

“To Different People, it was a Different Treasure”:
The Creation and Development of Historic Stagville, 1976-1981

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Abstract

Kristin Deiss: "To Different People, it was a Different Treasure":
The Creation and Development of Historic Stagville, 1976-1981
(Under the direction of Heather Williams, Anne Mitchell Whisnant, and Louise
McReynolds)

As a state-owned historic site, Historic Stagville was not originally intended to be a site that interpreted its plantation history and slavery for visitors; rather, it was to be a Preservation Center that emphasized preservation education. This essay seeks to understand that decision through analyzing Stagville's development from its acquisition by North Carolina in 1976 to its organizational transfer in 1981. The relationship between Stagville and its place and time, namely Durham County in the late 1970s, makes clear the power that local influences had in shaping that decision. Furthermore, an examination of this process enables historians to gain a better understanding of the contours and contestations of public history, especially that which involves slavery. And though Stagville may have been a unique case among other historic sites in the state, its early years provide further insight into the conditions of public history during the late 1970s in North Carolina.

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Table of Contents

Chapter	
I.	Introduction.....1
II.	Interest in the Past.....8
III.	Rise of Public History and Durham’s New Industry.....18
IV.	Durham’s Black Community.....27
V.	Forming Relationships and Finding Support.....52
VI.	Conclusion.....58
	Bibliography.....63

Chapter One: Introduction

Driving up a long, dirt and gravel driveway, under a brilliantly sunny sky, with a warm breeze whipping around her inside her red Corvette convertible, Alice Eley Jones was anything but excited. Wanting to be in the middle of it all, in the heart of urban Washington D.C., Jones instead found herself in the backwoods of rural Durham County, North Carolina. And things only got worse; she couldn't stop thinking about the kicked up stones from the gravel nicking away at her shiny red paint.

Jones was arriving at Historic Stagville in June of 1985—one of the largest antebellum plantations in the South then owned and operated by the State of North Carolina. This young African American woman, armed with a new Masters degree in history from North Carolina Central University, had been afforded the opportunity to work at this historic site through a fellowship. Needing a job, she couldn't turn it down. Although it did not fit the historical focus she was interested in, which was constitutional history, Jones met the challenge unhappy, but ready to work. Grudgingly preparing herself to endure the next six weeks of her fellowship, Jones entered Stagville.¹

Today it is difficult to visit this site and not be transported back into time. Located deep within rural Durham County, the seventy-one acre tract that Stagville

¹Alice Eley Jones, phone interview by author, 4 March 2010.

now occupies is set back into the woods where just a few narrow roads lead. After driving for miles down pine-lined roads, the driveway suddenly appears, hidden from any unsuspecting eye. A half-mile down the drive, a big, white house comes into view, clearly dating from the antebellum South. Forking left at the break, visitors are greeted by a visitor's center, its brown roof and dark green siding barely visible through the brush surrounding the house, tucked away as to not disturb the scenery.

Tours given at Stagville today not only focus on the planters, but they also show visitors the other side of the plantation story: slavery. Once the tour of the Bennehan House is finished, visitors climb back into their modern day vehicles to take another trip into the past: a very different view of the past. As visitors drive about a half-mile down that same tree-lined road, then down yet another dirt and gravel path to what is known as Horton Grove, four, simple two-story, wooden slave quarters begin to peek out from the brush, creating a clear contrast to the grandiose nature of the white house visitors had just left. And just a few more yards away, a towering white barn invites visitors who gaze upon its size to come closer and marvel at its antebellum architecture.

These six structures at Historic Stagville, all original, enable the site to give a unique and well-rounded interpretation of plantation life, complete with stunning visual accompaniments, to anyone who visits. However, in the summer of 1985, when Alice Eley Jones arrived at Stagville dreading the next six weeks of her fellowship, neither the site's literature nor the tours were doing such a thing. While informing visitors of plantation life, the tours and the literature at the site focused

on the planter's story, leaving slave life to the visitors' imaginations. Enraptured by the feeling the space and structures at Stagville created, Jones began taking steps to provide the public with more information about the approximately nine hundred slaves who had once occupied and worked what, by 1860, amounted to nearly thirty-thousand acres of land.

Upon her arrival, Jones noticed the lack of information regarding the slave population at Stagville. Even with four slave cabins still in tact, and a large barn both designed and built by the slaves on the site's grounds, there was little in the tour and virtually nothing in writing to explain that history to visitors. After giving her first tour at the site, Jones sat at the typewriter, and typed up a short brochure on the African American presence at Stagville, based on sources readily available at the site. Understanding the impact she could have at Stagville, Jones began a quest to better understand the African American experience at this plantation, portions of which had been so neatly preserved over the past decade. So, while Jones found herself in a completely different situation than she would have liked, she started researching a topic that would not only change her life but also change the future intentions of the site, to not only include, but focus on, the rich black history that Stagville had the unique opportunity to tell.²

Acquired by the state in 1976, the site was not originally intended to be a traditional historic site for visitors, and in fact, was to become a Preservation Center where students of all backgrounds and education levels could come to learn about

²ibid.

proper preservation techniques and procedures. Rather than seeing the preserved structures as a window into Stagville’s history as a slave plantation, state officials chose instead to use those structures’ materiality to better understand and educate others on the proper techniques of preservation. By establishing Stagville as a preservation center, the state had attempted to create a space that favored the preservation of the materiality of history, rather than one that used those materials to focus on better understandings of plantation life.³ This study attempts to understand the reasons behind that decision through exploring the site’s development from its acquisition by the state in 1976 under the Historic Sites Section to its organizational move to the Archaeology and Historic Preservation Section in 1981.⁴ Through this exploration of how national and local social, economic, and cultural forces converged in Stagville’s formation in Durham, the process of public history is revealed as complicated and complex, yet inextricably tied to its geographic and chronologic specificity.

As a site-specific case study, this essay contributes to the larger body of scholarship on public history and preservation studies. The process of creating a site, both literally and figuratively, that preserves the past—whether it be a material

³This paper explores a story involving actors at the state level making decisions within and through the mechanisms of state agencies and offices. While it is a story largely based on those decisions, the remainder of the paper will use references to the “state” to refer to those agencies and institutions. I do not wish to point to the entire state administration, nor do I want the state to act as rational actor in this essay, but for the purposes of simplicity and word choice, the state references refer to state agencies and the individuals that comprise them.

⁴The administrative organization of the North Carolina state historic agencies from the years 1976-1982 is as follows: At the top was the Department of Cultural Resources. That Department headed the Division of Archives and History. The Division of Archives and History lead five sections—Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Archives and Records, Historic Sites, Historical Publications, and Museum of History—until 1980 with the addition of two additional sections: State Capitol/Visitor Services, and Tryon Palace.

or intellectual past—is historically embedded in both time and place and must be understood in those terms. Historians Max Page and Randall Mason point out that much of the history of preservation until recently has been understood through the lens of national institutions and their efforts in passing preservation legislation, such as the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. This traditional framework does not address the geographical and chronological issues and influences of “citizens, officials, activists, and professionals [who practice] preservation” highly influenced by “their sense of place.”⁵ This essay contributes to this growing field of preservation history by offering a study of a local process of preservation to contribute to the explanation of why and how individuals participated in such acts.

This study has also been influenced by and contributes to previous public historians’ work insofar as it examines the evolution of a particular site in its cultural context. Works such as Cathy Stanton’s *The Lowell Experiment: Public History in a Postindustrial City* (2006) and Anne Mitchell Whisnant’s *Super-Scenic Motorway: A Blue Ridge Parkway History* (2006) reveal the processes through which public history sites develop to better understand just how public history functions in different locations and in various time periods. Therefore, an examination of the process of Stagville’s development from 1976-1981 enables us to gain a better understanding of the contours and contestations of public history, especially that which involves slavery— what historian James Horton calls, “the tough stuff of

⁵Max Page and Randall Mason, ed., “Rethinking the Roots of the Historic Preservation Movement,” *Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States* (New York: Routledge 2004), 8.

American memory.”⁶ And though Stagville may have been a unique case among other historic sites in the state, its early years provide further insight into the conditions of public history during the late 1970s in North Carolina.

By focusing on the time and place surrounding the process of acquiring and developing Stagville, this study engages the methodology of cultural theorist Raymond Williams. Williams stresses the importance of “social location” in any analysis of either an artistic or intellectual project. This theory dictates that the meaning and formation of such a project cannot be understood as separate from its origins.⁷ That analytical theory, combined with the utilization of both oral history interviews with key players in Stagville’s evolution and primary sources—such as correspondence materials, official memos, minutes from meetings, and state agency papers—provides a window into why the site, in its original stages, emphasized preservation education over the interpretation of black history.

Through exploring the site’s development from its acquisition in 1976 to its organizational move to the Archaeology and Historic Preservation Section in 1981, in conjunction with both the time and place in which this development occurred, it becomes clear that Stagville’s development is not one of simple progression—in fact it was multi-layered and complex. In an effort to dig through those layers and complexities, I will present Stagville’s growth chronologically as a historic site, stopping at points to explain larger historical, social, and economic forces that

⁶James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, ed., *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

⁷Suzanne E. Smith, *Dancing in the Street: Motown and the Cultural Politics of Detroit* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 9.

surrounded and influenced that growth. Through this exploration of the relationship between Stagville and its time and place, namely Durham—both urban and rural—in the 1970s, four local threads of influence will come to the fore: the rise of historical interest, the drive for new industry and economic profit, the anxiety over black identity and its relationship to slavery, and the lack of academic interest in public history. Although the four operated together simultaneously, for purposes of simplifying the complexity, this essay will address each strand individually. However the four operated, their influence was largely felt, whether consciously or unconsciously, by the individuals making decisions affecting the outcome of Stagville's future. In an effort to better understand the processes of public history, this study tells that story.

Chapter Two: Interest in the Past

While conducting a statewide historical survey for the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources in the early 1970s, Greer Suttlemyre scanned Durham County for any structures and/or properties that appeared to contain “historical, archaeological, cultural [or] architectural significance.”⁸ During one such survey he stumbled upon, “A house [that] could hardly have appeared more desolate.” Suttlemyre at once recognized the late eighteenth century architecture as that of a plantation owner’s residence. With rails torn, windows shattered, and vines taking up residence in the siding, the dilapidated house was remarkably still standing after almost two centuries.⁹ After research confirming the historical existence of the land as Stagville Plantation and the structure as originally belonging to a man by the name of Richard Bennehan, the Bennehan House, dating from 1787, was entered onto the National Register of Historic Places in 1973 by then owner Liggett and Myers Tobacco Company.¹⁰

⁸Thomas F. King, *Cultural Resource: Laws and Practice* (New York: Altamira Press, 2004), 22.

