



The Awakening

Final Booklet
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University of Delaware
Area of Reflection
John Dickinson Plantation
Senior Capstone
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Background	1
Site Analysis	3
Conceptual Plan	4
The Awakening	5
Mission and Objectives	6
Precedent Study	7
Prescribed Movement	8
Design Concepts	9
Proposed Habitat	12
For Reference	13

Table of Contents

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John Dickinson Plantation
The Awakening

Project Details

Professionals at the Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs along with the staff at The John Dickinson Plantation (JDP) have received financial support, in the form of a grant, from Charles R. Cook along with support from the state of Delaware to re-envision the site. The overarching theme seeks to remember the enslaved peoples once held on the land and create an area of reflection that illustrates the narrative to be told through the history of the site. The JDP staff are currently in the process of researching primary and secondary source documents, excavating historic artifacts, and creating an informative database to eventually be accessed by visitors.

The current tour of the site begins at the existing visitor center located at the far most northeast section of the property. While there, visitors are shown a movie about the plantation and are then able to view a few exhibits before heading out to the mansion. Once the mansion exhibits have been toured, surrounding quarters such as the smokehouse, urban garden, and Dickinson burial are seen before the tour of the Historic Corridor is concluded. While a guided tour is provided, visitors do have the opportunity to lead a self-guided tour.

With 12 acres currently in use, an additional 88 acres will be used to introduce alternative pathways and trail systems from the mansion to the various proposed sections of the plantation. Proposed plans include:

- Area of reflection: one or multiple designated site areas used to engage visitors in the slave experience and provide a calming space for interpretation.
- St. Jones Reserve connection: potential panels or pathways connecting the site to the nearby estuary reserve.
- New visitor center: larger and more modern visitor center to support increased visitor activity.

The Bernardon firm has proposed a site plan that incorporates a site wide trail system, new visitor center and parking lot, amphitheater, viewing landing, and various boardwalk platforms. These plans are featured in the following site plans.



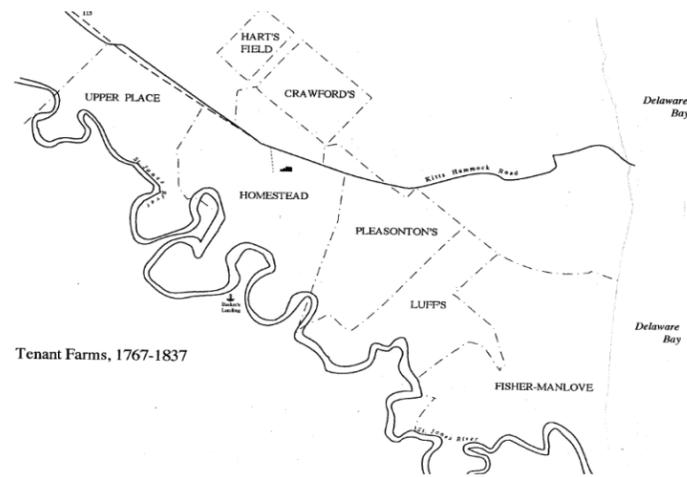
John Dickinson Mansion

Background

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John Dickinson Plantation

Historically, The Dickinson Plantation reached a total acreage of 4500 with continuous sell and purchase of various parts of the estate. On the plantation lived the Dickinson Family in their mansion which sat on the Homestead and was completed in 1740. Along with the main family was a host of tenant farmers and slaves who lived and maintained the grounds. After his death in 1760, Dickinson leaves the land to his son who does not live on the plantation but rather leads a self sufficient farm while he conducts business in Pennsylvania. A fire strikes in 1804 which requires reconstruction of the mansion and some of the surrounding areas. In 1808, while in the process of repairing damage from the fire John passes leaving his land to his daughter Sally.



