HIDDEN TOWN

“The Sounds of Hidden Town” and the *Hidden Town Project*

DRAFT PRESENTED BY
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And financial support from the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

NC DEPARTMENT OF
NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

“In our Negro church, a Negress made a great disturbance by all sorts of shouts and motions. This gave Br. Steiner opportunity to express his disapproval of such performances…” (Salem diary, June 15, 1824)

Research Mapping Project to locate the dwelling places of the enslaved in the town of Salem, North Carolina, USA (1766-1865)

The *Hidden Town Project*

Abstract

This essay will: (1) Introduce Old Salem Museums & Gardens, (2) the *Hidden Town Project*, (3) describe the historic background of slavery in the Moravian church as found in Salem, North Carolina in the 18th and 19th centuries, as well as provide an introduction to music traditions in the historic Moravian church and West Africa; (4) present the "Sounds of Hidden Town," a series of musical happenings that will take place as part of the *Hidden Town Project*; and (5) introduce the "Mobile Dwelling of Dialogue."

Background: Old Salem Museums & Gardens

Old Salem Museums & Gardens is a living history site located in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, USA. It consists of 100 acres of interpreted landscapes, reconstructed gardens, both original as well as reconstructed architectural buildings and landscape elements. Originally the town of Salem, founded in 1766, was the mercantile outpost for a group of Moravian settlers immigrating from what is now on the Cech Republic/German border. The founding Moravians purchased a large tract of land, calling it Wachovia, and began settling small agricultural communities. Salem was conceived as the central hub connecting these outlying agricultural communities. It became known for the quality of pottery, guns, and other crafted objects. The money gained from the sales of goods created in Salem were to go toward the Moravian world-wide missionary work.

Salem became one of the largest and wealthiest cities in the state of North Carolina. The practice of slavery was lawful in the state. From the founding of the town, the use of enslaved labor was fundamental to the creation, management and success of the Moravian town of Salem. At the height of slavery, in the 1860 USA census, there were about 160 enslaved individuals living in the city limits of Salem being housed in at least 40 distinct slave dwellings scattered throughout the town. The town of Salem reflected the state's enslaved population of about 20% of its residents were kept in human bondage.

In 1861, the state of North Carolina was one of the 11 states that seceded from the United Stated, formed the Confederate States of America, and battled the Union states of America in the Civil War. The causes of this civil war, remain for some even today, contested**.** The purpose of this essay is to not engage in this debate. One of the differences between the Northern Union and the Southern States of the Confederacy, is that the Southern states allowed the manifest practice of slavery. In 1865 the Southern States of the Confederacy lost to the Northern Union States and slavery became outlawed in the entire United States. Following the civil war, the slave dwellings in the town of Salem were converted to washhouses, storage outbuildings, and workshops. Eventually, as the years past these buildings collapsed and were removed, so much so that by the 1950's no slave dwelling was extant in the town. The story remained hidden from the public memory.

The original Moravian Town, although derelict, the town square, Church, and other community buildings survived well into the 20th Century. In 1950, a group of residents from the Town of Winston-Salem came together and formed what is now the historic site of Old Salem Museums & Gardens. Once the actual downtown of the modern city, was restored back to a 1766 colonial-esque appearance, the site began interpreting the settlers through costumed guides, historical programing, and reconstructed activities. This nostalgic-heavy perspective of hard-working Moravian settlers did not include interpreting the narrative of the enslaved.

It was not until the mid-1990's that Old Salem Museums & Gardens formally began researching and interpreting the pre-civil war period of slavery in the town of Salem. Early researchers, such as Leland Ferguson, and Jon Sensbak presented a deep, rich and significant relationship between the white Moravians enslavers and their African and African-American enslaved individuals.

Background: Slavery among the Moravian Community of Salem, North Carolina

The history of Salem, North Carolina involves the use of slavery and enslaved people to build the town and a fundamental contribution to the mercantile prosperity of Salem. Although initially controlled by the governing religious Moravian organization, the practice of slavery increased, even against the town's regulations.

