charles B. Aycock Birthplace State Historic Site in Fremont, North Carolina. Working closely with site staff, I conducted original archival research and consolidated substantial secondary research into a new content narrative that site staff will use to shape site interpretation going forward. Along with an updated content narrative, I provided numerous suggestions for future directions and several key recommendations for interpretive updates

Product:

- **Content Narrative**
    - Governor Charles B. Aycock Birthplace State Historic Site Updated Content Narrative *(Appendix 1).*

Strategic Landscape Planning at Stagville State Historic Site

May 2020 – August 2020

During a Mellon-funded fellowship through the Humanities for the Public Good Initiative at Stagville State Historic Site, I collaborated with the site manager at Stagville State Historic Site in Durham, North Carolina, to fill a need for a strategic plan that incorporated both environmental and interpretive priorities in the next ten years of site development. Through archival research and close communication with the site manager, I produced the first strategic plan for a North Carolina State Historic Site that incorporated environmental management and landscape alongside historical interpretation.

Product:

- **Strategic Plan/Report**
    - "Stagville State Historic Site Landscape Plan" (*Appendix 2)*

Appendix 1: Gov. Charles B. Aycock Birthplace State Historic Site Updated Content Narrative

December 2023

Executive Summary

The following document serves as an updated content narrative for the Governor Charles B. Aycock Birthplace State Historic Site, in Fremont, North Carolina. Beginning with Governor Aycock's family and childhood and continuing into his time at UNC, his role in the White Supremacy Campaign of 1898, and his support of the Suffrage Amendment, this narrative aims to bring together two disparate threads of Aycock's legacy: his commitment to education, and his commitment to White supremacy. In the process, this narrative places Aycock within a broader social and political Southern context and provides a brief overview of the ways in which Aycock has been remembered and memorialized since his death. This narrative was completed through a Priority Updates to State History (P.U.S.H.) Fellowship from February to December 2023, funded jointly by the North Carolina Department of Natural & Cultural Resources and Carolina Public Humanities at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Author Information

Mary T. Biggs, Ph.D., is a qualitative and archival researcher with a particular interest in public historic sites, historic landscapes, and how Southern history has been remembered and communicated through time. She can be reached at mary.t.biggs@gmail.com, or on her website: www.marytbiggs.com.

Introduction

On November 1, 1959, a crowd gathered in Wayne County to witness the dedication of the Governor Charles B. Aycock Birthplace. An eyewitness account in the *News & Observer* describes an air of excitement and celebration at what was essentially a large Eastern North Carolina family reunion (Daniels 1959). However, the same account cautions the reader against overly romanticizing Charles Aycock himself. "We need to know the qualities, the humanity, the struggles and the defects as well as the talents of the man who grew from this house to become a word for the best aspirations of a State," wrote Jonathan W. Daniels, then-editor of the paper and son of Josephus Daniels (a colleague of Aycock's and one of the leading perpetrators of the Wilmington Insurrection of 1898) ("Jonathan Worth Daniels" n.d.). "Aycock was a man. He was one of us...If he is to have meaning long, we need understanding of him too, as a man like ourselves facing problems like our own" (Daniels 1959). Daniels's words resonate today. Contextualizing Governor Aycock with rigorous, archival information about his family, his community, and his policies, as well as within the broader socio-political landscapes in which he moved and worked and the socio-political landscapes in which his memory has been kept alive, can only enrich our understanding and memorialization of the man himself.

Charles B. Aycock (1859-1912) remains both a central and divisive figure in North Carolina today. In the century since his death, historians and laypeople alike have perpetuated a narrative that prioritizes Aycock's educational policies, nicknaming him the "Education Governor" and highlighting that his administration oversaw the building of 1,100 schools across North Carolina, raised teaching salaries, and extended the length of public school terms at a time when North Carolina had some of the highest illiteracy numbers in the country (Boyette 1985; *Public Laws and Resolutions* 1901; Walker and Seaton 1883). Today, the Aycock Birthplace is

owned by the state and serves as an important aspect of local Fremont and Pikeville communities, with 17 regular volunteers from the surrounding area (including a 9-person support group as of fall 2023), summer reading programs with local libraries, and popular public programming, including Farm Heritage Days in late spring and genealogy workshops throughout the year ("Fifty-Eighth Biennial Report of the North Carolina Office of Archives and History" 2020).

On the other hand, Aycock's legacy as a governor concerned solely with expanding public education in North Carolina has been problematized more and more over the past several years. Supported and encouraged by the Uprisings for Black Lives in 2020, and substantiated by numerous researchers, Aycock's explicit White[1] supremacy and the connections he drew between education, White supremacy, and disenfranchising non-White voters are becoming clearer. In 2020, the UNC Commission on Race, History, and a Way Forward prepared a report that highlighted Aycock's role in the Wilmington Insurrection of 1898. As a result, Aycock's name was removed from two university buildings (Hudson 2020). His name has also been removed from streets in Raleigh, Greensboro, and Charlotte, where local leadership pointed to his White supremacist views and voter suppression policies as a reason to change the signs (Anthony 2019; H. Lee 2021; Gutierrez 2021). A statue of Aycock that previously stood in the U.S. Capitol Building's crypt was removed in 2020 (Friedman 2020).

How, then, to understand and memorialize a man whose political legacy includes both progressive public education and institutionalized White supremacy? In the following content

[1] In this document, I follow current scholarship that recommends capitalizing both "Black" and "White" when discussing race to recognize the social and historical roots of both categories. Capitalizing "Black" recognizes the shared history and vital contributions of Black Americans. At the same time, a pervasive tendency to capitalize "Black" without capitalizing "White" often results in identifying Whiteness as a neutral, natural category, when in reality it, too, is a historically-created social grouping (Appiah 2020).

narrative, I aim to knit together the disparate threads of Aycock's social and political legacy that have created a memorial figure of such complexity. I first present information about Aycock's family, early life, and education, then turn to his oratory with the Southern Democratic Party and his pivotal involvement in the White Supremacy Campaign of 1898. I further interrogate the connections Aycock made throughout his life between public education and White supremacy, placing his work in the political context of North Carolina and the broader South in the late 1800s in order to more fully understand his goals. I close with an institutional history of the Charles B. Aycock Birthplace State Historic Site from its beginnings as a memorial commission in 1949, to its present iteration as a postbellum farm museum with great potential for interpreting Reconstruction and Jim Crow in North Carolina. In doing so, I demonstrate how the story of Charles Aycock is the story of both the development of a public school system, *and* the emergence and entrenchment of Jim Crow in North Carolina[2].

An additional note: the site today does an admirable job of showcasing multiple aspects of Charles B. Aycock's life and politics. Along with Aycock's early life and political goals, site staff have added additional materials in the past few decades regarding the impact of segregation and desegregation on North Carolina educational systems over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Ongoing archival research by the assistant site manager, Tyler Mink, continues to shed further light upon Aycock's family, early life, and politics. These findings add nuance to the story of Aycock as a simple farm boy who became a governor dedicated to universal education. Mink's new interpretive plan (2021) is a significant asset to the site and

[2] Other aspects of Aycock's life, including his law practice, his gubernatorial work on behalf of railroad expansion and temperance in North Carolina, and his marriages and children, are less present in this document due to length constraints.

should be employed further in guided tours and printed materials, as well as incorporated into volunteer guides, websites, and any language for new employees and school groups. The following content narrative augments and underlines Mink's new interpretive plan and should be utilized alongside Mink's document.

Not a Simple Farm Boy: Charles B. Aycock's Family & Childhood

When Charles Aycock arrived at the University of North Carolina in 1877, he was met – along with the other first-years – by a crowd of sophomores. One of these sophomores, Francis D. Winston, recalled that: "Aycock was yet a boy in appearance and bore about him the simplicity and naturalness of one who has just left the plow handles on his father's farm" (Connor and Poe 1912, p. 21). Aycock later said that: "I must have been a sight. I wore a homemade suit of homespun cloth" (Orr 1961, p. 26) This image of a simple farm boy arriving on the collegiate – and, later, political – scene is one that Aycock himself, as well as his friends, continued to perpetuate throughout his life and after his death. Aycock's first biographers[3] describe the community in which he grew up as "sturdy, law-abiding, industrious, [and] rural" (Connor and Poe 1912, p. 5) They represent Aycock's upbringing as hardscrabble and difficult on a poor, isolated farm in rural North Carolina. Benjamin Aycock, Charles's father, is described in the same volume as "a man of great reserve and dignity" who loved simplicity and was uncomfortably thrust into politics only when his neighbors demanded it of him. Charles's mother, Serena Hooks Aycock, is described as intelligent, though uneducated, and as a kind,

[3] Clarence Poe and R.D.W. Connor published the first biographical account of Charles B. Aycock in 1912, less than a year after his death. The book includes transcripts of many of Aycock's speeches, as well as biographical sketches drawn from letters and interviews with Aycock's friends. R.D.W. Connor was a longtime friend of Aycock himself, and Clarence Poe was Aycock's son-in-law.

dutiful mother. The family's Primitive Baptist faith[4] is cited as a central reason for a lifestyle largely devoid of material comforts and pleasures (Connor and Poe 1912).

However, archival research reveals a different picture: one in which young Charles Aycock grew up on a thriving, prosperous farm, raised by a socially-connected mother and a politically-minded father. The Wilmington-Weldon railroad line began operation in 1840 less than half of a mile west of the Aycock farm, effectively connecting the Aycock farm to the world beyond (Boyette 1985). Furthermore, the Aycocks themselves were much wealthier than many of their neighbors. In 1860, Charles's father Benjamin had a combined value of real estate and personal estate of $20,000, and enslaved at least 12 people prior to the Civil War according to the 1850 and 1860 census slave schedules. By 1870, despite the upheaval of the Civil War and the emancipation of the farm's enslaved workforce, Benjamin was the fifth wealthiest man in Nahunta township (Boyette 1985). He served as the Wayne County Clerk throughout the 1850s, earning a steady salary of $100 per year ("Wayne County Clerk of Superior Court Minutes" 1845). In addition to his clerk earnings, the Aycock family farm steadily increased in value and productivity over the decades. Census records show that the value of the farm increased from $1,000 in 1850, to $10,000 in 1860. Even after the Civil War, the farm was valued in the 1870 census at $8,000, and the "acres improved" on the Aycock farm in 1870 (1,030) were nearly 5

[4] By 1830, Primitive Baptists had established themselves in North Carolina as a distinct sect from Missionary Baptists, and were a prominent presence in Eastern North Carolina by the time of Charles's birth. Jesse Aycock, Charles's grandfather, left land to Fremont's Memorial Primitive Baptist Church in his will in 1822, indicating a longstanding connection between the Aycock family and the Primitive Baptist faith. Benjamin and Serena Aycock attended Memorial PB Church with their children, where sermons would have stressed honesty, integrity, decorum, and an avoidance of worldly luxuries. Charles Aycock was never baptized in the Primitive Baptist church, however, since the church only engaged in adult baptism. While at UNC, Aycock attended a Missionary Baptist revival and formally joined a Missionary Baptist congregation in 1879 (Wegner 2005; Boyette 1985).

times bigger than the number of acres improved on the average North Carolina farm of the time (212) (Boyette 1985).