⁹Paul Bonner, “Historic Gem gleaned out of tangled growth- State survey saves Stagville Plantation from certain ruin- Preservation effort was an impetus for Society’s start,” *Herald-Sun* (Durham, NC), 26 April, 1999. America’s Newspapers, NewsBank Inc.

¹⁰Upon Bennehan Cameron’s death in 1925, his daughter Isabel Cameron van Lennep became owner of one half of her father’s lands, known as Stagville, while the other half, Fairntosh, fell into the ownership of Cameron’s other daughter Sally Cameron Labouisse. Isabel eventually sold Stagville to Pat Brown Lumber Company who ended this chain of land titles when in 1954 the company sold 3,088 acres of Stagville lands to Liggett and Myers Tobacco Company. Betty Walker, “Stagville Named Historic Shrine,” *Durham Morning Herald*, 13 June 1973. North Carolina Collection Clipping File Through 1975. North Carolina Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (Hereafter

Stagville first developed in the late eighteenth century under Richard Bennehan whose holdings, over the course of some sixty years and under the eventual ownership of his grandson Paul Cameron, came to include nearly thirty thousand acres and about nine hundred slaves. Through marriage, Stagville's lands joined nearby Fairtosh to create this massive estate under Paul Cameron, and by the eve of the Civil War, the estate had become the largest plantation, and Cameron the richest man, in North Carolina.¹¹ As trustees and original board members of the University of North Carolina as well as politicians holding offices such as Supreme Court justice and senator, the men from this family of plantation owners had a direct hand in the administration of the state, solidifying Stagville's large contribution to the state's history.¹² But even with its newly acquired title securing the state's official recognition of the historical significance of the structure, "the Bennehan House remained overgrown with honeysuckle [and] cluttered with broken glass, discarded farm implements and dust."¹³

NCC (UNC)). See also Jean B. Anderson, *A Preliminary Report on Stagville Plantation: The Land and the People* (North Carolina Division of Archives and History, June 1977), 21-27, 54. See also Preservation Resource Group, Inc., "General Management Plan for Stagville Preservation Center," October 1979, 3. NCC (UNC).

¹¹Stagville Nomination Form for the National Register of Historic Places, 8 May 1973. Department of Archives and History, Division of Historical Sites and Museums, Research and Restoration Section, Survey Unit, Box XII.4, Folder 284. North Carolina State Archives (Hereafter NCSA). See also Flo Johnston, "Nearby history: Just a few miles, and you're back in time," *Herald-Sun* (Durham, NC), 2 April 1995. America's Newspapers, NewsBank Inc.

¹²For more information regarding the history at Stagville see Jean B. Anderson, *Piedmont Plantation: The Bennehan-Cameron Family and Lands in North Carolina* (Durham: Historic Preservation Society of Durham, 1985).

¹³Jim Wise, "New focus on STAGVILLE- Interest increases in historic landmark despite worsening budget woes," *Herald-Sun* (Durham, NC), 24 August 2003. America's Newspapers, NewsBank Inc. See also Stagville Nomination Form for the National Register of Historic Places, 8 May 1973. Department of Archives and History, Division of Historical Sites and Museums, Research and Restoration Section, Survey Unit, Box XII.4, Folder 284. NCSA.

The Bennehan House was not unique in its dilapidated condition among properties in the county in the early 1970s. Historic structures throughout Durham were in decay. According to local Durham reporter and historian Jim Wise, “by 1974, Durham was a mess.”¹⁴ This “mess” resulted from the 1950s building boom that focused its efforts on the suburbs, transforming a once bustling metropolis into one that lay empty and deserted. Cities across the country were also facing similar problems, pushing the federal government to implement urban renewal initiatives. Local city officials latched onto these initiatives and started the process of improving Durham’s urban landscape.¹⁵

Unfortunately, not all Durhamites felt the benefits of these improvements. Historian Jean Anderson notes, “What occurred in Durham was correctly called ‘urban removal.’” As black neighborhoods became the main targets for these so-called improvements, city officials did not follow through with their promises of compensating losses or rebuilding these historically black neighborhoods for the benefit of its residents. Hayti—the prominent and well-known black business district of the city—was one such neighborhood that became victim to this “urban removal” taking place in Durham’s inner city. Perceived by many as unfair, these efforts created much bitterness among the African American community, especially

¹⁴Jim Wise, *Durham: A Bull City Story* (Great Britain: Arcadia, 2002), 141. North Carolina Collection at the Durham County Library.

¹⁵During the decades of the 1930s and 40s, construction in Durham significantly slowed due to both the Great Depression and the two world wars, making the 1950s the decade of a building boom. Within this decade, the newly created Durham City Planning Department did not focus on the city center, but rather pushed at the boundaries of the city and started construction at the edges and in the suburbs. Urban renewal started after the creation of the Durham Redevelopment Commission in 1958 in conjunction with a small majority approval of the required local funds bond. Jean Bradley Anderson, *Durham County: A History of Durham County, North Carolina* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 400.

after government officials' promises of improvements and rebuilding failed to come to fruition, leaving "land that had bustled with life [now] a wasteland overgrown with weeds."¹⁶

Black residents of Durham were not the only ones anxious about these urban renewal efforts. From this destruction sprang many residents' nostalgia for the past as they mourned the neighborhoods and historic buildings all across Durham that had been demolished or destroyed in the interest of saving the city.¹⁷ This sentiment that swept across Durham was also felt on a national level, prompting the federal government to create historic preservation legislation. The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 grew out of communities' fears across the country of losing cultural and aesthetic values to the Kennedy Administration's emphasis on urban renewal, which had threatened the fabric of America's integrity—just like it had in Durham. As a result of the new legislation, states began conducting statewide surveys to discover their own endangered historic treasures—explaining how Suttlemyre found himself scanning Durham County in the early 1970s.¹⁸

In the midst of these national and local currents of preservation, the Historic Preservation Society of Durham (HPSD) was chartered in 1974, as a product of

¹⁶Anderson, *Durham County*, 407-408.

¹⁷Ibid. After spending \$41.6 million, the new and improved downtown Durham was still waiting for investors to utilize new space, new roads, new traffic patterns, and new parking garages. It had seemed as if urban renewal brought none of its promised improvements to the city.

¹⁸King, 21-22. These fears and anxieties prompted the Johnson Administration to launch a beautification program under the First Lady, Lady Bird Johnson. The report created out of preliminary studies for this program, entitled *With Heritage So Rich*, recommended the creation of a national historic preservation program. With that recommendation, the piece of legislation known as the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 was enacted, inspiring citizens and state officials to preserve their history, especially those historic structures threatened by removal under the guise of progress.

Durhamites' fear that along with the destruction of Durham's old buildings would also go Durham's heritage and its residents' roots.¹⁹ Influenced by meetings of the Historic Preservation Society of North Carolina that she used to attend in Raleigh with her mother, Margaret Haywood, and the rest of the original twelve well-to-do women of the Preservation Society, led the cause to save Durham after these efforts of urban renewal had resulted in the loss of a number of Durham's landmarks—including the Morehead Hill neighborhood, and eventually the Washington Duke Hotel. But they also did so to save Durham's image, as its reputation among Southern cities was losing its luster. After hearing "that a Southern business magazine had referred to Durham as 'a hot-dog town,' lacking pedigree, taste, and culture," Haywood and her colleagues founded HPSD and in so doing refused to allow Durham's reputation to continue to be tarnished.²⁰ Determined to prove that Durham did in fact embody "pedigree, taste, and culture," the members looked toward Durham's golden days of the past—days when Southern plantations dotted the landscape and the city was a major player in the South's economy. The best way to remind contemporaries of those golden days, HPSD thought, was to preserve and display that history, since, according to Haywood, "very few can dream what a rich heritage Durham has."²¹ As a result, the women Haywood gathered—originally known as "The Pride Builders"—held their first meeting as the Historic Preservation

¹⁹Anderson, *Durham County*, 477.

²⁰Wise, *Durham*, 144.

²¹George Lougee, "Historic Society Meeting Draws 150 People," *Durham Morning Herald*, 17 October 1974. Historic Preservation Society of Durham Archives.

Society of Durham in October of 1974.²² “Thereafter the impulse to preserve, restore, and adapt old buildings to new uses was significantly strengthened by the Society’s work.”²³

Largely driven by the once pristine image of Durham County, the HPSD members were no strangers to the county’s history, and in fact wanted to showcase that history, especially since Durham was not officially a town until after nearby Chapel Hill and Raleigh, a point that Haywood believed real estate agents in those two areas loved to highlight, attempting to make their towns seem more “historic,” and therefore more valuable. So, even though, “among North Carolina’s one hundred counties, Durham is a Johnny-come-lately,” the HPSD wanted to showcase that the region had a history before it had an official name.²⁴ Not established until 1881, Durham County had previously been the minority sector within the much larger and impressive Orange County. But once the eastern section of Orange County had moved past agriculture and onto the booming profits of the tobacco industry, Durham County had amassed enough wealth to remove itself from Orange County and become its own autonomous and independent body. Durham became the new county seat, and, through its tremendous economic gains, a leader in the state.²⁵

²²Ibid.

²³Anderson, *Durham County*, 477.

²⁴Ibid., xi. See also Margaret Haywood, phone interview by author, 9 February 2010.

²⁵Ibid., xi.

Hoping to recapture Durham's glory days, The Historic Preservation Society of Durham eventually made Stagville their cause after learning of the Bennehan House's deteriorating condition through John Baxton Flowers III, an architectural historian working with the survey and planning unit in the Department of Cultural Resources, and a fellow Durham resident. Flowers could not idly witness the decay of historic structures in Durham and as a colleague of Suttlemyre's, was aware of the circumstances surrounding Richard Bennehan's eighteenth century plantation home. Writing to the newly formed HPSD, Flowers described the need for preservation and protection of the many historic structures still standing in Durham. The Bennehan House was among those listed in Flowers' letter and consequently became the Society's cause.²⁶

Taking heed of Flowers' advice, Society members saw in Stagville the potential to reverse Durham's negative image, not the least so in the minds of Durhamites themselves. Not only would Stagville be proof of a once bustling and successful section of North Carolina, but it also presented the Society the opportunity to test its newly formed muscles. In 1975, after much goading and prodding from Society members, Raymond Mulligan, the President of Liggett and Myers, announced that the company would "'make available' the Bennehan House for restoration." To celebrate, the Historic Preservation Society of Durham threw an open house on October 25, 1975. "'We didn't know if anyone would come,' Haywood recalled." Much to the surprise of the hosts, about 500 people attended the event, which included hayrides to the house, spinning wheel demonstrations,

²⁶Bonner, "Historic Gem."

and performances by the Duke Memorial United Methodist Church choir and a troupe of English country dancers. Perhaps most impressively, former Hollywood screenwriter Buck Roberts—then living in Durham—authored a play about the plantation owners performed at the open house by middle school students from Durham Academy. The event brought the community together to celebrate its history. It reflected the pride among those present and was a success.²⁷ Stagville clearly had a hold on Durham, and it would become clear that Durham clearly had a hold on Stagville.

