THE WHOLE STORY? ANALYZING MUTLI-NARRATIVE INTERPRETATION METHODS IN HISTORIC HOMES OF SAVANNAH, GEORGIA.

by

SHANNON GRAHAM

(Under the Direction of James Reap)

ABSTRACT

The popularity of Savannah, Georgia as a tourist destination gives the historic homes in the city the ability to convey their history to many people and to influence the sphere of museum and interpretation practices. Historically, a singular narrative emphasizing the lives of the families and the architecture of the properties has been presented to the public. A demand for a more multi-narrative interpretation of sites that includes the stories of the enslaved has increased. Because of this demand, historic homes of Savannah are using differing interpretation methods to expand their narratives to include the stories of the enslaved. Studying the different methods of including enslaved narratives in historic homes in Savannah will create a better understanding of the complexity of best museum practices while implementing difficult histories.

INDEX WORDS: Interpretation, Narratives, Public History, Tourism, Savannah, Georgia, Historic Homes, Museum Practices, Difficult Histories.

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DEDICATION

This thesis would not exist without the love and support of a few of the most important people in my life: to Martha and Glen who never stopped believing in me even when I didn't believe in myself. To Katelyn, whose help kept me motivated to keep going. To Luke, who will probably never read this, but regardless, has always supported me. To my grandparents, whose generosity, kindness, and love made my education possible. To Tracey, whose adventurous spirit and support kickstarted this thesis. Finally, to my friends, old and new, who have made the last five years of my life unforgettable.

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INTRODUCTION

In October of 2011, a symposium, named *Slavery and Freedom in Savannah Symposium* was hosted by the Telfair Museums. This event was three-days long and included lectures, performances, and the introduction of the book *Slavery and Freedom* by Leslie M. Harris and Daina Ramey Berry. Lectures included titles such as "Public History and Slavery: Exploring the Owens-Thomas House, Savannah, and Rural Georgia" by Daina Ramey Berry and Leslie M. Harris, "Laboring Slaves: Work and Workers in Antebellum Savannah" by Susan O'Donovan, and "Slave Housing in Antebellum Georgia," by John Vlach. This symposium was a full-scale attempt to incorporate the history of urban slavery into the history of Savannah and was happening concurrently with the re-interpretation process of sites like the Whitney Plantation and McLeod Plantation Historic Site.

Following the symposium, the book *Slavery and Freedom in Savannah* was published in 2014, and in 2018, the former Owens-Thomas House became the Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters. With the help of the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Owens-Thomas House launched a decades-long reinterpretation project to include the stories of the enslaved on the property. This event was highly influential in starting discussions within the historic house museum sphere within the city and aligned with the broader movement of the time to emphasize the stories of the enslaved. The three homes studied in this thesis were either directly associated with this symposium or were highly influenced by its teachings. A brochure from the event can be found in Appendix A.

This symposium indicated a movement in museum practice towards a more inclusive narrative that included stories of the enslaved. This event, coupled with the events of the Black Lives Matter movement in the year 2020, in which thousands of Americans in every state protested police brutality in the killing of a black man, created an environment in Savannah that required historic house museums in the city to closely analyze interpretation practices used to tell the narrative of the museum. The city of Savannah was chosen because of these circumstances.

Savannah, Georgia was founded in 1733 by colonists led by James Oglethorpe.[1] Savannah is the oldest city in Georgia and was the site where the colony was established. Savannah's city infrastructure was designed with multiple squares and connected neighborhoods and streets, with twenty-two of the original twenty-four squares still existing today. From 1778-1782, Savannah was under the control of the British. Following this period and the independence of the city, slavery flourished.[2] The climate of Savannah was soon found to be favorable to cotton and rice and plantations and slavery became a highly profitable system. Savannah served as a port for transporting thousands of slaves in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The explosion of cotton and rice production generated immense amounts of wealth to the already upper-class society. With this wealth, slave owners built extravagant homes and churches throughout the city.

In 1796 and 1820, the city of Savannah suffered a series of misfortunes, including two fires that destroyed half the city, and an outbreak of yellow fever that killed

[1] Reiter, Beth. "Historic Savannah Foundation." New Georgia Encyclopedia, last modified May 4, 2021.
[2] Leslie M. Harris, and Diana Ramey Berry. 2013. *Slavery and Freedom in Savannah*. Athens: University of Georgia Press. Pg. 15

hundreds. The city recovered, however, and preceding the Civil War, was praised as the most picturesque and scenic city in America. It was during this time that the Georgia Historical Society, which collects and teaches the history of Georgia, was founded.

During the period of the Civil War, Savannah's economy crumbled because of strict sea blockades. Fort Pulaski, located at the Savannah Rivers was overtaken with Union soldiers in 1862, but the city itself did not fall mid-December when William Tecumseh Sherman entered the city. Sherman thought the city too beautiful to destroy and sent a telegraph to Abraham Lincoln offering the city as a Christmas present.[3]

Following the Civil War, the city fell under hardship because of the ruined economy, lack of food, and an outbreak of yellow fever.[4] Despite this, the newly freed slaves who remained in Savannah were able to build a flourishing community. The people in the community built their own churches, schools, and economy, making it one of the most historically significant cities in the nation for the African American community.[5]

The 20th century brought the reestablishment of cotton as a vital source of economic success for Savannah, however, it also brought about the boll weevils and the Great Depression. Savannah once again fell into economic hardship. During World War I and World War II, Savannah became nationally important for food-processing and paper-pulp. The port facilities in Savannah also played a prominent role in World War II, with

[3] Jones, Jacqueline. 2009. *Saving Savannah: The City and the Civil War*. 1st Vintage Civil War Library Ed. Vintage Books. Pg. 207.
[4] Walter J. Fraser, Jr. *Savannah in the New South: From the Civil War to the Twenty-First Century*. [N.p.]: University of South Carolina Press, 2018. Pg. 66
[5] Whittington Johnson. *Black Savannah, 1788–1864*. Black Community Studies. Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1996. Pg. 170

the port becoming one of the nation's most active Atlantic shipyards. Savannah's economic prosperity increased along with the population.[6]

The image of a historic Savannah of today with its many historic homes and beautiful squares was not established until the 1950s. Two major developments occurred in Savannah during this time. Firstly, the Civil Rights effort in Savannah took root and grew. The local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People organized massive voter-registration drives for Savannah's Black residents and was successful in leading the way for the first African American officer to be hired on Savannah's police department. Secondly, the historic preservation movement began at this time. Many historic structures in Savannah were demolished for newer structures or parking lots, and the historic homes that remained standing were in bad condition due to years of neglect. This changed when a group of women came together to save these structures. The Davenport House, built in 1820 was the first house that was saved and served as the headquarters for the newly created Historic Savannah Foundation. The saving of the Davenport House in the 1950s sparked the preservation movement in Savannah, and the subsequent National Historic Landmark designation in 1966. The preservation movement in Savannah was, and is, vital to the revitalization of tourism in the city.

The once dilapidated historic structures were bought and restored to their original form. During the 1990s, more than 50 million people visited Savannah. The city was now known for its beauty, history, and Southern charm. This reputation was only heightened by the publication of the book and subsequent film *Midnight in the Garden of Good and*

[6] Walter J. Fraser, Jr. *Savannah in the New South: From the Civil War to the Twenty-First Century*. Pg. 182.

Evil. Visitors enjoyed touring through historic homes and learning about wealthy families of the past.

Since its establishment as a historic tourist destination in the late 1900s Savannah's popularity has only increased. Historic homes have grown to not only represent their own histories, but also the stories of the city of Savannah. Because of the city's popularity and notoriety as a historic city, the historic homes in Savannah play an important role in leading interpretation practices. This is especially true in recent years, when the public and scholarly demand for a more inclusive narrative has become unavoidable.[7] Because people visit Savannah for its history, it is imperative that the interpretation practices utilized by historic homes are inclusive of enslaved narratives.

In recent years, the public has become increasingly interested in difficult histories.[8] With this interest comes a demand for a more inclusive history. Difficult histories are "rich in opportunities to inspire and influence a large and diverse audience to live more consciously and to be more aware and prepared to contribute to unlimited opportunities for social improvement."[9] However, difficult histories can be hard to interpret, especially for historic house museums who base their narrative on the story of an individual or family. House museums face the challenge of interpreting the difficult history of the enslaved, while also trying to tell the story of the family who lived in the house, and who owned the enslaved.

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[7] Nelson, Velvet. 2020. "Tour Guide Perspectives on Representations Of Slavery At a Heritage Museum." *Tourism Culture & Communication* 20 (1): 1–14. doi: 10.3727/194341420X15692567324895. Pg. 2

[8] Alderman, Derek H., and Campbell, Rachel M. "Symbolic Excavation and the Artifact Politics of Remembering Slavery in the American South: Observations from Walterboro, South Carolina." *Southeastern Geographer* 48, no. 3 (2008): 338–55. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26225537. Pg. 340

[9] Rose, Julia. *Interpreting Difficult History at Museums and Historic Sites*. Interpreting History. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2016. Pg. 20

Because of the difficulty of creating a guideline that addresses the complexity of slavery and this fear of alienating groups of visitors, many museums fail "to acknowledge the contribution of Afro-Americans and a significant omission of the roles they played. Black history is short-changed whenever references to slavery are absent or, when they occur, slave quarters are referred to as servant quarters or carriage houses."[10] In addition to generalizing enslaved histories, slavery is mostly mentioned only in places where enslaved peoples acted as servants, such as the kitchen and dining room.[11] When mentioned, enslaved narratives are broad and lack humanistic qualities in which audiences can relate. These broad narratives lead visitors to think of slavery and slave holding in very simplistic terms that have no impact on their experience. Issues normally brought up during the tours are polite questions posed for technical information, not for an in-depth discussion of difficult histories.

Another challenge facing house museums is the issue of staying relevant. Unlike art and history museums, house museums do not normally have rotating exhibits. The singular history of the house is the story told. Because house museums only tell one story, visitors do not return. House museums face unique and difficult problems in interpretation and staying relevant. With this thesis, I will explore best practices for interpreting the difficult histories of the enslaved that lived in three historic houses, turned house museums, in Savannah.

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[10] Graham, M. S. Dann & Seaton, A.V. (2001) Slavery, Contested Heritage and Thanatourism, International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration, 2:3-4, 1-29, DOI: 10.1300/J149v02n03_01. Pg. 15

[11] Bunch, Lonnie (2007) Embracing Ambiguity: The Challenge of Interpreting African American History in Museums, Museums & Social Issues, 2:1, 45-56, DOI: 10.1179/msi.2007.2.1.45. Pg. 51

I will focus on three sites as case studies: the Davenport House, the Andrew Low House and the Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters. These three sites are in various stages of interpretation. One house barely touches on the lives of the enslaved that lived there while another is solely focused on the story of the enslaved. The other house falls somewhere in between the other two. By studying these different houses, I will show what interpretation methods are being utilized and how these practices can be improved upon for the future.

With the ever-growing need and demand for a more inclusive and sensitive historic narrative at historic house museums,[12] as well as the challenges facing historic house museums in remaining relevant and bringing back visitors, this thesis serves as initial research for studying historic houses in Savannah to determine what interpretation practices are being utilized to expand the historic narrative to include the enslaved. By studying the previous practices and history of interpretation in Savannah and comparing it to the current state of interpretation, I will provide a best practice plan for historic houses in hopes that the story they tell is diverse.

[12] Nelson, Velvet. 2020. "Tour Guide Perspectives On Representations Of Slavery At a Heritage Museum." *Tourism Culture & Communication* 20 (1): 1–14. doi: 10.3727/194341420X15692567324895. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,shib&db=hjh&AN=142531497&site=eds-live&custid=uga1. Pg. 2

Research Question

This thesis allows me to dive deep into the history and interpretation of historic houses in Savannah, Georgia. Specifically, by analyzing the interpretation practices across various media of three historic houses, I will be able to better understand the approaches of creating or modifying interpretation at the historic houses to include enslaved narratives and how the history of the site is being conveyed to the public. This research will attempt to answer the following primary question: how are interpretation practices being implemented in three historic homes in Savannah to include stories of the enslaved that lived on the property?

Sub-questions include: what was the original interpretation of the historic home and surrounding property, and how has it changed over time? How do these three historic house museums interpret enslaved narratives across different types of media within the museum and do these portrayals align with one another? What are some of the challenges of interpreting enslaved histories and how should museums combat these problems?

By researching three different historic houses, I hope to shed light on how, or if, these three historic homes in Savannah are including a multi-perspective narrative of enslaved stories and how those interpretation practices differ from house to house. The objective of this thesis is to determine interpretation practices implemented by three historic house museums in Savannah, their effectiveness and change over time, and how enslaved narratives are being included or excluded in the narrative.

Methodology

I employed a four-part methodology in my thesis. First, I toured of three historic houses: the Davenport House, the Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters, and the Andrew Low House in Savannah, Georgia. I wanted to start my research by going on tours of three houses in Savannah. Tours are one of the most visible ways historic house museums demonstrate their interpretation practices. I wanted to gain an experience like a regular tourist and did not do any preliminary research on sites before visiting and wanted my first impression of the site to be in-person and untainted with previous research. Three historic homes will be studied to understand the ways that historic house museums in Savannah utilize interpretation practices to expand the narrative of their historic sites. These case studies were chosen for various reasons: when researched, these houses commonly appeared on "must see" tourist destination lists available online, their role in both the city and museum community, and their response to a symposium held in Savannah in 2011 that discussed integrating the history of urban history into historic house museums.

Second, I interviewed museum staff to gather information about current and past interpretation practices and methodologies used at each site. By gathering information about both past and present interpretation practices I was able to better understand the methodologies implemented in the historic house museums currently. Because I had already visited the site before the interviews, I felt more prepared to create and ask questions that were specific to each site. Interviews with museum staff were carried out over Zoom and through the phone and were scheduled after my initial visit to the site. The websites of each case study were heavily researched to better understand the

representation of the museum on social media, and how accessible historical information about the site was to the public.

This step also included visiting the website of each case study. Because websites are such a prevalent part of how historic house museums can market themselves, it was important to look at the website of each historic house and see if there were any additional resources available that were not available on the tour, as well as seeing if the narrative given on the tour was like what was conveyed on the website. Visiting and going on tours was the only working knowledge I had of the sites before looking at the websites. After the tours, an idea of what narrative each website was going to portray was conceived, but when researching, the findings were surprising.

The third was conducting my own research into the history of the houses. This included looking at the primary sources that each site had available, looking at National Register Nominations for each site, and searching for secondary sources that gave the broader context of Savannah so I could better understand what role the historic home played in the community at the time. In chapter 2 of this thesis, a brief but multi-dimensional history of both the families and the enslaved who lived on the property will be included.

The fourth step was exploring and analyzing current guidelines and scholarly research written about inclusive and ethical narratives to better understand best practices in the field. Major resources discussed include Horton and Horton's *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory,* Bunch's "Embracing Ambiguity: The Challenge of Interpreting African American History in Museums," Van Balgooy's *Interpreting African American History and Culture at Museums and Historic Sites*, and

Rose's *Interpreting Difficult History at Museums and Historic Sites*. Other resources used to inform this study include Graham and Seaton's "Slavery, Contested Heritage and Thanatourism," Foote's *Shadowed Ground America's Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy,* Cohen's "The Tourist Guide: The Origins, Structure and Dynamics of a Role," and Nelson's "Tour Guide Perspectives on Representations of Slavery at a Heritage Museum." Studying these scholarly sources will give me a solid foundation upon which I can build my findings and apply to the interpretation practices experienced in each case study. I will be able to recommend changes that would improve the narrative of each museum to become more inclusive. I hope that this research will serve as a catalyst for further research hand more inclusive interpretation practices at other historic house museums in Savannah. For the historical narrative of Savannah to become more inclusive, its most popular and famous houses must lead the movement in including the stories of the enslaved.

Research Limitations

A limitation in expanding the narrative to include the enslaved is a lack of primary source material. A lot of house museums use the excuse that a lack of archival material makes it impossible to discuss difficult histories. However, through this thesis I hope to create methods in which difficult histories can still be discussed even if primary source material is lacking.