Archival evidence also suggests that, if Benjamin was a reluctant politician and leader, he nonetheless dedicated decades of his life to political leadership. In addition to his role as Wayne County Clerk, Benjamin was a Wayne County state senator in 1864 and 1865, and led his local Primitive Baptist Church as a deacon at the time of his death (Connor and Poe 1912; Boyette 1985). Benjamin's political career foreshadowed his son's in term of working for White supremacy. While in the Senate, Benjamin supported the Conscription Act, aligning himself with the Confederate government and against then-Governor Zebulon Vance, who considered the act unconstitutional (Boyette 1985; Connor and Poe 1912). At the end of the war, Benjamin found himself in the majority of the Senate as they adopted a "Black Code," which restricted Black citizenship. He also helped block the construction of a college to train Black teachers and ministers (Orr 1961). Throughout his political life, Benjamin was an advocate for White supremacy in a way that clearly impacted his son.

Charles Aycock's mother, Serena Aycock (née Hooks), was part of a large network of land-owning Hooks families in Wayne County, many of whom were also quite wealthy by the standards of the area. Her grandfather, Robert Hooks, is described as "a man of considerable wealth, as wealth was then counted in that community...indicated by the fact that he was the master of fourteen slaves. In all Wayne County only twenty-seven persons owned a larger number" (Connor and Poe 1912, p. 4). Serena's mother, Mary Bishop, came from a Quaker family, but was excommunicated from the Quaker congregation for marrying outside of the faith (Orr 1961). Serena's Quaker blood, however, is consistently cited in Aycock biographies as

having a lasting impact on her son (Connor and Poe 1912)[5]. In this way, Charles Aycock is portrayed as inheriting both a sturdy industriousness from his family's Primitive Baptist faith, as well as a grave gentleness from his grandmother's Quaker upbringing, despite the fact that his own mother was not Quaker and that he himself was never baptized in the Primitive Baptist church. Of course, upbringing can affect values passed to descendants as much as formal membership can. It is, however, interesting to note which religious groups appear in narratives about Charles Aycock, and how they are used to frame his character.

Benjamin and Serena Aycock had 10 children, of which Charles was the youngest (Boyette 1985). However, Aycock family members were not the only people living at the Birthplace prior to the Civil War. Two young Black men are listed in the Aycock census data from 1850 as "farmhands." Gilbert and Elbert Artice, ages 17 and 15 respectively, were indentured apprentices of Benjamin Aycock. While on paper, young people were indentured as apprentices in order to learn a trade and support poor families, in reality the practice in North Carolina was disproportionately applied to free Black and mixed-race families, as well as families headed by unmarried women, creating a form of social control that effectively targeted Black people outside of slavery and made it nearly impossible for women of any race to live independently from a while male head of household (Zipf 2005). As the county clerk, Benjamin Aycock would have been one of the people in the county responsible for identifying children

[5] A story attributed to Aycock himself is that Serena was illiterate, and that a young Charles, upon seeing his mother make her mark with an "X" on a legal document, was struck with the need for universal public education in North Carolina (Connor and Poe 1912). Modern historians have no way to prove or disprove such a story, and it is clear that this was a key way in which Aycock connected his later policies for public education with his own family and upbringing. However, one does wonder why a woman – who would not have been considered a legal entity in the mid-1800s – would have been signing a legal document at all.

who were eligible for apprenticeships: that is, children whose fathers were absent or whose parents were judged by the state to not be educating them properly. The indentured apprenticeship system was extremely popular in Wayne County among White landowning men. William Hooks, Serena's brother, also indentured two apprentices from the Artice family. Their bonds of service, along with the bonds of Gilbert and Elbert Artice, can still be found in the North Carolina State Archives.[6]

We know that Benjamin Aycock also enslaved people, although the names of many of these people have, unfortunately, not been found in existing research[7]. Without names, even the exact number of people enslaved on the Aycock farm is difficult to determine. In the 1850 census slave schedule, 4 people are listed under Benjamin Aycock's name. Based on the information in the slave schedule, we know their age, their gender, and their "colour" (that is, whether the census taker listed them as Black with a "B," or as a "mulatto," with an "M"). In 1850, people with the following characteristics were enslaved by the Aycocks: a 48-year-old Black woman; a 42-year-old Black man; a 32-year-old Black man; and a 5-year-old Black girl. By 1860, the number of enslaved people listed on the census slave schedule had increased to 9. In 1860, people with the following characteristics were enslaved by the Aycocks: a 35-year-old Black man; a 29-year-old Black man; a 25-year-old Black man; a 23-year-old Black woman; a 15-year-old Black girl; a 13-year-old Black boy; a 10-year-old Black girl; a 6-year-old Black girl; and a 10-month-old Black baby boy. 2 houses for enslaved people had also been added to

[6] While one of the central tenets of apprenticeship was to teach the apprentices to read and write, this part of the contract was crossed out when the child was not White.

[7] More on the lives of enslaved people in Eastern North Carolina can be found in the collection of interviews conducted by the Federal Writers' Project from 1936-1938, digitized at https://www.loc.gov/collections/slave-narratives-from-the-federal-writers-project-1936-to-1938/about-this-collection/

the farm's outbuildings by 1860, demonstrating the Aycocks' increased investment in the structures of slavery.

Some of the names of these enslaved people have been found by researchers using methods other than the census. It was common practice during the Civil War for slaveholders to rent their enslaved people to the Confederate Army to fill labor needs. In January of 1863, Benjamin Aycock rented two enslaved men named Prismus and Stephen to the Confederate Army for 16 days, at the rate of $15/month ("Defenses of Neuse River" 1863). This particular payroll is labeled as being for building fortifications along the Neuse River. Based on the location of the Aycock farm and contemporaneous maps of Confederate defenses, Prismus and Stephen were likely working in the vicinity of Kinston ("Field Map of Lieut. Koerner's Military Survey between Neuse and Tar Rivers North Carolina" 1863). We can speculate that Prismus and Stephen were two of the 35-, 29-, or 25-year-old Black men listed on the Aycock census from 1860, although it is also possible that Benjamin Aycock had purchased them more recently than 1860. Later in life, Charles Aycock recalled playing with an enslaved boy named Ike on his parents' farm (Orr 1961), who is likely to have been the 10-month-old listed on the 1860 census. Research must continue, however, into the lives and identities of the people enslaved on the Aycock farm.

After the Civil War, Benjamin Aycock dropped out of the political arena[8], but others in the Aycock family were active in anti-Reconstruction efforts and the Aycock house continued to be a place of political conversation within the community (Connor and Poe 1912; Orr 1961). At least one of Charles's older brothers was involved with a local violent White supremacist group

[8] Benjamin renewed his activities at the Primitive Baptist church and remained active in leadership there until his death in 1875 (Connor and Poe 1912).

called the Blue Season Rangers that repeatedly fought Union soldiers in the months after the Confederacy's fall (Connor and Poe 1912). It is clear from Charles's later speeches that his memories of his childhood during Reconstruction were colored by an overarching narrative of a poverty-stricken White South plagued by newly-freed Black people. "There was neither food nor raiment," he said in one campaign speech, speaking of what Confederate soldiers found when returning home after the Civil War. "Those who had in the past labored for them were free, and were enjoying their new freedom with license which imperiled life and property, and their fields were gone to waste" (Connor and Poe 1912, p. 14). Growing up during Reconstruction, Aycock absorbed a racially-charged worldview that set White and Black people against each other and that shaped his policies throughout his life.

Charles Aycock's earliest memories would have been of Reconstruction, and he grew up amid the propaganda and poverty that ran rampant throughout White Southern communities in the years after the Civil War. Aycock later used his childhood memories strategically in political speeches to both position himself as a true (read: rural and White) North Carolinian and to press for White political power. Far from being isolated and poor, however, Governor Aycock's childhood was likely quite materially comfortable, and deeply influenced by the broader political contexts of Reconstruction. Today, with additional research, we can understand him better by learning more about the people who raised him and the broader socio-political contexts that shaped his political career.

The Education of the "Education Governor"

Aycock's own education laid a further foundation for his later policies, both through formal training in oratory, and through the network of friends and peers he accumulated

throughout his schooling. This network would hold him throughout his life and deeply inform his role in the White Supremacy Campaign of 1898.

Charles Aycock began his formal education when he was eight years old. In 1867, he enrolled with six of his siblings in the local private school for White children, Nahunta Academy, which he attended until it closed due to lack of funding. In 1872, Charles and one of his brothers began attending the all-White Wilson Collegiate Institute in nearby Wilson, where he met Josephus Daniels (later the editor of the Raleigh *News & Observer*), formed a debate society, and connected with the local lawyer Henry Groves Connor through shared interests in law and politics (Boyette 1985; Orr 1961). Aycock left Wilson in 1875, accepting a teaching position at the reopened Nahunta Academy, but enrolled in the Kinston Collegiate Institute in 1876 (Boyette 1985). Aycock clearly thrived at the Institute, as he returned to deliver the commencement address there in 1879 (Taylor 2006).

Aycock was the only one of his siblings to attend college (Orr 1961). He entered UNC Chapel Hill as part of the second incoming class after the university re-opened[9] and was immediately enfolded into a tight-knit community of only 160 students, many of whom all lived together in South Building alongside George Winston, a new professor who would have an intense and lasting effect on Aycock (Boyette 1985; Downs 2009). During his first year at UNC, Aycock joined the Philanthropic Literary Society, one of two large debate teams on campus (Orr 1961; Boyette 1985). He was elected president of the society later that same year, and formed a smaller extempore debating society alongside Frank Daniels (Josephus's brother) (Orr 1961). He edited a small newspaper called *The Weekly Ledger* during his last year at UNC, in which he

[9] University trustees had voted to close the college rather than allow the Republican government to run the university in the war's immediate aftermath (Downs 2009).

wrote editorials on state politics and education (Orr 1961). Clearly, Aycock was already developing himself as an orator and a public figure during his time at UNC.

At UNC, Aycock joined what would become a group of public intellectuals who drew on progressive teachings – specifically, Darwin's theory of evolution – to re-imagine a White supremacist state founded in social evolution (Downs 2009). Aycock and many of his university peers diverged from their professors' insistence on laissez-faire (i.e. only the strong will survive) to craft a politics of social services and safety nets that were quite progressive for their time, including child labor laws, prohibition, and – of course – public education. However, these social services prioritized White people, with the idea that without such services, the "dominant race" was in danger of "degeneration" (Downs 2009).

Interestingly, the fear of White degeneration was not a new one for Southern White politicians, specifically in the realm of public education. Public figures associated with education, including the first president of UNC and the first superintendent of public schools, had been campaigning for public education systems since before the Civil War partly through emphasizing a particular danger of poor White people drifting closer to the status of enslaved Black people without education. Other White politicians pointed out that if the races were truly as separate as the slave system maintained, White progress through education was unnecessary and additional taxation for public schooling was not needed (Watson 2012). Such debates, casting the racial and class divides of antebellum and postbellum Southern society into sharp relief, would have been familiar to Aycock and his peers at UNC.

At UNC, Aycock became adept at wielding progressive ideas in the service of the race-based discrimination and White supremacy that had shaped his childhood and social context. Aycock graduated from UNC after only three years, in 1880 (Boyette 1985). The years between

his graduation and his entry into Southern politics were largely filled with his private law practice in Goldsboro and his growing family (Downs 2009). However, Aycock's education – particularly his time at UNC – would serve him well in the years to come, as contention continued to grow between social and political factions in the South.