However, the Society felt overwhelmed by the new project. Much to HPSD's relief, the state then became involved, influenced by both Flowers' knowledge of HPSD's efforts and other officials' first hand examination of the structures that comprised Stagville. After exploring the land and discovering the slave quarters and the barn, the state then asked the Society to consider giving Stagville to them, if the Society could successfully persuade Liggett to donate the land to the Department of Cultural Resources. State officials believed Stagville held great potential for research and education, and Flowers recalled, "everyone's imagination was captivated" by what historian Jean Anderson has referred to as "a goldmine of history."²⁸ After seeing the land and the structures, the director of Archives and History Larry Tise thought, "There's a story at Stagville that probably can't be told anywhere else." He later recalled that since "Stagville was like this incredible pie

²⁷Ibid. See also Wise, "New focus on STAGVILLE."

²⁸John B. Flowers III, phone interview by author, 25 February 2010. See also Jean Anderson, interview by author, Durham, NC, 11 February 2010.

that had something of interest to everybody,” it was not hard to get state officials on board.²⁹ Although these multiple interests and visions of what the site could be would haunt later efforts to develop it, they are what first sparked the state’s interest in acquiring the site. Haywood recalled the Society’s relief at the state’s proposition, stating, “It was too good to be true. We would have needed so much money to restore it.”³⁰

As a result of subsequent correspondence, negotiations, and research by all parties involved, the Division of Archives and History, in 1976, recommended that the site be used as “a center for teaching and study of historic preservation techniques and technology.” With that recommendation, and “gentle persuasion” by the Society, Liggett officially donated seventy-one acres of Stagville’s lands to the state, along with the structures on that land including the Bennehan House, the four Slave Quarters, Horton Cottage, the Great Barn, the Tobacco Barn, and the Cemetery.³¹ That donation would become “the largest gift of historic property ever received from an industry in the state of North Carolina.”³²

²⁹Larry Tise, interview by author, Chapel Hill, NC, 21 February 2010.

³⁰Haywood interview.

³¹Wise, “New focus on STAGVILLE.” See also John Flowers and John Kinney, Jr., “Stagville Preservation Center: The Development of a Research and Restoration Facility,” *Technology and Conservation* (Summer 1978): 1. NCC (UNC).

³²Correspondence from Larry E. Tise to Bruce MacDougal, 5 August 1975. North Carolina Division of State Historic Sites Library. See also Richard F. Knapp, “North Carolina State Historic Sites: A Brief History and Status Report” (Historic Sites Section, Division of Archives and History, N.C. Department of Cultural Resources, November 1985), 68-70, and Historic Stagville Foundation, *The Key: Bulletin of the Stagville Preservation Center* (Spring 2000): 2. As well as Pamphlet entitled “Fall Courses Stagville Preservation Center,” year unknown. NCC (UNC).

By rooting Stagville's creation in the context of Durham, it becomes clear that multiple strands of interest intersected to create this appeal in saving and preserving Stagville. At a time when Durham was suffering from failed attempts at urban renewal and the resulting loss of its history, Stagville presented an opportunity for both the city and county to uplift and promote a much better image of the Bull City. The national currents of historic preservation and the local interests to build pride in community and foster roots in heritage joined forces to generate an awareness of the ability of the past to affect the present. In their search for a usable past, Durhamites stumbled upon a historic site that they believed could uplift and save Durham's falling image. Now a state historic site run at both a state and local level, through a cooperative agreement between the Stagville Corporation and the state, Stagville would become a site of contention over how best to utilize the newly acquired property.³³

³³Created in 1977, the Stagville Center Corporation was organized by interested parties from Liggett and Myers and the Historical Preservation Society of Durham to promote development of the Stagville Center in cooperation with the Department of Cultural Resources. This nonprofit organization was the vehicle through which Stagville sought outside funds for the implementation of activities and programs not covered under the basic operating budget funded by the state. "Bylaws of the Stagville Center Corporation of North Carolina," 1977. North Carolina Division of State Historic Sites Library.

Chapter Three: Rise of Public History and Durham's New Industry

This contention would manifest through discussions of the site's purpose. Early in Stagville's life as a state-owned site, Janet Seapker, administrator of the Historic Preservation Section in the North Carolina Division of Archives and History, acknowledged problems inherent in the duality of the site's purpose. On January 15, 1977, in an inaugural meeting of the Advisory Subcommittee on Preservation Technology, one of two subcommittees involved in determining the purpose of the site, she stated:

I have been consistently concerned about the dual role that Stagville has been forced to play: historic site and conservation center. I think this should be carefully monitored and watched because if indeed the thing is allowed to develop in the format of the traditional historic site with the costumed guides and the people coming on Sunday afternoons to play in the yard, I don't think that is particularly appropriate for this place.

She later stated, "I would hope that any kind of visitor contact with Stagville could be oriented toward the research approach, not toward a pretty historic house museum," and in the same breath, "I am sure on the local level the feeling is golly durham County is going to get another historic site and I think that's inappropriate."³⁴ Seapker favored the site becoming a conservation center over a historic site.

³⁴The Advisory Subcommittee on Preservation Technology, "Stagville Center Corporation Proceedings Inaugural Meeting of the Advisory Subcommittee on Preservation Technology," 15 Jan. 1977, 16-17. Archives at Historic Stagville.

In that same meeting, other members seemed to agree that interpretation should take a back seat to the possible “laboratory” teaching and research function anchored in the conservation center concept. The chairman of the meeting, John Kinney Jr.— the consulting architect for the North Carolina Division of Archives and History —disagreed with Seapker when he shared his sentiment that he thought it was “a happy circumstance” that Stagville offered potential for both a historic site and a conservation center. But even when speaking of possible interpretation, most committee members focused on interpreting the Bennehan House rather than the black history at Horton Grove. Seeking ways to please not only state officials but also both the Liggett Group and the local community, the committee members appeared to agree that the Bennehan House could be used to promote the history of the house, while Horton Grove could be used as working laboratory to teach preservation techniques. To this Dick Sawyer, another member of the subcommittee and administrator of the Historic Sites Section, added, “We may change our minds completely. Right now we have no black history site anywhere in the state. In the back of our minds we say that some day Stagville could be developed as a black history site but we have just talked that back and forth—no secrets.”³⁵ The larger context surrounding these debates over the site’s purpose reveal insight into reasons for the stronger appeal for using Stagville as a conservation center rather than as a site in which to interpret black history for the public.

³⁵Ibid., 19-20.

At the time of Stagville’s acquisition and early development, North Carolina’s historical agencies were faced with a new academic field of inquiry in their efforts to create this new historic site: public history. This fairly new field developed in the 1970s as an attempt to bridge the gap between the public and academia, after almost a century of the two worlds occupying separate and distinct spheres. Although the production of history as an enterprise was closely connected to its public audiences in its early stages, the twentieth century’s influences of “the scholarly emphasis on scientific method and personal objectivity” pushed the historical profession further from the public, until it had become isolated within the ivory towers of knowledge. Though sporadic attempts were made to overlap the two distinct realms of history, no collective attempt was made until the 1970s, when two influences converged to create public history as a distinct academic field of inquiry and production. The first force was the job market. Both Ph.D.’s and college graduates in the field of history were having a harder time finding work within universities, and as a result, more of them began working in archives, preservation, and parks and heritage sites: what is now considered public history. Around the same time, philosophical reasons for linking academia and the public emerged from the various leftist causes of the decade. Focusing more on social history, academics began wondering what role they could play outside of the academy—a role that would involve “active civic participation.”³⁶ Due to the convergence of these two historical forces, public history emerged as a serious academic field.

³⁶Stanton, 8-12.

Although the academic field itself did not emerge until the 1970s, the concept of public history was active in the state of North Carolina as early as 1903. North Carolina had administered a state historic program since the 1903 creation of the North Carolina Historical Commission. The Commission was the first in the nation to allocate public funds to preserve and protect the state's history, and as such, "continued to expand into new horizons of public history [and has] habitually established professional standards and methods for other states to follow." By 1973, the agency had undergone two phases of organizational restructuring to become the North Carolina Division of Archives and History under the Department of Cultural Resources. This reorganization occurred just years before the nation's bicentennial of 1976—which sparked interest in history across the state and swelled the number and variety of sites owned and operated by the state under the Historic Sites Section.³⁷ Stagville was one such site.

Working within the context of this fairly new academic field, state officials constantly sought funding for such state-owned projects, and with preservation funds being funneled to the state from the federal government, Stagville, as a preservation site, would have more access to funds.³⁸ Coupled with dwindling visitation numbers at historic sites and a real need for dissemination of fairly new preservation education, Seapker's comments, as well as the Division's decision to

³⁷The Historic Sites Section was at that time one of many sections under the Division of Archives and History. This section was responsible for historic sites in the state. Larry E. Tise, "Preface," *Public History in North Carolina, 1903-1978* ed. Jeffrey J. Crow (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Division of Archives and History, 1979), vii-ix. See also Ansley Herring Wegner, *History for All the People: One Hundred Years of Public History in North Carolina* (Raleigh: Office of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 2003), 57-58. NCC (UNC).

³⁸Robert Price, interview by author, Raleigh, NC, 23 September 2009.

“establish the Stagville Center for Preservation Technology which would serve as a research and teaching facility in the techniques of preserving historic properties,” “rather than develop a historic site,” do not seem so shocking after all.³⁹ Larry Tise, then director of Archives and History, contextualizes state officials’ insistence on making Stagville a working laboratory, rather than a traditional historic site, by explaining problems that arose as currents of preservation fervor swept through the state on the heels of the Bicentennial. As the director of historical publications for the North Carolina Bicentennial Committee in 1973, Tise was charged with organizing County Bicentennial Committees to help counties locate historic structures to restore in efforts to preserve their heritage in the wake of such an important historical moment.⁴⁰

These experiences with preservation and restoration later conflicted with new academic preservation ideas that Tise learned through later interactions with numerous colleagues in the field of public history. Once he became Assistant Director of Archives and History in 1974, Tise was introduced to the conflicts between these two schools of historic preservation. Restoration attempted to restore structures to particular time periods, even if that meant destroying some of their architectural and historical integrity in the process, whereas preservation sought to preserve structures in the condition in which they were found as to not disturb those integrities. Preservation, preferred within the academy and public history, had started to become the professional mode of interacting with the

³⁹Supplemental Agenda, 23 July 1976, Division of State Budget, Agenda Item 17. North Carolina Division of State Historic Sites Library.

