

**Visualizing Objects, Places, and Spaces: A Digital Project Handbook**

# **Reframing the Remains: An Infrastructural Remediation of North Carolina Plantations**

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## Team

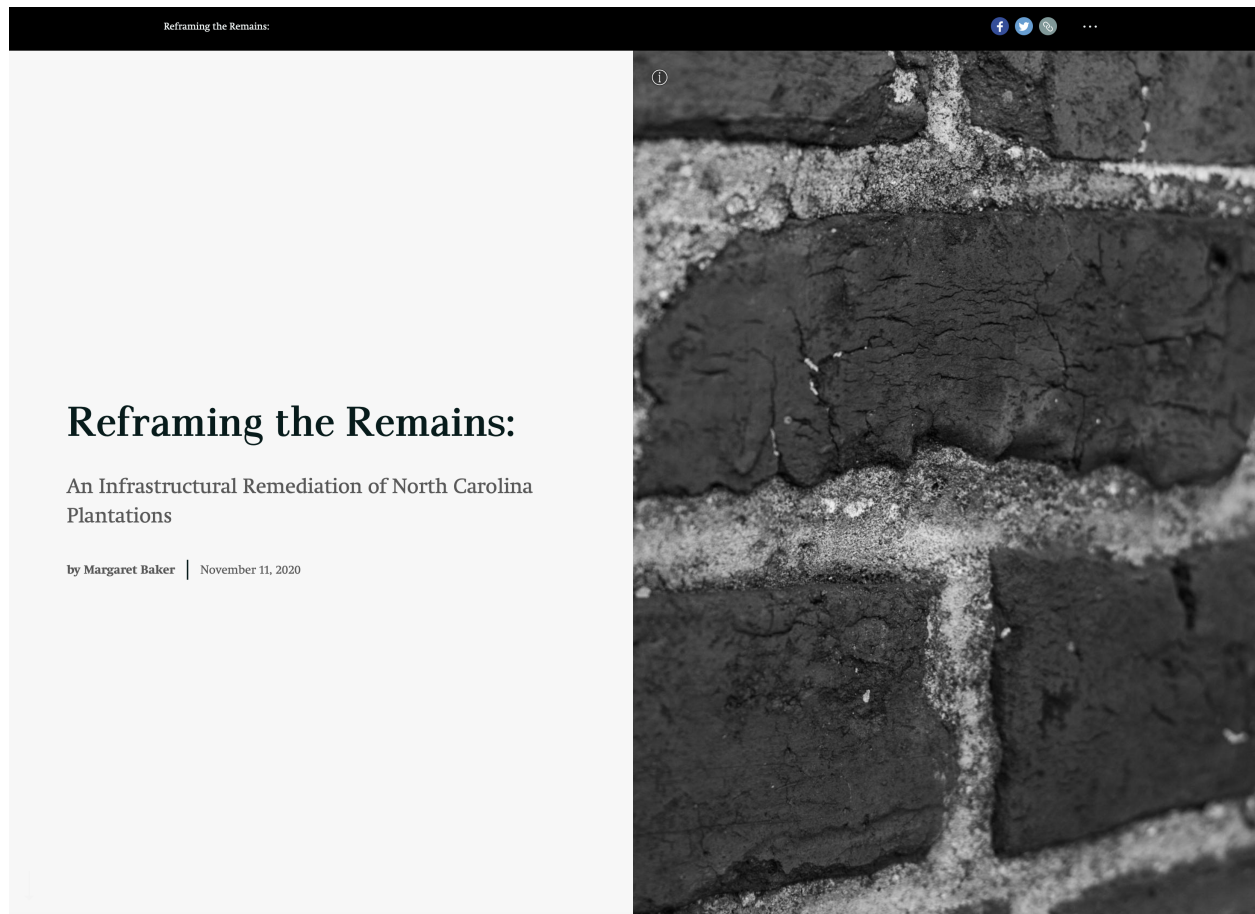
**Principal Investigator:** [Margaret Baker](#), Doctoral Student, North Carolina State University