Because of the many docents that volunteer and work at the Davenport House, the Andrew Low House and the Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters, each tour is different. I hope to better understand the practices and guidelines docents are taught and what material is required for docents to speak about on tours and thus, every person visiting the house will hear. However, I only have experience going on one tour by one docent. Experiences with interpretation at each of these sites will differ, however, themes covered in this thesis will be broad and applicable to the general interpretation of each site.

This thesis will only examine three houses. The city of Savannah has many historic houses that will not be discussed, and this thesis will not be comprehensive for the entire population of house museums in Savannah. By studying three widely popular and well-known houses that have influence over the community and interpretation methods implemented in the Savannah area, this thesis will be a starting point in which to build on for the future.

Thesis Organization

Sections of the introduction include the research question, methodology, research limitations and organization of thesis. Chapter One will contain an introduction to scholarly research, this chapter will also discuss the importance of Savannah as a center of history and tourism and the context in which these historic homes exist. Chapter Two will discuss my experiences with the Davenport House including my experience of the tour at the site, a study of the historic home's website, and interviews with the museum staff. A brief explanation of the governing organizations overseeing these homes will also be included. Chapter Three will include a brief history and experience of the Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters. Chapter Four will feature the Andrew Low House. Chapter Five will be an analysis of my findings, mainly comparing guidelines and best practices published through scholarly research and comparing and analyzing the interpretation practices I experienced through the tours, website and interviews to the scholarly research. Chapter Six is the final chapter of the thesis and will include the application of findings and suggestions for future development, a conclusion, appendices, and references.

CHAPTER 1

SCHOLARLY RESEARCH

The institution of slavery is at the very foundation of America's economic and political success and is inexplicably tied with America's history, culture, and principles. The institution of slavery has touched and affected every facet of American society and is an incredibly complex and controversial topic that divides audiences. According to Lois Horton and James Horton, the authors of *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*, a "vast majority of Americans react strongly to the topic, but few know much about it."[13] The generalized and euphemized history of slavery that is taught in the public education system is lacking in educating the American population of the true breadth of the institution of slavery and its effects on American life. When approaching the topic of presenting difficult histories to the public, public historians must first "attempt to address popular ignorance of slavery's diversity, longevity, complexity, and centrality."[14]

All people have identities that are based on narratives. These identities define how people see themselves and the world around them. Narratives that create identities consist of personal stories and grand historical narratives. A person can have multiple identities, as narratives happen simultaneously, such as family, region, racial, ethnic, and social class narratives. According to the book, *Interpreting African American History and*

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[13] Horton, Lois E., and James Oliver Horton. 2009. *Slavery and Public History : The Tough Stuff of American Memory*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,shib&db=nlebk&AN=295702&site=eds-live. Pg. 37

[14] Horton, Lois E., and James Oliver Horton. 2009. *Slavery and Public History : The Tough Stuff of American Memory*. Pg. 38

Culture at Museums and Historic Sites by Max van Balgooy, these narratives, or lack of, also contribute to public memory. In the case of slavery, much of the history plays a little or no role in the overall American conscience. Slavery is mentioned most in African American history or the history of wealthy southern families, but in regions like the North, West and Midwest areas[15] of the United States, much history is interpreted as independent of slavery. Many white families and institutions in these areas do not see their history intertwined with slavery. Slavery was integrated in every region of the United States and a good interpretation of slavery includes the role of slavery in a much broader sense of history. Dismantling the idea that slavery only existed in a certain region can be healthy and promote growth but can also generate resistance and disbelief. This process is gradual and can be shocking at first. It is "essential that an interpretive plan and staff training take this process, and its manifestations, into account, and that visitors be given plenty of opportunity to express their cognitive and emotional struggles as they absorb the interpretation."[16]

As the role of museums and historic houses is changing. From institutions that display and collect histories to leading institutions for public education, it is imperative that these institutions emphasize and highlight the role of slavery within their own institutions and in the surrounding historical context. While there has been a period of growth over the last decade in including African American history in museums,[17]

[15] van Balgooy, Max A., ed. *Interpreting African American History and Culture at Museums and Historic Sites*. Blue Ridge Summit: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014. Accessed March 30, 2023. ProQuest Ebook Central. Pg. 27
[16] van Balgooy, Max A., ed. *Interpreting African American History and Culture at Museums and Historic Sites*. Blue Ridge Summit: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014. Accessed March 30, 2023. ProQuest Ebook Central. Pg. 29
[17] Bunch, Lonnie (2007) "Embracing Ambiguity: The Challenge of Interpreting African American History in Museums." Pg. 51

according to Lonnie Bunch in his article "Embracing Ambiguity: The Challenge of Interpreting African American History in Museums," exhibits are shallow and only discuss African Americans existing in a certain time or space. The complexities, interactions, and difficulties of those stories are glossed over. According to the book *Interpreting Difficult History at Museums and Historic Sites* by Julia Rose,[18] examples of single dimensional stories are those descriptions that just give the job title, social position, and name of the historical figure. Single dimension representations lack a human quality and make it difficult for visitors and staff to connect to the historical figure. By using single dimensional representations and lacking a multi-dimensional story, learners have difficulty creating discussion around the narrative. This lack of discussion leads to a lack of learning. Multi-dimensional representations are a double-edged sword in that visitors could empathize with the historical figure, but by creating a more relatable and realistic story, visitors can react with resistance as the personal stories of the historic figure become too painful to discuss.

Many African American histories are not included in the permanent stories that the institution presents and therefore, not effective in creating long term change for a more inclusive narrative. Museums are important and relevant to educating an American population that is still struggling to understand the impact of race relations. However, few institutions "address this history of slavery for a non-scholarly audience, and there are even fewer opportunities to discuss - candidly and openly - the impact, legacy, and contemporary meaning of slavery."[19] The role of public historian is now one that requires

[18] Rose, Julia. *Interpreting Difficult History at Museums and Historic Sites*. Interpreting History. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2016. Pg. 102
[19] Bunch, Lonnie (2007) "Embracing Ambiguity: The Challenge of Interpreting African American History in Museums." Pg. 47

the historians to be "called upon to deal with this unsettling but critical topic, often under less than ideal teaching conditions. Moreover, they are asked to educate a public generally unprepared and reluctant to deal with a history that, at times, can seem very personal."[20]

In the article "One Person at a Time: Interpreting Slavery at Montpelier" written by Elizabeth Chew for the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the process of developing and including enslaved stories to the history of Montpelier is discussed. As preparations for a new exhibit were underway, care was taken to include descendants of the enslaved that lived and worked at Montpelier. It is also important to include academic scholars in crafting strategy for approaching expanded narratives, as well as consulting communities descended from enslaved to create a fully comprehensive guide. There is a pressing need for public historians and historical interpreters to engage in serious discussions about techniques and strategies for addressing race in general and slavery in particular.[21]

According to the book *Interpreting African American History and Culture at Museums and Historic Sites,* through community involvement, organizations can become strong and more relevant to wider communities and potential visitors. Community involvement can also spark a deeper perspective in the museum and can create opportunities that are more significant and impactful. The museum should foster public discussion and through community engagement, the site can become a more visible

[20] Horton, Lois E., and James Oliver Horton. 2009. *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*. Pg. 37
[21] Horton, Lois E., and James Oliver Horton. 2009. *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*. Pg. 55

community institution. This outside source can also provide advice to museums and bring accountability in the interpretation process.[22]

In the article by Chew, the descendants of the enslaved presented two main requests that should be addressed when presenting enslaved narratives. The first is the understanding that the trauma experienced by black people of past is still "raw, still provokes anger and shame, and still has relevance and consequences in the present."[23] As discussed in Horton and Horton's *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory,* the complexity of this issue is only furthered when one considers the difficulty of conveying an Afro-American history to a predominantly white audience, who might feel alienated by discussions of slavery. Any "attempt to integrate these aspects of the national past into the American memory risks provoking defensiveness, anger, and confrontation."[24]

This alienation of a largely white audience could lead to lower attendance figures and thus, less income for museum institutions. As stated in Graham and Seaton's "Slavery, Contest Heritage, and Thanatourism," because of this fear of lower attendance numbers and the difficulty of creating a guideline that addresses the complexity of slavery, many museums fail "to acknowledge the contribution of Afro-Americans and a significant omission of the roles they played. Black history is short-changed whenever

[22] van Balgooy, Max A., ed. *Interpreting African American History and Culture at Museums and Historic Sites*. Blue Ridge Summit: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014. Accessed March 30, 2023. ProQuest Ebook Central. Pg. 32
[23] Chew, Elizabeth One Person at a Time: Interpreting Slavery at Montpelier." *National Trust for Historic Preservation.* September 6, 2017. Accessed April 1, 2023.
[24] Horton, Lois E., and James Oliver Horton. 2009. *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*. Pg. 37Pg. 36

references to slavery are absent or, when they occur, slave quarters are referred to as servant quarters or carriage houses."[25]

The second request of descendants of the enslaved that were involved in the exhibit at Montpelier was to emphasize the humanity of enslaved people. This idea of emphasizing multiple facets of an enslaved persons history aligns with the research discussed in both *Interpreting Difficult Histories at Museums and Historic Sites* and in *Interpreting Slavery at Museums and Historic Sites.* Additionally, enslaved histories are generalized when slavery is mostly mentioned only in places where enslaved peoples acted as servants, such as the kitchen and dining room. When mentioned, enslaved narratives are broad and lack humanistic qualities in which audiences can relate. These broad narratives lead visitors to think of slavery and slaveholding in very simplistic terms. According to Graham and Seaton's "Slavery, Contested Heritage, and Thanatourism" these simplistic narratives have no impact on the visitor experience and issues normally brought up during the tours by visitors are polite questions posed for technical information, not for an in-depth discussion of difficult histories.[26]

When people visit museums, they are often looking for simple answers to complex questions.[27] Museums are also a tool for visitors to find confirmation of memories and traditions. Because of this, museums create exhibits that satisfy the visitor's desire to be comforted and have closure when visiting. The complexities of the

[25] Graham M. S. Dann & A. V. Seaton (2001) Slavery, Contested Heritage and Thanatourism, International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration, 2:3-4, 1-29, DOI: 10.1300/J149v02n03_01. Pg. 15
[26] Graham, M. S. Dann & Seaton, A.V. (2001) Slavery, Contested Heritage and Thanatourism, Pg. 15
[27] Bunch, Lonnie (2007) "Embracing Ambiguity: The Challenge of Interpreting African American History in Museums," Pg. 53

past are known by museum professionals and historians and should be conveyed to the public.

There is no standard guideline which all museums follow to interpret and present difficult histories to the public. Because of this lack of standardized procedure, museum staff are left to create their own guidelines or follow the example of larger museums. Creating guidelines for interpreting histories of the enslaved is difficult and complex. Academic sources written by Graham and Seaton, and Bunch both discuss the difficulties of addressing the issue of slavery to the public. There are "few noncontroversial means of addressing the issue of slavery in a public setting and no comfortable way to deal with these questions at the core of American identity and conscience."[28] Museums should combat this practice and have a goal of providing "opportunities for audiences to embrace and even revel in the ambiguities of the past."[29]

As discussed in Elizabeth Chew's article that included working with descendants of the enslaved at Montpelier, the history of slavery in the United States is not only a difficult part of the past but is also a living history which raises issues like racial justice, healing, or repair. Confronting the history of slavery requires analyzing historical narratives that create the core of how some Americans understand their identity. This change in historical narrative can create emotions such as fear, anger, guilt, or shame, especially "if the topic is explored in depth, made personal, or presented in a way with which we are not already familiar. A site's interpretive plan must therefore consider the

[28] Horton, Lois E., and James Oliver Horton. 2009. *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*. Pg. 46
[29] Bunch, Lonnie (2007) "Embracing Ambiguity: The Challenge of Interpreting African American History in Museums," Pg. 54

cognitive and psychological challenges for staff and visitors as they encounter this history."[30]

Just like visitors, museum staff can struggle with the same conflicting narratives and identity baggage. According to the book *Interpreting African American History and Culture at Museums and Historic Sites,* the first step in equipping staff to interpret narratives of the enslaved is having frank and open dialogue about people's personal identities and narratives in relation to slavery. Another important step is discussing staff concerns about visitor reactions. This step is critical to producing confidence amongst staff for when they discuss enslaved narratives to the public. One way to help staff become more confident is making a list of worst possible outcomes and preparing potential responses to these situations. In addition to this, interpreters should have a sound understanding of how visitors receive and process information. With this understanding, interpreters can better navigate difficult situations as well as creating a space where staff can present individualized stories of the enslaved. When museum staff present individual stories, historical individuals are depicted as active historical agents and not just a mechanism of the household or plantation life, without this complexity, museums are not as effective. Interpreters "should tell emotionally evocative stories about all people who lived and worked at a site, giving visitors equal opportunities to invest emotionally in the lives of the enslaved."[31] For Lonnie Bunch, a sign of a

[30] van Balgooy, Max A., ed. *Interpreting African American History and Culture at Museums and Historic Sites*. Pg. 30.
[31] van Balgooy, Max A., ed. *Interpreting African American History and Culture at Museums and Historic Sites*. Blue Ridge Summit: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014. Accessed March 30, 2023. ProQuest Ebook Central. Pg. 34

successful "exhibitions or programs is whether the audience becomes more comfortable with ambiguity and with complexity."[32]

It is important to include academic scholars in crafting strategy for approaching expanded narratives, as well as consulting communities descended from enslaved to create a fully comprehensive guide. There is a pressing need for public historians and historical interpreters to engage in serious discussions about techniques and strategies for addressing race in general and slavery in particular.

At two historic sites, discussions of strategies for addressing race in the South is at the forefront of the sites' goals. In 2014 and 2015, the Whitney Plantation in Louisiana and the McLeod Historic Plantation Site in South Carolina, began to focus the interpretation of their sites to that of enslaved stories. While the Whitney Plantation focuses more on the lives of enslaved peoples during a specific time period, the McLeod Plantation Historic Site focuses on the experience of African Americans beyond the abolishment of slavery. The African American experiences is traced through periods following the Civil War up until the late 20th century.

The Whitney Plantation was originally a sugarcane plantation and was home to over 350 African American enslaved people. The plantation was bought by a new owner in 2011, and by 2014 the site had opened to the public with a completely new interpretation. The site was fully reconstructed with slave cabins, a church, and a steel cage from the 1800s that served as a jail for disobedient slaves. Not all of these structures are original to the site, they are original to the time period. The reconstruction of the site plays a key role in the interpretation of the site. According to Dorota Golańska in her

[32] Bunch, Lonnie (2007) "Embracing Ambiguity: The Challenge of Interpreting African American History in Museums," Pg. 53

article "Against the 'Moonlight and Magnolia' myth of the American South. A new materialist approach to the dissonant heritage of slavery in the US: The case of Whitney Plantation in Wallace, LA," the "intended design of the educations process rests on the idea of an 'aesthetic encounter,' where the site and the visitor affect and are affected by each other, and where knowledge emerges as a material semiotic assemblage."[33] Having physical landscapes which visitors can walk through and experience for themselves makes the information given by the tour guide much more real. Sculptures are also used at the Whitney Plantation to help visitors envision the life of the enslaved.

The McLeod Plantation came under the ownership of Charleston County Parks and began a new interpretation in 2015. According to article "McLeod Historic Site,"[34] by Shawn Halifax, the change of interpretation to focus on the lives of African Americans from 1851-1990 was created using sources such as Van Balgooy's *Interpreting African American History and Culture at Museums and Historic Sites* and Rose's *Interpreting Difficult History at Museums and Historic Sites*, as well as the National Association for Interpretation's theme-based interpretation methodology. Through these sources, the McLeod Plantation Historic Site was able to create curriculum for tours and educational programs that told the story of the enslaved, as well as discuss the broader African American experience.

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[33] Golańska, Dorota. 2020. "Agaisnt the 'Moondlight and Magnolia' Myth of the American South. A New Materialist Approach to the Dissonant Heritage of Slavery in the US. The Case of Whitney plantationin Wallace, LA." *Muzeológia a Kultúrne Dedičstvo* 8 (4): 137–60. doi:10.46284/mkd.2020.8.4.9. Pg. 145

[34] Halifax, Shawn. "McLeod Plantation Historic Site." *The Public Historian,* August 2018, Vol. 40, No. 3. University of California Press. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26504433.