⁴⁰Tise interview.

materiality of history, and after having witnessed so many county committees during the bicentennial improperly restoring historic buildings using state funds, Tise could not help but see the potential the structures at Stagville had to alleviate that problem. Likewise, John Flowers, who would later be appointed as the site's first administrator, saw that same potential. Influenced by discussions with colleagues of the Association for Preservation Technology, Flowers saw, what he believed to be, almost nine million dollars spent annually on preservation that was being performed improperly, and thought a remedy was desperately needed. So, when the state became aware of the amazing buildings on the tract of land that the HPSD was trying to save in 1976, it was a logical choice to turn to preservation education as the main impetus for creating a site at Stagville.⁴¹

This desire to create a working laboratory at Stagville that would engage with surrounding research and education facilities also sprung out of the region's new focus on bringing new revenue to the city through research. Resulting not only from better funding and the need for proper preservation education, this push to focus on research and preservation education at Stagville also stemmed from a larger shift of industry and economy occurring in Durham from the 1950s into the 1970s.

North Carolina had not always been invested in the research industry. After heavily relying on three industries—furniture, textiles, and tobacco—for the stability of its economy, North Carolina's government understood the need for diversification. Due to increasing Northern relocation of the furniture industry,

⁴¹Ibid. See also Flowers interview.

increasing textile competition from Asia, and increasing degradation of tobacco products and automation in the tobacco industry, North Carolina's economy held a tenuous status in the 1950s. In 1952, only two states in the nation—Mississippi and Arkansas—had a lower per capita income level than North Carolina. Although no government official foresaw or desired abandonment of those industries, it was clear that diversification of the economy had become necessary, and the post World War II focus on research as “a critical element for industrial growth” afforded the perfect opportunity to do so.⁴²

Industries in research would provide North Carolina with more than just a diversified economy. Although home to three outstanding universities within close proximity to each other—North Carolina State University in Raleigh, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Duke University in Durham—the state was unable to retain college graduates from these prestigious universities as most of their brightest students were attracted by better opportunities elsewhere in the country. This so called “brain drain” largely influenced the state's low per capita income level. Therefore, state officials proposed Research Triangle Park (RTP) in the mid 1950s, in hopes that it would join the three nearby universities in a research collaboration that would hopefully begin to attract other research industries. The proposed RTP would not just be an actual tract of land, but an idea that would engage both the graduates and facilities of NC State, UNC, and Duke to stimulate

⁴²Albert N. Link, *A Generosity of Spirit: The Early History of the Research Triangle Park* (Research Triangle Park: The Research Triangle Foundation of North Carolina, 1995), 2-10.

research for the state and the nation. Its proponents saw RTP as “the marriage of North Carolina’s ideals for higher education and its hopes for material progress.”⁴³

Within the span of a decade, Research Triangle Park had grown large enough to receive its own zip code, and had attracted the relocation of over five major organizations to its lands, resulting in national visibility. As historian Albert Link succinctly states, “By the end of 1965, all indications were that it was a success.” And this success would continue. Through the next ten years, RTP witnessed the addition of fourteen organizations, such as The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Army Research Office and International Business Machines Corporation (IBM).⁴⁴ Thus, by the time the state acquired Stagville, the ideas of academic collaboration for new industry, economic development, and national prominence were well established, and influenced the creation and development of the site.

Depending “on the material resources of the Stagville farm site,” the proposed Stagville Center was to be the first of its kind in the nation: a hallmark in North Carolina’s quest for historic preservation greatness. While it may seem odd that the state would choose a dilapidated eighteenth-century plantation house and surrounding lands to launch such a groundbreaking endeavor, the Department of Cultural Resources did not think so. In fact, it believed Stagville had “ideal attributes as a preservation technology center.” It assessed these attributes as follows:

⁴³Ibid., 3-5, 7, 2.

⁴⁴Ibid., 87-110.

Within a radius of twenty-five miles of the center are three of the largest university libraries in the nation, making available a combined total of over nine million volumes of research materials; the Cameron papers in the Southern Historical Collection (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill) are among the most extensive collections in the state and are unusually rich in content. The Research Triangle Park is the second largest “think tank” in the nation, and its laboratories have the potential for providing great assistance in the development of preservation technology. The single largest local preservation society in the state is located in Durham; with over 750 members, the Historic Preservation Society of Durham has an active preservation program dedicated to supporting the center with moral and financial resources. A cooperative arrangement between the Division of Archives and History and 27 colleges and universities, operating as the Institute of Applied History, provides a mechanism through which to offer credit courses in preservation technology.⁴⁵

Largely based on its location, Stagville held a potential that could launch North Carolina into national prominence. Believing the center to be “sorely needed to foster an increasing exchange of understanding among professional preservation disciplines and generate fundamental information about building preservation technologies,” the Department of Cultural Resources believed they had found a diamond in the rough.⁴⁶ It seems that while Margaret Haywood and the Society saw in Stagville the promise to uplift the downtrodden city of Durham, Larry Tise and

⁴⁵North Carolina Division of Archives and History, “Proposal for the Stagville Center for Preservation Technology,” 1976. North Carolina Division of State Historic Sites Library.

⁴⁶Ibid. See also North Carolina Division of Archives and History, “Program Outline: Stagville Center,” 1976. North Carolina Division of State Historic Sites Library.

the state's administrations saw in Stagville the ability to elevate North Carolina onto the national stage.⁴⁷

⁴⁷The success of RTP helps explain the original excitement over the geographic location of the Stagville Center. But the ideas behind RTP also help shed light on both the inspirations for such a project and the goals and aspirations of the individuals who wished to embark on this new bold experiment at Stagville. Having already witnessed the potential of such an innovative approach to collaboration and research, it seems that in their attempt to create the first state-owned working laboratory that would both educate and research methods of preservation technology, state officials were not only seeking national prominence and a place within the burgeoning field of research, but also economic gains as well, pointing to officials' hope that the Stagville Preservation Center would bring in some revenue for both the city and state. In her study of Lowell, Massachusetts, historian Cathy Stanton explores how town officials utilized its past for a profit attempting to regenerate the once industrial center. The term "culture-led regeneration" as Stanton points out, can be used to explain this idea, "particularly the notion that cultural activities may be useful in establishing a kind of beachhead from which other kinds of economic and social growth can take hold." In the case of Stagville then, that type of cultural attempt becomes evident when placed within the context of the burgeoning Research Triangle Park. Cathy Stanton, *The Lowell Experiment: Public History in a Postindustrial City* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 5.

Chapter Four: Durham's Black Community

Research as an industrial pursuit, and preservation as both a hot topic among public historians and a means to access federal and state funds, were not the only local forces helping to shape the creation and development of Stagville. Black history as an academic pursuit was on the rise, and influenced early plans for Stagville. “Carried along by the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s,” historians at the time began viewing the profession of history as one to democratize by adding the stories of those who had, until then, been left out—such as women, gays, workers, immigrants, and African Americans.⁴⁸ This new social history trend was also evident in publications by state officials involved with Stagville's development as a preservation center. Public history in North Carolina was clearly recognizing the need for interpretive efforts aimed at the African American history of the state, and the projects of two actors working in public history for the state, Jeffrey Crow and Larry Tise, evidence those very sentiments.

During Stagville's early development, Crow acted as head of the General Publications Branch under the Historical Publications Section.⁴⁹ With his Ph.D. from Duke University, Crow was no stranger to the academic world. His engagement with

⁴⁸Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 4.

⁴⁹Jeffrey J. Crow, ed., *The Black Experience in Revolutionary North Carolina* (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, Department of Cultural Resources, 1977), 121. NCC (UNC).

that world led him to argue, in *The Black Experience in Revolutionary North Carolina* (1977), that “While university and commercial publishing houses have poured forth a plethora of new works on slavery in the past decade, relatively few of them [have] undertaken the analysis of the peculiar institution in this state alone.”⁵⁰ As a major actor in the North Carolina public history field during the time, Crow was aware of trends in his field, and his work exemplified a larger interest the state started to take in African American history during the late '70s.

Larry Tise also participated in this growing interest. With a Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, and a dissertation entitled ““Proslavery Ideology: A Social and Intellectual History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1790-1840,” Tise was aware of the historiography of North Carolina slavery as well.⁵¹ Along with Crow, Tise edited a collection of essays entitled *Writing North Carolina History* (1979), which evaluated the field’s treatment of the history of North Carolina. In that evaluation, historian Harry Watson, a contributor, explained, “The principal area that calls for investigation [in the historiography of North Carolina’s history] is the nature of slavery and slave-based society.”⁵² African American history had started to gain relevance as an emerging area of focus within the larger history of the state, but work was still needed to bridge the gap between academics and the general public. In the introduction, Crow and Tise voiced

⁵⁰Ibid., 117.

⁵¹Larry E. Tise, “Proslavery Ideology: A Social and Intellectual History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1790-1840,” (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1974). NCC (UNC).

⁵²Harry Watson, “The Historiography of Antebellum North Carolina, 1835-1860,” *Writing North Carolina History*, ed. Jeffrey J. Crow and Larry E. Tise (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1979), 126. NCC (UNC).

concern over this lack of connection between the public and the professionals in the field, calling for a direct dialogue that would keep the public better educated on its state's history. They wrote:

The decline in the formal study and teaching of history is a complex issue that yields no simple solution. But if professional historians abdicate their responsibility to demonstrate the pertinence of historical inquiry and perspective, if they withdraw into the insular walls of academia, if they permit the ahistorical and untutored to interpret the past's meanings for the present, then state and local history in North Carolina and elsewhere will become by default the province of hagiographers, antiquarians, and local chambers of commerce. In the absence of discourse between historians and the general public, dangerous misconceptions and misinformation can be propagated. . . But if historians don't mediate between the past and present, who will?⁵³

Furthermore, this interest in black history in the late 1970s was starting to become evident through actions taken at another site under the state's administration—namely Somerset Place. At the time of Stagville's acquisition, in 1976, the Division was home to twenty state historic sites, including Somerset Place—the remnants of a once large plantation in the Eastern part of the state. However, not until 1979, with the revision of Somerset's master plan did Somerset include the enslaved population in the interpretive plans for the site.⁵⁴ Thus, the state was not actively interpreting African American history at their sites when the Division acquired Stagville.⁵⁵

⁵³Jeffrey J. Crow and Larry E. Tise, ed., *Writing North Carolina History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), xiv-xv. NCC (UNC).