The origins of the enslaved people of Salem is a story that both typifies the broader American experience of colonialism and slavery, yet has some unique, complex, and even paradoxical distinctions. Paramount among

these distinctions is the Moravians' practice of "allowing" some enslaved Africans to enter into their congregation, all the while failing to voice any moral objection to enslaving individuals, whose humanity they professed to recognize.

When the mostly-German Moravian congregation came to settle a tract of land called Wachovia in the mid-1750s, in the foothills of the Southern upcountry (in the present-day American state of North Carolina), they were very familiar with the practice of slavery. Despite being a religious and spiritual congregation, they saw no disconnect at all in their lack of moral opposition to the concept of human bondage. The Moravians, in fact, perceived the use of enslaved persons as a necessity for the settlement of this new territory – a place which they viewed as a refuge from religious persecution. The Wachovia tract became, at the same time, a refuge for some and a place of captivity for the human chattel brought over in horrific conditions on slave cargo vessels, forced to endure unimaginable hardships both before and after this perilous passage.

Slavery in the Americas was, of course, a ubiquitous phenomenon existing in the Americas since the 1500s, and it combined many peoples and spanned many lands, including Africa, Europe, and The Caribbean. The Moravians had preached the gospel to enslaved individuals in the West Indies in the early 1730s and undoubtedly recognized the profitability of using unpaid forced labor in the production of sugar cane and agricultural in general.

Much of what is known about the origins of the enslaved Africans in Salem remains incomplete and imprecise, as is the case with most enslaved Africans peoples. However, due to the Moravian Church tradition of detailing the spiritual course and conversion of their congregants by creating a document called a *Lebenslauf* (or literally "Life Course"), there exists several records of these life stories of enslaved Afro-Moravians, who joined the Unitas Fratrum and were thereby enslaved congregants in the earliest settlements of Bethabara, Bethania, and Salem. Two *Lebenslauf* which stand out are the stories of Abraham (Sambo) and Peter Oliver – the former born in West Africa and the latter in Virginia. They also provide a more detailed look at individuals, offering greater insights and a more personal look into their life experience. It should be noted that a *Lebenslauf* may have, to some degree, been subject to the interpretation of the White Brethren who recorded those stories.

Background: Hidden Town Project at Old Salem Museums & Gardens

Old Salem Museums & Gardens has begun a concentrated research focus called the *Hidden Town Project* to investigate and reveal the history of a community of enslaved Africans, free Africans and African Americans who once lived in the town of Salem, North Carolina. In 1913 the Moravian town of Salem unified with the town of Winston and became Winston-Salem. At the time of this merging of municipalities there was a concerted effort to beautify the new city and present it as a forward-looking prosperous, financially desirable location. One of these efforts to beautify included the removal of the headstones that located the burials of the pre-civil war enslaved blacks and hide them under one of the Moravian church buildings. In fact, several of these headstones were used to prop up rotten floor joist underneath the church. The headstones were "hidden" until the mid 1990's when Old Salem Museums & Gardens restored the "First Black Church" and they were found by contractors and archeologists.

The *Hidden Town Project* takes both the figurative as well as literal quality of "hidden headstones" to label this initiative.—through research, interpretation and artistic expression, the narratives of these African people from the inception of the town in 1766, Civil War era (1861-1865), through Emancipation, Reconstruction, Jim Crow era, the Civil Rights movement, and into 21st century discussions of race relations and social justice. Due to the excellent record-keeping of the Moravian leaders, there remain highly detailed accounts of the names, activities, and events surrounding the Salem enslaved.

Since December 2016, as a next step in Old Salem's research, a diverse, cross-functional committee of Old Salem Museums and Gardens staff and external scholars has regularly been gathering to research, discuss, and formulate a larger strategy to take this lesser-known aspect of the Moravian town of Salem to the public. Once more data is compiled, this committee will expand to include descendants of the enslaved as well as residents of early Salem.