Politics and Education in North Carolina and the U.S. South between 1865-1898

Charles Aycock's attention to education reform was not separate from the White supremacist policies and goals that he and many of his contemporaries in the Southern Democratic party held. Rather, Aycock's support of public education throughout his oratorical and political career was intimately bound up with a dedication to White supremacy that is visible throughout his life.

Farmers & Fusionists: Shifts in the Southern Political Landscape

Charles Aycock grew up and came to political power during an extremely turbulent time in Southern politics. The entire postbellum South was dramatically changed by the rise of the Farmers' Alliance and the Populist Party (Vann Woodward 1951). The Farmers' Alliance began appearing in North Carolina in 1887, organizing farmers along racial lines but cooperating with Black farmers through the Colored Farmers' Alliance. The group was purportedly apolitical, claiming to support the unique interests and needs of farmers regardless of their political affiliation. Indeed, early leadership included Democrats, Republicans, and independents (Redding 2003). As ongoing economic struggles continued to plague the state, however, "farmer" more and more became a political identity and Democratic leaders began to fear the power of a broad coalition with the potential to bring White famers under the same political umbrella as the Republicans and their majority-Black constituency (Redding 2003). As Farmers Alliance members began to defect from the mainstream Democratic party to create the Populist

Party of North Carolina, Fusion tickets began appearing in elections with Populist and Republican candidates running for office alongside each other (Prather 1977; Boyette 1985). These tickets were bi-racial, continuing and expanding a trend of Black officeholding that began with Reconstruction. By 1898, over 1,000 Black men held office in North Carolina – including George White, who represented North Carolina's Second Congressional District in Washington from 1896-1900 (Zucchino 2020; Redding 2003; Vann Woodward 1951; Anderson 1981; Boyette 1985; Foner 1996).

In response to this burgeoning bi-racial movement, the Democratic party focused on voting rights: specifically, removing voting rights from non-White people in an effort to consolidate power and re-establish White Democrats as the main political players in the state. North Carolina Democrats were not alone in this. In 1890, Democrats in Mississippi implemented poll taxes and literacy tests to limit voter registration. Such strategies were not explicitly race-based; however, going hand-in-hand with violent intimidation tactics against Black and White Fusion voters and politicians, the ultimate goal of the strategies were clearly anti-Black (Redding 2003; Anderson 1981; Vann Woodward 1951; Prather 1977). Democrats justified the literacy test and poll tax by referring to rampant voter fraud and compromised elections. A White Republican in Virginia noted: "The remedy suggested here is to punish the man who has been injured. The Negroes were to be disfranchised to prevent the Democratic election officials from stealing their votes" (Vann Woodward 1951, p. 327) The Supreme Court upheld both the literacy tests and the poll tax in *Williams v Mississippi* in 1898, setting a legal precedent for voter suppression and opening the floodgates for other Southern states to follow suit (Vann Woodward 1951).

Education in North Carolina

The shifting political landscape in the South was echoed by shifts in the landscape of public education. Before the Civil War, North Carolina had been the first Southern state to offer state-funded education to all White children, although questions of whether or not to fund primary education for White children had provoked widespread debate across the state and region prior to the Civil War, as noted above (Watson 2012). The first Superintendent of Common Schools, Calvin Wiley, took office in 1853 and served until the end of the war in 1865 (Watson 2012). During Reconstruction, the Republican-led government instituted a racially-equitable (though still segregated) four-month public education for all children in the state between the ages of 5-21, and the Freedman's Bureau established 431 schools for Black students across the state, with 20,000 pupils over three years (Boyette 1985). In 1896, with a Fusionist victory and Republican leaders once more in control, the school tax was raised, teacher exams were mandated, and local schools gained popularity (Boyette 1985). Still, there was a dramatic gap between the education and uneducated population in North Carolina. In statistics from the 1880 census, North Carolina had one of the highest rates of "native White illiteracy" – that is, illiteracy among White people who were born in the U.S. – of any state in the country (Walker and Seaton 1883). This gap fueled Aycock, along with many of his peers at UNC, in a lifelong dedication to public education[10].

The White Supremacy Campaign of 1898

Following in Mississippi's footsteps, voting restrictions began to sweep through Southern states. In South Carolina, alongside poll taxes and confusing ballot systems, a vigilante White

[10] Further information on education in North Carolina can be found in Joan Malczewski's book, *Building a New Educational State: Foundations, Schools, and the American South*.

supremacist group called the Red Shirts violently intimidated Black voters and their allies at the polls (Vann Woodward 1951; Redding 2003). Red Shirts appeared in North Carolina throughout the 1890s as well, and were folded into the campaign plan created by the North Carolina Democratic Party's leader, Furnifold Simmons. Simmons aimed to mobilize White North Carolinians around a platform of race-based fear-mongering (Downs 2009; Boyette 1985), and devised a strategy incorporating "men who could write, men who could speak, and men who could ride" to get campaign messages across the state (Tyson 2006). While "men who could write" wrote editorials and newspaper articles and "men who could ride" violently intimidated Black voters and Fusion politicians, "men who could speak" were orators who travelled across the state connecting with crowds of largely-illiterate White poor and working class people.

Here, Charles Aycock's oratory – which he had nurtured throughout his education and continued to develop in his private law practice – found its place in the White supremacist campaign. In fact, Aycock himself was part of a rally in 1898 that formally introduced White supremacy as a key party priority for the upcoming elections (Boyette 1985). Ever skillful at cultural translation, Aycock consistently played up the threat of "Negro rule" and the perceived danger that Black men – particularly Black men in political office – posed to White women, effectively translating the Democratic party line of White supremacy to those who could not read the articles in the *Raleigh News & Observer* (which was headed, at this point, by Josephus Daniels, Aycock's old friend from school) (Vann Woodward 1951; Redding 2003; Downs 2009; Tyson 2006).

Most of Aycock's speeches focused on perceived threats from Black people toward White people, without outwardly inciting violence on the part of White people or encouraging bloodshed. However, Red Shirts often escorted Aycock to his speeches, providing a visual

representation of the violent arm of the White supremacy campaign, and Aycock spoke at Goldsboro a few days before the Wilmington Insurrection of 1898 (Boyette 1985). The Wilmington Insurrection of 1898 was a successful effort to violently overthrow a Fusionist, majority-Black, and thriving city structure (Zucchino 2020; Tyson 2006). However, Aycock and his peers recognized that depending on violence would not be sustainable in the long run. They proposed an amendment to the North Carolina constitution – the Suffrage Amendment – that would legally entrench Democratic power – and institutionalize White supremacy – by disenfranchising Black voters in staggering numbers. Aycock's gubernatorial campaign was deeply connected with the campaign for the Suffrage Amendment, leading to one campaign slogan that read "For Amendment and Aycock." Once elected, Aycock signed the amendment into law in 1901[11].

The amendment required new voters to take a literacy test and pay a poll tax, as in other Southern states. Any man who could vote prior to 1867 and his lineal descendants, however, were protected under the "grandfather clause," creating an exception for poor and illiterate White voters while specifically – although not explicitly – targeting Black voters (since free Black people were banned from voting in North Carolina in 1835) (Roy and Ford 2019). The clause was set to expire on December 1, 1908. Thus, the overall literacy rate of White voters had to be improved by that date (Boyette 1985; Redding 2003). Aycock had been a proponent of public education for years, often supporting it in collegiate debates and corresponding with peers about North Carolina's need for a better education system, but this was a key moment in which he connected public education and White supremacy. In order to assuage the fears of illiterate

[11] For the full text of the amendment, as printed in the *Wilson Daily Times* in April 1899, see https://afamwilsonnc.com/2022/04/10/white-supremacy-made-permanent/

White voters who would be disfranchised under the amendment once the grandfather clause expired, Aycock promised, in his gubernatorial platform, to fund and build schools (Boyette 1985; Redding 2003).

He made good on that promise. As governor, Charles Aycock built over 1,000 public schools across North Carolina, raised wages for teachers, increased the length of the school term, and brought libraries into public schools (Boyette 1985; *Public Laws and Resolutions* 1901). These schools, though segregated, served both Black and White students; in fact, one of Aycock's more progressive stances, by today's standards, was that school taxes should not be divvied up in terms of race, but in terms of school population (Boyette 1985). However, the presence of Black schools did not ensure equality of education, and there was undeniably an unequal burden placed on African American taxpayers for the level of public education made available to them (Roy and Ford 2019). Of the 1,100 public schools built during Aycock's administration, only 200 of them were for non-White students (Boyette 1985).

Even where Black schools were present, they were consistently underfunded. James Y. Joyner, the Superintendent of Public Instruction appointed by Governor Aycock in 1902, wrote: "The negro schools can be run for much less expense and should be. In most places it does not take more than one fourth as much to run the negro schools as it does to run the white schools for about the same number of children. The salaries paid teachers are very properly much smaller...if quietly managed, the negroes will give no trouble about it" (Fountain 2022). In this way, Aycock and his cabinet stood for universal public education that was nonetheless consistently and intentionally unequal.

Despite unequal education conditions, Black people in North Carolina continued to deepen a longstanding commitment to education throughout the early 20th century. Teachers and

students across the state utilized the scant materials they were given to teach and learn, fostering intellectual curiosity and self-confidence that would continue to benefit a generation of North Carolinians (Roy and Ford 2019). The Palmer Memorial Institute, although not a public school, was founded in 1902 by educator Charlotte Hawkins Brown. Beginning squarely in the middle of Aycock's term as governor, the Institute became a national name in Black education, incorporating academic, industrial, and agricultural training. Over 90% of the more than 2,000 graduating students attended college, and 64% pursued postgraduate degrees (Wadelington 2006). Such successes set the stage for the Rosenwald Fund's campaign in North Carolina, which began in 1917 and built over 800 schools for Black students throughout the state, as well as providing funding, teacher training, and curriculum materials (Roy and Ford 2019). Despite structural inequality within the North Carolina public school system, Black North Carolinians actively built a network of schools and resources that educated a generation of students – the same generation that would go on to actively undermine and fight against White supremacy in the decades to come[12].

Charles Aycock, however, continued to preach White supremacy and segregation throughout his life. "Let the negro learn once and for all that there is unending separation of the races," he said in a 1903 speech to the North Carolina Society in Baltimore. "That the two peoples may develop side by side to the fullest but that they cannot intermingle...and the race problem will be at an end. These things are not said in enmity to the negro," he continued. "But in regard for him...as Governor I have frequently protected him. But there flows in my veins the blood of the dominant race...When the negro recognizes this fact we shall have peace and good

[12] Additional primary sources available at: "African American Education," North Carolina Digital Collections, https://digital.ncdcr.gov/spotlights/african-american-education-in-north-carolina

will between the races" (Poe, p. 162-3). Aycock was proud of his White supremacist views and he based much of his political life upon this foundation[13].

The outcomes of the White Supremacy Campaign of 1898, as well as the Suffrage Amendment, were numerous, long-lasting, and devastating for democracy and for Black political life in North Carolina. 750,000 Black men lost the right to vote when Aycock signed the amendment into law. The election of 1900 ushered in a 75-year Democratic government in North Carolina and set the stage for the Jim Crow system of segregation (Tyson 2006). Charles Aycock was a key figure in creating and implementing a structure of racial segregation and voter suppression that would impact the next century and counting. His educational policies were not separate from this legacy, but a central and foundational piece of that same legacy.