These two sites serve as examples of historic sites ethically implementing African American stories with interpretation practices that emphasize the humanity, legitimacy, and permeance of the institution of slavery and those bound to it.

CHAPTER 2

DAVENPORT HOUSE

A Brief History of the Davenport House

The Isaiah Davenport House was built in 1820 by architect Isaiah Davenport. Isaiah Davenport was born in 1784 in Little Compton, Rhode Island and came from an educated and wealthy family. Because of his father's passing at a young age, Davenport learned to earn a living at a young age.[35]

In the early 1800s, he moved to Savannah, Georgia, in the hopes of becoming established in the building trade. He was successful in this endeavor and by March of 1809, he was wealthy and prominent enough in the community to marry Sarah Rosamend Clarke. It was after his marriage that he bought a lot on the corner of State and Habersham Streets to build a home. The lot was bought in 1812 and it took Davenport many years to complete the house, it was not finished until 1820. The couple had seven children together, but Isaiah Davenport died in 1827, leaving Sarah to raise the children.

Sarah Davenport was born in 1788 into a wealthy family. She was twenty-one years old when she married Isaiah Davenport. The couple were married for eighteen years, until his death in 1827. Sarah birthed ten children, with seven living to adulthood. After her husband died, she managed the Davenport House, including overseeing the enslaved. She lived in the house for thirteen years as a widow, and at some point, used the home as a boarding house. During the Civil War, two of her sons fought for the Union and the other three sons fought for the Confederacy. After the war, she opened

[35] National Register Nomination Form, Isaiah Davenport House, Savannah Georgia. 1972.

another boarding house and took care of her grandchildren. She died in 1869 at the age of eighty-one.

The current house museum is interpreted to the period of the 1820s, which is the period that the museum has the most information about.[36] The Davenport family consisted of nine people: Isaiah and Sarah and their seven children, Isaiah, Jr., Benjamin Rush, Hugh McCall, Henry Kollock, Archibald, Cornelia, and Dudley. At the time, the Davenport property was home to more than just the Davenport family. In total, the Davenport's owned thirteen enslaved people. The thirteen enslaved peoples were named Deeping, Peggy, Nancy, Ned, Tom, Dave, Bella, who was the mother to four children – Polly, Jack, Jacob, and Isaac, and Mary, who was the mother to Anne, who was possibly married to either Isaac or Jacob.

Name	Born	Joined the Davenports	Age	Left Davenports	Age	Rejoined Davenports	Age	Left Davenports	Age
Deeping	1795	1809	14	1825	34	1829	34	1830	45
Peggy	1810	1810	0	1840	30				
Nancy	1782	1813	30	1816	33				
Ned	1780	1813	33	1828	48				
Tom	1798	1815	17	1820	22				
Bella*	1789	1817	29	1843	54				
Polly*	1816	1817	1	1840	24				
Jack*	1808	1817	9	1840	20				
Jacob*	1812	1817	5	1858	46				
Isaac*	1812	1817	5	1860	48				
Mary	1790	1819	29	1825	38	1829	39	1860	70
Anne	1815	1819	4	1860	45				
Dave	1790	1821	32	1828	39				

Table 1. Date and Age of Enslaved Peoples in the Davenport Household

Nancy was the most well-documented of the enslaved peoples in the household.[37] Born in 1782, Nancy was originally owned by the Keiffer Family, who were one of the original German speaking Salzburger families in Ebenezer, Georgia. Because of this,

[36] Davenport House, "Davenport Timeline," *Davenport House,* Accessed February 12, 2023.
[37] Westfield, Kelly. "The Enslaved Members of the Davenport Household: Geography, Mobility, and Pre-Davenport House Lived Experiences." Pg. 9

Nancy was able to speak German. For thirty years, she stayed in the German community but was sold to four different owners during that time. In 1812, Nancy was bought by Isaiah Davenport.

A few months after Isaiah Davenport bought Nancy, she ran away. Because of the sale, Nancy was forced to separate from her family and had to transition from rural to urban life. Her previous life had been completely ripped away from her and running away was the only way she could attempt to gain her life back. It is because of this incident that we have documentation about Nancy. Isaiah Davenport had put a runaway notice in the local paper that gives insight to Nancy's life.

Fifty Dollars Reward

Ranaway from the subscriber on or about the 20th of March last, a NEGRO WENCH, Named Nancy, about thirty years of age, four feet ten inches high, has a scar on her neck; she can speak the German language; Nancy was formerly the property of George Rentz, who owns her sister by the name of Peggy; they look very much alike; Nancy was once taken, and got off by passing herself for Peggy; they can only be distinguished by the scar Nancy has on her neck, she has been several times seen passing from Savannah to Wilmington Island. The above reward will be paid on proof of conviction of her being harbored by any white person, or Thirty Dollars if harbored by a person of color, and Twenty Dollars if delivered to the subscriber, or lodged in any gaol in this state, so that the subscriber get her.

ISAIAH DAVENPORT.[1]

Figure 1. Runaway Notice for Nancy

A couple of details are listed: she was described as a "Wench"[38] signaling that she was a domestic servant in the Davenport household. Nancy was short, around 4' 10, and had a sister named Peggy, who looked so like Nancy that Nancy was able to impersonate her. Nancy had a significant scar on her neck, and she regularly traveled to and from Wilmington Island, indicating she probably had family or a support network there. It is also interesting to note that Davenport's runaway notice does indicate that Nancy can

[38] Westfield, Kelly. "The Enslaved Members of the Davenport Household: Geography, Mobility, and Pre-Davenport House Lived Experiences." Pg. 9

speak German but does not indicate whether she speaks English. From the date on the runaway notice and the date that Nancy was bought by the Davenport's, we know that she was on the run for a year. Nancy was eventually returned to Davenport, and in 1816, there is record that Nancy was taken to New York, where her record ends. She was most likely sold to someone in New York because the Davenport's thought she was a flight risk.

Bella, born sometime between 1789-1798, had four children, Jack, Polly, Jacob, and Isaac.[39] Polly was the youngest, born in 1816, Jacob and Isaac were twins, born in 1812 and Jack was the oldest and born in 1808. Jack and Polly are the only two physical representations of the enslaved shown on the current tour. Information about Bella's early life is difficult to find because she was born in a burn county that was set aflame during the Civil War. Courthouse records were destroyed making it impossible to find the original deed sale for Bella. Both Bella and her children were sold to the Davenport's in 1817. Their previous household, located in Hilton Head Island in South Carolina, directly links Bella and her children to the Gullah Geechee culture. Like Nancy, she was also taken from a rural area and forced to adjust to urban living. While not confirmed, it is speculated that Bella was a wetnurse for the Davenport children. Luckily, Bella and her four children were able to remain together many years after she was initially purchased. She died sometime between 1843 and 1850 at the estimated age somewhere between fifty-two and sixty-two.

[39] Westfield, Kelly. "The Enslaved Members of the Davenport Household." Pg. 38

Other enslaved people in the house include Dave,[40] who worked as a waggoner and was the last enslaved person bought by Sarah Davenport. Mary, and her daughter Anne,[41] lived and traveled with Sarah Davenport their entire lives and were able to create an extensive network of friends and contacts within both the free and enslaved community. Anne was possibly the wife of either Isaac or Jacob and the three were similar in age. The Mary and Anne were never separated. Deeping,[42] whose life and history has only been documented in a single deed record in 1825 when he was sold by Sarah Davenport to her mother, Susanna Clark. Deeping, Mary, and Anne were all sold to Susanna Clark, but, after her death, were eventually returned to Sarah Davenport. Little is known about Tom,[43] who was born in 1798 and whose record does not extend past 1815. He is the only one of the enslaved in the Davenport House that is not documented prior to, or after, 1820. There are two possible theories about why any later records do not exist. Tom could have died, or he was living alone and paying Sarah Davenport a portion of his wages.

The last enslaved person in the Davenport House, named Ned,[44] whose birth date is not provided in the deed of sale to Isaiah Davenport. In his early years, Ned was connected to Brampton Plantation, where the early grassroots movement began establishing Savannah's African Baptist congregation. It is likely that a young Ned witnessed the stirrings of the African Baptist movement. Before he was sold to Isaiah Davenport, Ned was incarcerated in the Savannah jail. Slave owners would sometimes

[40] Westfield, Kelly. "The Enslaved Members of the Davenport Household: Geography, Mobility, and Pre-Davenport House Lived Experiences." Pg. 120
[41] Westfield, Kelly. "The Enslaved Members of the Davenport Household." Pg. 72
[42] Westfield, Kelly. "The Enslaved Members of the Davenport Household." Pg. 88
[43] Westfield, Kelly. "The Enslaved Members of the Davenport Household." Pg. 91
[44] Westfield, Kelly. "The Enslaved Members of the Davenport Household." Pg. 95

incarcerate the enslaved for "safekeeping"[45] if there was a transfer of ownership or the enslaved person was considered a flight risk. Ned's incarceration aligned with the time he was sold to Isaiah Davenport.

In 1840, thirteen years after the death of Isaiah Davenport, Sarah Davenport sold the house to a man named William Baynard who lived in Hilton Head, South Carolina. Baynard occasionally rented the house to tenants, but rarely used the house himself. For the next one hundred and nine years, the house deteriorated under the care of the Baynards.

By 1954, the house was dilapidated. Ten families had been living in the building, but the chimneys were crumbling, and the windows had been broken and patched with cardboard. It was set to be demolished. Despite its condition, the house was still important to the fabric of the city, and many residents heavily protested its demolition. The Historic Savannah Foundation was created solely for the purpose of saving and restoring the Davenport House. Once the Foundation formed, money was raised to buy the house. The Foundation was successful in restoring the property, and soon, other houses in the area were bought and restored. In 1963, the Foundation opened the house to the public and moved their headquarters to the basement.

The significance of the Davenport House is twofold. The house is important because of its Federal era architecture which represents early 19th century port city life in Savannah as well as its role in the creation of the Historic Savannah Foundation.

The house museum is currently open to the public from Monday to Saturday from 10 a.m. until 4pm. With both self-guided and regular tours offered. There is also a gift shop, which is located across the street.

[45] Westfield, Kelly. "The Enslaved Members of the Davenport Household." Pg. 105

Experience with the Davenport House

Tour

The Davenport House was the first stop on the tour of historic houses of Savannah. Originally on the lowest floor of the Davenport House, the gift shop had been moved to a space across the street. Attached to the gift shop was an exhibit space with a timeline of a general history of Savannah and the history of the preservation movement in Savannah.

Figure 2. Timeline located in the Davenport House gift shop.

The tickets for the tour were $10 each for an adult. The tour group was a relatively large group, so much so that the tour guide commented on the unusual size. All sixteen visitors were white and at least in their mid-forties. Our tour guide, a black student at the Savannah College of Art and Design, was one of the youngest people in the room.

The tour started in the hallway of the first floor of the house, with a brief presentation of the history and preservation of the house. Throughout the tour, there was a heavy emphasis on the role of preservation in the house's history. This theme was also apparent in the gift shop, which sold multiple books revolving around the preservation of the house and the history of preservation in the city of Savannah. The tour guide was very knowledgeable about the history of the Davenport family and the house and was able to answer any questions the visitors had. During the tour, she was able to show the group

primary sources from the house and Davenport family, such as a swatch of the original wallpaper that was used in redecorating the room. The addition of primary source materials that were presented during the tour really contributed to the story the tour guide was conveying.

Figure 3. Piece of original wallpaper of the Davenport House shown on the tour

In Davenport's Office, the first room that we entered, a different narrative to Davenport's story was introduced. A faceless cutout silhouette, probably 5'8 inches tall was in the corner of the room. He was dressed in period piece clothing of pants, a loose linen shirt and a brown vest. On his face, in white writing, said "I'm Jack."[46] The first enslaved narrative introduced to the tour was this silhouette. The tour guide made no mention of this silhouette, or of the person it represented, and no one on the tour asked

[46] "Davenport House Tour." Davenport House, October 9, 2022.

any questions about it. There was also no signage, other than the writing on the face of the cutout, to indicate more about Jack's story.

Figure 4. Silhouette of enslaved person, the words "I'm Jack" written on the face

Also in that room was a list of the enslaved who lived in the house from 1820-1827. This list was a simple piece of paper haphazardly placed on top of the mantel. If one was not specifically looking for the paper, it would have never been seen. The tour guide and the visitors made no mention of this list.

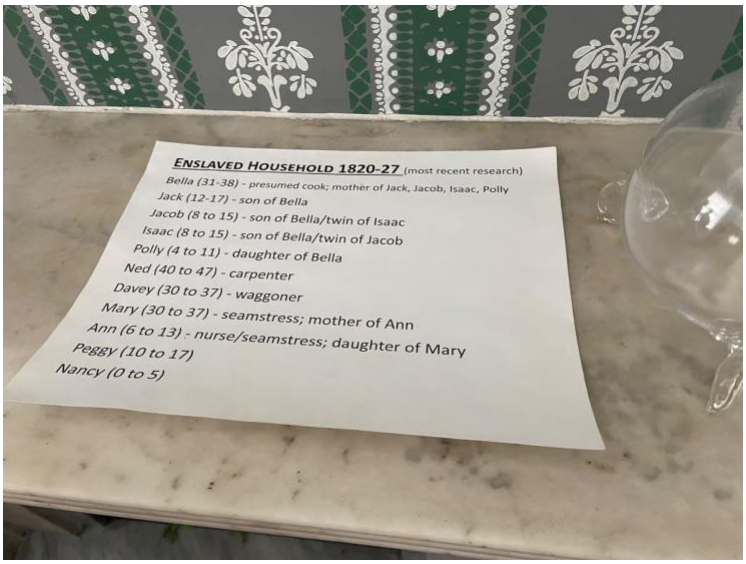

Figure 5. List of enslaved that lived the house from 1820-1827

As the group moved from room to room, the tour guide discussed the history of the Davenport family. The history of the Davenport family was well documented during the forty-five minute tour. The tour guide made the first verbal mention of the enslaved in the house as the group entered one of the bedrooms of Isaiah Davenport's daughter. The guide mentioned the importance of discussing the narrative of the enslaved and talked a little bit about the work the enslaved did in the house, but there was no mention of any personal narrative of the enslaved. In total, the tour guide mentioned the enslaved four times on the tour, and on the second floor was another cutout of a young, enslaved girl with the name Polly.[47] The cutout was short and wore a light pink blouse with a green skirt. A bucket was also located beside the cutout. As we walked past the cutout, no mention was made of her story.

[47] "Davenport House Tour." Davenport House, October 9, 2022.

Figure 6. Silhouette of enslaved child named Polly. Located on the second floor of the Davenport House.

It's important to note that the entire building as well as the second floor of the building, where the bedrooms and the cutout silhouette of Polly was located, was not accessible to people who could not climb stairs and were considered steep for those who were able to. This was problematic for some members of our tour group and important to note because of the older age of many of the visitors.

After the tour of the house, as well as the garden, the tour guide was asked about the resources the museum staff used to learn about the enslaved in the house. She mentioned resources such as deed records and archives. She did not go into detail about the stories of the enslaved when asked but provided the contact information of the education coordinator.

The inclusion of cutouts representing the enslaved on the property was confusing and not impactful. No known photos exist of Jack and Polly, who the cutouts are modeled after, and because the tour guide only mentioned the enslaved a couple of times, and

never in-depth, having the cutouts with no verbal discussion made them forgettable. The writing on the face of the cutouts was also confusing as it made the cutouts faceless. If the visitor had not been looking for stories of the enslaved, the tour itself would not have yielded much information. While having hints of enslaved stories, such as the paper with the list of the enslaved and their birthdays, or the cardboard cutouts with their names and period clothing, the lack of verbal discussion about the stories made these things feel irrelevant to the tour.

While there was some mention of the enslaved and a sense that the museum was trying to convey enslaved stories through different mediums, individualized stories were not present on the tour.