The Strategic Goals of the *Hidden Town Project* are:

1. To locate the sites of dwelling places of enslaved people throughout the entire historic district.
2. To archaeologically investigate the sites.
3. To fully integrate the narrative of the enslaved into the visitor experience.
4. To connect with descendants of the Salem enslaved population and form an Advisory Committee to help direct future efforts at Old Salem.
5. To interpret through contemporary art forms, salon discussions and public gatherings.

It is the 5th goal of this project that the "Sounds of Hidden Town" project originates.

"The Sounds of Hidden Town"

The 5th goal of the *Hidden Town Project* is to, through contemporary primary artistic production, interpret the heritage of the Afro-Moravian enslaved peoples. With this in mind, a project has been created in which, through multiple community partnerships (the University of North Carolina School of the Arts, Moravian Music Foundation, Moravian Archives, and Winston Salem State University), auditory compositions will be created referencing and utilizing both the suppressed traditional West African spiritual music and behavioral traditions of the enslaved, combined and/or contrasted with the traditional German Moravian spiritual music traditions.

Neither purely historically-based nor a contemporary endeavor, these entirely new constellations of auditory and physical experiences will then be performed in the historical dwelling spaces of the enslaved. These experiences will be visually and auditorily recorded, with the end product a formation of contemporary "music videos" tied back to the place of human bondage. Along with these site-specific films, there will also be separate micro museum-experiences designed for a single person or very small audiences, to be set up in the dwelling places of the enslaved so as to engage on a personal level with those experiencing "The Sounds of Hidden Town."

The presentations will showcase the results of this process and discuss how music and sound in historic spaces can be progressive and current while engaging historic precedent.

Moravian Music Traditions

Throughout their history, Moravians have embraced music as a central component to their spiritually-centered lives. In the 18th and 19th centuries, music was thought to be an essential part of everyday, mundane life. Moravian composers at that time were familiar with the European classicism of such composers as the Bach family, Haydn, and Mozart, and they composed in a similar style. The Moravian settlers to America brought their music traditions with them, and those who were trained musically continued composing and performing works.

Music was an integral part of Moravian life and worship services, with great emphasis placed on singing by the congregation and choir, and the use of musical instruments. Students attending Moravian schools in the 18th and 19th centuries practiced singing almost every day and they were encouraged to learn how to play musical instruments; girls, string instruments, and boys, wind instruments. Written accounts note that the singing was particularly slow, quiet, and solemn. Musical instruments played a prominent role in worship. Moravians were

known uniquely for their use of brass instruments played to announce special occasions and to accompany singing at outdoor services. They first brought the trombone to America and formed trombone choirs to play within their communities.

West African, Southern Enslaved African Music Traditions

Like the Moravian enslavers, the enslaved Africans (and later African Americans) considered music, sound, dance, and performance fully integrated with their social, political, and spiritual concepts. The difference was in the lack of agency of the enslaved to practice these activities unencumbered and without recourse. Much of what eventually became American music styles such as gospel, blues, soul, and hip-hop derive their sources from musical activities of the American enslaved (field hollers, work unison chants, and spirituals)– much of this activity was discouraged and denied by the white enslavers. Such was the case in the Moravian town of Salem.