Constructing Aycock's Memory: Memorialization and Birthplace Site Trajectory from 1912-2023

The trajectory of the Aycock Birthplace State Historic Site reflects the shifting narrative of Southern Democrats, and of Aycock himself, over the course of the twentieth century. Charles B. Aycock died suddenly while still quite young, during a speech at the 31st annual convention of the Alabama Education Association on April 4, 1912 (Boyette 1985; Connor and Poe 1912). He was 53 years old, and mid-speech. Poe and Connor wrote that his last word was "education" (Connor and Poe 1912).

Memorialization of Charles B. Aycock began almost as soon as he died and can be traced alongside contemporaneous political movements. In April 1912, well-attended memorial

[13] Today, the Birthplace museum holds two exceptional artifacts that attest to Aycock's White supremacy: the button from his 1900 gubernatorial run, and his cane. The cane is an ornately-carved wooden piece that museum materials state was gifted to Aycock by a supporter. The words "White Supremacy" are carved into the handle at the very place where Aycock's hand would have gripped. The button, in contrast, is extraordinarily simple. It foregoes any of the more recognizable aspects of a campaign button today, such as election year, elected position, and even the candidate's name. The small button only has two words written on it: "White Supremacy."

exercises were held for him in Alabama and in North Carolina. Transcriptions of the several speeches given at the memorial were bound with a stenographer's report of his final speech in a slim volume ("Memorial Exercises" 1912) . The biography by Connor & Poe was published later than same year and set the tone for the next several decades of Aycock memorialization by emphasizing Aycock's rural upbringing and his educational policies, although without downplaying Aycock's White supremacy. In fact, contemporaneous pamphlets advertising the biography explicitly highlights "the arousing campaign of 1898 and 1900, including...the work of maintaining White supremacy" and "the supreme effort of the White race in holding its own" ("The Life and Speeches of Charles B. Aycock," n.d.). Testimonials printed in the same pamphlet maintain that "a copy of 'The Life and Speeches of Charles Aycock' should be in every home and every school in North Carolina."

Memorialization continued throughout the twentieth century. A monument to Aycock was erected in Capitol Square, Raleigh, in 1924, just twelve years after his death and during the governorship of Cameron Morrison (a fellow perpetrator of the Wilmington Insurrection of 1898). The monument's inscription, printed in the unveiling program, positions Aycock as dedicated to equality before the law ("Unveiling of Monument" 1924). Although the 1924 pamphlet does not mention White supremacy as explicitly as the memorial literature from 1912, many of the speakers (including Governor Morrison and Josephus Daniels) were directly connected to White supremacist violence. In 1933, Aycock was honored at the UNC Founder's Day with a special memorial oration ("140th University Day" 1933). In 1941, a memorial tablet jointly commemorating Governors Charles Aycock and Zebulon Vance was placed at UNC (Winston 1941). In 1951, a joint session of the North Carolina General Assembly met to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Aycock's inauguration as governor and commissioned a portrait

of him to hang in the Hall of the House of Representatives, which was unveiled later that same year (Hoey and Graham 1951). Throughout the century, as memorialization continued under predominantly Democratic administrations, Aycock's White supremacy occupied less and less of the memorial language. It was drowned out, more and more, by his educational policies.

In keeping with this trend, the Charles B. Aycock Birthplace began as a shrine to Aycock's educational achievements. In 1949, the General Assembly appointed a special commission "for the purpose of studying the possibilities of the perpetual preservation of the birth place and homestead of Governor Charles B. Aycock" (*Resolution 12* 1949). The resolution notes that since Governor Aycock is "recognized as one of North Carolina's greatest statesmen and the father of education in this state," the preservation of his birthplace and the establishment of a "suitable memorial" is "one of statewide concern and responsibility." The commission would consist of two members of the State Senate and three members of the House of Representatives, and would examine the logistical feasibility of acquiring the house in which Aycock was born and "establishing it as a State shrine in...recognition of the outstanding services by our recognized leader of education and as an incentive for others to assume leadership in solving the educational problems of this day and time." The resolution lays out quite clearly the original intention of Aycock Birthplace as a site: to memorialize and enshrine a very specific narrative of Charles B. Aycock's life, with an emphasis on his educational policy placed against the backdrop of his early childhood in rural Wayne County[14].

[14] Coming one year after President Harry Truman mandated the desegregation of the U.S. military in 1948 ("Executive Order 9981, Desegregating the Military" 2023), 1949 saw increasing formalization and solidification of White Southern resistance to integration (McRae 2018; Brückman 2021). It is interesting to note the attention paid to a governor who advocated *segregated* education at this time.

It would be another 10 years before the Birthplace opened as a state historic site in 1959, but the emphasis on Aycock's educational policies and his agricultural upbringing remained key features of the site's interpretation, at the expense of his White supremacy. A Goldsboro news article from 1957 describes a play about Governor Aycock's life with an emphasis on his early childhood and educational policies, encouraging any readers or audience members to come to the Birthplace when it opened (*Goldsboro News-Argus* 1957). The site's dedication program, on November 1, 1959, featured main speakers such as: Dr. David J. Rose (chairman of the Aycock Memorial Commission and a State Senator known for his educational work); the president of the Atlantic Christian College; and the state superintendent of public instruction ("Program for the Opening of the Charles B. Aycock Birthplace" 1959) . With such a line-up, the emphasis on education is clear. In addition, one of the first pamphlets for the site, published in 1959, highlights the governor's "plain beginnings" and his parents' hardworking character, along with his gubernatorial dedication to public education ("Charles B. Aycock Birthplace State Historic Site" 1959). Overall, the dedication program and early site interpretive materials, as well as contemporaneous newspaper articles, highlight a particular interest in Aycock's rural upbringing and his educational policies.

The 1959 pamphlet does note that the 1900 Suffrage Amendment, alongside which Aycock campaigned for governorship, was a key piece of his educational policy. The amendment, which required new voters to take a literacy test, "made schools and learning necessary in order to produce voting citizens. This gave Aycock the opportunity to develop his educational policy" ("Charles B. Aycock Birthplace State Historic Site" 1959). The pamphlet neglects to mention the uneven distribution of resources between the segregated White and Black schools built at this time.

Over the next few years, however, the Aycock Birthplace made a name for itself as both a memorial for Charles Aycock and a working farm museum. Recreations of Aycock's Goldsboro law office and his Raleigh parlor were installed in the Birthplace museum, and the 1870 Oak Plain schoolhouse was moved to the site, demonstrating a continued prioritization of Aycock's educational work in site interpretation. Stables and several other dependencies were also moved to, or reconstructed at, the site, although the two slave houses that stood on the site in the 1850s were never rebuilt, despite their inclusion in initial site plans ("Twenty-Eighth Biennial Report" 1960). Children who visited the site could take part in hands-on activities like churning butter and making candles at least as early as 1975 ("Thirty-Sixth Biennial Report" 1976), which mirrors a rise in living history and hands-on activities at historic sites in the 1970s (Rymsza-Pawlowska 2017). In 1984, the site added a barnyard with live animals, including seven sheep ("Forty-First Biennial Report" 1986).

The site has incorporated more diverse narratives over time. In 2001, the site held a symposium on education and race relations in Aycock's time in collaboration with Wayne Community College (W. Lee 2002). In 2005, the Birthplace joined several other state historic sites in celebrating the 140th anniversary of the end of the Civil War by presenting the postwar occupation of Goldsboro by a brigade of Black Union troops ("Fifty-First Biennial Report" 2006). In 2009, according to Assistant Manager Tyler Mink, staff added language about the Red Shirts and White supremacy to the main exhibit panels, and in 2011 an interactive exhibit on school segregation and integration was added to the lobby area ("Fifty-Fourth Biennial Report" 2012). In 2019, the site held its first Black History Month program, with traditional African dance and musical instruments ("Fifty-Eighth Biennial Report" 2020). In 2022, Tyler Mink

created a voting exhibit inside the schoolhouse that expertly connects education, White supremacy, and voting rights.

Throughout its history, the site has been intimately impacted by contemporaneous politics in North Carolina and the South more broadly. Photos in the site's archives record several visits from segregated school groups. The photos of the Black students depict mainly hands-on farm chores (for the boys) and domestic chores (for the girls), while the White students are shown seated in the schoolhouse, answering questions and looking at a globe. The visitor center was built with segregated bathrooms, which are used as supply closets today.

Just as the life of Charles Aycock represents the construction and entrenchment of Jim Crow in North Carolina, the trajectory of Aycock Birthplace State Historic Site is a microcosm of racial interactions in Wayne County, the continuation of the Jim Crow system in the twentieth century, and ongoing efforts to more deeply contextualize Aycock's legacy of White supremacy in the present day.

Conclusion

In the 2023 budget passed by the General Assembly of North Carolina, the statue of Governor Charles Aycock that had previously stood in the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C. was slated for removal to the Charles B. Aycock State Historic Site (*House Bill 259* 2023). In order for this to become a reality, site staff say, significant structural updates will need to happen in the Birthplace museum, including reinforced flooring and a higher ceiling to accommodate the huge, heavy statue.

It is entirely fitting that a statue of the man whose legacy continues to shift more than a century after his death is itself in a state of flux. Material questions of where and how to display and contextualize the statue resonate alongside ongoing questions of where and how to

remember Aycock himself, along with his many long-lasting impacts on North Carolina. One thing is clear: Aycock's legacy as a White supremacist and his legacy as the "Education Governor" are not separate. Not only are they deeply intertwined, but their connections shed light on the ways in which race, political power, and education have been constructed and experienced in North Carolina after the Civil War, with 1898 as a flashpoint. By focusing on Aycock's childhood during Reconstruction and providing further information on North Carolina between Reconstruction and 1898, the Birthplace is uniquely positioned to interpret such connections and to continue upholding Aycock's memory. The struggles for public education and racial justice are ongoing. As the Birthplace looks to the future, continued attention to the political landscapes of Reconstruction – and their impacts on Charles Aycock's childhood and politics – is not only desirable, but deeply necessary.

Additional Resources & Future Directions

The following list includes additional resources and avenues for further research that, while beyond the scope of this project's timeline, are important for the continued interpretation of Governor Aycock's life, childhood, and legacy. Several of these avenues incorporate stories that, while they do not relate directly to the life of Charles B. Aycock, do reflect the lived experiences of people in Wayne County and North Carolina who were directly impacted by Aycock's policies during his governorship and by structures of White supremacy more broadly. These include enslaved and free Black people in antebellum Wayne County, Black people in Wayne County during Reconstruction and the early twentieth century, and Native people in Wayne County and eastern North Carolina, particularly in relation to school segregation. By fleshing out such narratives and including them in interpretation, the Birthplace can continue to serve as a place of inquiry and learning for all of its visitors.