Overall, primary sources were used to strengthen the historical narrative of the Davenport family and the history of the house on the tour. Information of the enslaved is available, but not fully explored during the tour. There was mention of enslaved peoples in the house, but no mention of individualized stories of enslaved peoples, because of this, any mention of enslaved peoples is forgettable, as they are only mentioned in passing and lack humanistic qualities. There were also attempts to include enslaved narratives through silhouette cutouts of enslaved peoples, but these attempts were not necessarily effective in creating discussion amongst the tour group.

Website

The Davenport House was the most unexpected website of the three case studies. While initially, the opening page of the website is what was expected, with a heavy emphasis on historic preservation in Savannah, event opportunities, and information about visiting, after scrolling to the bottom of the page, a tab was found that presented resources about the enslaved. The page was filled with primary and secondary sources

that told the story of the general history of slavery in Savannah as well as the individual stories of the enslaved that lived in the Davenport House. There was an entire page listing the names of the enslaved: Dave, Nancy, Ned, Anne, Mary and Bella and her children with each name having a corresponding page detailing their individual stories and any contextual information the museum staff knew about them. There was even an audio clip of a narrator discussing the stories of the enslaved.[48] This page also showed images of artifacts in the house that were associated with the enslaved person's story. A virtual tour was also available on this page so visitors could look through the house to find the artifacts.

Of the resources available on the website, the most in-depth source was a link to the research conducted about the enslaved on the property. In the fall of 2017, a student by the name of Kelly Westfield researched and compiled all information about the enslaved on the property. The research paper is publicly available through the website and is incredibly in-depth. Westfield's research contributed to the history section of this paper and had a huge impact on the interpretation of the Davenport House. There is also a section that explains how Westfield found the stories of the enslaved and the resources used in the research. Having this information available publicly is incredibly helpful in learning about the history of the site. There were also articles and videos on the website that discussed the narratives of the enslaved.

The information presented on the Davenport House website was expansive and accessible. Having individual pages dedicated to each enslaved person that resided on the property contributed to the multi-narrative history of the site. From the website, it was

[48] Davenport House "We Know Their Names," *Davenport House*, Accessed February 12, 2023.

gathered that the Davenport House Museum staff had a substantial amount of information about the enslaved on the property,[49] and were transparent about how information was gathered and the findings of the research. The amount of information available was unexpected because of the lack of enslaved stories on the tour.

In summary, stories of the enslaved are featured prominently on the website and are easy to find, with individualized stories of the enslaved being in-depth and telling the stories of the enslaved in a way that is memorable. The full breadth of research about the stories of the enslaved is also available for the public to view. Virtual tour included on the website that features artifacts tied to the stories of the enslaved is helpful in relating the enslaved to physical objects in the house.

Interview

Interviewing the museum staff was the last step of researching each house. The staff of all three houses were asked similar questions to better understand how the museum staff is approaching interpretation of enslaved peoples at their respective sites. Through interviews, an understanding of the museum's process of changing and developing the interpretation of the site was furthered. The museum staff of all three house museums was more than helpful in answering my questions.

Jamie Credle, the Director of the Davenport House, and Sheena Fulkerson, the Davenport House Museum Tour Coordinator, were interviewed about the Davenport House and were able to give great insight into the Davenport House. Jamie has been the director of Davenport House Museums for twenty years and was able to speak about the changes in the museum during her time. Sheena, who joined the staff of the Davenport

[49] Davenport House "We Know Their Names," *Davenport House,* Accessed February 12, 2023.

House in 2018, is responsible for leading and training the docents who give tours at the house.

From interviewing Credle and Fulkerson it became clear that Kelly Westfield's research was a catalyst in transforming the museum's interpretation. Her research contributed to information relayed on tours and on the website.[50] However, it became clear that Westfield's research was not fully implemented in the tours, as both Credle and Fulkerson stated that information relayed from the docent to the public is not conveyed in a "tour script, because it could end up being a rope delivery. We give people pointers, outline, and rough ideas for them to be able to craft it into their own language,"[51] and that docents have the freedom to discuss topics of personal interest to them.

Even though the training for the docents includes Westfield's research, as well as a youth guide detailing the lives of the enslaved that is located on the website, the freedom given to the docents in discussing topics of personal interest has replaced the need for the docents to discuss enslaved narratives. Fulkerson also stated that some of the newer docents were more accepting of expanding the narrative,[52] while some older docents who have volunteered with the Davenport House for longer were more hesitant to include the new narratives. Because the docents at the Davenport House are volunteers, it is difficult to completely implement Westfield's research because docents would rather discuss their personal interest on tours. Having a training program that made including Westfield's research a necessity on tours as well as teaching docents how to successfully discuss difficult histories to audiences would be helpful in giving the

[50] Cradle, Jamie. "Interview About Davenport House." by Shannon Graham, November 8, 2022.
[51] Cradle, Jamie. "Interview About Davenport House." by Shannon Graham, November 8, 2022.
[52] Fulkerson, Sheena. "Interview About Davenport House." by Shannon Graham, November 8, 2022.

audiences a more in-depth understanding of the stories of the enslaved. The personal interest of the docents can still be conveyed in tours, but those interests should not take precedence over stories of the enslaved.

Talking with Credle and Fulkerson allowed insight into the training of docents and the implementation of Westfield's research. The Davenport House has taken steps to include enslaved stories, however, lacks consistency in presenting these stories to the public through tours.

Overall, information relating to enslaved stories is relatively new and mostly based on the research of Kelly Westfield. Docents are volunteers, making implementing enslaved narratives more difficult because docents would rather discuss personal interests. Interestingly, some docents have been more accepting of including enslaved narratives, and some are more hesitant to change traditional narratives that have been told in the past. There is no set training program in place to ensure docents are trained to teach and relay difficult histories.

CHAPTER 3

THE OWENS-THOMAS HOUSE AND SLAVE QUARTERS

A Brief History of the Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters

The Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters was designed in 1816 by English architect William Jay, built by John Retan and was commissioned by Richard Richardson.[53] William Jay was born in Bath in 1792 and after studying with a British architect, he moved to Savannah, Georgia. Richardson's family home was his first commission in America. His design of the house demonstrated his thorough knowledge of classical Greek architecture, while also showing his understanding of proportion and using ornamentation. The Richardson-Owens-Thomas House is a two-story brick and stucco structure built over a high basement. The house has Ionic columns and classical elements are interwoven throughout. The house is also a balanced-plan concept with a central hall flanked by rooms of equal width. The Richardson House, along with other houses he designed, was introduced to the city of Savannah as the English Regency style. William Jay returned to England in 1824, but his designs and architectural style heavily influenced a generation of housebuilders in Savannah.

Richard Richardson was a wealthy citizen and banker in Savannah. He married Frances Lewis whose brother married the sister of William Jay. Because of this, Jay was commissioned to design the house.[54] The builder of the house, John Retan, had already begun construction of the house a year before William Jay moved to Savannah. It is

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[53] National Register Nomination Form, Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters, Savannah Georgia. 1976.

[54] HABS No. GA-14-9, Richardson-Maxwell-Owens-Thomas House, 124 Abercorn Street, Savannah, Chatham County, GA. 1936

assumed that John Retan designed some parts of the house because of this time difference.

In 1819, the house was complete, and the Richardson family moved in. In addition to the main house, the property also includes a two-sided privy and another building on the east side of the property, which was used as a carriage house and slave quarters. Because of the financial panic of 1819, a yellow fever epidemic, a fire that destroyed half the city[55] and with the death of his wife Frances and two of the couple's children, the prosperity of the Richardson family decreased. After only living in the house for a few years, Richardson sold the house and moved to Louisiana.

From 1819 to 1865, anywhere between six to twelve enslaved people lived on the property and about half of them were children.[56] Most resided in the north half of the carriage house and the south half of the building was used for housing horses and carriages. This building was composed of three rooms on each level. The enslaved peoples, mostly women and teenagers, worked in duties of the house, such as cooking, cleaning, washing laundry and raising the owner's children. Some of the enslaved people slept in the main house in rooms such as the kitchen or the children's room. Furnishings for the living spaces of the enslaved sometimes came from the families who enslaved them. Enslaved peoples were also able to obtain or make their own as well as being handed furnishings down from others. Sometimes enslaved peoples had no material possessions.

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[55] Walter J. Fraser, Jr. *Savannah in the New South: From the Civil War to the Twenty-First Century*. Pg. 66

[56] Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters, "The History of the Owens-Thomas House," *Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters*. (2018). Accessed February 15, 2023.

By 1824, the Bank of the United States owned the home.[57] The bank leased the house to Mary Maxwell which she used as a boarding home. Eventually, the house was sold to George Welshman Owens for $10,000 at auction in 1830 Over the next 121 years, the Owens family owned the property. The first Owens family in the house consisted of George Owens, his wife Sarah and their six children. There were also up to fourteen enslaved laborers who also lived on the property.

One of the enslaved that lived and worked on the Owens property was Emma Katin.[58] Emma Katin was a nursemaid to the Owens' children and had an intimate relationship with the family. Because of her close position to the family, Emma Katin would sometimes receive benefits other enslaved peoples would not receive on the property, such as medical treatment for sickness. However, because she spent so much time with the Owens family, her movements were constantly supervised, and time spent with her family was limited. In 1860, Emma was sent to the Savannah jail in 1860 by the Owens family for "safekeeping."[59] Slave owners would sometimes send enslaved peoples to jail instead of whipping them at home. Emma was able to receive an inheritance from George Owens and his son John Owens after they died, however the control and use of the money was dictated by George and John Owens. Despite the seemingly close relationship between Emma and the Owens family, the Owens family never attempted to free Emma or her family.

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[57] Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters, "The History of the Owens-Thomas House," *Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters*. (2018). Accessed February 15, 2023.
[58] *Emma Katin* exhibition in the basement of the Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters. Visited on October 9, 2022.
[59] *Emma Katin* exhibition in the basement of the Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters. Visited on October 9, 2022.

The final descendent of the Owens family who lived on the property, named Margaret Thomas, eventually bequeathed the property to the Telfair Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1951, and by 1954, the site was open to the public.[60]

The Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters was also directly involved in the symposium of 2011, and in 2018, the name of the site, which was originally the Owens-Thomas House, was change to the Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters.

Experience with the Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters

Tour

The Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters was different from the other two tours for various reasons, one of which being that the tour was self-guided. Guided tours are available from 10am-2:30pm and self-guided tours are available from 1:30-4pm. Tickets for the Owen-Thomas House were $22 each for an adult but included admission to the two other museums in the Telfair Museums: Jepson Center and Telfair Academy. Both the Davenport House and the Andrew Low House had a tour guide. The Owens-Thomas House, however, was self-guided. A big reason given for this was a lack in staff. Visitors were given a tour time, then, at that time, they were allowed to begin their tour. At the beginning of the tour, visitors scanned a QR code to gain access to audio clips and a written script that would have been given during a regular tour.

[60] Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters, "The History of the Owens-Thomas House." *Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters*. (2018). Accessed February 15, 2023.

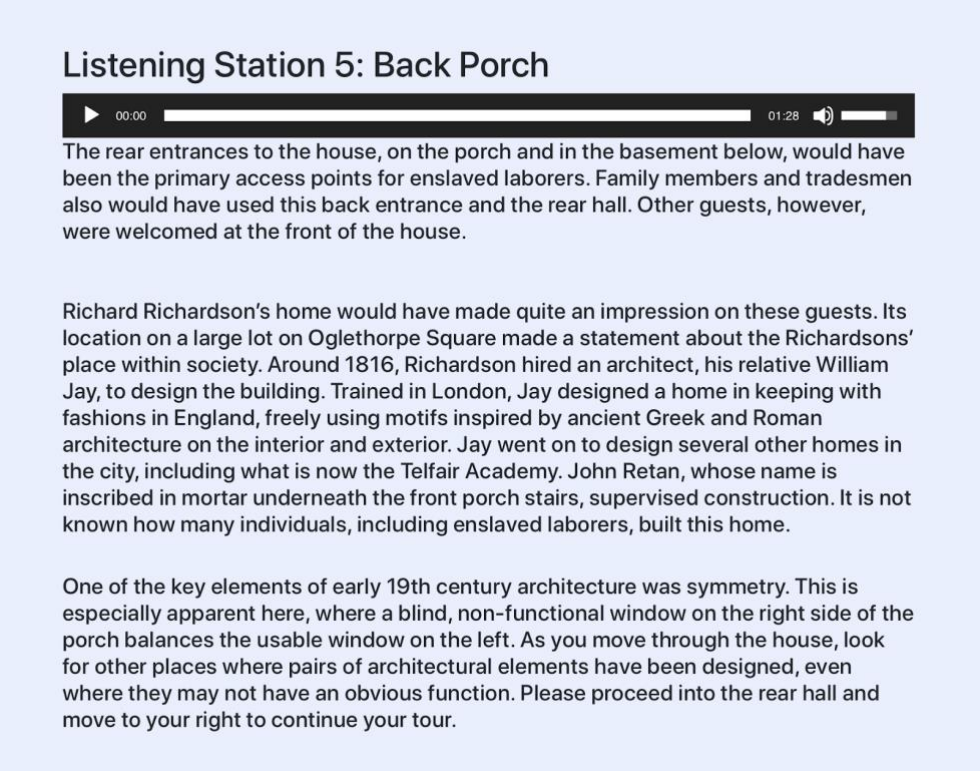

Figure 7. Screenshot of the audio and written script that visitors were provided for the self-guided tour.

There were eighteen "listening stations"[61] that visitors walked through, with each station having a brief audio clip associated with it. The audio clip and the written text were the same, so visitors could choose between listening or reading about the history of the house. The audio clips and script mentioned enslaved peoples by name and intertwined the history of the enslaved with the history of the white peoples who lived on the property. A lot of the text in the script telling individual stories of the enslaved were not as in-depth as the white narrative. While the script and audio clips provided for each room was helpful in relaying the information accessibly, having multiple audio clips

[61] "Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters Self-Guided Tour." Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters. October 9, 2022.

playing at different times became distracting and the script became tedious to read because of the many rooms.

There were docents located around the property, who regularly asked if we had any questions about the house. The ages of the people on the tour were a lot more diverse than the other two houses visited and many college students as well as middle aged and older people were visiting. A docent of the house explained that the museum utilizes primary sources like letters to learn more about the stories of the enslaved on the property and said that the creation and emphasis on the stories of the enslaved was a relatively new development in the house's interpretation.

The final exhibit explored the personal stories of the enslaved on the property through letters and artifacts. Visitors were able to read the letters for themselves, while also being given a broader context of the time. Tying both the broader context and the individual story together was incredibly impactful, and many visitors took their time reading each letter. While this exhibit had an audio clip, one that discussed the future of interpretation, many visitors were more focused on reading the letters and looking at the artifacts presented.

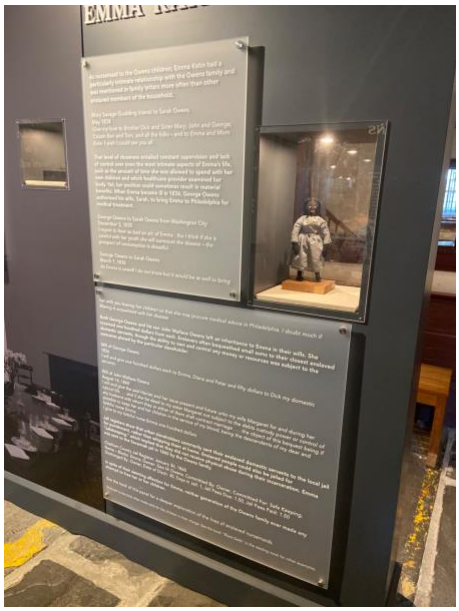

Figure 8. Part of the final exhibit in the Owens-Thomas House.