## Project URL

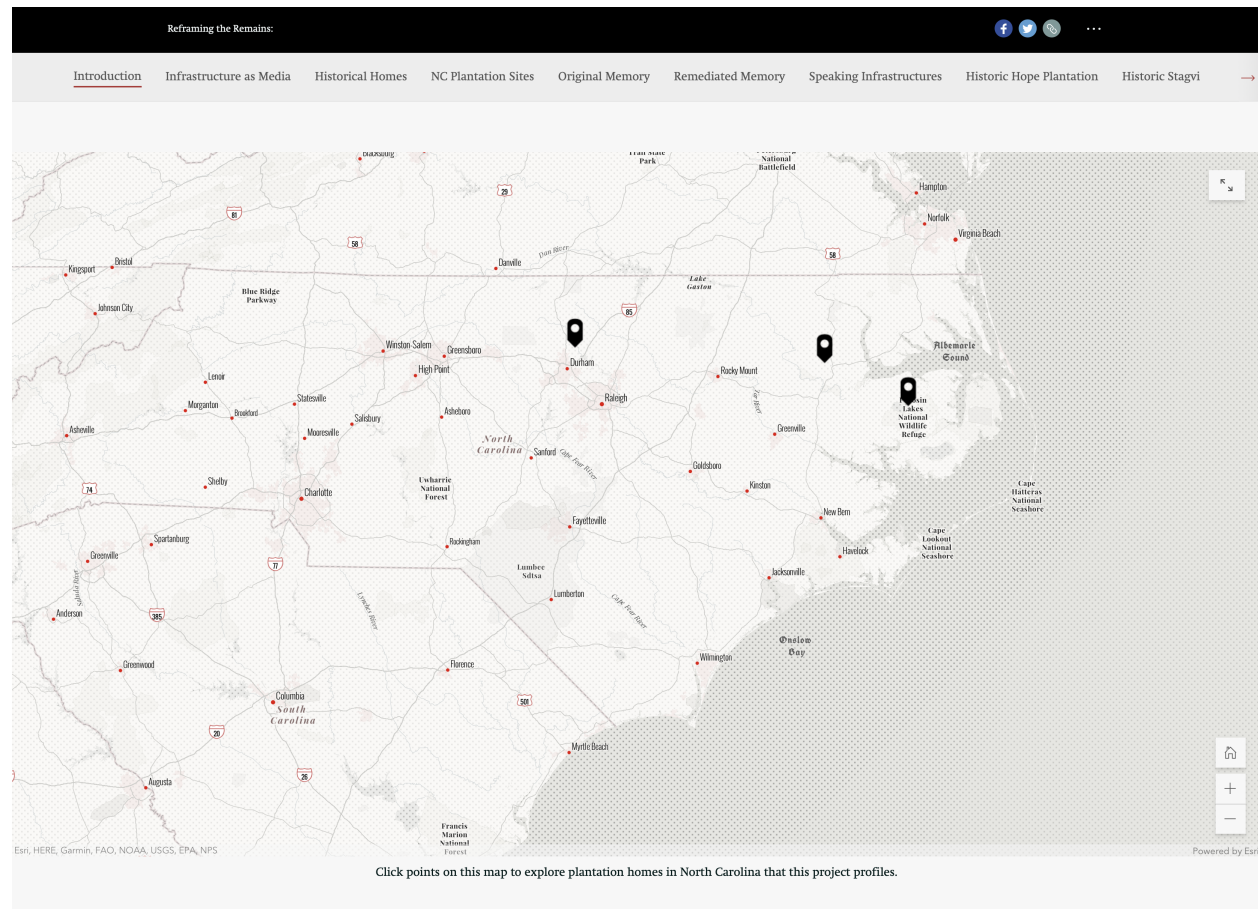
<https://arcg.is/0qOXX9>

## Project Abstract

Every year, millions of Americans visit national parks, museums, monuments, and cultural landmarks, experiencing guided walks, tours, exhibits, signage, and artifacts, each focused on interpretation of the important site. Historic plantations face unique challenges as locations of racialized memory, and historic interpretation of these sites hinges upon engaging communities and visitors in meaningful conversations, specifically centering around the historical artifacts and cultural sites' embodiment of racialized memory. This artifact-based survey of plantation infrastructure examines the complex narratives of three pre-Civil War plantations in North Carolina, detailing aspects of memory remediation. Plantation sites move from their original role as memory containers of working plantations to their reimagining as transmitters and broadcasters of memory for contemporary visitors. In this translation, critical questions emerge about the struggle for narrative space of enslaved voices in the remediation of plantation sites. Produced as an ArcGIS StoryMap, this project scrutinizes the delivery of plantation sites' narratives of both planters and enslaved peoples, while offering important reflections on the changing nature of Antebellum South historical sites.



Title slide of project highlighting knuckle prints embedded inside of a brick at Historic Stagville Plantation.



ArcGIS map embedded inside of project displaying three sites chosen for examination.

## Time Needed

*When did you begin this project? When did you complete this project?*

**Time Span:** August 25, 2020 - November 12, 2020

**Length:** 2.5 months

## Outcomes

*What is the outcome of the project?*

The outcome of this project was the creation of a digital presentation of the [narrative reanimation of pre-Civil War North Carolina plantation sites](#). Creating a visualization of the narrative recreation of historic homes as tourist sites invites visitors to interact

with digital information about the sites. The project also contributes important perspectives on the racialized memory of plantation infrastructures in the historic South.

## Resources

*What tools, resources, programs, or equipment did you use for this project?*

This project utilized digital storytelling utilized [ArcGIS Online](#) and [ArcGIS StoryMaps](#) to contribute to the cultural mapping space.