Black Life in Wayne County

- **Wooden Birthplace Graveyard Markers**: The graveyard area that is today part of the Governor Aycock Birthplace State Historic Site includes roughly 16 unmarked wooden blocks, which site staff replace as needed when one begins to rot. They are set outside the fence that delineates the Aycock family graveyard, and are of uncertain origin and purpose. Drawing on knowledge of antebellum burial customs, it seems very likely that these wooden blocks mark the burial sites of enslaved people; however, state archaeology surveys have been unable to confirm this as of 2023.
- **WPA Slave Narratives**: The published narratives from the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration include numerous firsthand accounts of enslaved life from formerly-enslaved people in North Carolina, including several from southeastern North Carolina. The full narratives can be accessed via the Library of Congress's website[15].
- **The Freedmen's Bureau**: There was a Freedmen's Bureau field office in Goldsboro, North Carolina, from 1865-1868. Materials from this office regarding free Black life in Wayne County can be accessed via the National Archives website (for finding aids) and FamilySearch.org (for digital access)[16]. Tyler Mink has already done substantial research into the records of the Goldsboro field office.
- **Black Wide-Awake**: This blog[17], curated by Lisa. Y. Henderson, is an incredible resource for information on Black life in Wilson County both pre- and post-Civil War.

[15] Full link to the collection: https://www.loc.gov/collections/slave-narratives-from-the-federal-writers-project-1936-to-1938/about-this-collection/
[16] Full link to the collection: https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/freedmens-bureau
[17] Full link to blog: https://afamwilsonnc.com/

Wilson County borders Wayne County to the north, and Henderson's research includes numerous connections with the extended Aycock family[18] and the extended Artis/Artice family[19].

- **Black Newspapers**: There were several newspapers run by Black people in Wayne County during and after Reconstruction[20], including the *Goldsboro Star*, which ran from 1881-1882[21].
- **Black Figures**: There is great potential for highlighting Black politicians, educators, and activists who were actively in conversation with Charles Aycock and his gubernatorial policies. Some examples include:
    - **Dr. Charlotte Hawkins Brown** (1883-1961), a Henderson-born educator raised in Cambridge, Massachusetts who returned to North Carolina to teach rural Black students in 1901 at the age of 18 and founded the Palmer Memorial Institute in 1902. Her life and work for Black education serves as an important counterpoint to Aycock's work, and could be an excellent tie-in between the Birthplace museum and the Charlotte Hawkins Brown Museum in Gibsonville.
    - **James H. Young** (1858-1921), a Wake County state legislator (1894-1898) and graduate of Shaw University in Raleigh (1877) who edited the Raleigh Gazette for five years (1893-1898) and was one of the principal influences behind the

[18] "The Estates of Jesse and Patience Aycock," with information on the people they enslaved https://afamwilsonnc.com/2022/12/27/the-estates-of-jesse-and-patience-aycock/
[19] "The Roots of Many Wilson County Artises, Part 1" https://afamwilsonnc.com/2023/02/04/the-roots-of-many-wilson-county-artises-part-1/ & "The Roots of Many Wilson County Artises, Part 2" https://afamwilsonnc.com/2023/02/06/the-roots-of-many-wilson-county-artises-part-2-artis-town/
[20] Records of Black newspapers in North Carolina on DigitalNC: https://www.digitalnc.org/exhibits/african-american-newspapers-in-nc/
[21] Records of the *Goldsboro Star* on DigitalNC: https://www.digitalnc.org/newspapers/the-goldsboro-star-goldsboro-n-c/?news_year=1882#

successful Fusionist strategy of the 1890s. His writing serves as a window into Black Republican stances and strategies in the face of the White Supremacy Campaign of 1898.

- **George H. White** (1852-1918), the US senator for the Second Congressional District (known as the "Black Second") from 1897-1901. The Second District included Wayne County, meaning that for first part of Aycock's governorship, Aycock himself was represented in Congress by a Black man. White was also connected with education, graduating from Howard University with his teaching degree in 1877 and serving as principal of the Black public schools in New Bern, NC in the late 1870s. White was the last Black politician elected to Congress from North Carolina until 1992.
- **Napoleon Hagans** (1840-1896), a free Black man who farmed near Nahunta/Fremont after the Civil War and provided testimony in 1880 to a US Senate committee investigating Black migration out of the South in the 1870s about the source of his wealth and the political climate for Black people in the state. Hagans testified that, while more Black men were more often convicted for similar crimes than White men were, overall the political climate was positive for Black farmers[22]. His testimony provides insight into the life of Black farmers very near where Charles Aycock grew up.
- **Charles Norfleet Hunter** (1852-1931), a Black educator and reformer who taught at numerous different schools around North Carolina during the late 1800s

[22] Full text of Hagans's testimony can be found here: https://scuffalong.com/2013/09/08/i-worked-for-it/. Recording from Wayne County Public Library talk Hagans's life can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W9s3CkJyUIc

and early 1900s. His life sheds light on the ways in which Black people fought for education.

- **Local History**: The local history department at the **Wayne County Public Library** in Goldsboro, is an incredible resource for additional resources and holds many archival documents[23]. Researchers should get in touch with the local history department at the library (instead of the Wayne County History Museum) for archival document assistance. The **Wayne County History Museum** hosts rotating exhibits on diverse topics related to Wayne County and is a good resource for guided tours and material culture of the area. The museum's monthly Black History guided tour focuses on Black life in Goldsboro during the early 1900s, with emphasis on the historically-Black neighborhood of Little Washington. Still standing structures, as of September 2023, include the former office building of the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company (a Black-owned insurance company that started in Durham in 1898), which also included the first Black dentist in Goldsboro and the first Black public library; and the Black-owned BBQ restaurant where local legend has it that White and Black Goldsboro citizens ate in the same dining room, despite segregated restaurant laws, because the BBQ was so good. Former sites of the James Street Theater, the Ideal Café (which was included in the Green Book), and a Black-owned pharmacy are identified, now empty lots.

Indigenous Life in Wayne County

Numerous Indigenous nations have included the land that is currently known as Wayne County in their homelands over time. Three of these – the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina, the

[23] Wayne County Public Library Local History & Genealogy: https://wcpl.org/local-history/

Tuscarora Nation of North Carolina, and the Catawba Indian Nation – are still in the area despite centuries of genocide, colonial violence, and occupation. Indigenous life in Wayne County and southeastern North Carolina more broadly during the antebellum period, the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the early 20th century should continue to be explored with an eye to incorporating relevant topics into Birthplace interpretation. Topics of particular interest to the Birthplace's interpretive goals could include Indigenous education (including Federal boarding schools, 4 of which were located in North Carolina[24]) and how Indigenous children were figured into the dichotomy of Black/White segregated schooling; and how voting rights were denied to Indigenous people through mechanisms that were both explicitly anti-Indigenous and overlapped with anti-Black voting restrictions throughout the early 20th century[25]. "Black" and "Indigenous" are not mutually exclusive identities, either, emphasizing how White supremacy functions along intersections of difference and marginalization that continue to impact communities and individuals today.

Interpretive Suggestions

The following include a few ideas for further incorporating diverse stories and additional aspects of Charles Aycock's life into interpretation and exhibits at the Birthplace. These suggestions should be taken in conjunction with the 2022 report by Lord Cultural Group.

- Ensure that all guided tours, not just specialized tours, include interpretations and narratives of enslaved people and the indentured Artis brothers. Share the names of enslaved people that we have been able to find, and explain the difficulties of learning

[24] Article on NC presence in DOI's Federal Indian Boarding School Report, 2022: https://www.ednc.org/four-n-c-schools-identified-in-interior-departments-federal-indian-boarding-school-report/

[25] "Voting Rights for Native Americans," Library of Congress: https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/elections/right-to-vote/voting-rights-for-native-americans/#:~:text=The%20Snyder%20Act%20of%201924,rights%20granted%20by%20this%20amendment

about individuals who were not recorded as individuals in the mainstream historical record.

- Ensure that all guided tours, not just specialized tours, include information about the Aycock family's material wealth (in context of their surroundings and historical period) and Governor Aycock's intertwined views of education and White supremacy through the Suffrage Amendment and the Grandfather Clause. Emphasize that this might be a chance from how visitors have heard about him in the past, and that historical figures, like people today, are complex and multi-faceted.
- Make the temporary voting rights exhibit in the schoolhouse into a permanent exhibit based in the schoolhouse, to further emphasize and flesh out connections between education and suffrage.

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Appendix 2: Stagville State Historic Site Landscape Plan

Durham, NC | Summer 2020

Executive Summary

The landscape of Stagville State Historic Site, in Durham, North Carolina, shapes visitor experience, site security, grounds maintenance, site interpretation, and site visitation. It offers unique opportunities to interpret Stagville's place in the history of the U.S. South, along with rich potential for teaching a more equitable history of the region that centers the experiences of Stagville's Black communities from the mid-1700s to the twenty-first century and beyond. In 2007, Stagville's three non-contiguous parcels were finally connected through a land acquisition deal; however, no landscape plan was adopted to redesign the site as a unified, continuous whole, until now.

This document provides a historical context for Stagville's current landscape and offers a landscape-level plan that unifies Stagville's two halves with positive interpretive, logistical, and historic preservation outcomes. It is intended to serve as a blueprint for the next ten years of landscape development at Stagville, and to ensure that landscape remains a vital part of management conversations at the site going forward. Overall, this plan envisions a unified historic site landscape that empowers visitors and staff to make meaningful connections between Stagville's history, interpretive themes, and current context. Read more about the process of creating it here.

Introduction

Stagville State Historic Site is located off Old Oxford Highway, 10 miles north of downtown Durham, North Carolina. Today, Stagville is owned by the State of North Carolina and is operated as part of the North Carolina Division of Historic Sites.[26] However, Stagville's past as antebellum plantation and post-bellum sharecropping farms goes far beyond the current 165 acres occupied by the historic site to encompass political, economic, and social networks across the U.S. South. The landscape of the historic site today offers ample opportunity to learn about and interpret Stagville's place in North Carolina history and the history of the U.S. South. It also offers rich potential for teaching a more equitable history of the region: one that centers the experiences of Stagville's Black communities from the mid-1700s to the twenty-first century, and beyond.

Horton Grove houses, 2019

[26] For more on the NC Historic Sites Program, visit the website https://historicsites.nc.gov/

In this plan, the term "landscape" includes: the buildings at Stagville[27]; the spaces around the buildings; and the spatial relationships between the buildings and outdoor areas. Visitor experience, site security, and grounds maintenance are all informed by Stagville's landscape, as are site interpretation and visitation. The purpose of this landscape master plan is to ensure that landscape remains a vital part of management conversations at Stagville going forward, and that future landscape-level changes to the site can be made in alignment with historical, interpretive, and logistical needs. This plan is intended to serve as a blueprint for the next ten years of landscape development at Stagville.

This plan is particularly necessary given that Stagville State Historic Site was originally established on three non-contiguous parcels of land. In 2007, land acquisition connected these disparate parcels (although the site still has a major road dividing the property in two). Since this critical land acquisition, no landscape plan has been adopted to redesign the site as a unified, continuous whole.

Bennehan House, 2019

This plan draws on conversations and interviews with Stagville staff and volunteers, including Vera Cecelski (site manager), Beverly McNeill (volunteer tour guide and Stagville Foundation president), and Tony Strother (maintenance mechanic), as well as primary and secondary sources digitally available through the UNC library system and/or shared by Stagville staff.

Vision Statement

This plan's vision for Stagville's landscape is the following:

1. Visitors forge meaningful connections between the site landscape, the documented history, and the interpretive themes of the site, beyond a simple re-creation of historic features.
2. Both halves of the site are valued, developed, and acknowledged with equal meaning and access, reflecting an equitable approach to the interpreted narratives.