⁵⁴Alisa Y. Harrison, "Reconstructing Somerset Place: Slavery, Memory, and Historical Consciousness," (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 2008), 300.

⁵⁵Robert R. Garvey, Jr., "North Carolina's State Historic Sites," *Public History in North Carolina, 1903-1978* ed. Jeffrey J. Crow (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Division of Archives and History, 1979), 61.

In her analysis of Somerset's development, historian Alisa Harrison agrees that the late 1970s witnessed a turn in the way the state agencies of North Carolina interpreted history. Planning efforts for the bicentennial caused Archives and History to realize that they needed to revamp historical interpretation efforts, and the department attempted to move away from the heavy focus on the upper crust of society, to allow for the inclusion and more interpretation of those below. Although part of this decision resulted from competition with the surrounding states of South Carolina and Virginia for visitors, the Division was also influenced by historiographical trends toward new social history. Moving from the stories of the rich white elite, and towards the history of the common person, historical sites in North Carolina followed—albeit almost a decade behind—the academic wave of social history that focused on writing history from the bottom-up. Commenting on this influence of academia, Larry Tise eloquently explained that:

History, like it or not, is a relativistic pursuit. If it were not, we would not have historiography. While some things in history are more relative than others and while some of the concerns of historians are mere passing fads, it is a fact that certain themes and topics will be of continual concern. There is likely not a single historical agency in America that has not made its bow to minority history. But as faddish as the study of minorities has been in recent years, it is not likely that the concern will die out.

Additionally, the popularity of the Roots miniseries “meant that after 1977 African American history occupied a new position in state-sponsored historical displays.” However, it was not until 1986 that the efforts and research required to implement the 1979 revisions to Somerset's master plan finally came to fruition, at last visibly resulting in the site's interpretation of slavery for its visitors.⁵⁶

⁵⁶Harrison, 289. Qtd. In Harisson, 266. Harrison, 313, 300-301.

Therefore, as state officials were first engaging in discussions revolving around Stagville's purpose in 1976, they had no local models of African American history sites to either analyze or emulate. In fact, Alice Eley Jones contends that her presence at Stagville in 1985 was one of the very few examples of historians at public sites interpreting black history.⁵⁷ The choice to interpret black history at Stagville, then, would have been breaking entirely new ground in the field of public history in North Carolina, and the state was apparently either hesitant to do so or simply lost in *how* to do so. Filtering historiography from academia into the public realm is a process, one that takes time, as evidenced by the black history that slowly made its way into public history sites and museums. Though academics were responding to demands of the liberation movements of the 60s and 70s, "it took an extra decade for the narratives about African Americans that were becoming so commonplace in the academy to make their way into public discourse."⁵⁸ Therefore, public history sites that had previously been focused on celebrating the antebellum South were slow to revise their exhibits and interpretations to include the new academic focus on black history.⁵⁹

Although black history began to filter down from the ivory towers and into the public spaces of sites and museums, interpreting African American history is different from interpreting the concept of slavery. Slavery, "the tough stuff of

⁵⁷Jones interview.

⁵⁸Harrison, 291, 305-306.

⁵⁹W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 293.

American memory,” poses numerous challenges to public historians attempting to approach the controversial topic in a public setting. Therefore, public history’s treatment of slavery has received much attention from historians who critique the multiple ways in which that history is either forgotten or minimalized. Historian James Horton argues that because so many Americans learn their history from museums and historic sites, those very sites and museums have obligations to “attempt to address popular ignorance” on the topic. Acknowledging that slavery is difficult to address in public settings due to its controversial nature and its place “at the core of American identity and conscience,” Horton also believes that discussion is necessary because it affects race relations in the present.⁶⁰ In other words, the past has the potential to create negative legacies of racial meaning for those in the present if not directly confronted and understood.⁶¹

Furthermore, the fact that most visitors to museums and sites believe that what they learn there is the truth further complicates the contest for memory in these spaces. According to a survey of American citizens conducted by Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, about eighty percent of those surveyed trusted museums and historical sites as a source on history—a higher number than the fifty-five percent who trusted college professors.⁶² While the public education that the majority of Americans have received on the topic of slavery has transformed over

⁶⁰James Horton, “Slavery in American History: An Uncomfortable National Dialogue,” *Slavery and Public History*, ed. James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton (New York: The New Press, 2006), 36, 38, 46.

⁶¹Joanne Melish, “Recovering (From) Slavery,” *Slavery and Public History*, ed. James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton (New York: The New Press, 2006), 105.

⁶²Rosenzweig and Thelen, 21.

the past few generations from preparing “children to think about slavery and race in ways consistent with the assumption of white supremacy” to introducing and discussing the role of race in slavery, Horton contends it has not changed drastically enough. This is due in large part to the lack of dialogue between academia and the public; much of the best and recent historical scholarship on the topic produced in academia never reaches most Americans. Horton argues that it most certainly never reaches high school level, and that “history education at the college level is generally better, but in 82% of the nation’s colleges United States history courses are not required, even for liberal arts majors.” Moreover, when those same Americans visit museums and sites that reinforce a romanticized vision of slavery, visitors’ views on race become skewed with the potential to negatively affect the ways in which those visitors think about racial meanings in their everyday lives.⁶³

Even with these challenges, however, efforts at interpreting slavery at Stagville were present, even from the outset, in large part due to the remarkable sources it offers for the study of slavery. The standing structures, such as the Great Barn and the slave quarters built by the enslaved people, reveal both cultural and material aspects of plantation slave communities. Furthermore, the private records kept by the Bennehans and Camerons include detailed records about their slaves, such as their names and the dates of births and deaths. They are invaluable and rare resources that even caught the attention of historian Herbert Gutman, who in *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom* (1976) pieced together some of the African American ancestry at the plantation. In this work, Gutman contested the notion that

⁶³Horton, “Slavery in American History,” 40-42.

twentieth century single parent black families were a result of plantation life—an idea made popular by Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s *The Negro Family in America* (1965). Instead, Gutman argued that family life for black slaves on plantations occurred outside of the masters’ orders and that this somewhat autonomous community consisted mostly of two-parent households. Utilizing the rich records left by Stagville’s plantation owners, among others, Gutman was able to discuss aspects of slave plantation life such as naming practices and kinship networks and ties.⁶⁴ His use of the information available from Stagville to create such strong arguments undoubtedly demonstrated the value of the African American history inherent at the site. Local historians, such as Sydney Nathans, Peter Wood, (both from Duke University), Earlie E. Thorpe (from NC Central), Donald Scott (from NC State), and John Semonche (from UNC) who were all members of the Advisory Subcommittee on Education in 1977—another committee charged with determining the site’s purpose—also took note.⁶⁵ According to the *Tar Heel*, “The Quarters, combined with the extraordinarily well-kept slave registers at Stagville, constitute one of America’s richest black historic artifacts.”⁶⁶ These resources would logically

⁶⁴To read more about this study refer to Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom: 1750-1925* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976).

⁶⁵Stagville Center Corporation, “Advisory Committee on Historic Preservation Technology and Education: Subcommittee on Education Roster, March 1977. Archives at Historic Stagville. See also Sydney Nathans, phone interview by author, 7 March 2010.

⁶⁶Marguerite Schumann, “The Quarters at Horton Grove: Preserving a Different Side of Antebellum History,” *Tar Heel* 8, no. 5 (July 1980): 16. NCC (UNC). See also Horton Grove Nomination Form for the National Register of Historic Places, 12 January 1978. Department of Cultural Resources, Division of Archives and History, Archaeology and Historical Preservation Section, Survey and Planning Branch. Nominations to National Register of Historic Places File, 1977- ca. 1982. Box XII.25, folder 535. NCSA.

excite interest by the state, and, from the start, efforts were made to perform research pertaining to the history of slavery at Stagville.

Jean Anderson, a contract researcher for the Division of Archives and History, was appointed to prepare an initial study of the site. As a professional geneologist and historian with her MA from the University of Pennsylvania, her resulting 1977 work, *A Preliminary Report on Stagville Plantation: The Land and the People*, noted the presence of a rich black history.⁶⁷ In this initial study, the slave presence at Stagville was very much part of the plantation narrative as a whole. Using a combination of oral histories from those “who lived or worked at Stagville and can remember how things were in their day,” as well as the Cameron Family papers housed at the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina, Anderson was able to refer to slaves by name as she discussed records the Camerons’ kept, and was even able to describe both their physical and mental attributes from letters in her sources. These letters also reveal the Camerons’ worry over the health of their slaves, as well as the former slaves’ newly found freedom after the Civil War. In her discussion of the landscape, she pointed to numerous structures that had previously been used for slave quarters, some of which still stand, as well as numerous locations of cemeteries for the slaves and their descendants.⁶⁸ Furthermore, she incorporated the transcriptions of the graves that she found marked—including one that read, “Mary, a slave, died Jan. 30, 1860.”⁶⁹ As

⁶⁷Anderson interview.

⁶⁸Anderson, *A Preliminary Report*, 42-44, 46, 52, 69, 71-75, 101-102.

⁶⁹Ibid., 104.

Anderson's mission was to research the significance of Stagville, her inclusion of information about enslaved people made clear that the African American presence, in her professional opinion, as well as the state's, was significant.

Focusing solely on the African American presence at Stagville, George McDaniel, also in 1977, produced a work entitled *Stagville: Kin and Community*. McDaniel began his research on family histories of slaves and overseers at Stagville in 1974 while still a graduate student in the history department at Duke University. After a fellowship with the Smithsonian Institute took him to Washington, D.C., McDaniel applied for and received a grant from the Mary Duke Biddle Foundation in 1977 to continue his work at Stagville under the sponsorship of the North Carolina Department of Archives and History.⁷⁰ McDaniel produced a work of great substance—one that amplified Gutman's arguments about slave life, by using both written records and oral testimonies. McDaniel found missing pieces of Stagville's genealogical puzzle by interviewing the descendants of former plantation overseers and slaves. As a result, he could connect Gutman's work to more recent family histories.⁷¹ Due to this revelation, McDaniel explained that:

The historian Herbert Gutman, author of *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925*, has declared the results of our combined research at Stagville to be "irreplicable." Irreplicable because they furnish highly unique and rich insights, based on documents and oral histories, of ongoing generations of black families; some of whom are known to have begun in the period 1720-1770. They have continued to the present day and for the most part they lived in one location: Stagville. It is highly likely that no where else in America has a black community of extended families been documented so

⁷⁰George McDaniel, preface to *Stagville: Kin and Community*, 1997. NCC (UNC).