## Funding

*Please describe any costs incurred for this project, and (if relevant) how you secured funding for these costs.*

North Carolina State University provided me with an ArcGIS account to be able to create the StoryMap, so no costs were incurred by me.

## Workflow

*Please give an overview of the workflow or process you followed to execute this project, including time estimates where possible.*

Initial workflow on the project began with choosing sites for specific study. The sites in this project were chosen based on their status as interpreted as pre-Civil War plantations. Additionally, each site operates regularly as a historic home site for visitors, rather than only under special circumstances (i.e. during holidays and special celebrations). After narrowing that search, 5 plantations were eligible, and 3 were chosen for ease of visitation during the COVID-19 pandemic. This project examines the reanimation of three specific plantation sites in North Carolina: [Historic Hope Plantation](#) in Windsor, NC, [Historic Stagville](#) in Durham, NC, and [Somerset Place](#) in Creswell, NC.

Upon visitation of each site, I participated in both a traditional public tour and also received some answers to personal questions by docents, tour guides, and site

managers after the tour. It was mission critical to the project to capture the public's experiences of the site. Photographs were taken of the site during the tours, and additional documentation was provided by each of the site's research libraries. Documentation included websites and digital presence; original sources such as architectural plans, ledgers, and receipts; and secondary sources (social media, dissertations, and reports) about the sites. The site visits shaped the scope of the project by narrowing the focus of the digital project to include information accessible at the plantation sites.

After compiling site information from both primary and secondary sources, work began on the digital project in ArcGIS StoryMaps. As an incredibly user friendly product, the click-and-drag StoryMap builder integrates various types of content into the story, such as images, videos, audio files, and maps. This was also very important to me as showing images of the various material structures at the sites augmented the story. Additionally, embedding videos and other additional pieces of content like PDFs or other sites can help augment a project by pulling together various sources of information.