Broadly speaking, the landscapes of Stagville should not only align with the historic site's interpretive goals, but enhance them through enabling deeper and more meaningful connections between visitors and the site's many-layered history and present. At the moment, the

[27] The name "Stagville" requires clarification. Stagville was the name of a single portion of the 30,000-acre Piedmont plantation owned by Paul Cameron, along with Snow Hill, Fairntosh, Fish Dam, Peaksville, and Eno, among others. However, since today's historic site sits on the Stagville section, I have used "Stagville" in this report as shorthand for the entire 30,000-acre complex owned by the Bennehans and Camerons, as well as the historic site today.

Bennehan House half of the site boasts superior infrastructure for visitors and tourism, including the visitor center, the main parking area, air conditioning, and the only public bathrooms on site. As a result, no matter how history is interpreted, the visitor experience centers on the Bennehan House, instead of the Horton Grove slave dwellings, as described below. A lack of infrastructural equity between the site's halves has, historically, resulted in a lack of interpretive equity that site staff today are still working to address. Equity and connectivity in landscape planning is one means to repair this gap.

Challenges & Opportunities

The most obvious challenges to the landscape-level alterations described above are funding and staff time.

Challenges:

1. Money: Existing state budget is extremely limited, and expected to be cut in the coming year due to COVID-19. These projects will have to leverage outside funding.
2. Staff capacity: The three full-time Stagville staff members are already stretched to cover daily site operations, leaving limited staff time for project management, fundraising, and strategic planning.
3. Archaeology: Any ground disturbance on state historic sites requires archeology clearance. Clearance may require additional surveys and testing to evaluate archeological sites.

Opportunities:

1. Funding for inclusive public history: Private funding and institutional grants are increasingly funding sites or programs that interpret the history and legacies of American race-based slavery. Stagville has a dedicated, holistic mission to interpret these narratives, and an existing track record of interpreting this history. This makes Stagville competitive for these outside funds.
2. Trails and recreation: New walking trails and outdoor access will engage new donors and partners in outdoor recreation, conservation, and land stewardship.

All that being said, the opportunities for more thorough, socially-equitable, and physically secure interpretation; a site that more closely aligns with historical sources; and the ultimate lessening

of staff time spent maintaining mown lawns and traveling from one half of the site to the other make confronting the challenges very worthwhile.

Horton Grove from Jock Road, 2019

Historical Landscape Overview

Landscape and the movement of people on and through the landscape has always been central to Stagville's existence, prosperity, and meaning. Today, Stagville State Historic Site sits on native land, including the homelands of the Occoneechee-Saponi, Catawba, Eno, and Shakori nations. By 1768, when Richard Bennehan arrived, fur trading had already been established between Virginian colonists and the Catawba, Cherokee, and other neighboring tribes in present-day North Carolina and farther south (Davis, 2006). Many of these indigenious communities had already been forced off the land. The "Old Indian Trading Path," or the "Great Trading Path," which connected the Catawba settlements on the South Carolina border and Cherokee lands farther south with Petersburg, Virginia (Anderson, 1985), developed from a network of interconnected roadways used by native people for generations, into a main thoroughfare for incoming colonists (Fetcher, 2008). The stores that Richard Bennehan operated and owned drew much of their custom from the traffic on this road (Anderson, 1985). Despite the historic site's apparent isolation today, this land north of present-day Durham was a hub of local, regional, and national movement.

Thorough histories of the Bennehan and Cameron families can be found elsewhere.[28] The Bennehans and Camerons steadily increased the size of their land holdings in the central Piedmont, expanding south and east of the Bennehan House. These lands were often purchased with profits taken from the forced agricultural and industrial labor of generations of enslaved people. By 1860, Paul Cameron, Margaret Cameron, and their siblings owned 30,000 acres across five modern-day counties[29] (Anderson, 1985), not including additional holdings in Alabama and Mississippi.[30] They enslaved over a thousand men, women, and children across this land. By 1860, Paul Cameron was the single largest slaveholder in the state of North Carolina (Anderson, 1985). The economic and political wealth gained from these agricultural lands and the enslaved African Americans who were forced to work them, cannot be overstated, and had a

[28] See end of this document for a list of additional resources.

[29] In 1860, the counties were Orange, Wake, Person, and Granville. Durham County split from Orange County in 1881.

[30] More information on Cameron properties in Mississippi and Alabama, and on the enslaved and freed African Americans who made those lands home, can be found in *A Mind to Stay: White Plantation, Black Homelands*, by Sydney Nathan.

significant impact on the development of the surrounding towns, including Chapel Hill, Durham, and Raleigh (Fountain, 2014; Smith, 2013).

The current footprint of Stagville State Historic Site is a small fraction of the total land and resources historically owned by the Camerons. Today, the site's historic structures are concentrated in two sections separated by Old Oxford Highway and thick stands of trees: Horton Grove (the complex of five houses built by and for enslaved families in the early 1850s) and the Bennehan House (a white, two-story house built between 1787 and 1799 as a Bennehan family residence). Today, with or without an interpreter, visitors must drive between each part of the site. This interrupts guided tours and ensures that visitors with limited time may only see the Bennehan House half of the site. Often visitors report an impression that the two sections of the sites are very far apart, and visitors struggle to visualize the connections between these spaces.

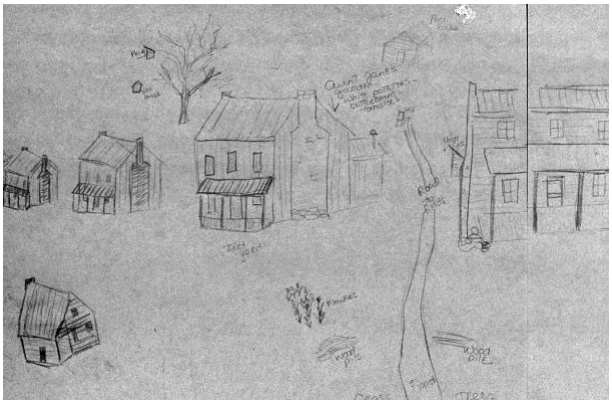
Bennehan House, 1918. Note the empty space behind the house that allowed for uninterrupted views of the surrounding lowlands, including Horton Grove.

Regarding the landscape of Stagville prior to the Civil War, scholars tell us that: "The plantation house was an island in a sea of corn and wheat fields, pasture, and forest" (Anderson, 1985, p. xiv). The Bennehan House sat on the end of a ridge line, on high ground, while Horton Grove was at the base of the hill, near the bottom land of the creeks and the Flat River. Stagville interpreters teach that the land between the Bennehan House and the Horton Grove houses was cleared, enabling white surveillance of the Black community there through the resulting sight lines (once the Horton Grove houses were constructed). The Great Barn, constructed in 1860, would have been visible from Horton Grove as well. Additional visible structures in the area might have included other slave dwellings, a loom house, kitchen, dairy, smokehouse, stables, store, and workshops. Volunteer Beverly McNeill described a hedge of Osage orange trees around the back of the Bennehan house. A nineteenth-century roadbed that connected the Bennehan House with Horton Grove is still faintly visible at the site today, although today's landscape is dominated by forests of pine and maple, as well as mown grass lawns around all the houses.

The uses of these buildings, and the landscapes around them, have changed through time. After Paul Cameron's death in 1891, ownership of Stagville passed to his son Bennehan Cameron (McFarland, 2006). Bennehan Cameron lived in the Bennehan house until his death in 1925, and white tenant farmers or farm managers lived there until circa 1940. Sharecropping, often by formerly enslaved families and their descendants, continued from Emancipation into the 1970s; in fact, the 1920s and 30s are the decades about which the site today has the most oral history evidence, thanks to research conducted in the 1980s onward with former sharecroppers.[31] During the early decades of the twentieth century, sharecropping families still lived in the Horton Grove houses, maintained gardens and an orchard to the west of the houses, and worked the

[31] See specifically Lounsbury & McDaniel's (1980) "Recording Plantation Communities;" Alice Eley Jones oral history collection, 1986; Emerson Burton and Irma Day(e) Burton oral history with Peggie Linda Burton Best, February 23, 2019.

surrounding agricultural fields (Lounsbury & McDaniel, 1980). Oral histories with former residents demonstrate that all Horton Grove houses were inhabited until 1940-1942, while the Hart House was inhabited by the Hart family into the 1960s and by other Black families until the 1970s. Horton Grove, then, not only tells a story of enslavement, but also the story of a thriving and long-lived Black community in the central Piedmont.[32]



Descendant rendering of Horton Grove, 1980. Note the label of "Dirt yard" in front of the middle house, the flowers, and the "road to fields."

Aerial photo of Stagville property, 1940. The wagon road between the Bennehan House and the intersection of Old Oxford Hwy and Jock Rd is visible as a diagonal line towards the lower right corner of the image.

Upon Bennehan Cameron's death in 1925, the plantation was split between his two daughters. Isabel Cameron van Lennep inherited the half of the property then known as Stagville, and Sally Cameron Labouisse inherited the other half, known then as Fairntosh. In 1950, Isabel sold her portion of the property to the Pat Brown Lumber Company (Deiss, 2010), suggesting either that the land in question had mostly reforested by this point, or that the company planned to plant trees for lumber in the former agricultural fields. In 1954, the Liggett & Myers Tobacco Company purchased 3,088 acres of Stagville acreage and raised field crops and livestock. In 1976, after immense pressure from the Historic Preservation Society of Durham, Liggett & Myers donated 71 acres to the state, in three plots: the Bennehan house, the Horton Grove houses, and the footprint of the Great Barn. This property became a state-owned facility for teaching historic preservation theory and technology known as the Stagville Preservation Center (McFarland, 2006). Controversy bloomed and continued over whether the site was more appropriate as a technical historic preservation center or a public history site.[33] During meetings of the Historic Preservation Section of the NC Division of Archives and History in the late 1970s, there was general agreement that a compromise might be reached: the "Bennehan House could be used to promote the history of the house, while Horton Grove could be used as a working laboratory to

[32] Vlach (1993) provides an invaluable examination of the spaces and landscapes of slavery in the antebellum South in *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery*.

[33] For a thorough examination of the local and national cultural contexts in which Stagville was "discovered" by Durham preservationists, and the ensuing controversy over the best use of the site, see Deiss (2010).

teach preservation techniques" (Deiss, 2010, p. 19). That the house of the white owning family should be preserved as "history" while the houses of the enslaved families should be treated as a "working laboratory" makes clear the racialized views of the committee by devaluing the history of Stagville's Black communities in relationship to Stagville's white residents.

The land use trajectory at Stagville is indicative of larger patterns, both cultural and material. Black people -- enslaved or free -- were living on or sold poor quality land with heavy erosion, stagnant water, poor drainage, and proximity to spaces considered waste.[34] At Stagville, these bottom lands had profitable agricultural soil, but were prone to flooding and damage from the Eno, Little, and Flat Rivers. As a result, the buildings constructed on these lands are inevitably subject to more environmental damage, including flooding and other natural disasters induced and exacerbated by climate change. Thus, structures built by and for enslaved people are far more difficult and expensive to preserve, creating a feedback loop which incentivizes those in power to not preserve these buildings, on top of not valuing the historical narratives and perspectives of the people who lived in them. This is one factor in why Horton Grove includes the only surviving slave dwellings from the once-vast properties of the Bennehans and Camerons.