⁷¹George McDaniel, *Stagville: Kin and Community*, 1977, 5. NCC (UNC).

far and so extensively into the 18th and 19th centuries to common ancestors and brought forward into contemporary times.⁷²

McDaniel's work had clear, significant implications for African American history—enough to catch Gutman's attention—however, the Division of Archives and History kept his work unpublished until it was revisited by Kathryn Staley, a University of North Carolina graduate student, two decades later in 1997.⁷³ Those actions speak to the underlying hesitancy and anxiety by the state's agencies to make interpretation of slavery for a larger public audience the main goal of Stagville.

While the state may not have acted to make interpretation of black history a major goal at Stagville, a document prepared by the North Carolina Division of Archives and History the year of the site's acquisition in 1976 suggests that it was of significant interest among the many goals of the site. The "Proposal for the Stagville Center for Preservation Technology," states that, "Antebellum plantation history, particularly black history, will be central to the interpretive storyline."⁷⁴ Additionally, "The Program Outline for the Center"—also written in 1976 by the same agency—more specifically addressed interpretation as a future goal. By dividing the Center's plan into four phases, the outline described a process that, in the end, would effectively separate the Stagville Center from the Horton Grove Historic Site, thereby creating two distinct sites of interest: one devoted to

⁷²Ibid., 1.

⁷³Ibid., forward.

⁷⁴North Carolina Division of Archives and History, "Program Outline: Stagville Center," 1976. North Carolina Division of State Historic Sites Library.

interpretation and the other devoted to preservation education and research.⁷⁵

While the plan seemed to cater to all parties' interests involved in the planning and development of Stagville, the site did not follow that outlined path.

The General Management Plan, created in 1979, reveals that the initial interest in interpreting and researching black history had, by the end of the decade, been trumped by efforts to use the site for preservation education. Hired by the state, the Preservation Resource Group, Inc., a consulting firm that developed "historic preservations programs and projects," drew up the plan for the Stagville Center explaining that their efforts to write the plan were built "on the concept of the Stagville Preservation Center from its inception in 1976" and that "the General Plan emphasized the continuation of activities in preservation education and in utilization of the physical and documentary resources of Stagville Plantation."⁷⁶

Primarily, this document outlined plans for what was considered to be the three major concerns of the Stagville Center: the education program, the development of preservation resources, and institutional development. In all three of these areas, the creators planned every aspect of the center to highlight and advance the aim of preservation education and research, while the eventual goal of interpretation, as projected in the outline of 1976, never made an appearance within the document. This absence, combined with the adoption of the plan's goals and

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Preservation Resource Group, Inc., *General Management Plan for Stagville Preservation Center*, October 1979, 15-16, 75. NCC (UNC).

objectives, points to the state's growing interest in developing and operating the site for preservation purposes only.

Within the same management plan, Stagville's history and remaining structures were recognized as significant, but again, there was little mention of the substantial resources offered by Stagville to history in general and to African American history more specifically. This sentiment is perhaps best illustrated in the proposed use of the slave dwellings and the Great Barn to meet storage and utility needs. Such suggestions included using the buildings, aside from preservation teaching tools, for equipment and artifact storage, as well as converting the spaces to administrative offices, meeting rooms, toilets, a service kitchen, and lounge areas.⁷⁷ One of the most unique aspects of the new Stagville Center was to be its adaptive usage of the existing structures on the site, including the slave quarters. In the plan's description of that concept, a disregard for the history of those slave dwellings becomes evident, as it locates the slave quarters' significance in their modern day use as structures that "have survived with few alterations and are remarkably intact from the latest operating period of the Plantation."⁷⁸ The history associated with the buildings at Stagville, including the structures at Horton Grove that caught the attention of prominent historian Herbert Gutman, was now only considered significant through its material importance, rather than what it could potentially reveal about the experiences of the slaves that once lived within those walls.

⁷⁷Ibid., 47-48.

⁷⁸Ibid., 46.

Moreover, the few times black history was mentioned, it was shunned from the main stage of operations and funding, and placed into a separate and distinct category of interest to be handled by outside or private funding. For example, acknowledging that research projects conducted at Stagville could have the potential to substantially contribute to “the important transition, over the past ten years, of studies of American plantation life away from the planters to focus on the workers,” the plan nonetheless explained the research as outside and “independent of the operating educational and research programs,” requiring “special funds” to support the work.⁷⁹ Although the plan made clear the importance of Stagville’s resources to African American history—even going so far as to mention a shift in the academic focus—it was set aside as an afterthought to the importance of the site for preservation education and research. The general management plan made clear its primary objective by requiring that the few interpretive projects be funded from outside sources, securing the focus on preservation at the forefront of the site’s priorities.

Some may argue that the management plan stressed preservation education not only because the Preservation Resource Group, Inc. (PRG) is a company based on preservation, but also because the PRG drafted the plan for the Stagville Center, not the proposed Horton Grove Historic Site. While that is so, it also did not once mention the proposed separation. Furthermore, I have found no evidence to suggest that a similar management plan was drafted solely for the projected historic site. The fact that the Division of Archives and History hired a consulting firm for

⁷⁹Ibid., 33, 37.

the center and not the historic site reveals a much greater emphasis on the center itself—favoring the importance of preservation education and research over the historical interpretation of Stagville’s undeniably important history.

William Price, then Assistant Director of Archives and History, offered an explanation as to why interpretation fell to the wayside, even in the midst of black historical research being conducted by academics, government officials in the North Carolina public history field, and by researchers working on the site in its early stages. Price recalled being appointed to organize a group of in-house government officials to develop an interpretive plan for Stagville fairly early in its development—around 1977. Along with other young, white males straight out of graduate school—such as Jeffery Crow and John Flowers—Price and his committee agreed that an interpretive plan to best suit Stagville would be one that focused on the black experience. The committee saw Horton Grove as the driving force of this interpretive plan, and a way in which to significantly engage visitors in discussions on slavery and Reconstruction. Price explained that one of the goals of the Preservation Center was to unite both the black and white community in Durham through its efforts to build heritage and pride; therefore, Price and his committee presented the plan to prominent members of the African American community in Durham—members selected by both state workers and the women of HPSD—who, due to their social roles as powerful black leaders in the community, could potentially rally local support for the site.⁸⁰ Price and his team thought their drive to change the conservative nature of interpretation of the past had developed a

⁸⁰Price interview.

foolproof plan that would be attractive to those to whom the plan was being presented.

Much to the committee's surprise, the African Americans who were presented with this interpretive plan did not respond favorably. Price recalled, after listening to the presentation and briefly discussing it amongst themselves, a few of the black leaders, "very sternly yet very politely" expressed their dislike of the matter. Those prominent members, speaking for everyone at the meeting, explained that Stagville should be used to emphasize progress and the celebratory aspects of racial pride, not the negative thoughts and feelings associated with slavery. Those black leaders were especially adamant about the education of school groups at a site such as Stagville—they felt that educating black children about the horrors of slavery would send them the wrong message about their history. Price explained that he and his committee heeded that advice, as the site was supposed to create a sense of unity among the races in Durham, and went back to the drawing board. However, the committee never developed another plan, and preservation, for the meantime, thus took precedence over interpretation.⁸¹

The black community's concern over the racial image that Stagville would project, had slavery been its main interpretive focus, can only be fully understood within the context of Durham's black community in the 1970s. Public discussions of the history of those enslaved may have caused societal unrest just as the smoke started to clear from the Civil Rights movement that occurred years before. While Durham had a strong African American presence—especially the black community

⁸¹Ibid.

of Hayti—the strides made by protests of the sixties to integrate and acquire equal rights for both races were not easily accomplished. Historian Jean Anderson notes, “that almost all the gains, from school integration to fair employment practices, were achieved not through greater voting influence but through the courts, demonstrations, protests, boycotts, or threats of violence.”⁸² Although the Durham of the seventies was different from the Durham of the sixties, racial tensions still ran high and were the result of a long legacy of struggles for freedom.

African Americans in Durham had expended a great deal of energy to move away from the clutches of slavery. In the early 1900s, Durham attracted the attention of both Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois due to their belief that its black community had progressed tremendously from slavery. DuBois applauded the “upbuilding of Black Durham” that “characterize[d] the progress of the Negro American,” in 1912, and a year prior Washington referred to the Bull City as the “city of cities to look for the prosperity of Negroes.”⁸³ Leslie Brown explains that “the Durham Group, as its notable residents were called, [had] created exactly what southern whites despised: a prosperous black society marked by the elements that whites believed black people could not achieve.” Home to numerous well-developed and successful black neighborhoods, the Bull City witnessed black-owned business and institutions, and as a result was home to some of the richest African American men in the country, in no small part due to Durham’s prominent, black owned and

⁸²Anderson, *Durham County*, 445.

⁸³Qtd. in Leslie Brown, *Upbuilding Black Durham: Gender, Class and Black Community Development in the Jim Crow South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 12-14.

operated, North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company.⁸⁴ Understanding race progress as measured by respectability and the distance between blacks' present and their ills under slavery, leaders of the black community resisted Jim Crow by using the imposition of segregation to their advantage: by building their own businesses and institutions that drew consumers and clientele away from the demands and degradations of whites.⁸⁵

Segregation, however, would not last in Durham. The fifties and sixties witnessed a plethora of legal challenges, sit-ins, boycotts and protests in which Durham youth were especially active. The older generation of black leaders was critiqued for being too conservative and accommodating segregation by this emerging restless youth who did not agree with their predecessors' tactics. As the Civil Rights Movement swept across the nation, Durham was no stranger to the struggle. In fact, both Brown and Anderson identify the 1930s as the beginning of the Long Civil Rights Movement in Durham, when in 1935 the Durham Committee on Negro Affairs (DCNA) was established. Activity only upsurged further after World War II when many black veterans returned home impatient to find themselves still on the margins of social, economic, and political equality. With the the beginning of public facility integration in the early 1960s and the effective start of Durham's school desegregation in 1969, Durham's residents both witnessed and

⁸⁴For more on NC Mutual Life, see Walter B. Weare, *Black Business in the New South: A Social History of the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

⁸⁵Brown, 14-19.

participated in struggles until the early 1970s when both the integration of schools and protesting closed public spaces had ended.⁸⁶

But desegregation did not magically end race tensions; it may in fact have helped to create new ones. Due to the resistance of whites in the city to desegregation, and the consequential white flight to the suburbs, Durham city and county schools remained, for the most part, racially identifiable. In addition, segregated racial patterns in Durham's housing and neighborhoods clashed with integration efforts, and caused some black residents to become resentful of whites in control of school assignments. In 1971 when Durham city and county school boards proposed a merger of the two that would more fully integrate the school system, the DCNA urged voters to vote against it fearing the control of whites.⁸⁷ This fear and distrust of white Durham leaders by the black community also stemmed in part from the "urban removal" efforts previously noted in this essay. Once a burgeoning black business district, Hayti was deemed insignificant by these efforts, and as a result, many African Americans lost their businesses and homes, as well as, perhaps more importantly, their sense of community. Under segregation, the black community in Durham was "able to carve a mountain of economic stability

⁸⁶Anderson, *Durham County*, 429-450. See also Oral History Interview with Patricia Neal, June 6, 1989. Interview C-0068. Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007) in the Southern Oral History Program Collection, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁸⁷Jack Michael McElreath, "The Cost of Opportunity: School Desegregation and Changing Race Relations in the Triangle Region since WWII," (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2002), 429-430, 433, 458, 387.

out of an atmosphere of official racial oppression.”⁸⁸ But once that stability was threatened, under the guise of “city improvements,” black Durhamites began to question, improvement for whom?