These vibrant cultural forms of sound activity and behaviors were considered by the Moravians as idolatrous and un-Christian. Research shows us that they were discouraged and kept out of the formal sanctuary services. It is unclear if the enslaved in Salem practiced these outlawed practices in private, out of the way spots. Traditional Appalachian, North Carolina folk and blues music, such as the banjo, can finds its origins in traditional African music history

Sounds of Hidden Town research

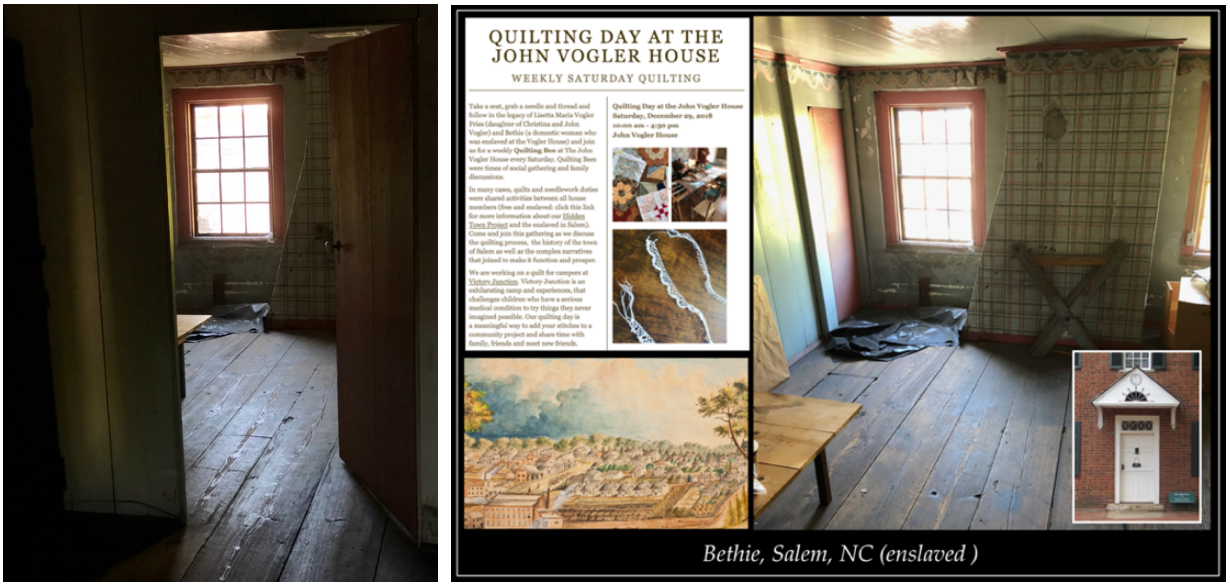
The *Hidden Town Project* has discovered that the white Moravian enslavers, while happy to have the enslaved individuals convert to the Moravian form of Christianity, strongly opposed the use of any traditional tribal African spiritual practices that would result in a hybrid "Afro-Moravian" religious practice. The Moravians preferred a non-charismatic controlled worship style. For this reason, the Afro-Moravian worship practices tightly mimicked the stoic white German Moravian behaviors. Most public of these practices could be found in the music compositions, song lyrics, and liturgical behaviors. The Afro-Moravians were guided toward ceasing any physical dance and vibrant behaviors during the church services.

> *"Sun, April 11. Found no one at the church but the sexton. After the second bell, Alex (Vogler) came. We talked about the congregation until after 11 0'clcok. Some are not satisfied with our quiet ways, want more lively meetings in which they can "rejoice" without restraint, and as they know I am opposed to noisy meetings and do not like to have them in the church, they seem disposed to go elsewhere." (written by Albert L. Oerter in the church diary, April 11, 1869)*
>
> *"Frank [Christian] could be seen on the streets of Bethabara trying to earn money by dancing, or, in the words of his memoir, 'his peculiar turns of the body that no one could imitate.' Frank's movements signified a* ***desire to preserve the cultural memory of African dance customs*** *and even bring in some cash. Such a display must have seemed incongruous in the austere Moravian community, and, indeed, to white Brethren, a whirling African in their midst represented licentious idolatry. They were pleased that, after gaining, 'self-knowledge about his lost condition, [Frank's] whole way of walking changed, he spoke few words, and when one talked to him about his spiritual state one could clearly tell from his broken words that he stood in close communion with the Savoir.' Yet his decision to forego dance and redirect his cultural expression into Christian fellowship could not have been easy. His conversion might well have been shadowed by a sense of loss, possibly emotional anguish, over familiar ways sacrificed."- From A Separate Canaan.*