Work at Flat River Bottoms, 1931-1941

The visitor center that still stands at the site today was constructed between 1982-1984 as a classroom building. It reflected the opinion that the Bennehan House was of most historical interest to visitors, and was not designed as a visitor center. By building the site's main facility for signing up for guided tours, learning more about the site from staff, using a public restroom, or visiting the gift shop next to the Bennehan House, the visitor center has continued to shape and impact site operations by orienting visitors to the site first and foremost through the Bennehan House. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of spatial organization when thinking through visitor mobility and interpretive goals.

The remaining plantation lands around Stagville were purchased in 1984 by Durham Research Properties. With the Fairntosh and Snow Hill plantation sections, it is now the 5,200-acre Treyburn complex, "one of the largest residential, commercial, and industrial developments in the Southeast" (McFarland, 2006, p. 1069). The historic house and buildings at Fairntosh remain intact, held as a private home by Terry Sanford Jr. and family. Stagville's driveway today cuts through this private property: a very tenuous access point for a state historic site.

By 2001, the site was transferred into the NC Division of Historic Sites and remains part of that division today. The site in 2020 encompasses 165 acres, including the 71 acres donated by Liggett & Myers. Additional acreage was acquired in 2007 through partnership with the Triangle Land Conservancy (TLC), which operates the Horton Grove Nature Preserve to the north and west of the Horton Grove portion of the historic site. Today, Historic Stagville is bounded almost

[34] There is much scholarship on this topic. See end of this document for additional resources.

completely by trees: vast stretches of pine and maple that are the result of reforestation on former agricultural fields. The areas around the houses in Horton Grove, the Great Barn, and the Bennehan House are mown grass lawns. Two c. 1935-40 wood frame houses with no documented historical significance sit adjacent to Horton Grove, and were used as rental units until 2020.

Site Landscape Goals

Ideal Future Visitor Experience

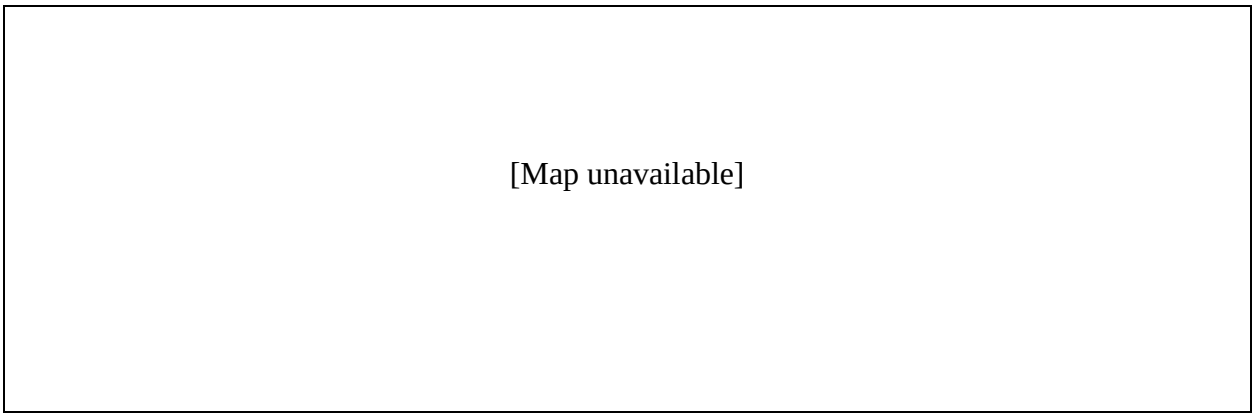


Figure 1: Graphic depiction of unified Stagville landscape. ***Depiction not to scale.***

Visitors park at the new Stagville visitor center (#1) at the intersection of Old Oxford Highway and Jock Road. There is overflow parking across Jock Road (#2), but on a day with no special events there is plenty of room in the visitor center parking lot. Visitors enter the visitor center to find site resources like a map, guided tour timetables, self-guided tour brochures and audio download information, allowing visitors to choose and create the interpretive experience that works for their schedule. Staff members are on hand to answer questions, and the gift shop provides further opportunities for visitors to engage with and contribute to Stagville.

Visitors would then have several options. They could sign up for a guided tour of the entire site. They could utilize a self-guided tour brochure and/or the audio guide to learn more about the site on their own. From the rear of the visitor center, visitors can easily see the row at Horton Grove and the Great Barn in the distance. If they turn around, they can easily see the bridge across the creek and the walking route to the Bennehan House. Visitors can most easily access Horton Grove. Depending on staff, they may be able to enter the Hart House and the Holman House on their own. As visitors walk north up the row, they move from the 1850s setting of the Holman House to the 1930s setting of the Hart House, connecting the experience of enslaved people to their descendants to the present day.

Both the Hart and Holman Houses have swept dirt yards in front of them, allowing visitors to glimpse this historic landscape feature that enslaved people brought from West Africa and that was once ubiquitous across the U.S. South (Brown, 1999; Raver, 1993; Jenkins, 1994). Historic garden plantings represent the foodways, medicinal plants, and landscape traditions of

enslaved people circa 1860 and Black sharecroppers circa 1930.[35] The field in front of the Horton Grove row is cleared of new-growth pine and small hardwoods, instead growing native Piedmont prairie (Zambello, 2014; Triangle Land Conservancy, 2012) with walking paths mown through it. This prairie grass evokes the circa 1850 grain fields without recreating them. Behind the Horton Grove houses, underbrush has been cleared from the forest trees.

The Great Barn is visible from Horton Grove, rising over another sea of Piedmont prairie and emphasizing the spatial and visual connections between Horton Grove and the barn. Once finished in Horton Grove, visitors walk a short trail (#3) to see the Great Barn. They can complete a loop of the site by returning on a trail along Jock Road, protected from vehicle traffic by a split rail fence (#4).

Great Barn surrounded by fields, 1980. The barn was visible from Horton Grove until new-growth trees began to grow in the abandoned agricultural fields.

From Horton Grove, visitors cross Old Oxford, cross a bridge over the small creek, and walk up the path to the Bennehan House, which roughly follows the path of the nineteenth-century roadbed (#5). Waysides along the path provide historical interpretation about plantation land and landscapes, and interpreters use this walking transition as additional interpretive space. While the hillside is not completely clear, the visitor walks a shady, 0.3-mile trail through a thinned, open forest up to the Bennehan House. The forest between the visitor center and the Bennehan House would be cleared of underbrush and periodically undergo prescribed burning in collaboration with the Triangle Land Conservancy (Tysinger, 2018; Hackenburg, 2016). Next to the Bennehan House, where the current visitor center sits, a covered, open-air facility with public restrooms offers space for classrooms and gatherings (#6). An additional trail (#7) offers hiking opportunities on a second loop to return to the creek, including a wayside stop near the original store site, as well as a wayside on the "Old Indian Trading Path" that runs through the site roughly west to east.

In total, a visitor would walk between ⅔ and 1.5 miles to view the entire site, with an optional vehicle route and parking available for those with mobility needs.

Plan Description and Outcomes

This plan has intersecting beneficial outcomes for historic preservation, logistics, and interpretation. The main changes are as follows:

- **A new visitor center** at Horton Grove, with the existing visitor center either dismantled or repurposed as an open-air, covered classroom/gathering space with public toilets;

[35] Self-guided materials and/or a wayside behind the houses note that the land behind the houses was used for gardens and orchards by sharecropping families who lived in the houses in the 1930s (Lounsbury & McDaniel, 1980). While we do not have primary sources that describe this space in the 1840s, it is likely that the sharecroppers (descendants of people enslaved by the Camerons) used the land in a similar way to their ancestors.

- Transition of **mown grass lawns to Piedmont prairie** between the Horton Grove houses and Old Oxford Highway and between Horton Grove and the Great Barn;
- The creation and maintenance of **swept dirt yards** in front of the Hart House and the Holman House in Horton Grove;
- The creation of a **transportation corridor** between Horton Grove and the Bennehan house, along with an additional **hiking trail** in a loop on the property between Horton Grove and the Bennehan house.
- A new driveway access securely on state property, with the existing driveway closed or reserved for maintenance.

Interpretive Outcomes

- **Visitor center:** The new location of the visitor center would re-orient the site to center Horton Grove and the experiences of African-American communities before and after emancipation, which aligns more fully with Stagville's interpretive goals. A new visitors center would also enhance the interpretive exhibits for visitors. Increased staff presence at Horton Grove would facilitate secure self-guided access to the houses at Horton Grove.

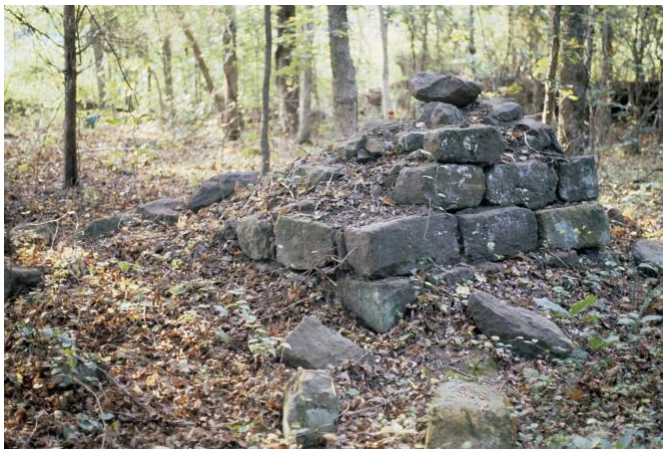
- **Lawn → Prairie:** Piedmont prairie around the Horton Grove houses and the Great Barn would support tour guides and interpretive materials in giving visitors a better sense of the lived experiences of Stagville's communities. Piedmont prairie, while not an agricultural landscape in and of itself, more closely approximates the fields that would have surrounded these houses in the 1850s, enabling visitors to better understand Horton Grove as both homeplace and working place. Sight lines would open between Horton Grove and the Great Barn, giving a better sense of the spatiality of plantation architecture. Lastly, fostering a native ecosystem like the Piedmont prairie would allow for additional interpretation of the region's history and ecology.

Piedmont prairie on Triangle Nature Conservancy land

- **Swept dirt yards:** Creating and maintaining swept dirt in front of the Holman and Hart Houses would enable a deeper and richer interpretation of Black life and culture in Horton Grove. In their report on Stagville in 1980, Lounsbury & McDaniel note that "exhibiting a house without interpreting the grounds around it conveys an inaccurate picture of life, especially with rural homes since essential domestic activities occurred outdoors...and yards took on the functions of 'rooms'" (p. 7). The swept yards around the

Horton Grove houses were a vital part of life, and further illustrate African American contributions to the Southern landscape in a way that is currently being done only at one other state historic site (Somerset Place).

- **Transportation corridor**: A transportation corridor between Horton Grove and the Bennehan House would support interpretation in several ways. First, by re-opening period-specific sight lines between Horton Grove and the Bennehan House, visitors will better understand the architectures of surveillance that were built into Southern plantations. Using the transportation corridor as part of the guided tour would allow tour guides more interpretive time than they currently have, since now visitors and tour guides must drive separately between the Bennehan House and Horton Grove. Walking the path between Horton Grove and the Bennehan House would also illustrate the proximity of Horton Grove to the Bennehan House, and the intimate, complex proximity of enslavers and enslaved people.