One such Durhamite, Lawrence Ridgle, attributes the decline of the black community to the negative impacts of urban renewal. Not only did the black community lose many of its businesses, but Ridgle also believed they lost a sense of unity, especially across class lines, therefore isolating African American neighborhoods and communities from each other.⁸⁹ Another black Durhamite, Margaret Kennedy Goodwin, agrees with Ridgle, having actually been forced out of her home due to urban renewal. According to her, about seventeen black businesses were lost in the Hayti district, and the once tight knit African American community became unraveled and now had to depend on white-owned businesses where not long before blacks were unable to try on clothing or return items if they did not fit.⁹⁰ Patricia Neal also corroborates Ridgle’s testaments. As having served eighteen years on the County Board of Education in Durham, Neal witnessed the integration efforts once they hit Durham in 1969 and 1970. She notes that not only did middle and upper class whites move out of the city centers, but that middle and upper class

⁸⁸John S. Butler, *Entrepreneurship and Self-help Among Black Americans: A Reconsideration of Race and Economics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 204.

⁸⁹Oral History Interview with Lawrence Ridgle, June 3, 1999. Interview K-0143. Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007) in the Southern Oral History Program Collection, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁹⁰Oral History Interview with Margaret Kennedy Goodwin, September 26, 1997. Interview R-0113. Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007) in the Southern Oral History Program Collection, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

blacks did as well, breaking apart the unity of the African American community in Durham.⁹¹

If older, more conservative black leaders found ways in which to build the black community and the progressive, respectable image of that community, under Jim Crow through segregation, how then would that community sustain its image of respectability in the face of integration and interaction with whites? Furthermore, due to divisions across class lines that integration caused in the black community, how would class come to play a factor in determining a respectable image? Durham's black community in the changed environment of the post-Civil Rights era in the late 1970s faced new challenges and obstacles, perhaps heightening the need and projection of the respectable, progressive image. When placed in this context, the rejection of the slavery interpretation plan for Stagville by the black leaders in Durham fits into a larger community, or most likely upper-class based, concern for an image of respectability through maintaining a distance from the negativity and degradation of the history of slavery. This rejection also fits into the black community's distrust of white leadership in not only running schools and preserving their homes and communities, but as this essay shows, also in telling their history.

When interviewing descendants of former Stagville slaves and sharecroppers who were still living in the immediate area for his research, George McDaniel recalled their tremendous support and cooperation as they volunteered their time

⁹¹Neal interview.

and stories for his project.⁹² But while the working class blacks may have wanted to see their roots documented and presented, in hopes of building a legacy for younger generations succeeding them, upper class black leaders in Durham were not so interested, because, as Syd Nathans suggested, it probably was not their story to tell.⁹³ The administrator of the site at the time, John Flowers, recalled the difficulty it took to get influential Durham blacks involved in the Stagville project. Working with the HPSD to save St. Joseph's AME Church (a significant landmark in the African American community), he had learned from that experience that the upper and middle class African Americans in Durham found it difficult to celebrate a history they found to be degrading, and Stagville of course was no exception to that sentiment.⁹⁴

Although the Stagville Preservation Center opened its doors at a time when black history was being researched by academia, government officials in North Carolina's public history agencies, and individuals hired to perform initial research at the site, the legacy of black struggles for freedom could be heard loud and clear through Durham's prominent black community members. Regardless of the desire by some state workers to see the black experience interpreted at Stagville, the surrounding milieu of issues pertaining to race identity, in large part due to those in the upper class who were given the opportunity to speak for the community, silenced those desires. Thus, both the finalized purpose of the site and the debates

⁹²George McDaniel, phone interview by author, 11 March 2010.

⁹³Nathans interview.

⁹⁴Flowers interview.

surrounding that purpose cannot be fully understood without embedding them in Durham's social context.

While class divisions were certainly present among the black community of Durham, some middle and upper class African Americans may not have shared the sentiments of those who rejected Price's original interpretive plan. This is evidenced by the actions of Elna Spaulding, the wife of influential former N.C. Mutual Life President Asa Spaulding, and William Clement, another former President of N.C. Mutual Life, who both sat on the Board for Stagville through the early years of its development.⁹⁵ Clement, as former President, was a highly influential leader in the black community and both Spaulding and her husband were active figures during Durham's battles in the Civil Rights Movement.⁹⁶ Elna, in fact, started an inter-racial non-violence group (Women-In-Action for the Prevention of Violence and Its Causes) in 1968 in an effort to curb unrest after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The group also worked to ease tensions over the desegregation of Durham's schools in the summer of 1970.⁹⁷ After much prodding by officials at Stagville, both Spaulding and Clement finally agreed to serve on the board, a board that was very interested in interpreting the site's black history.⁹⁸ So while class divisions can help explain some black Durhamites negative reaction towards plans to interpret slavery at the site, those divisions are not clear cut, and therefore can

⁹⁵Stagville Center Corporation of North Carolina, "Board of Director's Meeting," 20 October 1978, 1. Archives at Historic Stagville.

⁹⁶Anderson, *Durham County*, 439, 443, 448, 452.

⁹⁷McElreath, 522-523.

⁹⁸Flowers interview.

not be relied on as the only reason for the interpretive plans to have been put on the back burner at Stagville.

Chapter Five: Forming Relationships and Finding Support

Even with concerns from some members of Durham's black community, by the end of the decade some state officials decided to move forward with interpretive plans for the site. A group comprised of Larry Tise, Peter Wood, John Flowers, Brent Glass (administrator of the Archaeology and Historic Preservation Section), Larry Misenheimer (assistant administrator of the Historic Sites Section), and Bill Price, dubbed the "Stagville Policy Committee" proposed the establishment of a Historic Properties Interpretation Program at Stagville.⁹⁹ This proposal, written in July of 1979, called for the interpretation center in an effort to combat the increasingly heavy focus on preservation technology at the site. The committee agreed that though there had been plans to separate Horton Grove from the Center as a means to create an African American historic site, "more recent planning documents on Stagville and activities at and for the Center, suggest that Stagville's present thrust is directed almost totally toward preservation technology." The document further reads, that as a result, "Social history is given a minor, secondary role in Stagville's program."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹Larry Misenheimer, interview by author, Durham, NC, 18 November 2009. See also "Stagville Center Corporation of North Carolina," 22 October 1976. Archives at Historic Stagville.

¹⁰⁰"Stagville Policy Committee," 3 July 1979, 1. Archives at Historic Stagville. See also Stagville Policy Committee, "Proposal for An Historic Properties Interpretations Program at Stagville Center," 3 July 1979, 1. Archives at Historic Stagville.

At this moment, state officials began to realize the importance of well-planned interpretive efforts at historic sites, and through doing so, also realized their shortcomings to do so in past endeavors. This sentiment is evident in the following:

Only within the last few years has the Division begun to incorporate interpretive planning with planning for preservation; only now are preservation and interpretation specialists becoming aware of their interdependency. Historians, particularly social historians, find themselves in extremely limited roles where public interpretation of historic properties is concerned. They are called upon to supply basic research reports, facts, or an occasional overview; they are underutilized in terms of their potential contribution of ideas and ideals.

Acknowledging the failure to fully incorporate interpretive plans not only in past state endeavors, but in Stagville's development as well, the committee saw in Stagville an opportunity to create a program that would investigate how best to do so, while simultaneously keeping the preservation education focus, showcasing the newly realized interdependency of the two.¹⁰¹

The Stagville Policy Committee also suggested that in order to fully utilize all of the resources available under the Division of Archives and History, Stagville's operations be separated between both the Historic Sites Section and the Archaeology and Historic Preservation Section. This way the interpretations program could be run under Historic Sites, and the preservation program under Archaeology and History Preservation (AHP).¹⁰² This plan became effective late in 1980 officially granting AHP "responsibility for technical preservation research and

¹⁰¹Ibid., 3.

¹⁰²Stagville Policy Committee, "Stagville: Organization and Programs," 4 July 1979. Archives at Historic Stagville.

education,” while Historic Sites “retain[ed] management over much of the property.” Furthermore, the positions of both the site’s secretary and administrator had been moved to AHP as well.¹⁰³ Archives and History Director Larry Tise explained that the move “was part of an expansion scheme for Stagville.”¹⁰⁴

However, the proposed Interpretation Program never came to fruition as the Stagville Center transferred completely to AHP on July 1, 1981, effectively disrobing Stagville of its historic site status. Though still on the national register, Stagville was no longer considered a state historic site. Accompanying that transfer was the beginning of the construction of a new classroom building at Stagville as well as the creation of a new branch under the AHP section: the Preservation Education Branch. Designed to expand the educational efforts of the AHP section, the Preservation Education Branch’s main concern was of course the development of the Stagville Preservation Center. Prior to the acquisition of Stagville, the section did not include any type of site or center under its operation, although it had been involved with the planning and implementation of some of Stagville’s programs. As the AHP section’s activities included conducting historical surveys across the state, creating and managing legislation pertaining to historical preservation, conducting research on both archaeology and preservation, managing and dispersing federal and state grants, as well as holding public symposia and workshops on preservation topics, it

¹⁰³North Carolina Division of Archives and History, *Biennial Report 38, 1978-1980* (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, Department of Cultural Resources, 1981), 69. NCC (UNC).