Through the exhibits and presentation of information throughout the grounds, it was clear to the visitor that the Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters emphasized the stories of the enslaved that resided on the property and throughout Savannah. Having a wall where all the names of the enslaved are written is the first exhibit presented to visitors and sets the tone for the space as multi-narrative. This tone is carried throughout the house and slave quarters and is especially prevalent in the basement and kitchen area, where the story of Emma Katin, an enslaved woman, is shown through the display of a doll, and the presentation of the letter and a Chatham County Jail Register Notice. This notice states "Name-Blacks: Emma, Owner: Geo W. Owens, Committed By: Owner, Committed For: Safe Keeping, Dischared by: Owner, Date of Disch: 30, Days in Jail 1, Jail Fees Due: 1.50, Jail Fees Paid; 1.50"[62] This space solely dedicated to the enslaved not only gives the visitor a more in-depth understanding of the enslaved on the property,

[62] *Emma Katin* exhibition in the basement of the Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters. Visited on October 9, 2022.

but also conveys a sense that the stories of the enslaved are as important as the history of the family that resided in the house.

The physical exhibits in the spaces conveyed individualized stories about the enslaved consistently, but the self-guided tour script was brief in mentioning the role of the enslaved in house. While having audio clips of the tour script was helpful if the visitor did not like to read, it became distracting if multiple people were listening to the same script at the same time. However, exhibits that featured primary sources, such as letters or dolls, were effective in highlighting stories of the enslaved and were memorable for the visitors.

Website

The Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters is a part of a larger organization called the Telfair Museums, which includes the Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters, the Jepson Center and the Telfair Academy. Because of this, the website includes information about all three museums. The section of the website that discusses the Owens-Thomas House includes general information about the property and specific information about the carriage house, parterre garden, the mansion, and the decorative arts on the property. Photos of the property are also included with the information about the different aspects of the property. The information given on the website is not incredibly in-depth but gives a good overview of the history of the site. The audio clips and script that were used for tours are also available on the website, so those interested in the property can access those resources from anywhere. A page that discussed the history of individual stories of the enslaved and links to primary sources used to create narratives of the tours was not available.

The website provides more resources about the Jepson Center and the Telfair Academy that are a part of the Telfair Museum organization than the Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters. Many pages on the website provide resources for research of the art collection and histories of the collection. The architecture of Savannah is also discussed on the website. As far as resources for histories of the enslaved, there were a couple of blogs relating to the enslaved on the property and guides for teaching enslaved narratives for teachers. Events are also posted on the website, though most of them are involved with the Jepson Center and the Telfair Academy more than the Owens-Thomas House.

Because of the emphasis on enslaved stories during the visit, it was expected that the website of the Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters would have substantial information about the enslaved highlighted on the website, but this was not the case. Other than the self-guided tour script, which was published on the website and a blog, there were no primary sources linked and information about individual stories was scarce. Because of the information presented in the tour script at the site, it is known that the house has information about the enslaved at the site, but that information is not available on the site and thus not available for those who cannot access the site in person. Overall, the lack of information on the website was surprising and disappointing.

In summary, the website focused more on the entity of Telfair Museum and lacked resources about the history of the enslaved on the Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters, with the only specific information about the Owens-Thomas House was the self-guided tour script that was provided at the property. The physical exhibits that displayed the stories of the enslaved were not featured on the website, and based on the

information given on the website, anyone who did not visit in person would not be knowledgeable about the stories of the enslaved.

Interview

Talking to the museum staff at the Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters was the last interview conducted. The history and present interpretation of the site was discussed with Ahmauri Williams-Alford who is the Assistant Curator of Historic Interpretation. Ahmauri has only served in this position since 2021, but she was very helpful in answering questions.

The Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters had the most information available to the public through tours and exhibits. Williams-Alford stated that the goals of the Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters are somewhat different than a regular house museum because the house is a part of the Telfair Academy, which focuses more on art. Three main themes are emphasized through the interpretation of the site: art, architecture, and slavery.[63]

The docent training program consists of a three-month period of study with the interpreters having to become nationally certified. The source *Slavery and Freedom in Savannah*, which was introduced at the 2011 Symposium, is used to train docents about urban slavery in Savannah. Ahmauri also puts together a guidebook which includes the history of the site and its inhabitants. While there is a three-month training period, like the Davenport House and the Andrew Low House, there is no program is in place to make sure every docent is taught everything about conveying enslaved narratives. However, unlike the other two case studies, the Owens-Thomas House and Slave

[63] Williams-Alford, Ahmauri. "Interview About Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters." by Shannon Graham, January 12, 2023.

Quarters employ their docents and pay them, therefore, making it easier to implement new narratives and a stricter script. Docents have guidelines with the story to address, which includes stories of the enslaved, but are also freed to discuss their personal interest as well.

The stories of the enslaved are conveyed to the docents as a necessary part of the information presented to the public, which makes the discussion of enslaved narratives more prevalent on tours.

Overall, the three main themes that the Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters emphasizes are art, architecture, and slavery. While self-guided tours can be beneficial because stories of the enslaved are consistently conveyed in the tour script, visitors can choose to ignore enslaved narratives and discussion about difficult topics is impossible. The museum docents are paid and participate in a three-month training period, however, no consistent training program is in place to ensure that enslaved narratives are mentioned in every part of the house, however, stories of enslaved are conveyed to docents as a necessary part of the curriculum presented to the public.

CHAPTER 4

ANDREW LOW HOUSE

A Brief History of the Andrew Low House

The Andrew Low House, created in 1849 by architect John Norris, was the home of Andrew Low and his family. Andrew Low the II was born in Kincardinshire County, Scotland, on July 20, 1812. At the age of seventeen, Low moved to Savannah, Georgia to work as an apprentice for his uncle.[64] He eventually assumed responsibility for the dry goods and cotton factoring business and when his uncle died ten years later, he completely inherited the business and his uncle's property. He married his first wife, Sarah Cecil Hunter in 1844 and the couple had three children together. Sarah Cecil Hunter was born in Savannah in July of 1817. The two met through the connection between her father and Andrew Low's uncle, as the two were friends and business associates. It was during this time that Low commissioned John Norris to design and build a house for Low's growing family. From 1848-1849 both Low's wife and one of their children passed away.[65]

Five years later, Low married his second wife Mary Cowper Stiles. Mary Cowper Stiles was born on November 15, 1832. Mary came from a wealthy family and her father practiced law in Savannah before being elected as a Democratic Representative from Georgia to the U.S. Congress. Her father was also appointed American Minister to the Austrian Empire in 1845. Mary's family was from north Georgia, and when she married

[64] National Historical Landmark Nomination Form, Juliette Gordan Low Historic District (including Andrew Low House). Savannah, Georgia. 2007.
[65] National Historical Landmark Nomination Form, Juliette Gordan Low Historic District (including Andrew Low House). Savannah, Georgia. 2007.

Andrew Low, the wedding was at her family's home. The couple had four children together and were married for nine years until Mary's death in 1863. Following the Civil War, Low moved the family to England and spent most of his time abroad. He would travel to Savannah once a year during the winter months. In 1886, Low died in England at the age of seventy-four. He was buried in the Laurel Grove Cemetery in Savannah.

It is known that at least two enslaved people live and worked in the Low house. Tom Milledge was born in Savannah on August 20, 1818 and was purchased by Low's uncle in 1844 for a sum of $398.92.[66] Tom was given authority over the house and when Low moved the family to England, Tom was charged with taking care of the house. Tom married a woman named Mosianna Ruth Delegal who was twenty years his junior. Mosianna was a fantastic cook, and is credited with teaching southern cooking to Rosa Lewis, who became famous in London for her southern dishes.[67] Tom and Mosianna had three, or possibly four, children together. The two were legally freed following the Civil War but remained with the Low family until their deaths in 1886 and 1909.

The Low House is located in Lafayette Square and was one of the first homes to be erected on that square. The house was one of the first in Savannah to include elements associated with the Italianate style.[68] Through the architecture, architect John Norris was able to show the transition from Greek Revival to the Italianate that became prevalent in Savannah. After its completion in 1849, the house demonstrated multiple elements that indicated the Italianate style: a square block, pyramidal roof, tall narrow windows on the

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[66] Andrew Low House Museum, "Historical Figures - the Milledges." *Andrew Low House Museum.* Accessed February 13, 2023.
[67] Andrew Low House Museum, "Historical Figures - the Milledges." *Andrew Low House Museum.* Accessed February 13, 2023.
[68] National Historical Landmark Nomination Form, Juliette Gordan Low Historic District (including Andrew Low House). Savannah, Georgia. 2007.

main floor, recessed main doorway, generous use of cast iron, and shallow balconies on the south and east elevations. The house still had some elements of Greek Revival.

The Andrew Low House was sold to the National Society of The Colonial Dames of America in the State of Georgia by the Low family in 1928.[69] The Georgia Dames is an organization devoted to "furthering an appreciation of our national heritage through historic preservation, patriotic service, and educational projects."[70] used the space as their headquarters for meetings and social gatherings. Between 1929 and 1937, the basement of the house was turned into a restaurant and the upstairs rooms were sometimes rented for income to help pay for the purchase and maintenance of the home. The house was opened for limited public viewing in 1952 and by 1966, the house was fully open to the public. The Andrew Low House, along with the Wayne-Gordon House, known as the birthplace of Juliette Gordon Low, the founder of the Girl Scouts of America, and the First Girl Scout Headquarters were all nominated as the Juliette Gordon Low Historic District in 1966. The house is still under the ownership of the Colonial Dames of Georgia, and tours are given from Monday – Saturday from 10am to 4 pm and on Sunday from 12pm to 4pm.

[69] Andrew Low House Museum, "Museum History and Governance." *Andrew Low House Museum.* Accessed February 13, 2023.
[70] "GA Society About Us." The National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the State of Georgia. Accessed March 29, 2023. https://nscdaga.org/about-us/

Experience with the Andrew Low House

Tour

The final house we visited was the Andrew Low House. Reservations for our tour were not made in advance and tickets cost $12.00 for an adult. This tour had the smallest number of people, with the group number at eight people. The tour of the Andrew Low House was heavily based on the history of the family and had the least amount of information about the enslaved that lived on the property out of the three tours.

The tour was a mix of the history of the family as well as the history of the artifacts in the house and the architecture of the house. Our docent, an elderly man, was very knowledgeable about the history of the family and seemed passionate about what he was teaching. As the tour group moved through the house, learning about the family, anytime the enslaved were mentioned in the tour, they were referred to as "servants."[71] It was not made clear if the people the tour guide were referring to were truly freed slaves or if the term "servant" was a euphemism for enslaved, the tour guide never clarified. The only physical evidence of the history of the enslaved in the house was a QR code that conveyed the story of an African American woman named Mosianna Milledge. The tour guide did, very briefly, make mention of her existence.

[71] "Andrew Low House Tour." Andrew Low House. October 9, 2022.

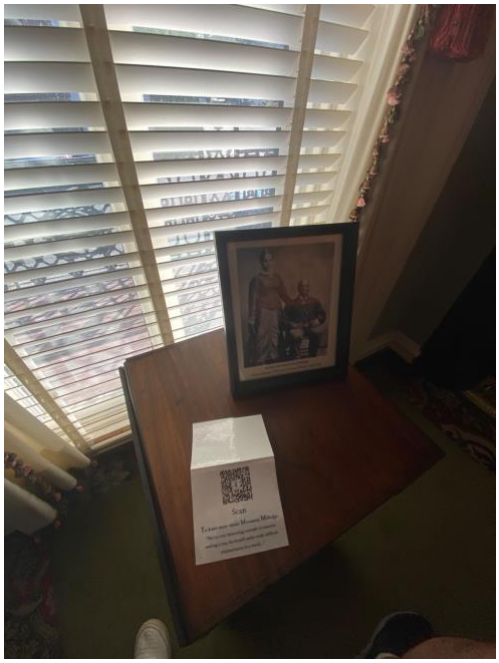

Figure 9. Information about Tom and Mosianna Milledge

From the tour, it was gathered that the Andrew Low house has extensive history of the Andrew Low family and highlights the family on the tour. Other than the family history, the main theme was the architecture; however, it seemed that the discussion of the architectural features of the house was driven by the tour guide's own interest and not necessarily the script created by the Andrew Low House Museum staff.

The QR Code and the brief mention of Tom and Mosianna Milledge created some acknowledgement of the two, but it was clear that the tour was focused on the family's history and architecture. The standing of Tom and Mosianna Milledge as a free servant or enslaved was never clarified, and the lack of a multi-dimensional representation of the pair also made their story feel forgettable and not important to the history of the house. Overall, there was a feeling that the stories of the Milledges were not a priority when telling visitors the history of the house.

The tour focused heavily on the history of the Andrew Low family and the architecture of the property. While a QR code was also available to scan during the tour to learn more about the enslaved in the house and the names of the enslaved who resided

in the house was mentioned briefly, it was not in-depth. Also, the stories of the enslaved were lacking during the tour and was not a priority when presenting the history of the site.

Website

The website of the Andrew Low House had more information discussing the stories of the enslaved. But, as with the tour, the website only gave the individual stories of two peoples: Tom and Mosianna Milledge. The story of the two and their children is incredibly brief and gives no other resources for learning more about the pair or the general history of the enslaved in Savannah. The website does clarify that both Mosianna and Tom were enslaved then freed but continued to work for the Low family. The freedom of the Milledges only came after the Civil War and Tom, in particular, was tied to the family for most of his life.

The website mostly discusses the architecture and collections located in the home and the history of the family, as well as the connection with the Girl Scouts. The Andrew Low House is owned and operated by The National Society of The Colonial Dames of America in the State of Georgia and the website goes into detail about the organization and its relationship with the property. Other historical figures, such as William Thackeray, John Norris, and Ogden Nash, are also mentioned on the website.

Of the three sites, the Andrew Low House was the most consistent between the in-person tour and the website. There was more information about Tom and Mosianna Milledge mentioned on the site than on the tour with stories of the Milledges being discussed more in-depth. It seemed, however, that a focus on the history of the Low family was emphasized over the history of the Milledges.

Overall, the website was slightly more informative than the tour was in telling the stories of the enslaved on the site, but still lacking in primary sources and in-depth stories. Like the tour, the website emphasizes the architecture and the collections located inside the house and the story conveyed on both the website and the tour were the most consistent of the three case studies.

Interview

The next interview was with Chris Sergi, the Education and Program Manager for the Andrew Low House. Chris has been employed at the Andrew Low House since 2018 and was very passionate in talking about her role in expanding narratives to include women and Native American histories in Savannah. Sergi was helpful in giving more information about the Milledge family and the docent training process.

Sergi conveyed an in-depth history of the Milledge family that was not conveyed on the tour or on the website. She stated that research about the Milledges was supported by family letters, deed records, newspapers and other primary sources. The process of docent training includes giving docents information about the enslaved through books, lectures given by professionals, studying tax digests and deeds, and workshops about discussing difficult histories. Docents also visit different sites to understand differing interpretation practices.

Like the Davenport House, the Andrew Low House has individualized stories of the enslaved that lived on the property, but those stories are not conveyed on the tour because the personal interest of the docent replaces the stories of the enslaved. This information correlates to the tour experience for this thesis, as it focused heavily on architecture which seemed to be the interest of the docent. The story of the Milledges is a necessary part of the history of the house and docents must convey these stories before

exploring their own personal interests. While having these individual interests woven into the tours can be fascinating and can make the tour experience unique, the stories of the enslaved must be told as a foundational part of the tour script.

Through the interview with Chris Sergi, it was learned that the Andrew Low House creates and hosts events such as “Tasting Traditions” which presents recipes from Mosianna Milledge and that represent the Gullah and Geechee cultures to the public. Sergie also wanted to develop lectures that highlighted Mosianna recipes as well as to create open events that highlight African American history in Savannah.

In summary, the interviews provided an in-depth history of the stories of the enslaved on the property that were not available on the website or the tour. The docents are volunteers and can present personal interests as curriculum on the tours. The training process includes workshops, lectures and research through books and other sources. Enslaved narratives are taught during the training process, but not emphasized as a necessity when presenting the history of the house to the public. Finally, there is community involvement through events such as “Tasting Traditions.”

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This thesis attempts to answer the question: how are interpretation practices being implemented in three historic homes to include stories of the enslaved that lived on the property? By looking at scholarly resources, such as Rose's *Interpreting Difficult History at Museums and Historic Sites* and Gallas and Perry's *Conscientious Interpretation of Slavery at Historic Sites and Museums* a guideline can be formed as to the ways to create a more inclusive narrative, and if the three museums, the Davenport House, the Andrew Low House and the Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters have succeeded in expanding this narrative. Based on scholarly research, an outline of best interpretation practices has been created. This outline took inspiration from the sources but was created by the author.