Locations of Historic Memory & Contemporary Performance

"The Sounds of Hidden Town" compositions will initially be performed in spaces throughout the historic district that are believed to have housed enslaved individuals. The three locations with their respective contemporary composition narratives are:

1. **Bethy's Attic Room:** Peyton Clifford, The University of North Carolina School of the Arts.
2. **The African Church** (St. Phillips Moravian Church): performance by The Burke Singers directed by Maestra D'Walla Simmons-Burke, Director of Choral and Vocal Studies, Winston-Salem State University (WSSU), Department of Music.
3. **The Tavern Room of Reflection & Dialogue**: Algernon Robinson, The University of North Carolina School of the Arts.



Vogler Historic House, Attic Room conjecturally attributed as the dwelling place of a domestic enslaved woman named "Bethy".

1. Bethy's Attic Room

Bethy (a female, enslaved, domestic) was born in 1831, perhaps in nearby Waughtown, North Carolina, as she may have been the daughter of Patience, a woman enslaved at that time by James Waugh. Also known as Betty and Elizabeth Jane, Bethy was about 17 years old when she entered the Salem household of the John and Christina Vogler as an enslaved young woman. Bethy sought membership in the African Church in Salem and was baptized in November 1851. She became a communicant member the following year and was then a sponsor for many Baptismal candidates.

Her enslavers, the Voglers, were highly respected in the community. John Vogler (1783-1881), a tradesman, was a significant participant in early nineteenth-century transformations, especially as a leader in industrialization. In 1848, when Bethy was enslaved to John Vogler, the three Vogler children were grown and his wife Christina's health was compromised. Bethy was essential to the function of the Vogler household. There is no indication of a "slave house" on the Vogler lot, and Bethy probably lived in the house, a two-story brick building. The large attic may have served as her sleeping area, and it is likely that at times she slept near Christina in her decline (Christina died in 1863).

The Vogler house has been part of the Old Salem museum experience since the 1950s. The recent revelation of Bethy's presence in this exhibit building provides the opportunity to think about the role of slavery in the community and the individuals who were enslaved. It is hoped that further research will reveal more information about the person Bethy. Although conjectural, the Sounds of Hidden Town composition asks us to imagine Bethy looking out of her attic window, onto Salem Square, contemplating her future. Whereas normally a teenager dreams of what can be, Bethy had only a life of enslavement to anticipate.

Comments from composer Peyton Clifford (UNCSA):

"Half Lives is a sound-installation that communicates story through melodic quotation, instrumental timbre, and electronic alteration. The source material for the piece consists of two songs written by Piedmont Blues musicians from the 20th century. The Piedmont Blues style was North Carolina's contribution to Blues music which was born out of the collision of West African and European musical elements that occurred during the enslavement of West African people in the United States. The first song, "Freight Train" by Elizabeth Cotten, begins acapella and unaffected; but is gradually marred by a number of electronic effects. During this battle between competing sounds, the second song, "I'm A Stranger Here" by Blind Boy Fuller, enters the fray. Pipe organ, an instrument used heavily by Moravian people, eventually swallows up the entire mass. With this, the density gives way to a new, spacious section of the piece grounded in the sound of the organ, along with excerpts of the Blues songs, all of which have been slowed down exponentially. A banjo and a "thumb piano"- two instruments which are rooted firmly in African music and whose predecessors were brought to the Americas during Triangular Trade - can be heard overtop the stretched-out music. Layers gently fade out, until the piece ends with the return of the unaffected vocal line of "Freight Train." *Half Lives* is a piece about the attempt and failure to strip people of their diverse cultural heritages- thereby stripping them of their humanity. Ruminating on this dark piece of history reminded me of an atom with a half-life; no matter how much decay occurs, the atom will never be reduced to zero. Something will always survive."

