Historic Latta Revisited
Project Update

Mecklenburg County Government

Park and Recreation

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Introduction

In June of 2021, Mecklenburg County opted not to renew its contract with Historic Latta, Inc., a 501(c)(3) organization that had operated the site since the 1970s.

Mecklenburg County staff and community partners have since completed the first of a three-phased site reopening project.
Community Partner Outreach

A diverse team of community partners was assembled, some of whom reached out to the County and some of whom were invited to participate.

The following organizations are represented:

- Charlotte Chapter of the NAACP
- Historic Landmarks Commission
- Johnson C. Smith University
- Levine Museum of the New South
- Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation
- Mecklenburg County Manager’s Office
- Mecklenburg County Public Information
- Mint Museum
- North Carolina Department of Natural & Cultural Resources
- UNC Charlotte

The group also includes several independent historians, interpreters and descendants.
Mission Statement Development

Staff and community partners developed a mission and vision statement based on peer-reviewed research and public input.

Latta Place
Truth – Transparency – Compassion – Transformation – Unity

We believe it is our duty to tell the truth. We resolve to practice transparency in all that we do.
We are dedicated to providing:

• A transformational and engaging experience featuring holistic storytelling filled with truth and empathy.
• An educational experience, giving voice to a multitude of historical perspectives.
• A bridge between the past and present through historical interpretation.
• An essential resource to the residents of the greater Charlotte/Mecklenburg community and beyond.
• A visit that inspires self-examination and application of knowledge.
• A hub for the promotion of historical research and peer-reviewed scholarship.
• A welcome to all visitors with the intent of fostering dignity, while respecting the natural environment in which Latta Place is located.
Public Input – Initial Survey
A statistically valid survey of 917 respondents was conducted in December of 2021.

Prior to this survey, had you heard of Historic Latta located in Mecklenburg County?

- Yes: 31%
- No: 69%

Have you visited Historic Latta in the last year?

- Yes: 45%
- No: 55%

Survey results indicate that nearly 70% of respondents had heard of Historic Latta. Of these, 2/3 (55% of total respondents) had visited the site in the past year.
Public Input - Initial Survey
A statistically valid survey of 917 respondents was conducted in December of 2021.

Please share your experiences and thoughts from your recent visit to Historic Latta.
Many respondents mentioned Latta Nature Preserve as a lovely setting for the historic site and mentioned that they hiking on trails, horseback riding or visiting Mountain Island Lake in addition to spending time at the house.

Key Themes shared in these comments are as follows:

• Many respondents described their visit as a positive experience overall.

• Most like the site for its programs and educational opportunities. There were a number of comments suggesting that the site ought to be kept open for purposes of historic preservation.

• Some respondents shared that they experienced uncomfortable feelings during their visit including sadness, somberness and a general feeling of being unsettled.

• A few respondents remarked that they did not enjoy their visit because of its ties to chattel slavery.
A statistically valid survey of 917 respondents was conducted in December of 2021.

Initially I saw a lot of history and charm and culture and considered it a great wedding venue…. However, as I came to terms with the symbolism and saw no atonement for the acts of savagely brutalizing my people, I could not incorporate one of the happiest days of my life at one of the most treacherous landmarks for my ancestors.

Loved it. Loved the history and the education.

It's historic. It's part of history. It's our heritage. I'm white and I know about what's going on with tearing down statues and I think it's despicable. Sooner or later they are going to rip into the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Taken my kids to Latta before, often. I think the reason they closed it was ridiculous. My kids went to all their camps, war camps, etc. We are homeschoolers and we went every year to their homeschoolers' program.

As a black person, it makes you sad.

It's a typical plantation experience. Need to know more about slave ownership that took place there.

Nicely done local plantation experience. But did not tell the whole story of slavery on plantations.
Public Input – Initial Survey
A statistically valid survey of 917 respondents was conducted in December of 2021.

If you have not recently visited Historic Latta, please tell us why not.

Many of the responses focused on lack of proximity to the location or lack of interest or awareness in the site. A few residents noted they have visited the park, but not the plantation itself.

Key themes shared in these comments are as follows:

• Logistics/awareness, including lack of time, lack of transportation, lack of opportunity, lack of money, disability or health-related reasons and lack of awareness.
• Lack of interest in historic sites.
• Objection to the idea of visiting a plantation.
A statistically valid survey of 917 respondents was conducted in December of 2021.

I am disabled and have a hard time walking, so I do not go many places.

I don't go to plantations because I don't approve of slavery and do not wish to celebrate our horrible history.

I actually go to Latta Nature Preserve pretty often but haven't visited the historic stuff.

Oh, I have no idea. I just haven't gone. It's not close really.

Because I'm black. I'm sure you can put two and two together on that one.
Benchmarking

Mecklenburg County staff and community partners conducted site visits to 11 facilities and noted the following key themes.

- Storytelling is key and should incorporate a variety of perspectives.
- Programming should cater to a variety of learning styles/preferences and may include a combination of signage, interpreter-led tours and audio tours.
- Staff training on the following topics is critical:
  - Customer Service
  - Public Engagement
  - De-escalation
  - Crowd Management
  - Personal Wellness/Self-Care
- There are numerous potential activities that could occur at the Latta site. Execution of these depends on available resources. Our Interpretive Master Plan consultant will assist with prioritization.
- Desirable site attributes include public art that is reflective of the site’s mission, spaces for reflection and a gift shop.
Site Assessment – Ongoing Maintenance

During the Discovery phase, onsite maintenance including repairs to the main house exterior, connection to city water and tree maintenance has been ongoing.

Planned repairs at the Latta main house include window refurbishment.
Phase 2: Blueprinting

Beginning this Spring, staff and partners will conduct research to ensure that site programming is aligned with the established mission statement.

Interpretive Master Plan
- Request For Proposals closes on February 24.
- Scope of Work to include interpretive theme development and a phased implementation plan.

Archival Research
- Partnership with local universities and HBCUs.
- Location and documentation of primary and secondary sources related to the historical time period 1790-1865 in and around Historic Latta.

Key Informant Identification
- Partnership with Charlotte Chapter of NAACP.
- Identification and recruitment of elders willing to share oral histories with the team.

Story Collection
- Public invitation to share stories related to Historic Latta to inform the project.

Initial Archival Work: Hopewell Plantation District Map
Phase 3: Implementation
Site reopening is projected for FY23.
Thank You & Questions

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