It has been deduced that comprehensive interpretation methods are composed of two categories: information and investment. Information consists of a multi-dimensional story of an individual that conveys their human experience as more than just a mechanism of a larger organization. These representations utilize all information surrounding a historical individual to include their interactions with the world around them. Multi-narrative stories can create an emotional connection between historical individuals and the audience who listens to their stories. This experience can be incredibly impactful for audiences who can draw similarities from the story of the historical individual to their own experiences in the present. These stories also could discourage some audiences from listening due to the pain and fear that comes from hearing difficult histories. An individual's narrative plays a large role in their response to

difficult histories as well as their ability to learn and grow from hearing the stories of historical individuals. Multi-dimensional stories are vital in representing individuals that have historically been labeled only by name and occupation.

Another aspect of information that contributes to a more inclusive narrative is the tangible items available. These items can serve as a visual aid for audiences to connect to stories. These items can only show one part of a story, and it is necessary for museum staff to understand and analyze these items to inform the public of their partiality and research the full history.[72] Stories of the enslaved always exist even if artifacts representing them do not. By looking at artifacts, or the lack of, through an analytical lens, both museum staff and visitors can better understand how the story of the enslaved is associated with historical objects. The lack of historical objects, however, does not limit the museum's ability to discuss enslaved narratives.

The final component of information is the narrative available to the public. This is the most front facing representation of the museum and ties together all the information gathered from stories and artifacts. Narratives are constantly changing with time and depending on who is telling the story. Because of the subjectivity of narratives, it is necessary that museums take steps in order to ensure that information regarding the enslaved is implemented in tours. The importance of staff training introduces the other category that is vital to interpretation practices: investment.

Investment of inclusive interpretation practices consists of three groups: community, institutional and visitor. Community engagement is a vital aspect of the

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[72] Alderman, Derek H., and Campbell, Rachel M. "Symbolic Excavation and the Artifact Politics of Remembering Slavery in the American South: Observations from Walterboro, South Carolina." *Southeastern Geographer* 48, no. 3 (2008): 338–55. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26225537. Pg. 340

museum infrastructure. Through community engagement, museums can reach communities who otherwise would not be involved in the museum. Community relations with willing parties can provide benefits for both. Museums can gain valuable insight into audiences and the knowledge of the public as well as advice and accountability for interpretations presented. Communities gain the ability to speak of their experiences on a larger scale and are involved in education.

Institutional investment is the most important factor in creating an inclusive narrative. For interpretations to convey a narrative that includes multiple perspectives, institutions must have commitment from 100% of the museum staff, from the executive committee to the tour guides. It is impossible for an inclusive interpretation to come about without internal change. A spirit of inclusiveness must take over the very mission and spirit of the organization. Staff training is also necessary. Museum staff must understand their own racial identity and subconscious bias before speaking to the public about enslaved stories. Tour guides must understand visitors' understanding of knowledge and how to present information. Knowing how to deal with confrontational visitor reactions must also be addressed in training. By equipping museum staff with the knowledge of the enslaved, how to represent and convey these stories, and how to deal with confrontational or awkward situations, staff members are likely to be more confident in their delivery of enslaved stories and able to facilitate discussions. Being confident in the story they are presenting; staff can create a space that allows people to learn in ways that perpetuates growth.

The final group involved in investing in interpretation is the visitors themselves. If museum staff create a space open to discussion, visitors must be open to engaging in

material, discussions, and questions.[73] If visitors are to grow in their experience at a museum, they must have a willingness to learn. The learning experience includes grappling with their own identity. Visitors must face their own bias before they are able to truly understand the stories of the enslaved. If they succeed in this, they are able to grow in knowledge and contribute to creating a more inclusive interpretation.

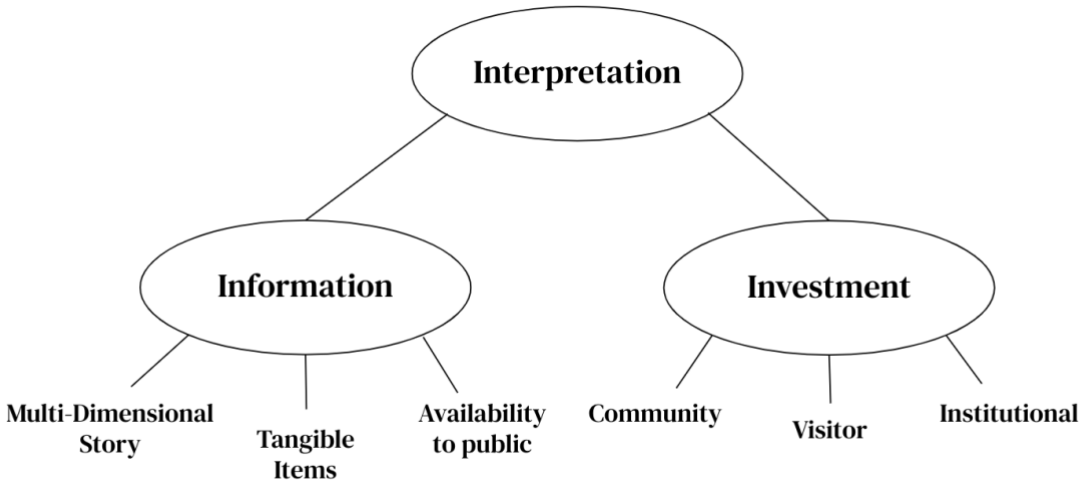

Figure 10. Elements of Interpretation

So, the answer to the previous question of how three historic homes in Savannah are including enslaved narrative in their interpretation practices, is a complicated one. Based on the guidelines outlined above, aspects of each case study succeeded in some areas, however, no case study identified in this thesis was 100% successful in their interpretation of the enslaved. In the following paragraphs, there will be an analysis of the interpretation practices utilized in each museum that were successful.

[73] Nelson, Velvet. 2020. "Tour Guide Perspectives On Representations Of Slavery At a Heritage Museum." *Tourism Culture & Communication* 20 (1): 1–14. doi: 10.3727/194341420X15692567324895. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,shib&db=hjh&AN=142531497&site=eds-live&custid=uga1. Pg. 4

The Davenport House showed successful implementation of interpretation of enslaved narratives on their website. By far, the Davenport House had the most detailed and personal stories of the enslaved that lived on the property. The stories of the enslaved were multidimensional and shed new light on the members of the household. The website had the stories of enslaved as well as audio recordings of people reading the stories, which was helpful in allowing more groups of people to access the information. A virtual tour of the house also included artifacts that were associated with enslaved peoples, but these artifacts were not mentioned during the in-person tour. All information obtained about the enslaved was included on the website. By having this research available, more people can read about the history of the enslaved even if they did not attend a tour. Because of the virtual nature of this information, discussions are minimal, however, by tying together a multi-dimensional story as well as the artifacts connected to the enslaved, the narrative conveyed was representative of the enslaved of the site and was educational in understanding the full history of the Davenport House.

The Davenport implemented multi-dimensional enslaved stories through their website and research available to the public, however, this research was not presented during the tour. Tangible items relating to the enslaved were also presented on the website, but not during the tour and the cutouts of the enslaved were not effective. The cutouts should be re-interpreted to better convey the stories of the enslaved and show humanistic qualities. The institution has shown investment in furthering enslaved narratives by working with Kelly Westfield but visitor involvement is not as emphasized because a majority of this research is presented digitally and not during the tours.

Community involvement is present in community events such as a walking tour titled “Discover 1820’s Savannah Architecture of a New Nation” and “Springtime Tea at the Davenports,” however these events do not address the stories and history of the enslaved on the property.

The Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters implemented representations of the enslaved in their tours at the museum. Out of the three museums, the Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters had the most written information about enslaved peoples within the house and throughout the exhibits. Primary sources, such as letters, were printed in displays so that visitors could read firsthand accounts of the lives of enslaved peoples. One exhibit focused solely on the story of an enslaved woman, Emma Katin and the context of her enslavement. By displaying primary sources and giving the broader historical context which she lived and worked gave the visitor a holistic view of her life and showed her as more than just a slave.

The Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters also had the greatest number of artifacts related to enslaved available throughout the museum and being in a space solely dedicated to educating about enslavement was impactful. Even though this tour was self-guided, there were many docents available to answer questions, but if the tour was a docent-led tour, the interpretation would have been even more inclusive, and discussions would have been facilitated. It was very clear that the docents surrounding the displays

were passionate about answering questions about the enslaved and that the institution was working towards a more inclusive narrative. The Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters has shown institutional involvement through events such as the 2011 *Slavery and Freedom in Savannah* symposium and the re-interpretation of the site.

The website of the Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters was the most lacking element of the museum's interpretation. No further stories about the enslaved were featured, and the information regarding the most impactful exhibit in the museum which featured the story of Emma Katin was not discussed.

The Education and Program Manager, Chris Sergi, was informative in the history and stories of the enslaved on the property, and through the conversation with Chris, an understanding of the stories of the enslaved on the property was better grasped. Through family letters and newspaper articles, she was able to craft a multi-dimensional story about the enslaved on the property and how they interacted with their community and surroundings. However, this information was largely missing from both the website and the tour.

While the tour and website mentioned the existence of enslaved on the property, there was a lack of history of the enslaved on the property that went beyond name and occupation. Visitor discussion and involvement in the tour was little, as the docent did not discuss the enslaved stories in-depth. There was some attempt to bring more attention to enslaved narratives through QR codes that could be seen on the tour, as well as a photo of Tom and Mosianna Milledge but these were brushed over and rarely discussed. Tangible items relating to enslaved were few and far between, with the picture of Tom

and Mosianna being one of the only visible items relating to enslaved stories and it was only mentioned in passing.

The implementation of events such as "Tasting Traditions"[74] and including recipes from the Gullah and Geechee culture was an important element that included different communities while teaching the history and recipes of Mosianna Milliedge. However, these recipes and the understanding of this culture is not seen throughout the general interpretation of the site.

Overall, through the interview with Chris Sergi and elements of the tour, such as the QR code, there has been some attempt at highlighting enslaved narratives; however, publicly presented narratives are shallow and lack the stories conveyed by Chris Sergi. The information given through multi-dimensional stories, tangible items, and availability to the public is lacking, especially given that the institution has more information regarding the lives of the enslaved. The investment of enslaved narratives throughout community, institutional, and visitor involvement can be seen through community events and the institutions initiatives to research enslaved narratives.

From the findings one common theme emerged: lack of a developed program for training tour guides. Because of the subjectivity of tour guides, it is necessary that museums have a program in place to teach tour guides how to understand and convey difficult histories to the public that includes an in-depth study of the tour guide's own identities and a discussion about dealing with confrontational situations with visitors. From the tours, the verbal confirmation of enslavement at the property and a mention of multi-dimensional stories was lacking in all three museums. If docents and museum staff

[74] Sergi, Chris. "Interview About Andrew Low House." by Shannon Graham, November 10, 2022.

are better equipped to convey difficult histories to the public and the mission of the museum emphasizes the necessity of including multi-dimensional stories of the enslaved during tours, the public would be able to learn much about the history of enslavement in Savannah. Sources that could be helping including *Interpreting Difficult Histories at Museums and Historic Sites and Interpreting African Americna History at Museums and Historic Sites.* As well as looking at the recommendations by the National Association of Interpretation for best interpretation practices.

A lack of coherence between information given on tours, on the website, and by the museum staff was also apparent. Because of unexpected discrepancies between the three sources, evaluating the interpretation practices of the museum was difficult and subjective. In the future, it is hoped that all three museums can create more cohesiveness between these sources, so the public gets a more consistent and well-rounded interpretation.

Recommendations for all three case studies include creating more cohesion between information given on tours, on the website, and what is told by the museum staff. Also, implementing more in-depth training program that emphasizes the necessity of giving enslaved histories before personal interests as well as gives docents proper tools to interact and discuss difficult topics with the public. The Davenport House could improve with a few recommendations: for the cutouts of the enslaved children either emphasize their place in the household during the tour or remove them from the space. Without the guide referencing them during the tour, they become confusing for visitors. Also, Kelly Westfield's research featured on the website is well-researched, in-depth and should be emphasized during the tour. Maybe by introducing enslaved stories by

tangible items would provide docents with a more comfortable way of discussing enslaved stories.

The Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters could improve the self-guided tour by including more history of the enslaved peoples in every space. Also, having paper guides as well as the QR code could help audiences who are not as technologically savvy. Finally, information shared in the exhibits in the slave quarters are not available on the website, and overall, the website could be more in-depth about the history of the enslaved. Links to primary sources could be helpful.

The story of the Milledges at the Andrew Low House needs to be emphasized in the tour, especially given the information known about the family. Also, the image of the Milledges is a rare resource that most museums do not have, so it could be featured more as well. The QR code is a good start to sharing their story, but not necessarily accessible to all audiences. Having handouts about their story could be helpful. A mention of the other enslaved peoples on the property should be implemented as well, as they are not featured anywhere on the property. The website could feature the Milledges more and could link the primary sources used to gather information about the family, such as newpapers and letters, so that the public could read about the history themselves.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this study, I thought issues in interpretation of enslaved lay largely on lack of primary source material. My first assumptions were incorrect. In fact, primary sources that document enslaved persons are very much in existence and owned or accessible to museums. This fact was subsequently followed by the question of why these materials and stories are not shared with the public. Throughout my time visiting, interviewing, and analyzing these three museums I have found that while these case studies have some successful aspects of interpreting enslaved narratives, overall, a lack of proper docent training largely contributes to the public not receiving information about the enslaved.

Some interpretation methods are being utilized. However, until every aspect of correct interpretation methodology is in place and employed, no museum will have a completely inclusive interpretation. Institutional commitment, too, is necessary in changing interpretation. Predominantly euro-centric ideas must be questioned for space to be created for narratives of other communities.

By utilizing six elements (community, institutional and visitor involvement and multi-dimensional stories, tangible items, and availability to the public) derived from the academic research, and the subsequent analysis of each case studies based on these categories that was gathered in field work, it becomes clearer how these three historic homes in Savannah are implementing practices to ensure the inclusion of enslaved narratives.

It is my hope that by studying and analyzing current museum practices that changes may occur so all communities can become involved in having their history told in museum institutions. The movement to permanently include enslaved stories in historic spaces is increasing based on the re-interpretation of sites such as the Whitney Plantation and the McLeod Plantation Historic Site. As more sources are being published and studies being completed about the importance of including enslaved narratives and the effect these narratives have on the public memory, it is imperative that historic sites in Savannah use time and resources to study and implement the stories of the enslaved on the property. Historic house museums in Savannah and historic houses in general can be fantastic educational tools that can actively collaborate with communities, however, necessary steps must be taken to ensure that enslaved stories are researched carefully and implemented with the utmost thought. While this thesis is just the beginning in starting to understand the long-held interpretation practices of three historic houses in Savannah, there is a hope that a widespread effort to include enslaved stories are a permanent part of the interpretation of historic sites will increase.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Brochure of 2011 *Slavery and Freedom in Savannah Symposium*

WELCOME!

Led by national scholars Dr. Daina Ramey Berry, University of Texas at Austin, and Dr. Leslie M. Harris, Emory University, the Telfair will present *Slavery and Freedom in Savannah*, a symposium of local, regional and national significance. The program will kick off with a keynote lecture by Berry and Harris, followed by a day and a half of lectures about slavery and freedom in Savannah, from the Colonial era through Reconstruction. The materials presented at the symposium will be published by the University of Georgia Press and used for the reinterpretation of exhibits and tours at the Owens-Thomas House.

SLAVERY AND FREEDOM IN SAVANNAH AND THE REINTERPRETATION OF THE OWENS-THOMAS HOUSE

For over a half-century, Telfair Museums' architecturally-significant Owens-Thomas House has been interpreted as the home and stylish showplace of former owners Richard Richardson, the merchant and banker who first commissioned the residence, and later George Welshman Owens, plantation owner, alderman, mayor, Georgia state senator and representative, and United States congressman.

