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### **Old Salem Museums & Gardens and the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts Launch New Study South Initiative for Research and Experimentation**

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (June 12, 2020) – On July 1, 2020, Old Salem Museums & Gardens and the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA) will launch the Study South initiative, a period of online and onsite study, research, and experimentation available to scholars, researchers, makers, and any other members of the public who wish to intensively study the history of the American South using the Museums' unparalleled resources. The Study South initiative will run from July through December 2020.

In addition to free access to Old Salem and MESDA's online resources, the Museums' research centers and library will be open by appointment starting in July; in August, the Museums' collections also will be open by appointment. By the end of the summer, onsite resources available to scholars, researchers, makers, and members of the public interested in studying the South will include the Anne P. and Thomas A. Gray Library, the MESDA Research Center, the Moravian Research and Archaeology Lab, and the vast collections of Old Salem and MESDA.

"Along with onsite appointments, Old Salem and MESDA will create digital programs and experiences that further their mission to present an authentic view of the rich cultural history of early southern life," said Franklin Vagnone, President & CEO of Old Salem. "Rather than use the COVID-19 pandemic as a reason to retreat from our public mission, we are confidently moving forward into a transformed visitor experience. Valuable resources that have remained somewhat marginal in our operations will now become front and center. This is the strength of Old Salem and MESDA—and Study South has been designed to expand our public offerings and visitor experiences in innovative and compelling ways."

"Old Salem and MESDA are home to some of the country's most important resources for the study of life in the early South," said Daniel Ackermann, Interim Chief Curator and Director of Collections. "We are looking forward to engaging the public with these resources in new and innovative ways online and in person."

This summer, Old Salem and MESDA will unveil exciting new summer programs and experiences for visitors as part of the Study South initiative. "COVID-19 realities have forced Old Salem and MESDA staff to reimagine the visitor experience in new and creative ways," said Samantha Smith, Director of Community Engagement and Digital Learning. "In the wake of a

pandemic and worldwide protests calling for racial justice and reform, the Study South initiative contextualizes our present through intensive study and engagement with vast cultural histories of the American South.”

Although the living history site will not be open for traditional interpreted experiences during this period, Old Salem and MESDA will expand their offerings to include new innovative programs, including the Salem Pathways choose-your-own-adventure experience, the Salem Presents online lecture series, the MESDA Summer Scholars Series lifelong learning program, K-12 online and in-classroom outreach, new digital content about the history of the American South, and the expansion of the “Out of Bounds” contemporary art initiative. All of these programs draw on the museums’ rich collections as well as recent initiatives, including The Hidden Town Project’s research into the lives of enslaved people in Salem and recent efforts to develop a better understanding of the relationship between Cherokee and Moravian communities through the Cherokee Advisory Committee. MESDA and Old Salem also will be creating new virtual visiting historian and curator fellowships. Working remotely, scholars from around the country will support and contribute to Old Salem and MESDA’s ongoing work to evaluate, broaden, and diversify the stories they tell using their collections and research resources. More information on these and many more exciting new programs will be announced soon.

Along with these mission-centric programs, Old Salem will continue to support the local community by assisting the community in non-traditional ways, including baking bread and cultivating fresh produce for local food banks. To learn more about Study South, visit [oldsalem.org/StudySouth](https://oldsalem.org/StudySouth), or visit Old Salem and MESDA on social media at @oldsaleminc and @mesdagram.

### **About Old Salem**

Voted the 2019 #1 Tourist Attraction in North Carolina (AAA), Old Salem Museums & Gardens is a unique museum, education, and research organization. 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](https://oldsalem.org).

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