Remains of original Bennehan store site

- **Hiking trail:** The proposed hiking trail would deepen the self-guided experience, and attract visitors who might not otherwise encounter the site's interpretation. The route would lead past the original 1787 Bennehan store site, later a slave dwelling. The hiking trail could also include a wayside describing the significance of American Indian history and the Great Trading Path, yet another layer of human history for visitors to engage.

Logistical Outcomes

- **Visitor center:** The new location of the visitor center would increase the site's visibility, likely leading to an increase in visitation, publicity, and access.. It would ensure that visitors with limited mobility or time would have direct access to Horton Grove and site staff there. Furthermore, the new location of the visitor center would give the extremely limited site staff more security. Clear sight lines across Horton Grove will make a safer experience for staff and visitors, plus more sorely-needed protection for the historic structures. These security considerations are even more vital in light of recent events: an arson at the Bennehan House and a break-in at the Hart House in June 2020.

- **Lawn → Prairie**: Limited site staff time would be saved from having to mow vast grassy lawns. Instead, specific trails can be mown through prairie grass and maintained much more easily.

- **Swept dirt yards:** Small swept dirt yards could be easily maintained by strategic herbicide application (see Development Plan, below), tour groups and visitors walking on the yards, and staff occasionally sweeping the dirt (before a special event, for example). Maintenance will necessarily look different from mowing a lawn, but will ultimately take less staff time. These yards could be used as gathering space and demonstration space for interpretation.

- **Transportation corridor**: The transportation corridor would enable easier and quicker access between both parts of the site, which would allow for streamlined tours and a tighter connection between both halves of the site. Closing the existing driveway would also allow the site's main access point to be on land over which the site has full control, instead of relying on a tenuous access over private property.

- **Hiking trail:** The hiking trail would allow for public use of the space even when the visitor center and historical houses are closed. Visitors would still be able enjoy the state's property. In summer 2020, these trails are valuable additions for public use of the site amid the restrictions of the coronavirus pandemic.

Historic Preservation Outcomes

- **Visitor center:** While not a historic structure, a new visitors center at Horton Grove would at least be a purpose-built structure to replace two modern 20th century rental houses which are condemned, poorly maintained, and ahistoric.

- **Lawn → Prairie:** This native North Carolina ecosystem is far more historically representative for the area than mown grassy lawns and stands of pine trees. Interpretive materials on/about the prairie trail between Horton Grove and the Great Barn could note the native ecology, the human disruption of native ecosystems, and the agricultural uses of the land from the 1850s into the 1970s. While no crop fields would be re-created, the tall grass prairie would evoke the grain fields of the 1850s.

- **Swept dirt yards:** Swept dirt yards are an important piece of African American cultural history. By re-creating this historical landscape, visitors will be exposed to Black landscape traditions in the United States and African cultural retentions in outdoor spaces.

- **Transportation corridor**: In the 1850s, this hillside would have been cleared to allow sight lines and a direct line of travel between the Bennehan House and Horton Grove. Creating a transportation corridor would also restore this aspect of the plantation landscape. Archeological research has already begun on the existing 19th century roadbed.

Janie Riley demonstrating how to make a brush broom, 1980.

- **Hiking trail:** The forest currently covering the hillside to the southeast of Old Oxford Highway, while not entirely historically accurate in its place, does include some of the older trees on Stagville's site. Unlike the young cedar and pine thickets at Horton Grove, this forest would be more representative of the timber land sections of Stagville's 19th century landscape. These trails would also connect visitors to the stream, now hidden in deep woods near Old Oxford. Waterways were defining plantation landscape features, and much of Stagville was crisscrossed by rivers and streams.

Development Plan

The following tables are a break-down of phases and action steps to reach the site landscape outcomes detailed above. For the purpose of this plan, Stagville is divided into the Northwestern Half (northwest of Old Oxford Hwy, where Horton Grove and the Great Barn are located) and the Southeastern Half (southeast of Old Oxford Hwy, where the Bennehan House and current visitor center are located). Priority level and feasibility are both rated on a scale of 1 to 3, with 1 representing highest priority/most feasible, and 3 representing lowest priority/least feasible.

Northwestern Half

Main Goal	Priority Level	Feasibility	Estimated Cost
Visitor Center re-location			
(1) Demolish existing modern houses on either side of Jock Rd.	2	1	$22,000 (12k per house for demolition and mitigation)
(2) Construct a grass parking area to the east of	3	2	

Jock Rd (drainage, entrance, enclosure as needed).			
(3) Construct new visitor center, with accessible parking area in front of new visitor center	1	3	$2,000,000
(4) Demolish or repurpose existing visitors center.	2	3	
Lawn → Prairie			
(1) Identify the exact spaces in which Piedmont prairie is desired: between Horton Grove and the Great Barn, and between Horton Grove and Old Oxford Hwy/Jock Rd.	2	1	No cost.
(2) Work with TLC or another consultant to develop a plan for each specific transition site.[36] **(Note: this process will likely take 5+ years and include prescribed burns at a safe distance from the historic structures)**	2	3	
(3) Mow trails between visitor center and Horton Grove; between Horton Grove and the Great Barn	2	1	
(4) Install interpretive waysides	3	2	$1,000 per wayside
Swept dirt yards			
(1) Identify the locations and parameters of desired swept dirt yards.	1	1	No cost.
(2) Starting in winter (when the grass is already browner and less vibrant), begin to kill the grass in the desired areas. One way is **solarization**, which uses plastic sheets weighted down at the edges to "cook" the grass using sunlight.[37] This will take ~4	1	2	

[36] For an overview of the transition from abandoned agricultural field into native grassland community, see the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's description of the five-year transition of another Stagville field to Piedmont Prairie, https://www.fws.gov/raleigh/pdfs/NativeGrassFactsheet.pdf

[37] One of many step-by-step solarization articles available on the internet: https://www.tipsbulletin.com/how-to-kill-grass-without-chemicals/. An article with organic herbicide: https://www.tipsbulletin.com/natural-weed-killer/#simple-vinegar-amp%3B-castile-soap-based-weed-killer-recipe

months. After the grass has completely dried, rototill the sod under and tamp the dirt down.			
(3) Maintain the swept yards by sweeping (as able) and/or using another organic herbicide (such as concentrated vinegar, salt) to kill any volunteer plants.	1	1	$10
Miscellaneous			
(1) Construct Black Locust split-rail fence between Horton Grove houses and roads, gate driveway to Horton Grove with pedestrian access.	1	1 (state funding secured in July 2020).	$23,000 (materials alone, labor by site staff)
(2) Tree trimming to protect houses at Horton Grove while maintaining shade trees, specifically on Black Walnut and other oldest trees.	1	2	TBD
(3) Re-plant shade trees to replace trees at end of lifespan in grove. Possibly graft from existing iconic Black Walnut.	2	2	TBD
(4) Re-plant kitchen garden and orchard plantings for c. 1860 and c. 1930 landscape at Horton Grove.	2	2	TBD
(5) Bury or move power lines at Horton Grove to not obstruct viewshed.	3	2	TBD

Southeastern Half

Main Goal	**Priority Level**	**Feasibility**	**Estimated Cost**
Transportation corridor			
(1) Cut walking trail along old roadbed between Bennehan House and Old Oxford Highway	1	1	TBD
(2) Cut back vegetation and trees to increase visibility on blind curve at pedestrian crossing.	1	1	TBD

(3) Build a footbridge over the creek.[38]	1	1	In house?
(4) "Pave" dirt trail with more stable substrate or gravel, drainage, trail erosion controls.	2	2	TBD
(5) Clear underbrush to open forest and clear unhealthy or crowding trees on slope.	2	2	In house?
(6) Install three interpretive waysides.	2	2	$3,000
(7) Consult engineer/landscape architect for route of new access driveway.	2	3	TBD
(8) Environmental review, permits, and construction for a stream culvert for driveway.	2	3	$50,000
(9) Construct new gravel driveway.	2	3	TBD
(10) Install professional navigational signage to help visitors navigate between both halves of the site.			
Hiking loop trail			
(1) Work with historians and archaeologists to define a path for hiking trail.	2	1	No cost.
(2) Cut trail along proposed path -- work with NC State Parks.	2	2	TBD
(3) Install two interpretive waysides.	2	3	$2,000

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[38] For trail footbridge construction, see recent wooden bridges built by TLC at Horton Grove. For more, resources from California State Parks: http://www.parks.ca.gov/pages/1324/files/Chapter%2016%20-%20Trail%20Bridges.FINAL.04.04.19.pdf From NPS: https://www.nps.gov/noco/learn/management/upload/NCT_CH5.pdf

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Further Resources

Environmental Racism and Blackness in U.S.

Holifield, R., Chakraborty, J., & Walker, G. (2018). *The Routledge Handbook of Environmental Justice*. Routledge.

Pulido, L. (2017). Geographies of race and ethnicity II: Environmental racism, racial capitalism and state-sanctioned violence. *Progress in Human Geography, 41*(4), p. 524-533. DOI: 10.1177/0309132516646495

Vasudevan, P. (2019). An intimate inventory of race and waste. *Antipode, 0*(0), p. 1-21. DOI: 10.1111/anti.12501

History of Bennehan and Cameron families

Anderson, J. (1985). *Piedmont Plantation: The Bennehan-Cameron Family and Lands in North Carolina*. The Historic Preservation Society of Durham.

National Historic Register applications for both sections of the property

- Horton Grove Complex: https://files.nc.gov/ncdcr/nr/DH0003.pdf
- Bennehan House / Stagville: https://files.nc.gov/ncdcr/nr/DH0007.pdf

Other Cameron properties

Nathans, S. (2017). *A Mind to Stay: White Plantation, Black Homeland*. Harvard University Press.

- Emphasizes the lives and work of enslaved people who were forced to move from North Carolina to Cameron plantations in the Deep South, and their ongoing legacies, land ownership, and autonomy.

Site history prior to Thomas Bennehan's arrival

Anderson, J. (1985). *Piedmont Plantation: The Bennehan-Cameron Family and Lands in North Carolina*. The Historic Preservation Society of Durham.

- The early chapters of Anderson's book provide further detail on Stagville land as part of Lord Granville's claim

Magnuson, T. (n.d.) Trading Path Association. http://tradingpath.org/

- Web page and blog of Tom Magnuson's Trading Path Association, which occasionally hosts events with Stagville and publishes blog content on early NC roadways and settlement

Swept dirt yards

Westmacott, R. (1992). *African-American gardens and yards in the rural South.* University of Tennessee Press.

- The first few chapters might include some interesting historical context for swept dirt yards

Louis P. Nelson, "The Architectures of Black Identity," Winterthur Portfolio 45, no. 2/3 (Summer/Autumn 2011): 177-194. https://doi-org.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/10.1086/660810

- Abstract: "This article argues against the long-standing penchant to interpret the architecture of enslaved and free Africans in the Americas as evidence of West African cultural survivals. Conversely, this article reflects on the recent practice of repurposing amortized and discarded shipping containers to suggest that the earliest generation of free blacks in Jamaica similarly erected creative architectural responses to the intense pressures of colonialism. These buildings represent strategies by free blacks to fashion a way of life with limited material availability, shaped by intensive climatic conditions and oppressive racial injustices."