Attention was also paid to the most famous guest at the house, the Revolutionary War hero Marquis de Lafayette who stayed there in 1825 when the house was between owners and run as an upscale boarding house. The Telfair Academy of Arts and Sciences, following the bequest of Margaret Thomas, opened the Owens-Thomas House to the public for tours in 1954. Tours focused primarily on the architecture and decorative arts, with limited information about the families who owned and lived in the house and nothing about the enslaved household workers.

However, with the preservation of the slave quarters in the mid-1990s, and the receipt of generous National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) consultation and planning grants in 2005 and 2006, staff began introducing visitors to a broader spectrum of its former inhabitants—white and black; men, women and children; enslaved and free. An important aspect of this new interpretation project focuses on the lives and labor of the documented enslaved people who built, maintained and serviced the home and contextualizes the Owens-Thomas House within the social environment of its neighborhood in the 1820s and 1830s where more than 50% of the residents were people of color – enslaved, nominally enslaved (slaves freed by their masters but not by the law) and free.

Slavery and Freedom in Savannah, both the symposium and the book of the same title scheduled for publishing by the University of Georgia Press in the spring of 2013, will broaden public understanding of American history and culture by exposing audiences to the complexities of urban slavery and freedom. Providing the foundation for the entirety of the reinterpretation project, the new research generated by nationally and internationally prominent scholars will provide a crucial informational base for future interpretation and exhibits at the Owens-Thomas House. The complete picture of this largely unstudied form of slavery in Savannah – a microcosm of the entire institution of urban slavery throughout the nation during this time – unfolds through the Telfair's own historic assets and stories.

Image: Owens-Thomas House c. late 19th century.

SECOND AFRICAN BAPTIST CHURCH

Savannah's Second African Baptist Church had its beginning as early as 1720 when Negroes, both free and enslaved, took an active part in the religious affairs of white churches. Deacon Henry Francis and Henry Cunningham were ordained as Baptist Ministers during the early months of 1802 and the Rev. Henry Cunningham received his letters from the white Savannah Baptist Church. The newly-ordained Minister and his followers chose a site for their church at what is now 123 Houston Street.

The edifice, a "comfortable building, 67 feet by 30 feet," was completed by December 1802 and officially established as the Second Colored Baptist Church. Some of the more financially-able free African Americans of that day composed the pioneer members including Evans Grate, Richard Houston, Susan Jackson, Leah Simpson, Charlotte Walls, and Elizabeth (Betsey) Cunningham. Rev. Cunningham pastored the church from 1802 to 1808 and again from 1813 until his death on March 29, 1842. Training more black preachers than any other Baptist Church (black or white) in the country, Second Baptist Church had furnished First African Baptist Church five of her six pastors by 1848.

Few records exist regarding the history of the church's services, the pastors' sermons or the congregation's practices. The limited information available shows that in 1833, the church, which had since become Second African Baptist Church, changed its name to Second Baptist Church to "protect" the religious freedom enjoyed by blacks. Services of that time featured sermons to provide its members with inner strength to persevere during hard times. The black churches in Savannah did not have a baptismal pool; hence members were baptized in the Savannah River. The Lord's Supper was administered quarterly; business conferences held monthly and singing was a distinctive and important part of the service. The membership of the Second Baptist Church grew steadily, reaching 1,454 members in 1841.

Rev. Thomas Anderson replaced Reverend Cunningham in 1841, serving until 1848, and was followed by Rev. John Cox who was a masterful minister, serving well during the stormy and uncertain years of the Civil War. During the 58th Anniversary of the church in 1864, Pastor Cox and the church were hosts to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton and General William T. Sherman during the liberation of the slaves of Savannah and the Lowcountry. A large overflowing crowd gathered at Second Baptist Church for the great event. A commemorating marker was placed in Greene Square.

A succession of pastors served Second Baptist Church (see below), during milestones such as its 100th anniversary in 1902 and the restoring of its original name as Second African Baptist Church in 1985. Major renovations to the building were began in 1999, including the installation of an elevator, a new public address system, refurbished lower auditorium, cross, outside sign, and restoration of the main sanctuary and exterior of the church. Several church ministries have been added as well as a great increase in providing help for the needy.

In 2002, after over a century of worship and praise, Second African Baptist Church celebrated its Bicentennial under the theme "1802 - 2002: 200 years of Service as Ambassadors for Jesus Christ at 123 Houston Street.

Rev. John Cox 1848-1870
Rev. H. L. Simpson 1870-1881
Reverend Alexander Ellis 1881- 1890
Rev. J. J. Durham 1890-1904
Rev. S. H. Smith 1905-1906
Rev. J. H. May 1906-1910
Rev. D. Augustine Reid 1910-1914
Rev. Bolivia Davis 1915-1917
Rev. P.W. Wrenn 1919-1921
Rev. Solomon Ross 1923-1929
Rev Miles Hunter 1929-1931
Rev Norman Perry 1932-1935
Rev Ivory W. Collins 1936-1938
Rev C. N. Hawks 1938-1941
Rev L. L. Scott 1943-1947
Rev. Edgar Perry Quarterman 1947-1984
Rev. James H. Cantrell 1985-1997
Reverend C. MeGill Brown 1998 – present

LIVE OAK PUBLIC LIBRARIES PRESENTS RELATED PROGRAMMING

OCTOBER 4-15, 2011

Savannah storyteller, Lillian Grant-Baptiste, presents author Virginia Hamilton's "The People Could Fly", a moving collection of folktales and stories about slavery and freedom at several locations throughout the city.

ISLANDS LIBRARY: TUES., OCT. 4, 4 PM
HINESVILLE LIBRARY: WED., OCT. 5, 4 PM
SOUTHWEST CHATHAM LIBRARY: THURS., OCT. 6, 4:30 PM
CARNEGIE LIBRARY: SAT., OCT. 8, 4 PM (ALL AGES)
BULL STREET LIBRARY: TUES., OCT. 11, 11 AM
RINCON LIBRARY: WED., OCT. 12, 4:30 PM
POOLER LIBRARY: THURS., OCT. 13, 4 PM
WEST BROAD LIBRARY: FRI., OCT. 14, 4 PM
OGLETHORPE MALL LIBRARY: SAT., OCT. 15, 4 PM

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 13, 3:30PM, Bull Street Library

Prizewinning author Jacqueline Jones, presents *Saving Savannah: The City and the Civil War*, a masterpiece of time and place, transporting readers to the boisterous streets of this fascinating city. *Saving Savannah* is a panoramic portrait of the city of Savannah before, during, and after the Civil War—a poignant story of the African American freedom struggle in this prosperous southern river port, set against a backdrop of military conflict and political turmoil. The event will include a book discussion, Q&A, then book signing. Copies of the book will be available for sale.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 16, 3PM, Southwest Chatham Library

A book discussion of the award-winning novel "Jubilee" by Margaret Walker takes place Sunday, Oct. 16, 3 p.m. at the Southwest Chatham Library. A free copy of the novel will be given to the first 25 readers who reserve a space in the discussion group. Reserve your spot by emailing Constance Coleman at colemanc@liveoakpl.org.

For more information on Live Oak Public Libraries and symposium-related programs, call 912.652.3600

BIOGRAPHIES (CONT.)

DR. TIM LOCKLEY is the Director of the School of Comparative American Studies at the University of Warwick in England. He is the author of *Maroon Communities in South Carolina* (2009), *Welfare and Charity in the Antebellum South* (2007) and *Lines in the Sand: Race and Class in Lowcountry Georgia* (2001). His research concentrates on the social history of the antebellum South, focusing particularly on Georgia and South Carolina. He resides in rural Warwickshire.

DR. JOHN MICHAEL VLACH has followed a long career since 1970 when he spent a year as a student at the University of Ghana. He would go on to receive his doctorate at Indiana University and pursue a career in teaching at three universities, museum curatorship at more than fifty venues, and publication in nine books, thirty chapters, and fifty articles. His best known volumes are "Back of the Big House," "The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts","Charleston Blacksmith", and "The Planter's Prospect."

DR. JEFFREY YOUNG is the Associate Director of the Honors College and Senior Lecturer in the History Department at Georgia State University. He received his B.A. from Yale University in 1989 and his Ph.D. in American history from Emory University in 1996. His research has focused on race, slavery, and family life in the American South. In 1999, the University of North Carolina Press published his book, *Domesticating Slavery: The Master Class in Georgia and South Carolina,* and in 2006 the University of South Carolina Press published his anthology, *Proslavery and Sectional Thought in the Early South.* His work has also appeared in the *Journal of Southern History* and the *Georgia Historical Quarterly* and been funded by grants from the Pew Center. Before joining the faculty at Georgia State, he taught at Georgia Southern University and Emory University.

Owens-Thomas House Kitchen

SYMPOSIUM PROGRAM ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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A special thanks also goes to our Community Advisors: Dr. Ronald Bailey, Savannah State University; Dr. Michael Benjamin, Armstrong Atlantic State University; Pastor C. Megill Brown, Second African Baptist Church; Constance Coleman, John Tuggle, Live Oak Public Libraries; Jeanne Cyriaque, State Office of History, DNR; Shirley James, Tanya Milton, Savannah Tribune; Charles J. Johnson, Jr., Historian/Author; Candy Lowe, Massie Heritage Center; Dr. Deborah Mack, Museum Consultant; Danielle Meunier, Historic Savannah Foundation; Dr. Paul Pressly, Ossabaw Island Education Alliance; Dr. Preston Russell, Historian/Author/Artist; Dr. Leon Spencer, Georgia Southern University; Lynette Stoudt, Georgia Historical Society; Richard Shinhoster, NAACP, Diaspora Marketplace; Dr. Robin Williams, Savannah College of Art and Design; Dale Thorpe, Friends of the Owens-Thomas House; Darlene Wilson, Beach Institute/King-Tisdell House.

Owens-Thomas House Slave Quarters

TELFAIR MUSEUMS

Telfair Museums offers compelling expressions of visual culture embracing three unique buildings and three distinct collections that bridge three centuries of art and architecture. The museum develops awareness, understanding, and appreciation of the arts and serves as a dynamic cultural center connecting people of all ages and backgrounds.

TELFAIR.ORG


Telfair Academy


Owens-Thomas House

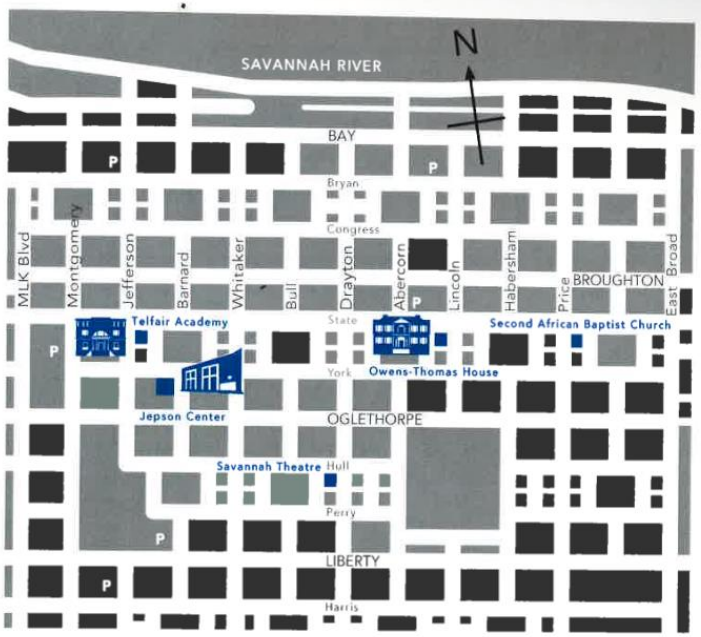

Jepson Center

On the front cover: The watermark is an overlay of a 19th century map of Savannah. The ceiling on the first floor of the Owens' Thomas slave quarters features the largest example of "haint" blue painting known to exist in America. "Haint" blue paint was believed to have spiritual properties in many African cultures, such as the abilitiy to ward off evil spirits. In nineteenth-century America, the paint—created by mixing indigo, lime, and buttermilk—was used on ceilings, around doors or windows, and even behind or under furnishings.

125 YEARS

art + history + architecture

SAVANNAH MAP



CONTACT INFO

Telfair Academy / 121 Barnard Street / 912.790.8871 / telfair.org

Owens-Thomas House / 124 Abercorn Street / 912.233.9743 / telfair.org

Jepson Center / 207 West York Street / 912.790.8800 / telfair.org

Second African Baptist Church / 123 Houston Street/ 912.233.6163 / secondafrican.org

Savannah Theatre / 222 Bull Street / 912.233.7764 / savannahtheatre.com

SCHEDULE

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 13 / Second African Baptist Church, Greene Square

6:00 PM WELCOME ***Pastor C. MeGill Brown***

CHORAL SELECTION by the SAB Inspirational Voices

INTRODUCTION ***Tania Sammons,*** Curator of Telfair's Owens-Thomas House & Decorative Arts

KEYNOTE ADDRESS "Public History and Slavery: Exploring the Owens-Thomas House, Savannah, and Rural Georgia" ***Daina Ramey Berry and Leslie M. Harris***

CLOSING Choral selection by the SAB Inspirational Voices

RECEPTION & EXHIBITION OPENINGS immediately following at the Jepson Center on Telfair Square, sponsored by the Friends of the Owens-Thomas House; on view: *Beyond Utility: Pottery Made by Enslaved Hands* and Agents of Change: Portraits by Kenneth Martin.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 14 / Savannah Theatre, Chippewa Square

9:00 AM ***REGISTRATION/CHECK IN***

9:45 AM ***WELCOME*** ***Vaughnette Goode-Walker,*** Telfair's Director of Cultural Diversity

10:00 -11:00 AM ***SLAVERY IN COLONIAL GEORGIA***

Session Leader: Eric Hall, Assistant Professor of History, Georgia Southern University

The Transatlantic Slave Trade Comes to Georgia / ***James McMillin***

"The King of England's Soldiers": Armed blacks in Savannah and its hinterlands during the Revolutionary War Era, 1778-1787 / ***Timothy Lockley***

11:20-12:20 PM ***ESTABLISHING ANTEBELLUM SLAVERY***

Session Leader: Jeff Eley, Chair, Historic Preservation Dept., Savannah College of Art and Design

To "Venerate the Spot" of "Airy Visions": Slavery and the Romantic Conception of Place in Mary Telfair's Savannah / ***Jeffrey Robert Young***

Slavery in Antebellum Savannah: Control and Resistance / ***Leslie M. Harris***

12:20-2:20 PM ***LUNCH BREAK***

2:30 PM ***"NELSON'S VISIT WITH LAFAYETTE,"*** a living history performance featuring Owens-Thomas House Interpreters, introduction by ***Paulette Thompson,*** Owens-Thomas House Lead Interpreter

3:00-4:30 PM ***SLAVE LIFE IN ANTEBELLUM SAVANNAH***

Session Leader: Barbara Fertig, Professor of History, Armstrong Atlantic State University

Laboring Slaves: Work and Workers in Antebellum Savannah / ***Susan O'Donovan***

Slave Housing in Antebellum Georgia / ***John Michael Vlach***

'An' They Never Said a Mumblin' Word?' Reconstructing Enslaved Life through the Owens-Thomas House / ***Daina Ramey Berry***

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 15 / Savannah Theatre, Chippewa Square

9:15 ***AM PERFORMANCE*** by the Savannah State University Wesleyan Gospel Choir

9:30 ***WELCOME*** ***Harry DeLorme,*** Telfair's Senior Curator of Education

9:45-10:45 AM ***BLACK FREEDOM IN ANTEBELLUM AND CIVIL WAR GEORGIA***

Session Leader: Felicia Bell, Assistant Professor of History, Savannah State University

Free Black Life in Antebellum Savannah / ***Janice Sumler-Edmond***

Wartime Workers, Money-makers: Black Labor in Civil-War-Era Savannah / ***Jacqueline Jones***

11:00-12 PM ***THE STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM AND EQUALITY IN POST-CIVIL WAR GEORGIA***

Session Leader: Michael Benjamin, Assistant Professor of History, Armstrong Atlantic State University

"We Have Our Own Law Here": Spinning Politics and Violence in Reconstruction Savannah / ***Jonathan M. Bryant***

Reconstructing White Redemption: African American Intellectuals in Savannah, Georgia, 1890-1920 / ***Bobby Donaldson***

12:00 PM ***CLOSING COMMENTS*** ***Ronald Bailey,*** Visiting Distinguished Professor, Savannah State University / ***Emory Shaw Campbell,*** President, Gullah Heritage Consulting Services

Appendix B

Interview Answers from Jamie Credle and Sheena Fulkerson of the Davenport House

When you stepped into your role, what were some of your primary goals? Have those goals changed?

