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Old Salem Museums & Gardens Forms New Cherokee Advisory Committee

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (May 29, 2020) – Old Salem Museums & Gardens and Cherokee historians have formed a Cherokee Advisory Committee to assist in accurately interpreting the complex relationship between the Cherokee and the Moravians in the early South.

The British and American Colonial and Early National periods of our history are marked by the resettlement, displacement, cultural erasure, and genocide of the Cherokee and other indigenous cultures of the Southern Woodlands. With the assistance of the newly formed Cherokee Advisory Committee, Old Salem is seeking to interpret the early history of the United States in ways that include the diverse experiences of the Cherokee and other indigenous groups. Current advisors on the Cherokee Advisory Committee include historians Michael Crowe, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI); Malaciah Taylor, EBCI; and Watson Harlan, Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma (CNO).

Harlan states, “I look forward to collaborating and researching with Old Salem. Looking to our past should be an act of understanding and empathy. To understand those who were a part of it, we must see and hear the story of everyone, even at the expense of comfort. The Cherokee story is one laden with strife and conflict but is one absolutely necessary to tell for our understanding of the past.”

“We’re still here; we’re still Cherokee. We speak our language, dance our songs, know our history, our culture, our arts. We are Cherokee,” says Crowe. Taylor agrees, “I wish to show the proper history of my ancestors.” Karen Walter, Director of Learning in Place at Old Salem, states, that “this new advisory committee is the next step in our community-based interpretations that we initiated with our Hidden Town Project. Telling the accurate stories of the wider community expands our understanding of the Moravian Experiences here in Salem and beyond.”

“It is important to have open collaboration and conversations with people of indigenous descent and, wherever possible, create space for them to interpret their own history and material culture,” says Samantha Smith, Director of Community Engagement and Chair of the Cherokee Advisory Committee at Old Salem.” As part of our organizational reassessment, we have determined that Cherokee interpretation at Old Salem Museums & Gardens needs to be

reenvisioned. We hope that forming this committee will be one small step towards indigenous peoples reclaiming their own historical narratives.”

Advisors will be directly assisting members from Old Salem Museums & Gardens (Samantha Smith, Director of Community Engagement & Digital Learning; Daniel Ackermann, Interim Chief Curator; Johanna Brown, Curator of Moravian Decorative Arts; Martha Hartley, Director of Moravian Research; Frank Vagnone, President and CEO; and Karen Walter, Director of Learning in Place), Historic Bethabara Park (Diana Overbey, Education Director), and the Moravian Archives in Winston-Salem (Eric Elliot, Head Archivist) in their committee work and will be directly involved in all programming and interpretation of Cherokee history and material culture at Old Salem.

If you are a Cherokee tribal member interested in becoming an advisor for the Cherokee Advisory Committee at Old Salem, please contact Samantha Smith at ssmith@oldsalem.org.

About Old Salem

Voted the 2019 #1 Tourist Attraction in North Carolina (AAA), Old Salem Museums & Gardens is a unique living history site with a tactile-driven, immersive visitor experience. Its museums—the Historic Town of Salem, the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA), and the Gardens at Old Salem—are quickly becoming nationally known for innovative and novel interpretive models and programs. Old Salem Museums & Gardens is located at 600 South Main Street in Winston-Salem. For more information call 336-721-7300 or visit oldsalem.org.

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