

## Report for Meeting of the North Carolina African American Heritage Commission, Winter 2023

Prepared by Angela M. Thorpe, Director, NC African American Heritage Commission

### COMMISSIONER RE-APPOINTMENT

- Juanita Moore (Wilson County)

### FISCAL & LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

The 2023-2025 state budget is in development. The NCAAHC is hoping the following items will be considered:

1. Funding to expand the NCAAHC's trails and traveling exhibit program.
2. Funding for two full-time staff positions: a trails and traveling exhibit coordinator and a marketing and communications specialist.

### ORGANIZATIONAL UPDATES

- Newly filled NCAAHC staff positions:
  - Rodney Dawson, Education and Interpretation Specialist
  - Mikayla Medley, Administrative Associate
  - Vincentt Sutton, Program Coordinator

### 2023 NCAAHC STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

- NCAAHC Strategic Plan Goals, FY 2022-2023:
  1. Continue to expand grassroots technical assistance support to statewide cultural groups.
  2. Convene grassroots groups around statewide African American heritage needs and professional development opportunities, prioritizing local African American heritage commissions.
  3. Share news, funding resources, and professional development opportunities with stakeholders, prioritizing artists and creatives.
  4. Establish and nurture relationships with university and college programs and departments with disciplines that align with AAHC work.
  5. Develop strategy for connecting AAHC to K-12 public schools.
  6. Expand portfolio of public engagement resources, including trails, exhibits, educational resources, and physical resources.
  7. Collaborate with internal and external partners to develop statewide African American Heritage Tourism Study and Implementation Plan.

## MAJOR PROJECT UPDATE

### **“Africa to Carolina: Next Steps in the Journey” (Institute of Museum and Library Services Grant, July 2020-December 2022; Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation Planning Grant, July 2022-January 2023)**

Following a thorough national search, Amber Pelham, a graduate of the Public History graduate program at New York University and a Hampton University alum, was selected as the two-year Research Fellow for the AAHC’s “Africa to Carolina: Next Steps in the Journey” project. Amber began her role at the end of January 2021.

Amber performed additional research on the slave trade in the colony of North Carolina and has developed robust drafts of an introductory exhibit centering on the relationship between the Transatlantic Slave Trade and North Carolina. The exhibit underwent a thorough, stakeholder-centered review process in the Summer and Fall of 2021, as well as a thorough review by the North Carolina Historic Sites Exhibit Coordinating Committee in early 2022.

Slightly variable versions of this exhibit were installed at Bath State Historic Site, Brunswick Town/Ft. Anderson State Historic Site, Edenton State Historic Site, Somerset Place State Historic Site, Tryon Palace, Roanoke Island Festival Park, and the NC Maritime Museum at Beaufort in the Spring and Summer of 2022. The project team used excess grant funding to purchase additional copies of the exhibit, which have been added to the NCAAHC traveling exhibit program.

The project will also fund the development of an “Africa to Carolina” web portal. This website was designed to showcase information and resources that we know and have currently, with the intention of building upon it after the conclusion of the project in alignment with the larger goals of the Africa to Carolina initiative. A seasoned web contractor, Phil Bicking, joined the project team to build the web portal in July 2021. The web went live in December of 2022.

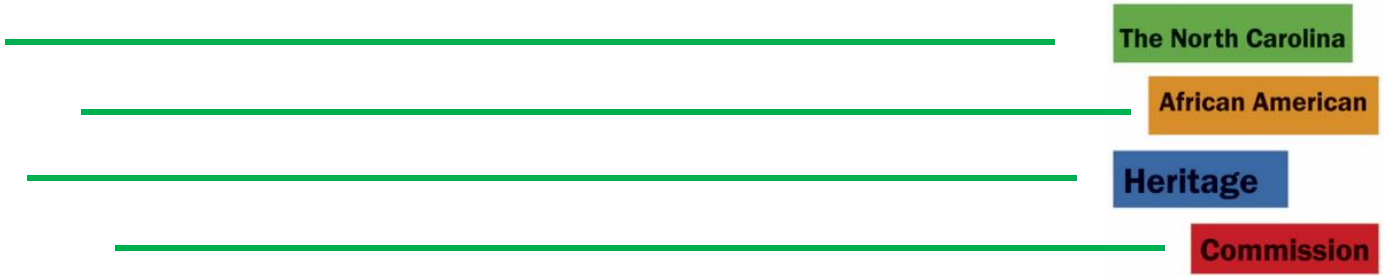
The [Africa to Carolina web portal](#) followed a flow that was similar to the exhibit, while also directing visitors back to where the exhibits are installed so that they may experience them in person. The portal serves as a collection of resources discussing the Transatlantic slave trade as a whole as well as its connections to North Carolina.

### Web Portal Goals & Themes

- Embarking on a New Journey: Discusses the primary locations of embarkation of the eleven identified voyages that made their way to North Carolina.
- Voyages and Vessels: Identified sites of disembarkation in North Carolina
- New Spaces and Places: Describing the experiences of enslaved Africans upon their arrival to North Carolina

Research Fellow Amber Pelham had her last day with the Commission on December 20, 2022.

“Africa to Carolina” was selected as a semifinalist for the **Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation’s Inclusive Public Art Initiative**. A call for artists, launched this summer, led to the selection of artist team Stephen Hayes and David Wilson to design the project public art piece. Through the fall and winter of 2022, the NCAAHC collaborated with Facilitate Movement, LLC., to design and implement community engagement sessions in Wilmington, Navassa, New Bern, and Plymouth to share project updates, and to gather public art design concepts from statewide stakeholders. These concepts will shape the semi-final renderings the artist team will submit for grant consideration.



The NCAAHC will submit a final application package to the ZSR IPA Initiative in late January 2023. If selected as a finalist in 2023, funding would enable the project to expand to place public art markers in coastal disembarkation communities.