Jamie, who has been the director of the Davenport for twenty years, stated that "we just didn't know how to tell that story [of the enslaved]. It took leaders in the field of museum interpretation…"[75] to push the inclusion of enslaved narratives and exemplify how to incorporate enslaved narratives for the Davenport to begin its own journey to tell the full story of the enslaved on the property.

Jamie said a primary goal was being a first-class museum. As far as incorporating the slave narratives, she said that "it doesn't mean that smaller places don't have the same recognition of imperatives, it's just having the wherewithal to do what is appropriate. So, you know being a first-class museum means that we are supposed to talk about the 1820s. You can't talk about the 1820s without talking about everybody that lived in a museum house." [76] Because Jamie has been employed by the museum for so long, she has been able to see the increase in resources surrounding the stories of the enslaved and states that "we have a narrative, now whether you got that on your tour or not, I can't say, but that is as substantial as anybody with regard to urban slavery."[77]

How did Kelly Westfield's research change how enslaved narratives were interpreted?

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[75] Cradle, Jamie. "Interview About Davenport House." by Shannon Graham, November 8, 2022.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.

"She [Kelly Westfield] was able, through deed research and will research, and then the historical newspapers online, to again, take these people back through their chain of sales…" [78]Jamie went on to say that Kelly's Westfield's research was vital in bringing about a more inclusive narrative in the interpretation of the site. Kelly spent a couple of semesters compiling resources in order to craft the story of the enslaved on the site. "With the data she's been able to put together, we've been able to craft narratives… Research is the foundation, and lots of house museums do not have the opportunity to do first class scholarship."[79]

How did you apply Kelly Westfield's research to the tours?

"Having her research has informed everything. Names, spaces, children. Having that scholarship has changed everything but even if we didn't have a fancy exhibit, we will always have our tour and what our docents say verbally."[80] Kelly's research is used as the foundation for any information about the enslaved narratives given on tours at the house.

Jamie also mentioned that while Kelly's research is used in training the docents, the docents have the freedom to discuss their own interest on tours, that might not necessarily include Kelly's research. "We don't like to do a tour script, because it could end up being a rope delivery. We give people pointers, outline, and rough ideas for them to be able to craft it into their own language. We do docent training and all of Kelly's work is in that training… Every space needs to have something about the enslaved

[78] Cradle, Jamie. "Interview About Davenport House." by Shannon Graham, November 8, 2022.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.

household, the white household, and has something to do with the structure, hopefully in every place."[81]

What did the original interpretation of the site include and when did the house first start presenting narratives of the enslaved on tours? Did any specific event cause the inclusion of the enslaved narrative?

While the house had been giving brief mentions of the enslaved that lived in the house, the research of Kelly Westfield expanded the interpretation of the house to include the personal stories of the enslaved.

Where did you gather the information about the enslaved narratives?

Jamie discussed how Kelly Westfield focused on researching the chain of sales for the enslaves and was able to learn the stories of the enslaved from those sources. Newspapers and family letters were also used to piece together the stories of the enslaved.

What resources did you use to interpret enslaved stories?

The Davenport House looked to large museum institutions for inspiration and information as to how to interpret enslaved narratives. One thing that the Davenport house museum staff found and implemented into their own space was cutouts of enslaved members that were displayed in various rooms of the house. The purpose of the cardboard cutouts, one of an enslaved boy named Jack, and the other of his sister, an enslaved girl named Polly, were supposed to serve as ways the docents could introduce

[81] Cradle, Jamie. "Interview About Davenport House." by Shannon Graham, November 8, 2022.

the topic of slavery as well as helping the public to ask questions about the history of slavery at the house.

How do you train tour guides/docents to approach and present difficult histories? Has it been hard implementing enslaved narratives into tours?

At this point in the interview, Jamie asks Sheena, the Davenport House Museum Tour Coordinator to answer my questions. Jamie felt because Sheena directly oversees the tours that she would be better able to answer my questions. Sheena stated that "from the docent perspective, some of our newer docents are acknowledging them [enslaved narratives] and mentioning them and incorporating them into their tour. Some of those that have been here a bit longer that are a bit newer to this interpretation with the information that we have received over the last few years might not be as inclined."[82]

Sheena went on to say that when training the docents, a lot of material that was researched by Kelly Westfield is implemented in their training program. The newer documents were more eager and ready to change the narratives given on tour, but the older docents who had been at the museum and had been giving the same tour narrative for years were less eager to change the narrative.

[82] Fulkerson, Sheena. "Interview About Davenport House." by Shannon Graham, November 8, 2022.

How has the public responded to the implementation of enslaved narratives on tours?

"As far as the visitors go, it's kind of a mixed bag with them. There's some who, especially with Jack because he's in one of the first rooms we go into, and all of a sudden here's this life size cutout of an enslaved person in that period of time and you can almost be taken aback by it. I've seen some who've been completely inappropriate and they're posting selfies with him…"[83]

Sheena stated that newer docents have no problem implementing enslaved narratives and older docents seem to be confused as to how to introduce slavery into the interpretation. She also discussed that sometimes when the public sees the cardboard cutouts for the first time, the reaction is not appropriate, with some guests trying to take "selfies" with the cutouts.

Sheena was asked if there was any correlation between a more diverse narrative drawing in more diverse groups of tourists. "There is certainly more diversity [in the tour groups] since I started five years ago. I have personally seen social situations that are influencing that, in my opinion. I don't think it's so much about what we are offering as far as tours go."[84] Sheena also touched upon the importance of politics in influencing who is attending tours. She says that in 2020 when the Black Lives Matter movement was prominent in social memory, that the museum had an influx of diverse peoples taking

[83] Fulkerson, Sheena. "Interview About Davenport House." by Shannon Graham, November 8, 2022.
[84] Ibid.

tours. However, "there's certainly an ebb and flow, obviously more of our demographics would be Caucasian, retirees who are on vacation."[85]

Overall, Sheena said that "I haven't heard my docents saying they had problems or any difficulty with their guests…90-95% have been well received, maybe even non-reactionary, just like a nod. Everything has been well received, but certainly the state of the country, and current events have a pretty significant role in things"[86]

Are you satisfied with the current interpretation of enslaved narratives at the site, or do you think more needs to be done? If so, in what ways?

Jamie took over the interview and talked about how the implementation of the cutouts was something that the staff wanted to expand upon. She states that the staff "wanted to infuse the house, not just with our stories verbally, but with a figure of someone…often, they are ignored as much by our public and maybe even our docents as they were as enslaved household members."[87] Up to this point, the cutouts have not been used to their full extent, so their effect on tourists is unknown.

What are some of your future goals for interpretation at the site?

The moving of the gift shop to the new space across the street from the Davenport House has opened up the basement space in the house itself that will be a great space for interpretation. The evolution of research will also lend itself to a changing narrative in the interpretation of the Davenport house.

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[85] Fulkerson, Sheena. "Interview About Davenport House." by Shannon Graham, November 8, 2022.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Cradle, Jamie. "Interview About Davenport House." by Shannon Graham, November 8, 2022.

Appendix C

Interview with Ahmauri Williams-Alford of the Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters

When you stepped into your role, what were some of your primary goals? Have those goals changed?

Ahmauri let me know that "because we are part of Telfair museums, our objects on this site might differ from that of the Davenport or Andrew Low House"[88] but that "one of the biggest goals we wanted to incorporate or implement in our narrative over here is also incorporating art and architecture and how those also play a role in slavery."[89] These three main themes: art, architecture, and slavery, were a big point throughout the interview and Ahmauri emphasized that the museum is "making sure our narrative has an equal balance between those three main themes."[90]

What did the original interpretation of the site include and when did the house first start presenting narratives of the enslaved on tours? Did any specific event cause the inclusion of the enslaved narrative?

The Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters initially focused solely on the white family, as well as famous historical figures such as the role of Marquis de Lafayette in the role of the family. A more inclusive narrative was incorporated " around 2010/2011, and they slowly started bringing in the voices of those enslaved here on the site. Within 2018, we launched those large scale reinterpretations that make the narrative

[88] Williams-Alford, Ahmauri. "Interview About Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters." by Shannon Graham, January 12, 2023.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.

more inclusive."[91] The basement level was opened up to the public along with the slave quarters which helped the staff create interpretations focusing on the enslaved.

Where did you gather the information about the enslaved narratives?

Most of the historical documents related to the Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters are located at the Georgia Historical Society. These resources include family letters and newspaper articles.

What resources did you use to interpret enslaved stories?

New docents must undergo a three-month intensive training period and all interpreters have to get nationally certified. Additionally, there are additional training programs in architecture, history, and art. Researching and shadowing are also necessary parts of training.

There is no solid training program set in place currently, but the process of training the docents has become more stable over the years.

How do you train tour guides/docents to approach and present difficult histories? Has it been hard implementing enslaved narratives into tours?

Ahmauri told me that the "interpreters have guidelines as to what needs to be addressed room by room but have flexibility to address what they want to address."[92] She said that the docents are very passionate about the mission of the site and include

[91] Williams-Alford, Ahmauri. "Interview About Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters." by Shannon Graham, January 12, 2023.
[92] Ibid.

enslaved narratives on tours. Of the three houses, the Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters is the only location whose docents are paid with benefits, therefore implementing new narratives is easier.

How has the public responded to the implementation of enslaved narratives on tours?

Public reaction has been mixed, but Ahmauri states that the museum attracts people of all different groups and visitors are diverse. She states that the museum has had incidents of visitors unhappy with the current interpretation. For Ahmauri, the museum is "not reaching one specific group which she considers a success"[93] because the stories of the enslaved reach many people who have different opinions.

Are you satisfied with the current interpretation of enslaved narratives at the site, or do you think more needs to be done? If so, in what ways?

Ahmauri's job is "largely a research job and research is never done. Constantly updating narrative as new things are uncovered."[94] Currently, there is a good balance between the three main themes of art, architecture and the enslaved. More evidence of enslaved people would be helpful in crafting even more detailed sources but in some cases, there is no written or oral documentation and family letters, tax records and census records are inherently biased sources. Trying to find more information would strengthen the interpretation of the site.

[93] Williams-Alford, Ahmauri. "Interview About Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters." by Shannon Graham, January 12, 2023.
[94] Ibid.

Does the relationship between the house museum and the governing body make it difficult to change the interpretation of the site?

Because the Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters is a part of the Telfair Academy, the museum follows the larger interpretation of the Telfair Academy. The museum is in the process of shifting its focus on being an art museum while also conveying the enslaved on the property.

What are some of your future goals for interpretation at the site?

The main goal Ahmauri has for the future of the museum is to have a solid training program in place with the potential for accreditation. Other goals included updating some more of the narrative, and re-addressing and re-evaluating some of the information presented in the exhibits.

The museum is "pretty lucky"[95] to have a staff and board who are looking for those changes and keeping up with current times. Ahmauri states that while presenting complex narratives to certain demographics can be difficult, "it's important to address the institutional history."[96]

[95] Williams-Alford, Ahmauri. "Interview About Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters." by Shannon Graham, January 12, 2023.
[96] Ibid.

Appendix D

Interview Answers from Chris Sergi of the Andrew Low House

When you stepped into your role, what were some of your primary goals? Have those goals changed?

Some major goals Chris listed included getting more staff for the museum, changing the branding of the museum's website and expanding and "researching the Milledge family. So we are constantly researching, so our history is evolving and with the Milledges we had always had oral histories and then came across documents we had always thought there was a fourth child."[97]

Chris stated how proud she was at the discovery of solid evidence of the existence of a fourth child of the Milledge family. Another main goal was to tell the entire story of the Andrew Low House.

What did the original interpretation of the site include and when did the house first start presenting narratives of the enslaved on tours? Did any specific event cause the inclusion of the enslaved narrative?

Originally the history given of the house during tours mainly consisted of the history of the Low family, but in the 1980s, Tom Milledge, an enslaved butler was added into the interpretation of the site. Tom's history was well documented amongst family letters and newspapers. Eventually, Mosianna Milledge was added to the narrative later.

[97] Sergi, Chris. "Interview About Andrew Low House." by Shannon Graham, November 10, 2022.

She stated that "it was harder to research Mosianna"[98] and that the staff didn't know for certain if Mosianna was enslaved or free. Tom, however, was enslaved and it is theorized that he was so well known and respected in the community that Mosianna married him despite his enslaved status. There were also two free women of color who also resided in the house, but not much was known of their stories.

Where did you gather the information about the enslaved narratives?

Information about the enslaved was mainly gathered from newspapers and family letters.

What resources did you use to interpret enslaved stories?

Family letters, deed records, newspapers, Tom's obituary/headstone, and Andrew Low's will.

How do you train tour guides/docents to approach and present difficult histories? Has it been hard implementing enslaved narratives into tours?

Chris stated that "we give guidance [about the Milledges]"[99] to the docents and that during docent training, the docents are given resources such as books to help them better understand the history of the site. As far as actually giving tours, Chris states that

[98] Sergi, Chris. "Interview About Andrew Low House." by Shannon Graham, November 10, 2022.
[99] Ibid.

"when I train them they have to be shadowed on a tour…I can also listen to them when they give their tours, and I'm able to correct them."[100]

The museum also hosts speakers who "come to talk about how to interpret enslaved."[101] Along with the speakers, lectures about various topics, such as historic preservation, and women's history are given. Another aspect of docent training is taking "field trips to another museum so they [the docents] can get an example of how other museums are telling their story."[102]

Different workshops are given throughout the year as well, but at least one of them focuses on enslaved history. Chris said that enslaved narratives are constantly changing with research so it is good to have that workshop once a year. The Milledge family is the main representation of enslaved peoples in the narrative of the Andrew Low House because "we know their history more."[103]

How has the public responded to the implementation of enslaved narratives on tours?

"Our tours before COVID were longer and you had a guide who took you room by room, and after covid we came back with our staff cut in half and we started doing more self-guided tours. Our staff was cut in half, but our visitation boomed. We had all these visitors but we didn't have the staff."[104] After COVID, the Andrew Low House implemented both regular docent tours and self-guided tours with docents available to answer questions. Chris stated that the public

[100] Sergi, Chris. "Interview About Andrew Low House." by Shannon Graham, November 10, 2022.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid.

reaction is positive and that just a few reviews that were upset that the history of enslaved was told.

The docents "are very educated in our history but then also in their own subjects."[105] Docents at the Andrew Low House have the freedom of discussing topics that interest them on the tour. The "historical interpreters can go different ways, as long as they give our family and our museum's basic history they could do architecture, social or any subject they are really interested in…so many different personalities"[106] Chris stated that having different perspectives and narratives in tours helps give the visitors different experiences every time they visit the house museum.

Being governed by the National Society of Colonial Dames of Georgia, do you sometimes find it difficult to change the interpretation of a site?

Chris tells me that the Colonial Dames of Georgia "have always backed"[107] whatever interpretation she presents at the site and that she has "100% support."[108] The Colonial Dames of Georgia are interested and want to be educated about the history and give Chris freedom to interpret how she sees fit.

As far as changing the interpretation of the site, Chris works with other museum staff and speakers to have discussions where both parties are educated about interpretation practices. Interpretations at the museum change by visiting other museums, doing research, and making sure information is correct enough to introduce it. Chris emphasizes that the historical interpreters at the museum are eager for new information.

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[105] Sergi, Chris. "Interview About Andrew Low House." by Shannon Graham, November 10, 2022.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid.

Future goals?

Future goals of the Andrew Low House included continuing and expanding an event called “Tasting Traditions” where recipes from Mosianna Milledge and that represent the Gullah and Geechee cultures. Chris also wanted to develop lectures that highlighted Mosianna recipes as well as to create open events that highlight African American history in Savannah.

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