Rebecca Siders-Changing Landscape of the St. Jones Neck Under Influence of Dickinson Family

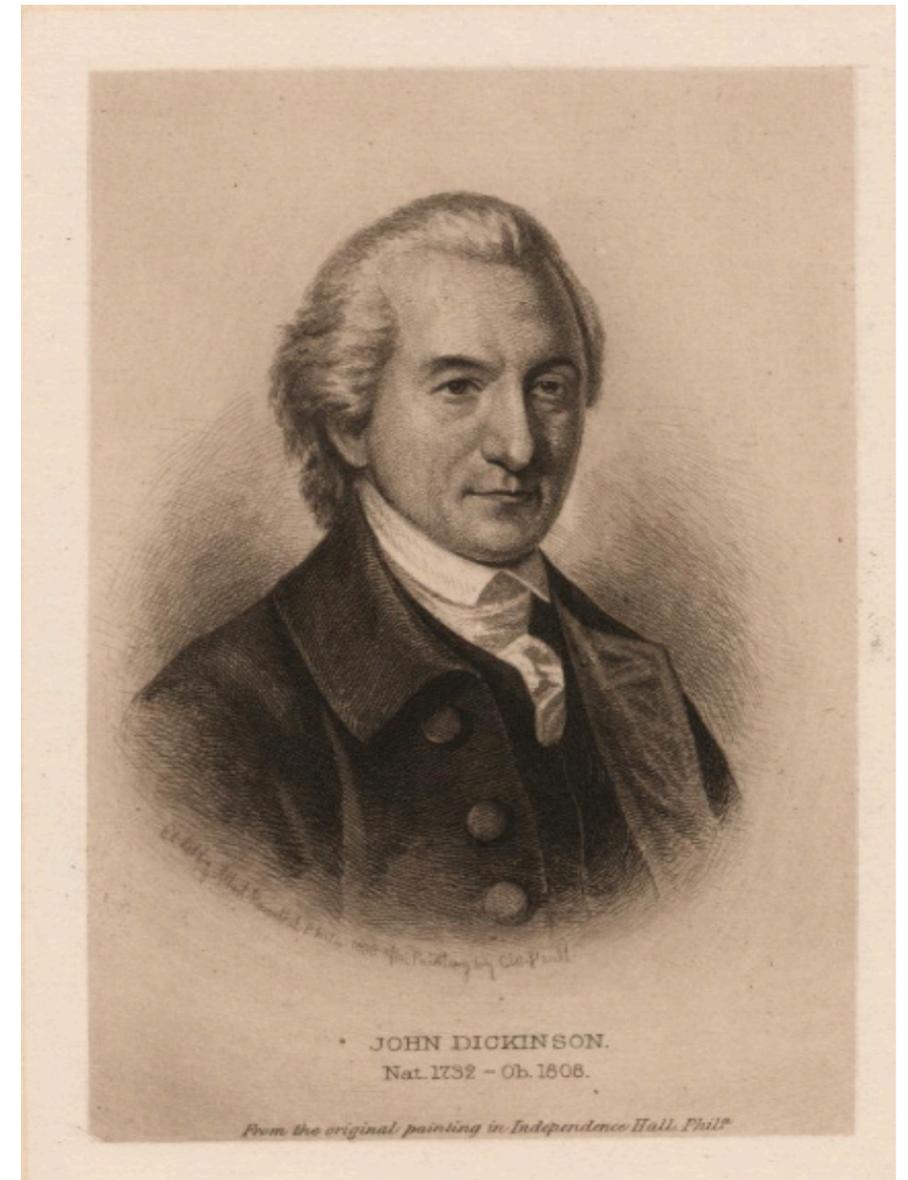
John's daughter Sally attempted to sell the land but ultimately left it to her nephews after her death in 1854. From here, the land went through a host of changes and was under the control of various owners before being acquired by the state of Delaware in 1961 when it was also labeled as a historic landmark.

The only plantation in Delaware, the site is often used as a source of historical education for various school districts and other interested parties. The current program provides visitors with a tour of the site starting at the current visitor center and through to the historical corridor. Documentaries, figurines, and third person accounts provide a more inclusive understanding of the sites history.