2. "The African Church" (St. Philips Moravian Church)

Known historically as the African Church in Salem, the all-black congregation was established May 5, 1822, as outreach mission to the mostly enslaved population in and around Salem. In 1822, the original Log Church for the new black congregation was built (adjacent to the Negro God's Acre graveyard established in 1816). This building was later superseded by the large brick Greek Revival-style church in 1861. This brick church is now the oldest standing African American church in North Carolina. It was in this brick structure that the enslaved of Salem were first told about emancipation and the formation of a period of reconstruction. Those church pews remain in the building to this day. It is under the steps of this building that the hidden headstones of the enslaved were found during restoration.

Since the 1980s, Old Salem has worked to restore the St. Philips complex, including a major investment in research and scholarship to understand the site, building restoration, and archaeology to reveal the graveyards. The Log Church was reconstructed and serves as space for interpretive exhibits about early Africans and African Americans in Salem as discovered through research. The Brick Church remains a consecrated Moravian church

and the historic home to the St. Philips congregation, which holds services there. In addition, the church building serves as an interpreted historic building, performance space, and lecture hall.

Comments from composer and director Maestra D'Walla Simmons-Burke, Director of Choral and Vocal Studies (WSSU):

"The Moravian story illustrates a connection of unity, prayer and global missions. This arrangement combines the *a cappella* hymn tune from the Moravian Book of Worship (*For Food in a World by Crocker/Manfred Wester*) that speaks to a global mission of hunger/loneliness/and living in fear but thanking God in the midst of these concerns. I created a simple hymn tune using the text *Ba wanda ya son shi (There's No One Like Him)* with inspired African idioms rounded-off with native percussion to infuse into this complete worship offering. This African text compliments the first hymn tune as it speaks of traveling/searching everywhere and not being able to find anyone as wonderful as God/Jesus. As research indicates, both Moravians and the enslaved Africans of the Moravians, believed in unity, prayer and global mission – thus, both musical cultures often spoke to the same or similar concerns within their existence and how they could exist in the midst of these concerns.

Ba wanda ya son shi (There's no one like Him)
Language: **Hausa**
djembe percussion

Babu wani wanda babu wani kamar Yesu (There's no one, There's no one like Jesus)
Babu wani, Ba wanda ya son shi (There's no one There's no one like Him)
Babu wani wanda babu wani kamar Yesu (There's no one, There's no one like Jesus)
Babu wani, Ba wanda ya son shi (There's no one, There's no one like Him)

Na yi tafiya a ko'ina, babu wanda (I have traveled everywhere, no one)
Na duba ko'ina, babu wanda (I have looked everywhere, no one)
Na bincike a ko'ina, babu wanda (I have searched everywhere, no one)
Babu wani, Ba wanda ya son shi (There's no one, There's no one like Him)"

A room in the historic Tavern dedicated to reflection of the enslaved in the town of Salem, North Carolina, USA (1766-1865)

3. Tavern Room of Reflection & Dialogue

The Tavern is an original building built in c.1816 and now an Old Salem exhibit building. The Tavern was the interface between the Moravians and outsiders who came to Salem for various reasons (commerce, medical

attention, Girls Boarding School, etc.) and served their needs for food and lodging. Enslaved people were used to operate the Tavern from its beginning, and the room above the kitchen, with its separate staircase, was likely sleeping quarters for these enslaved individuals or families.

An early Hidden Town effort was made to create a designated space within the museum historic district to be available and free for contemplation regarding the enslaved. For this reason, the "Room of Reflection & Dialogue" was established in the second-floor space above the kitchen. This room is now furnished with original pews from the African Church (St. Philips Moravian Church) and is available to anyone during museum operating hours, individuals and groups.