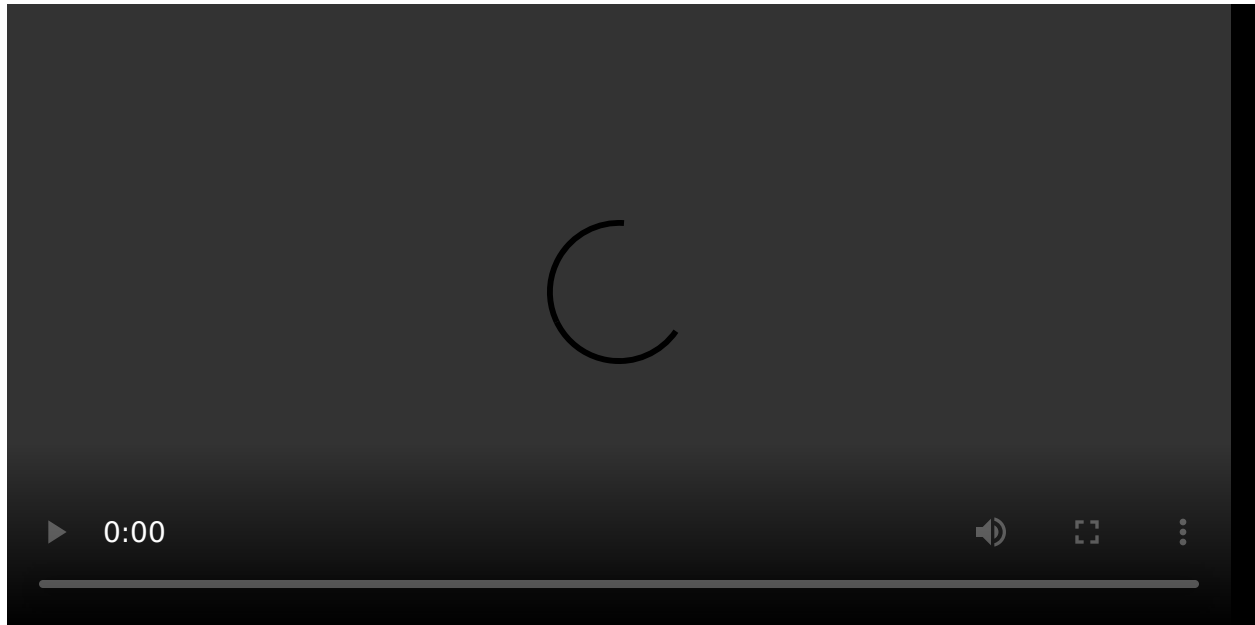
The creation of the StoryMap began by laying out the structure of the content for the project and creating a high-level outline of what information to include about each home. This outline was then translated into the written body of text now found in the project. Concomitantly, imagery and relevant documentation were chosen to highlight and augment the examples found in the written text. All of the sites had previously completed the work of digitizing the historical photographic records you see in the project today. Additionally, I sorted my own photographs from each of the site visits and edited the photos to a monochromatic color scheme to match the older photography from the sites. The result was a compelling interactive narrative of the reanimation of the plantation infrastructure of pre-Civil War plantations in North Carolina.

## Challenges & Opportunities

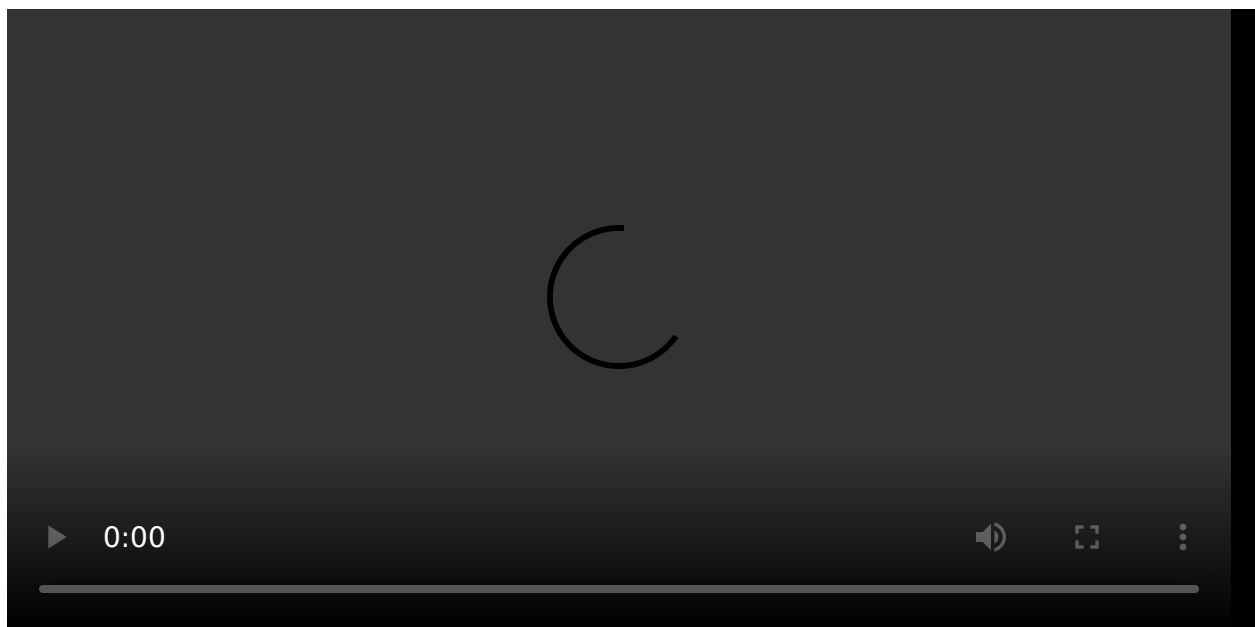
*What, if anything, changed between beginning your project and its current/final form?*