Tenants

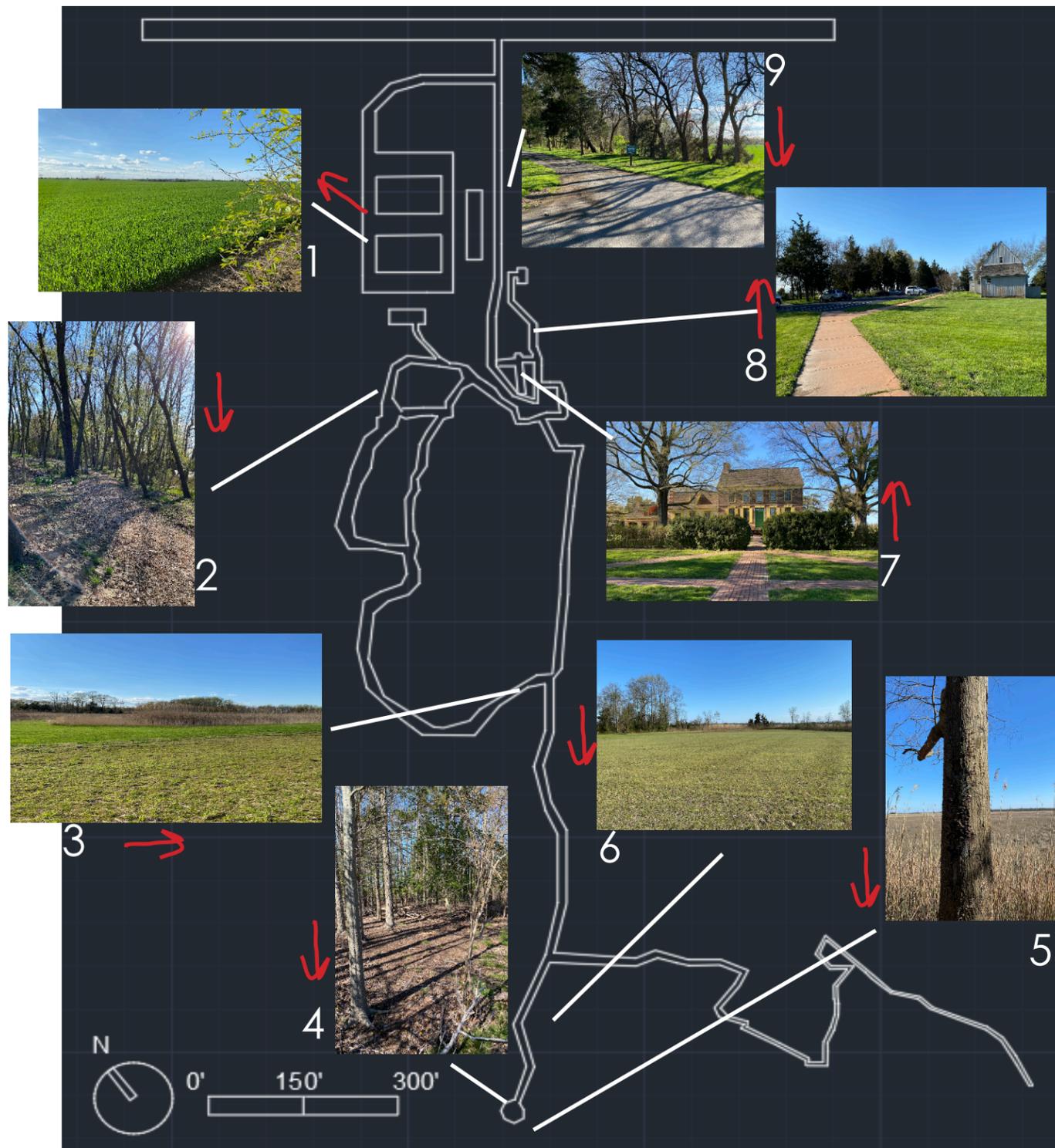
Tenants on the plantation ranged from wealthy white tenants to enslaved black tenants. Each of which group was provided a specific amount of land to live and work on then report back to Dickinson. It was often reported that Dickinson was a kind, yet strict when it came to property management.

The enslaved residents were reported to have similar experiences as other tenants as far as land management. Forms of liking could also be seen with Dickinson and some of these tenants with regards to particular agreements. However, given that these experiences are documented by the white landowners, there is no way to confirm the reliability of these accounts.



John Dickinson - New York Public Library

Background



John Dickinson Plantation - Aerial View

Existing Conditions

The John Dickinson Plantation is located at 340 Kitts Hummock Road in Dover Delaware. The site is nearby the major highway route one (west), the Dover Air Force Base (north), The Delaware Bay (east/south), and The St. Jones Reserve (southeast). Given the updated surroundings, the site is the subject of much background noise from the north and east. The site has a host of habitat types including grasslands, marshlands, forest, and farmland.



