

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](#).

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Vision Statement	3
Challenges & Opportunities	3
Historical Landscape Overview	4
Site Landscape Goals	9
Ideal Future Visitor Experience	9
Plan Description and Outcomes	11
Interpretive Outcomes	11
Logistical Outcomes	12
Historic Preservation Outcomes	13
Development Plan	14
Northwestern Half	16
Southeastern Half	16
Works Cited	17

Further Resources	19
Environmental Racism and Blackness in U.S.	19
History of Bennehan and Cameron families	19
Other Cameron properties	19
Site history prior to Thomas Bennehan's arrival	19
Swept dirt yards	20

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.¹ 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

In this plan, the term “landscape” includes: the buildings at Stagville²; 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.

¹ For more on the NC Historic Sites Program, visit the website <https://historicsites.nc.gov/>

² 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, Fairintosh, 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.

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 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 indigenous 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.³ 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 counties⁴ (Anderson, 1985), not including additional holdings in Alabama and Mississippi.⁵ 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 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.

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



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

³ See end of this document for a list of additional resources.

⁴ In 1860, the counties were Orange, Wake, Person, and Granville. Durham County split from Orange County in 1881.

⁵ 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.

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



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."

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.⁶ 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 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.⁷

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 Fairintosh. 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

⁶ 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.

⁷ 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*.

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.⁸ 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 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.⁹ 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



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.



Work at Flat River Bottoms, 1931-1941

⁸ 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).

⁹ There is much scholarship on this topic. See end of this document for additional resources.

properties of the Bennehans and Camerons.

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 Fairtosh 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 Fairtosh 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 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

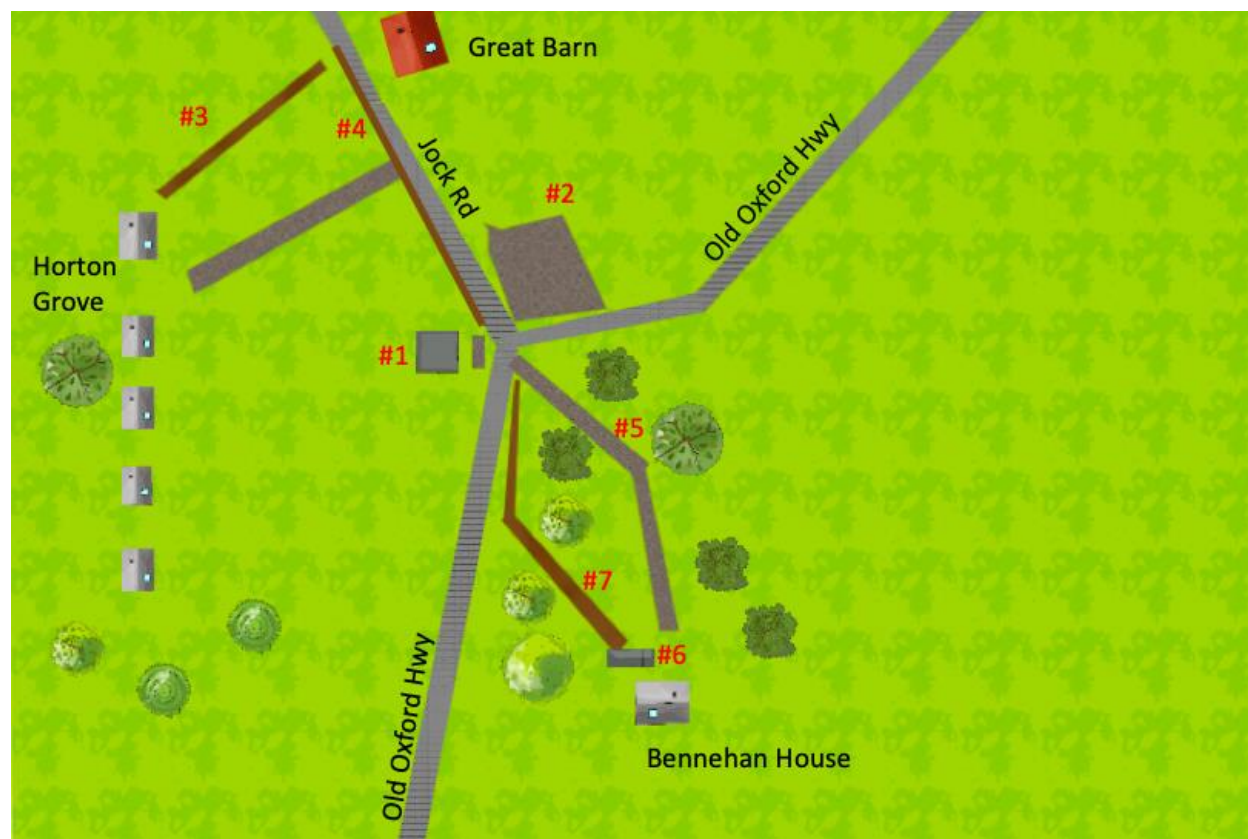


Figure 1: Graphic depiction of unified Stagville landscape. **Depiction not to scale.**

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 1930.¹⁰ 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



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.

