

A Quick Introduction to the History of Stagville and Horton Grove

What is Horton Grove? What is Stagville?

TLC's Horton Grove Nature Preserve is named for Horton Grove, an original set of slave dwellings that are part of Historic Stagville State Historic Site. Both the Preserve and the Historic Site were formerly part of the Cameron plantations, one of the largest sites of slavery in North Carolina. By 1860, over 900 people were enslaved here on 30,000 acres of Cameron land. Today, Historic Stagville is a public site that focuses on teaching about the local history of slavery and emancipation. Historic Stagville also preserves buildings and archaeology sites connected to enslaved people's history. Visitors to the TLC Preserve can connect with this history through the trail names, outdoor signs, or a visit to Stagville next door.

What historic buildings can you see from the trails?



Great Barn: The Jordan and Sowell trailheads start on either side of the Great Barn. Enslaved people constructed this barn in 1860. It was a massive building for its time, and the detailed construction of the three-story barn shows the expert craftsmanship of the enslaved builders. The barn was a plantation mule stable with large lofts. In the 1860s, it was surrounded by open fields where enslaved families were forced to grow corn, wheat, rye, tobacco, or cotton.

Horton Grove: The other end of the Sowell trail loop starts at the Horton Grove quarters. This row of four houses are the only preserved slave dwellings from the Cameron plantations. Each house was built by enslaved craftsmen, including the handmade bricks. Over a hundred enslaved people probably lived at Horton Grove in the 1850s. Four families shared each house. After emancipation, some formerly enslaved families sharecropped at Horton Grove into the 1970s.



What is the significance of the trail names?

The trails at Horton Grove Nature Preserve are named in honor of families enslaved at Stagville. About one thousand people were emancipated from the Cameron plantations in April 1865. Some freed people stayed and sharecropped on plantation land; others left, by choice or by force. Many Stagville descendants still live in Durham and Raleigh, including members of the Justice, Hart, Sowell, and Peaks families. Uplifting the names and individual stories of enslaved people is one small way to counteract the long silencing of enslaved people's voices in our nation's history. You can learn more about each family's history on the sign by each trailhead.

How can folks visit Historic Stagville?

The historic site is open Tuesday-Saturday. The visitors center is right up the road at 5828 Old Oxford Road, Durham, NC 27712. Visitors can start a self-guided tour anytime, or join a scheduled guided tour. Or, after a hike, folks can use their smartphone with the QR code at the Horton Grove quarters to start a short audio tour. All tours focus on the history of slavery and enslaved people at Stagville.

A brief history of the land:

- **1670s:** White colonizers create the first known records of the Great Trading Path. Also called the Occoneechee Path or Catawba Trail, this American Indian trade route ran near the southeast edge of Horton Grove. The Path connected Catawba, Cherokee, and Souian communities across North Carolina.
- **1690s:** A smallpox epidemic devastates local Siouan tribes, including at “Eno Town,” a large Eno community-- possibly quite close to Horton Grove.
- **Mid-1700s:** The Trading Path becomes a settlers’ wagon road. Horton Grove sits just beside this main commerce route for German, Scotch-Irish, and English settlers.
- **1740s:** England grants thousands of acres (including Horton Grove) to Henry McCulloh, a wealthy English land speculator. McCulloh sells a Horton Grove section to William Strayhorn.
- **1752:** William Horton purchases 320 acres of land there from William Strayhorn. The Hortons lived there and enslaved five people on their working farm.
- **1787:** Richard Bennehan, a white merchant and plantation owner, buys plantation land next door to Horton Grove, along the Trading Path. Bennehan enslaves about 24 people.
- **1804:** The Bennehan and Cameron families marry together, and quickly enter a partnership to jointly invest in plantation slavery. Their plantation expands dramatically over the decades.
- **1823:** The Bennehan-Cameron partnership purchases 410 acres at Horton Grove from the Horton widow after her husband's death.
- **1830s-1840s:** Horton Grove becomes a major site of plantation agriculture. Open fields stretch east across the Flat River bottoms. Enslaved men, women, and children are forced to grow grains, tobacco, and cotton for profit here.
- **1850-1852:** Enslaved builders construct a row of two-story slave dwellings at Horton Grove. Approximately 100 enslaved people live and work at the site.
- **1865:** Paul Cameron, patriarch of the Cameron family, owns Horton Grove. Slavery ends at Stagville in April, at the end of the Civil War. Some freed families remain at Horton Grove. They sign restrictive sharecropping contracts in order to stay, and continue farming the fields.
- **1870s:** Horton Grove families help establish a free Black school and churches nearby.
- **1891:** Bennehan Cameron inherits control of Horton Grove after his father Paul’s death. More and more Black sharecroppers grow tobacco there to supply the booming Durham tobacco industry.
- **1940-1942:** Most Black families leave the Stagville and Horton Grove communities. The Black school and churches begin to close or move. A few families and elders remain at Horton Grove.
- **1950:** Bennehan Cameron’s daughter sells Horton Grove.
- **1954:** Liggett and Myers Tobacco Company buys Horton Grove. Black and white tenants continue farming tobacco on the land.
- **Mid-1970s:** The last Black sharecroppers move away from Horton Grove.
- **1978:** Stagville becomes state property, and starts as a public historic site.
- **2012:** TLC opens the Horton Grove Nature Preserve.