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## Old Salem Museums & Gardens and the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts Expand Successful Study South Initiative to Include New Onsite Offerings

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (March 31, 2021) – On April 1, 2021, Old Salem Museums & Gardens and the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA) will expand their successful Study South initiative to include new onsite, in-person opportunities to engage with the history of Salem and the American South. While Old Salem and MESDA will remain closed for traditional walk-in visitation, these expanded opportunities include the new *Salem Pathways* choose-your-own-adventure outdoor experience as well as a new online portal for collections and research inquiries and appointments.

Beginning April 1, Old Salem will encourage visitors to explore the historic district and gardens with *Salem Pathways*, a new online choose-your-own-adventure experience where visitors can follow the personal lives, achievements, and challenges of real-life individuals who lived in or visited Salem from the 1770s to 1980s. These historical figures will take you on a tour of Salem's historic district as seen through their eyes and will include curated music and sounds reflective of their lives. *Salem Pathways* will be available to visitors 24/7 through their own mobile devices with a pay-what-you-wish suggested donation of \$20. "Salem Pathways celebrates how all of our lives are interconnected through the spaces we share, even across time. Even though each of these characters are from different times, the physical space of Salem brings them, and all of us, together," said Samantha Smith, Director of Community Engagement and Digital Learning. Learn more at [www.oldsalem.org/salem-pathways](http://www.oldsalem.org/salem-pathways).

On April 1, Old Salem and MESDA will also launch an expanded Study South web portal to connect scholars, researchers, collectors, makers, and inquisitive minds with the museum's unique collections and research resources. "During the past year, we've seen a surge of interest in our collections and research materials as well as our scholarly journal," said Daniel Ackermann, Chief Curator and Director of Collections, Research, and Archaeology. "While we look forward to continuing to support scholars, makers, and members the public through our online research services, and we're excited to formally welcome people back onsite to visit the collections and research resources in person." These resources include the Old Salem and MESDA collections as well as the resources of the Anne P. and Thomas A. Gray Library, the MESDA Research Center, the Moravian Research and Archaeology Lab, and the Garden and

Seed Saving Lab. To ask a question or book an appointment, visit:  
<http://www.mesda.org/researchit>.

“The expansion of the Study South Initiative is the next step in our transformation into a new and more sustainable Old Salem and MESDA,” said Frank Vagnone, President and CEO of Old Salem and MESDA. “Since closing for in-person experiences on March 12, 2020, we have experimented with and embraced new models for engaging and supporting our community using the unique resources we have.” These have included our support for K-12 students and educators through our Learning In Place videos and curriculum, scholars and researchers through our online databases and *MESDA Journal*, and life-long learners through innovative new programs like *THINGS: A Global Conversation*. Old Salem has also accelerated The Hidden Town Project’s research into the lives of enslaved people in Salem and the exploration of the relationship between the Cherokee and the Moravians through the Cherokee Advisory Committee. To date, Old Salem and MESDA have reached 174,233 viewers of Learning in Place Videos, 477,352 readers of #HistoryNerdAlerts, 14,706 viewers of their Eyes on Salem LIVE series, and 5,013,130 viewers on TikTok.

Over the next several months Old Salem and MESDA will continue to expand its in-person and online offerings to include new classes, unique walking tours, and Salem Saturdays. In late June, Old Salem and MESDA will host the 2021 MESDA Summer Institute, a graduate-level course in early Southern material culture taught in collaboration with the University of Virginia. In September, the organization plans to host an international symposium on the mapping of the early American South.

Along with these mission-centric programs, Old Salem and MESDA will continue to support the local community by helping in new ways, including baking bread and cultivating fresh produce for local food banks.

### **About Old Salem Museums & Gardens**

Old Salem Museums & Gardens is a unique living history site that shares the rich, authentic, and diverse cultural history of the early South—with special emphasis on the Moravians in North Carolina, enslaved and free people of African descent, and indigenous peoples of the Southern Woodlands—through the preservation and interpretation of material culture, architecture, and cultural landscapes. 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.  
[oldsalem.org](http://oldsalem.org)

### **About the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts at Old Salem Museums & Gardens**

The Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA) is the preeminent center for the research of decorative arts and material culture of the early South. Part of Old Salem Museums & Gardens, MESDA is home to the finest collection of southern decorative arts and related research materials in the country. The museum is internationally recognized for its contributions to the study and understanding of the history, decorative arts, and material culture of the American South. [mesda.org](http://mesda.org)