

THREADBARE NO LONGER

UNEARTHING THE BIOGRAPHIES OF ENSLAVED PEOPLE WHO LIVED AND WORKED AT FRIES' WOOLEN MILL

OLD SALEM'S HIDDEN TOWN PROJECT

Hidden Town Project at Old Salem Museums and Gardens (OSMG) is currently the main focus of the institution's Department of Moravian Research.

The project has 5 major goals:

1. Locate the sites of dwelling places of enslaved people throughout Salem's historic district
2. Fully integrate this narrative into the everyday interpreted visitor experience: where they lived and worked, and who they were as human beings
3. Connect with descendants of the enslaved
4. Archaeologically investigate designated sites
5. Interpret the heritage of enslaved people in Salem and their descendants through contemporary art forms, salon discussions, and public gatherings.

MY CAPSTONE WITHIN HIDDEN TOWN

My focus within OSMG's Hidden Town Project is Francis Fries and his woolen mill which he opened in Salem in 1840. Because Salem was a theocracy, overseen by the Moravians who settled the town, any business had to receive approval from the governing members of the church. Francis pushed the boundaries of the Moravian's rules on enslavement, by using primarily labor of enslaved people to run his business. He did hire some day laborers, however, most of his employees were enslaved people. By 1860, the census lists "F&H Fries" (Francis's brother Henry partnered with him in 1842) housing 48 enslaved individuals. Their father, Wilhelm Fries, was listed to have 20 enslaved individuals on his property by that same year. Salem was reported to have around 160 enslaved persons living in the town at its height, thus, more than one-third of the population of enslaved people worked for the Fries family.



Above: Portrait of Francis Fries, Painting, Circa 1838-1845, 5607.13; Old Salem Museums and Gardens Collection, Winston-Salem, NC. Below: "Fries, Francis Levine," 677; Old Salem Wachovia Residents Database, Oldsalem.org.



Above: Portrait of Lisetta Fries, Painting, Circa 1838-1845, 5607.14; Old Salem Museums and Gardens Collection, Winston-Salem, NC. Below: "Fries, Lisetta Maria," 682; Old Salem Wachovia Residents Database, Oldsalem.org.

Fries, Francis Levin		Trade	
Occupied	1840-1842	1840-1842	1840-1842
Children:	7	Children:	7
Personal History:	Memoir set in Archives (1)	Personal History:	Memoir set in Archives (1)

Fries, Lisetta Maria, n.k.a. Vogler Trade		Occupied	
Children:	7	Children:	7
Personal History:	Memoir set in Archives (1)	Personal History:	Memoir set in Archives (1)

BUILDING THE FILE

I was given "Lot 103: The Fries' Woolen Mill" to research. I started my research with a checklist that Martha Hartley, Director of Moravian Research, gave me, pulling relevant information from sources listed. I extracted information from OSMG's National Historic Landmark Nomination Application, the Wachovia Residents Database, census records, Moravian Records, the Moravian Archives in Winston-Salem, NC, multiple files from the Frank L. Horton Museum Center at the Museum for Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA) in Old Salem, among other sources.



Denke, Maria (Steiner), "View of Salem from the West," c. 1852, P-17; Old Salem Museums and Gardens Collection, Winston-Salem, NC.

IDENTIFYING THE CHALLENGES

Lack of Physical Structure

While other lots which have been researched as a part of Hidden Town still have some original structures or reconstructed buildings standing, the woolen mill, along with its dependencies have long since been torn down. The lot has neither been excavated, as it is now home to Kaleideum Downtown, a local children's museum in Winston-Salem, NC. Thankfully, the 1885 Sanborn Insurance Map for "Winston and Salem" identifies the structures that were present on the lot by that time. While this map was not drawn until after Emancipation, it still gives an idea of where enslaved people might have lived on the site.

Expansion of Scope

The Fries family's legacy in Salem did not begin with Francis. His father Wilhelm came to Salem in 1809 from the Moravians in Germany. As evidenced by Moravian records, Wilhelm pushed the boundaries of what was allowed in the town. He was constantly seeking ways to make the most money he could. Wilhelm's view of slavery informed his sons' views. Using letters and Moravian records, I have been able to understand how the two generations of Fries were involved in changing the town's rules regarding enslaved people. I needed to understand how enslaved people lived and worked under Wilhelm's supervision. Expanding my research to include Wilhelm's properties became important to understanding the lives of enslaved people in Salem.

Selectiveness of Documentation

Wilhelm Fries had property in town and outside of town. Wilhelm's vast property holdings of land outside the town's purview was not discussed as often in the Moravian records.