¹⁰⁴Wise, “New focus on STAGVILLE.”

was well-equipped to aid in realizing the site's goals as a preservation center.¹⁰⁵

Having been involved in such work even before the shift to this section, the site desperately engaged in attempts to form significant relationships with academic institutions in the area, in order to gain local institutional support: a necessary endeavor if Stagville was to become what state officials had envisioned.

One such attempt resulted in forming "a cooperative relationship" with Durham Technical Institute early in the site's existence, making Stagville an outdoor classroom for preservation students from the Institute.¹⁰⁶ From the outset of the site, the Stagville Center Corporation gained enough funding, through their educational efforts, to help "implement a new curriculum in historic preservation technology" at the Institute. As a result, students not only engaged in preservation work at the site, but also attended courses offered at Stagville by historians such as Jean Anderson and John Flowers on various preservation topics from "period architectural design and basic archaeological principles to . . . paint, wood, and masonry technology."¹⁰⁷ By 1979, the Center had recorded a total of "850 enrollments in various programs."¹⁰⁸

Programs offered at Stagville focused on more than preservation, and in fact many of them concentrated on slavery and black history. Starting in the summer of

¹⁰⁵The classroom building mentioned above is today the visitor's center. North Carolina Division of Archives and History, *Biennial Report 39*, 1980-1982 (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, Department of Cultural Resources, 1983), 12. NCC (UNC).

¹⁰⁶NC Division of Archives and History, *Biennial Report 39*, 12.

¹⁰⁷North Carolina Division of Archives and History, *Biennial Report 37*, 1976-1978 (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, Department of Cultural Resources, 1979), 70, 80. NCC (UNC).

¹⁰⁸NC Division of Archives and History, *Biennial Report 38*, 69. See also Pamphlet entitled "Fall Courses Stagville Preservation Center," year unknown. NCC (UNC).

1977, in conjunction with North Carolina State University, Horton Grove served as an archaeological field school where students could learn not only methods of archeology, but also, depending on what artifacts were found, learn more about slave life on the plantation.¹⁰⁹ One such example is a report resulting from the 1979 field school entitled, “Stagville Field School in Historical Archaeology: A Nineteenth Century Slave Cabin.” Attempting to synthesize the work done over the five-week course, the author, Jennifer Garlind, hoped that the information would “add specifically to the interpretation of Stagville Center and generally to an understanding of the existence of the Afro-Americans who composed the majority of individuals on plantations throughout the South.”¹¹⁰ That same year, the Center welcomed intern Carolee Williams whose task was to work with the black history reports.¹¹¹

These cooperative ventures with near-by institutions were crucial for not only the growth of Stagville as a preservation education center, but also as a site to enable research of the African American history present. Although the site had faculty members from local academic institutions as board members and had created relationships with both NC State and the Durham Technical Institute, the level of academic cooperation state officials were expecting was never met. When Larry Tise was first appointed to Director of Archives and History in 1975, he created the Institute of Applied History, a forum linking academia to the history

¹⁰⁹North Carolina Division of Archives and History, *Biennial Report 37*, 80.

¹¹⁰Jennifer G. Garlind, “Stagville Field School in Historical Archaeology: A Nineteenth Century Slave Cabin,” September 1979. North Carolina Division of State Historic Sites Library.

¹¹¹Historic Stagville Foundation, *The Key: Bulletin of the Stagville Preservation Center*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Winter 1979). NCC (UNC).

being done outside of the ivory towers. Asking universities in the area to appoint faculty members from their history departments to act as liaisons between the universities and the Department of Archives and History, Tise hoped that the Institute would build bridges between the two worlds, and when Stagville came under the auspices of the state it seemed a perfect place in which the Institute could function; where students would come not to learn history from books, but to learn history on their knees. With responses from these universities ranging from slightly interested to not at all interested, Tise realized that Stagville was not going to be able to get the kind of academic support the state had been hoping for.¹¹² Lacking in several areas necessary for success—such as academic support, influential community support, models to emulate and interact with, and a clear vision for the site—Stagville’s potential as a historic site was severely hampered, resulting in the inability to fully realize the goal of interpreting black history as easily as it could the goal of creating a preservation education center.

¹¹²Tise interview. Tise explains that the term “applied history” was used until institutions that started instituting programs for public history in a short time following Stagville’s acquisition (like Santa Barbara and Carnegie Mellon) gave a report to the Organization of American Historians in which they officially announced the use of the term “public history.” Though NC State later created a public history program, it was not until 1982 that the program got underway under John David Smith; moreover, the program did not focus on museum and site studies until the early 1990s. John David Smith, e-mail message to author, 4 February 2010.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Although preservation education seemed a more attainable goal, the proposed Stagville Preservation Center and its programs started floundering after the organizational shift to the AHP Section in 1981, in large part due to the previously mentioned downfalls. In the years that followed, Tise left the Division, John Flowers stepped down from the position of site administrator, and the site became something of a red-headed step child under the Division of Archives and History.¹¹³ As a site, Stagville no longer had any clear direction, and a task force was created in the early 1980s—comprised of representatives from the Stagville Corporation, the Friends of Stagville, Stagville Associates, and division staff—to “work on ideas and recommendations on future directions for the Center.”¹¹⁴ Larry Misenheimer believes it was the lack of a single vision that prevented Stagville from becoming what the state had envisioned it to be.¹¹⁵ Bill Price supports this assertion, as does Larry Tise who mentioned that not only did “a unique set of characters come together to make Stagville happen,” but that from the outset, the site’s development was aiming to please and cater to the multiple interests of all the

¹¹³Price interview.

¹¹⁴North Carolina Division of Archives and History, *Biennial Report 40, 1982-1984* (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, Department of Cultural Resources, 1984), 15. NCC (UNC).

¹¹⁵Misenheimer interview.

actors, agencies, and organizations involved.¹¹⁶ Syd Nathans explained that everyone knew Stagville was a treasure, but “to different people, it was a different treasure.”¹¹⁷ Without a clear single vision, or a unified leadership to promote it, the Stagville Preservation Center never reached its full potential and the site had been lying relatively dormant when Alice Eley Jones first arrived in the summer of 1985.

The relationship this study reveals between Durham and Stagville makes clear that the meaning and development of Stagville cannot be understood apart from the context of Durham and of North Carolina. Moreover, the time through which their relationship moved is crucial in examining the four local threads of influence: the rise of interest in the past, the drive for new industry and economic profit, the anxiety over black identity and its relationship to slavery, and the lack of academic interest in public history. These forces converged in the multi-layered and complex narrative that is Stagville’s story. While this study focuses on local trends and contexts, it contributes to a broader understanding of the importance of historically embedding analyses of any public history site in both their respective time and place. Had Stagville been a historic site in both a different location and another time, its development would have followed a dissimilar path and its outcome would have been undoubtedly different. As forms of cultural production, public history sites thus operate within specific spaces, geographic and chronologic, and without an understanding of those specific spaces, the meaning and origin of production is lost. Revealing more than Stagville’s relationship to Durham in the

¹¹⁶Price interview. See also Tise interview.

¹¹⁷Nathans interview.

'70s, this study also points to the importance of leadership and vision in public history endeavors. Too many competing ideas, voices, and visions for one space or landscape will, as in the case of Stagville, result in a site constantly teetering between them, never fully able to evolve or grow to realize its projected potential. However, as Stagville's story exemplifies, if preservation had not been a focus, there might not have ever been a site over whose purpose to debate. As academia and the public merge within the field of public history, it is important to explore the forces that shape not only that field, but also our understandings of the field.

After printing that original pamphlet on the African American presence at Stagville in June of 1985, Alice Eley Jones unknowingly started her journey towards transforming the way the site interpreted black history for its visitors. Originally concerned with the operations and daily tasks of slavery, Jones started researching the way slaves lived after a tour she gave to a group of fourth grade students that prompted her to think of slavery in a different light. She vividly recalls one little girl asking her a question that Alice did not know the answer to; that little girl looked up at her and asked, "Ms. Jones, what did they do as people?" This question helped Jones view slavery through a different lens. Rather than viewing them strictly as laborers in a labor system, Jones now started researching slavery through "the human point of view," driven by such questions as who took care of the children, did they cut their hair, and what did they wear? This reformulation of the interpretation of slavery at Stagville attracted the attention of state officials, especially then director of Archives and History Bill Price who was so pleased with

Jones' work during her six week stay that he insistently sought more grant money to enable her to stay and continue her work as the newly appointed African American Programs Coordinator. By the time her first fellowship had ended, Jones had researched and printed new literature on the lives of the slaves, incorporated that research into the tours, and had been able to rally the support of nearby black academic, religious, and commercial institutions by inviting them to the site for special tours and luncheons. Using family friends to make connections to the black community in Durham, Jones was able to attain the community support that her predecessors never could, and as a result, pushed the black experience to the fore of the interpretations at Stagville.¹¹⁸

Word spread of Jones' work at the site, and she began to receive invitations to speak at numerous conferences, historical sites, and college campuses across the state. After a presentation at Monticello, she was contacted by a staff member of American Girl, LLC—the organization famous for its American Girl Doll collection—who had attended the presentation on slave life and was interested in having Alice help design an African American doll and her story line concerning slavery. Her cooperation with the group resulted not only in the doll named “Addy Walker,” but also in a plethora of new opportunities to teach school children about slavery and slave life at Stagville. No longer was Jones worried about the stones from the gravel driveway nicking away at her shiny red paint; with Addy always buckled into the passenger seat by her side, clad in sunglasses no less, Jones felt that she had made,

¹¹⁸Jones interview.

and would continue to make, a tremendous difference in the future interpretation of slavery.¹¹⁹

The tremendous influence of Jones' work extended far beyond Stagville and the schools she traveled to with Addy. In fact, Jones' work led her to be asked to train docents at Williamsburg, Old Salem, Johnson, Middleton Place Plantation, and Drayton Hall, all of which had just started interpreting slavery for their visitors. Recognizing the efforts of her predecessors to interpret black history at Stagville when it was first acquired, and their lack of initial success, Jones explained that it simply was not the right time. When asked why she believed she was so successful at approaching such a difficult topic, she replied, "I wanted to teach to enlighten. I was never angry or upset when I talked about it, and understood that my emotional state would affect that of those listening to me speak." Pointing to the legacies of Jim Crow and the fairly new efforts of desegregation as barriers to interpretation when the site was first created in 1976, Jones believes that time needed to pass before the community was ready to face the complicated history of slavery. But when that time came, she was ready: "It was all part of a process. I was just one step in a cause that continues to the present. And it just keeps getting better over time."¹²⁰

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰Ibid.

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