Initially, I intended to utilize [KnightLab's StoryMapJS](#). Upon further review, however, [ArcGIS's StoryMap](#) software provided a stronger narrative style structure for the scope of my project. KnightLab's software is designed to focus on the map structure,

while ArcGIS follows a more traditional web “down the page” scrolling structure. This fundamental layout and interactive difference ultimately led me to choose ArcGIS; however, after selecting the software I found that ArcGIS’s customer support was also integral to my success. I found the body of knowledge created by Esri about their software to be an invaluable resource to me as I engaged with it.



An example of the layout and infrastructure of Knight Lab’s StoryMapJS software. Users are led location by location throughout the map. [Content in this video created by the Knight Lab.](#)



An example of the layout and infrastructure of Esri’s StoryMap software showing the [Reframing the Remains project](#). Users are led down the page in a traditional web page format rather than through connected dots on a map.

Additionally, COVID-19 added a layer to complexity to this project as many sites dealt with changing openings/closures. Lack of access to resources such as the North Carolina State Archives and the Southern Historical Collection at UNC-Chapel Hill (which both remained closed through the duration of the pandemic) forced the project to rely upon sources available at the site locations. For example, in the Southern Historical Collection alone, nearly 30,000 documents exist about the Cameron/Bennehan families who owned and operated Stagville Plantation. Lack of access to these collections forced me to rely upon the wisdom of site managers and the existing documents at the site, which in most cases, was a small selection of their most important documentation. In the future, I hope to explore these archives and augment my current research with my findings there.

*Is there anything specific you wish you had known when beginning your project that might help other people to know?*

Make sure to have a clear story laid out before beginning the creation process in StoryMaps. Without strong visual content, the StoryMap software truly falls flat. I highly recommend the outlining or storyboarding process. I chose to visit the sites before laying out my content for StoryMaps; this caused me to have to make do with some photographs. Had I cultivated a stronger structure beforehand, I might have photographed some images slightly differently.

## **Next Steps**

*Do you have any plans to follow up on this project or work on something similar in the future?*

There are so many opportunities for extension of this project—mainly its usage in schools as an educational tool, especially in pandemic times. I intend to build out resources for educators—discussion questions, ideas for lessons and extensions, field trips, etc., in a linked web-based archive with the idea that this project could be integrated into a curriculum around public history and memory remediation.



## **Publications & Presentations**

Baker, M. (2021). Reframing the Remains: An Infrastructural Remediation of North Carolina Plantations [conference presentation]. Project presented at the [2021 Chesapeake Digital Humanities Consortium](#). Virtual Conference.

Baker, M. (2020). Reframing the Remains: An Infrastructural Remediation of North Carolina Plantations [conference presentation]. Project presented at the [Digital Humanities Collaborative of North Carolina 2020 Virtual Institute](#). Virtual Conference.