

Meeting of the North Carolina African American Heritage Commission
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Africa to Carolina Research Fellow's Report

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Africa to Carolina: Next Steps in the Journey has completed the exhibit phase. The exhibit's goals are to identify and display disembarkation sites in North Carolina, to ensure that the exhibition commemorates spaces where Black bodies forcibly journeyed, to tell a larger story of enslavement and how it shaped North Carolina's socio-economic landscape, and to frame a story of survival and in addition, to provide space and voice for the enslaved Africans to tell their "origin story" in the larger historical framework of North Carolina. The exhibit consists of six panels. Specific panels are tailored to the various port sites. These port sites include Port Edenton, Port Beaufort (located in Newbern and Beaufort), Port Bath, and Port Brunswick (Wilmington). These port sites also consist of the host sites of the exhibition. The host sites include Historic Bath, Tryon Palace, Historic Edenton, NC Maritime Museum at Beaufort, Somerset Place State Historic Site, Brunswick Town/Ft. Anderson State Historic Site, and Roanoke Island Festival Park.

The exhibit follows the trajectory of the journey of the enslaved. It also consists of various themes. The themes explored are understanding native landscapes, the journey of the Middle Passage, the business of the slave trade, the legality of the slave trade, the displacement of Africans and its social effects, and collective memory.

Exhibit Goals & Themes

- To discuss the native environments of Africa and North Carolina before the Trans-Atlantic slave trade impacted them to give a base for the change that will occur and how that impacted the North Carolina community and its descendants
- Explain the geographical migratory patterns of the slave trade and how it relates to North Carolina.
- Discuss the treatment of enslaved Africans and others onboard the vessels embarking to North Carolina to spark dialogue on distinct behavioral patterns that were implemented in the discipline and care of enslaved persons upon disembarkation and displacement.
- Analyze the system of the slave trade.
- Display the multiple elements of the economic development of the slave trade and its effects transnationally, nationally, and locally.
- Examine the legality of the slave trade, discussing legislation that made it no less challenging to bring enslaved persons into North Carolina and how it affected the record-keeping of ships importing enslaved Africans into the state. It shows the complexity of the slave trade, as well as why there are so many unanswered questions.
- Show the various places where those Africans might have been sold.

- Lastly, make connections between the slave trade and disembarkation to issues passed down to the present. Examining how the slave trade has influenced our individual identities and our collective identities (nationwide and locally).

Currently, the exhibit is in the process of being distributed to the various host sites. The sites that have obtained their copy and have displayed the exhibition are Historic Edenton and Brunswick Town/Ft. Anderson. A survey tool has been completed. The feedback from Historic Edenton has been favorable. Plans have been made from the other sites for pick-up. The next step in the Africa to Carolina initiative is the development of the web portal. As of now, the portal is still in its beginning development phases. A list of resources has been sent to the developer, and the supplementary text for the website is under review.