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).

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 $\frac{2}{3}$ and 1.5 miles to view the entire site, with an optional vehicle route and parking available for those with mobility needs.

¹⁰ 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.

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;
- 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

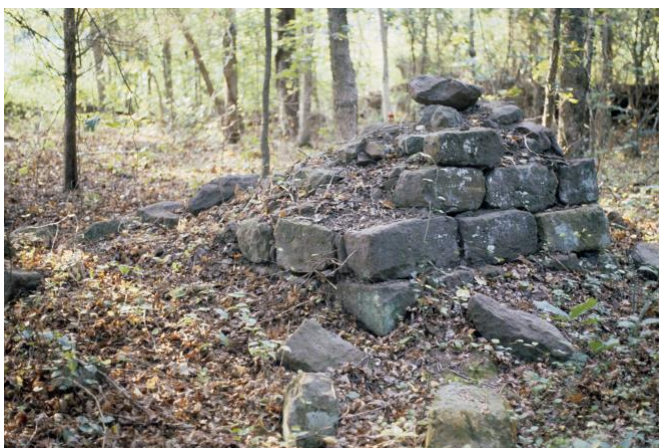
- **Visitor center:** The new location of the visitor center would re-orient the site to center Horton Grove and the experiences of African-American communities before and after emancipation, which aligns more fully with Stagville's interpretive goals. A new visitors center would also enhance the interpretive 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.
- **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



Piedmont prairie on Triangle Nature Conservancy land

“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.
- **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.



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

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 Jock Rd (drainage, entrance, enclosure as needed).	3	2	
(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. ¹¹ (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. ¹² This will take ~4 months. After the grass has completely dried, rototill the sod under and tamp the dirt down.	1	2	

¹¹ 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>

¹² 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>

(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. ¹³	1	1	In house?

¹³ 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->

(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

Works Cited

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

Brown, D. L. (1999, August). Black hands, green gardens: In African American yards, nurturing the roots. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <http://libproxy.lib.unc.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/408501809?accountid=14244>

Davis, R.P.S., Jr. (2006). Great Trading Path. In W.S. Powell (ed.) & J. Mazzocchi (associate ed.), *Encyclopedia of North Carolina* (1st edition, 533-534). University of North Carolina Press.

[%20Trail%20Bridges.FINAL.04.04.19.pdf](#) From NPS:
https://www.nps.gov/noco/learn/management/upload/NCT_CH5.pdf

- Deiss, K. (2010). *“To different people, it was a different treasure”*: The creation and development of Historic Stagville, 1976-1981. [Unpublished master’s thesis]. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
- Fetcher, R. T. (2008). The Trading Path and North Carolina. *Journal of Backcountry Studies*, 3(2), 1-13. <https://libjournal.uncg.edu/index.php/jbc/article/viewFile/26/15>
- Fountain, D. (2014). A broader footprint: Slavery and slaveholding households in antebellum Piedmont North Carolina. *The North Carolina Historical Review*, 91(4), 407-444.
- Hackenburg, D. (2016, January 12). *TLC to conduct controlled burn at Horton Grove Nature Preserve*. Triangle Land Conservancy. <https://www.triangleland.org/natural-habitats/tlc-to-conduct-controlled-burn-at-horton-grove-nature-preserve>
- Jenkins, V.S. (1994). *The lawn: A history of an American obsession*. Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Kukis, M. (1992). *Master and slaves at work in the North Carolina Piedmont: The Nicholas Bryor Massenburg Plantation, 1834-1861*. [Unpublished master’s thesis]. Rice University.
- Lounsbury, C. & McDaniel, G. W. (July 1980). *Recording Plantation Communities: Report on the Architectural and Historical Resources at Stagville*. North Carolina Division of Archives and History.
- McFarland, K. (2006). Stagville. In W.S. Powell (ed.) & J. Mazzocchi (associate ed.), *Encyclopedia of North Carolina* (1st edition, 1068-1069). University of North Carolina Press.
- Raver, A. (1993, August). In Georgia’s swept yards, a dying tradition. *The New York Times*, 1, 28. Retrieved from <http://libproxy.lib.unc.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/109080895?accountid=14244>
- Smith, J. D. (2013). “I was raised poor and hard as any slave: African American slavery in Piedmont North Carolina. *The North Carolina Historical Review*, 90(1), 1-25.
- Triangle Land Conservancy (2012, February). Horton Grove prairie restoration begins with prescribed burn. *Conservation Connection*, February 2012. https://www.triangleland.org/cms/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/CC_Feb2012.pdf
- Tysinger, W. (2018, May 8). *Prescribed fire*. Triangle Land Conservancy. <https://www.triangleland.org/company-news/prescribed-fire>
- Vlach, J. M. (1993). *Back of the big house: The architecture of plantation slavery*. University of North Carolina Press.

Zambello, E. (2014, April 17). *Saving Historic North Carolina Ecosystems*. Triangle Land Conservancy. <https://www.triangleland.org/blog/saving-historic-north-carolina-ecosystems>

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."