RESOURCE SELECTION

Ferguson, Leland. *God's Fields: Landscape, Religion, and Race in Moravian Wachovia*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011.
Forsyth County Genealogical Society. *The 1860 Federal Census and Supplementary Schedules of Forsyth County, North Carolina*. Winston-Salem, N.C.: Forsyth County Genealogical Society, 1988.
Fries, Adelaide L., et al., eds. *Records of the Moravians in North Carolina*. 13 vols. Raleigh, N.C., 1922-2006.
Hartley, Michael O., Martha Hartley and John Larson. "Old Salem Historic District, Winston-Salem, N.C." National Historic Landmark Nomination Form. United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2016.
Sensbach, Jon S. *A Separate Canaan: The Making of an Afro-American World in North Carolina, 1763-1840*. Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1998.
Shirley, Michael. *From Congregation Town to Industrial City: Culture and Social Change in a Southern Community*. New York: New York University Press, 1994.
Thacker, Tanya. "African American References, Wachovia/Salem, North Carolina." Prepared for Old Salem, Inc. 1994.
Vogler, E. A. "Map of Salem and Winston North Carolina: And the surrounding Land as far as it was owned by the Congregation of United Brethren Salem NC." Philadelphia: J. L. Smith, Publisher, 1876.

SARAH GRAHL

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA GREENSBORO

SARAHGRAHL@GMAIL.COM

REALIZING THE OUTCOMES

Understanding the Complex Relationships

Francis Fries would take his "boys" (as he sometimes referred to the enslaved men) on outings, such as ice skating. As a boy at school, his letters between himself and his parents revealed an affection for the first enslaved person in their household named Fanny. (Although Wilhelm spoke somewhat fondly of her, he later sells her to someone outside the town, even though her husband Adam was still working at Salem Tavern.) The paternalism Francis projected when talking about the enslaved persons in his household and business is starkly contrasted by his conducting of transactions to procure as well as sell enslaved people.

Identifying Names of the Enslaved Individuals

The census taken in 1860 revealed that 68 enslaved people were housed by Wilhelm and Francis Fries. So far, I have found 20 names of individuals, and I am continuing in my search for more. Along with some of the names are listed their positions/occupations.

Locating Potential Dwelling Sites

I have been able to ascertain from Moravian records and historic maps that many of the enslaved people lived on Wilhelm's farm land northwest of the township of Salem, and must have walked to the woolen mill from there. Also, once Salem's leadership lets go of its control over laws regarding enslaved people living in town, more enslaved people live on the mill's property, in buildings on site. I also know from a diary kept by Francis's daughter Mary that at least two enslaved individuals lived in Wilhelm's house in town (Lot 52).



Above: "September 26, 1888 / Fries Woolen Mill." 1888. Old Salem Museums & Gardens, Winston-Salem, NC.

CARDING at 6 Cents.

Various reasons have induced me to buy the Wool Cards, Felling Mill, &c. belonging to Rights & Shultz, (formerly V. Zevety) and by this purchase I am enabled to offer my customers and the public generally, still further accommodations in doing their work with dispatch and in first rate style. In order to encourage all prompt purchasers to give me their orders, and to induce those who are rather "slow" to be more punctual, I have concluded to card cheaper for the "pay down," and in order to avoid all misunderstanding, will more fully explain myself:

Firstly, We will hereafter charge 6¢ cents per lb. for carding wool into rolls, weighing the wool after it is greased and before it is carded. If payment is made when the rolls are taken away. If work is charged in the book, (and if it be but for one day) the old price will be exacted.

Secondly, The wool must be well prepared, and all burrs and other hard substances, carefully picked out. Whenever the owners neglect this and we must attend to it, an extra charge will be made for such work.

Thirdly, We would prefer to grease the wool ourselves, but wish persons to send along the fact, at least one pound to every ten of wool.