Algernon Robinson (UNCSA) is creating a music video using dancers, traditional African percussion instruments and string quartet. The music blends traditional West African rhythms with Moravian hymn textures. "Parapo" is a West African Yoruba word which means "blend" or "where the ways come together." This piece seeks to bring together Moravian and traditional West African musical ideas. Scored for string quartet and African percussion (including djembe, dun dun, and kalimba), the piece opens with a melody meant to evoke a call and response field holler, shared between members of the quartet. This is broken up by percussion strikes that progressively increase in volume, and morphs into an up-tempo section influenced by West African dance music before dissolving into the previously heard musical texture. This section of music juxtaposes the field holler melody from before with a tune inspired by Moravian church hymns. The West African dance music is heard once more before shifting back to the field holler melody played on the cello and ending the way the music began — making the piece cyclical. This piece has been choreographed, and the dance will be filmed on location in Old Salem.

"The Sounds of Hidden Town" Participants

Old Salem Museums & Gardens

- Scott Carpenter - Project Manager / Research, Director of Music
- Franklin Vagnone – President & CEO, Co-Chair Hidden Town Committee and progenitor of "Sounds of Hidden Town"
- Cheryl Harry – Research, Co-Chair Hidden Town Committee
- Martha Hartley – Research, Co-Chair Hidden Town Committee
- Leo Rucker / Bill Cook - Lead interpreters at St. Phillips Heritage Site
- Erin Glant / Cindy Kepley - Lead interpreters at the Tavern
- Kelly Beeson / Mary Hartung - Lead interpreters at the Vogler House
- Johnny Yeagley – Research (volunteer)
- Michelle Cook – Development
- Karen Walter – Development, Research, Editing

Winston-Salem State University

- D'Walla Simmons-Burke - Composer / Director of The Burke Singers
- The Burke Singers
  - Angel Andrews
  - Briana Headen
  - Brittany Headen
  - Nia Lewis
  - Kayla Phifer

University of North Carolina School of the Arts

- Algernon Robinson - Composer/Music Editor
- Peyton Clifford - Composer
- Larry Dillon - Instructor
- James Wiley - Director of Photography
- Evan Finch - Editor/BTS Videography
- Lauren Smith - Choreographer
- Alexis York - Dancer
- Kendall Ramirez - Dancer
- Alyssa Neal- Dancer
- Dominique Valenzuela - Violin
- Bella Ward - Violin
- Monica Muñoz - Viola
- Blake Kitayama - Cello
- Greg Freeman - Percussion

Moravian Music Foundation & Moravian Archives

- Eric Elliot - Research
- Nola Reed Knouse - Research

North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

DRAFT CONCLUSION:

Although still in the implementational stages, The Sounds of Hidden Town pilot project has already shown itself to be a powerful catalyst for education, dialogue, and interpretation. Some of the most difficult forms of public engagement are those that are centered on painful and complex narratives. If they are abrupt, they have the possibility to make people openly **dis-**interested. If they are too delicate, they in turn can leave a visitor with the feeling that something was left "secret" or "hidden". The Sounds of Hidden Town appear to be able to produce a level of experience that satisfies both sides of this spectrum. The hypothesis of this pilot project is that through the creative arts and sensory entrances into complex concepts, a visitor will be more open to the subtleties of a narrative.

The Sounds of Hidden Town, through primary research and substantial partnerships, strategically combines diverse historical narratives, new expansive community involvement, with the contemporary creative sector. Once this phase of the project is made permanent through sound installations in the above referenced historic spaces, the casual visitor to Old Salem Museums & Gardens will be able to, in a non-anxious and self-guided manner, encounter the difficult narratives of the enslaved who were kept in the town of Salem, NC. Using sound in historic spaces in this non-didactic manner may provide a fresh paradigm for future museum professionals to engage complex stories through the minds of visitors using, not text boxes or docents, but through sound, music, and emotion.