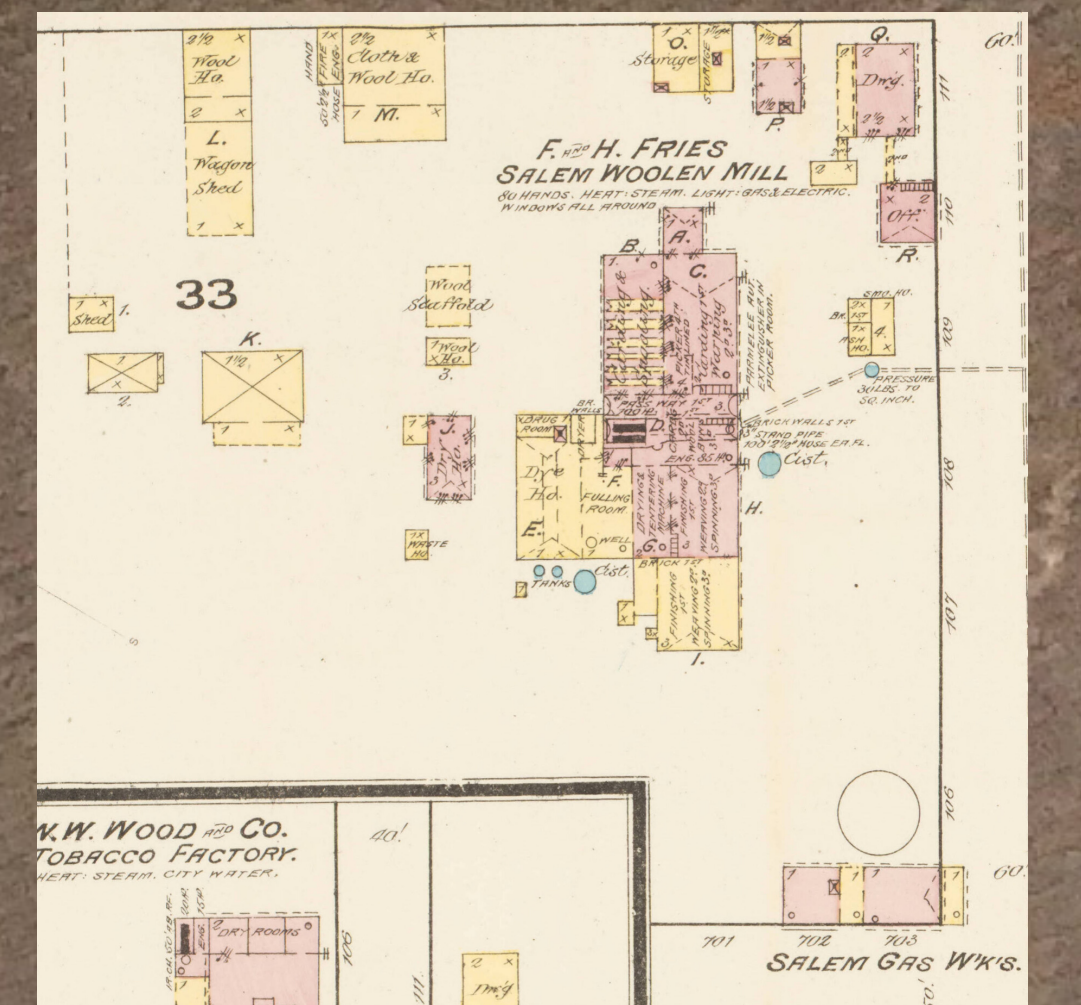
Fourthly, Wool, beswax, tallow, corn, wheat, hard and faxseed will be taken in payment, at cash prices—but cash itself will be most welcome.

With this additional Machinery, I may now invite all my customers to the various branches of my business, and only to continue their visits, but to induce as many of their neighbors as they can to follow their example. The machines will, in about a week, be in forward order, and I would advise all who wish to wait for their work, to come as early in the season as possible, as there is generally much of a crowd in the fall.

Making cloth for others, when the wool is brought, as also Felling, Coloring, &c., pieces brought to us from the country, done as heretofore,—only that we now work with more experience and expedition.

Filled Jeans & Negro Cloths, of better texture quality than we heretofore made, generally kept on hand and sold at prices to suit the scarcity of moles.

F. FRIES,
Salem, N. C., May 1, 1845.



1885 Sanborn map showing F & H Fries' Woolen Mill. "Winston and Salem, North Carolina, June 1885" (map), 1:600. New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1885.

A broadside used by the Fries' woolen mill to advertise fabric. A 2.1; Old Salem, Museums and Gardens Collection, Winston-Salem, NC.

A SPECIAL THANKS TO:

Martha Hartley, Director of Moravian Research, Old Salem Museums and Gardens, Project Supervisor
Dr. Torren Gatson, Assistant Professor of Public History, UNCG, Capstone Advisor
Shirley, Michael. *From Congregation Town to Industrial City: Culture and Social Change in a Southern Community*. New York: New York University Press, 1994.
Anne Parsons, Director of Public History, UNCG
The UNC Greensboro Department of History



UNC GREENSBORO



Background image is a photograph taken of a scrap of fabric produced in the F & H Fries Woolen Mill during Francis Fries's lifetime. The fabric is a piece of black canvas-like cloth and is held in the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Art's archives.