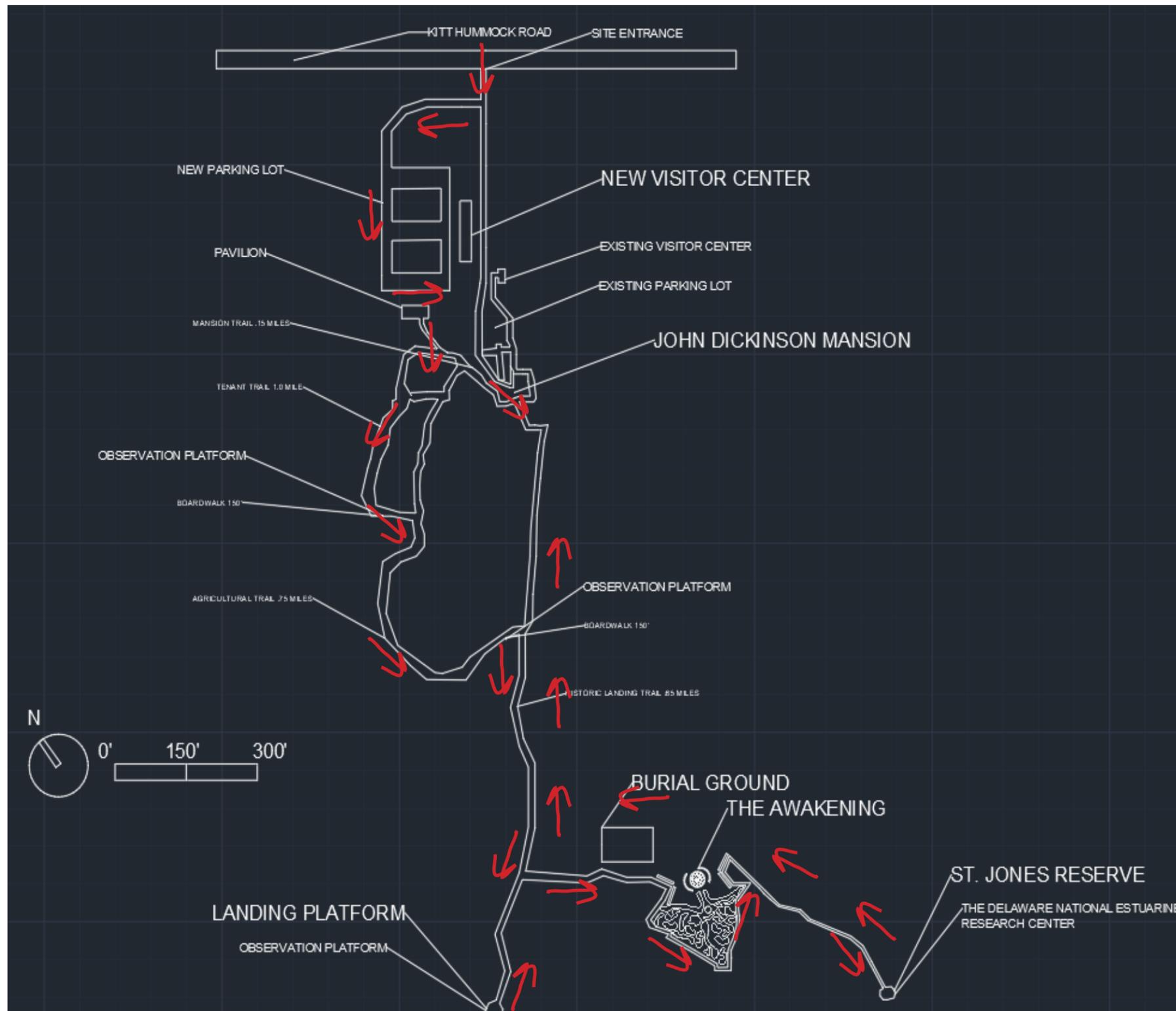
John Dickinson Plantation - Aerial View

Common wildlife species include the Canada Geese, Bull Fly, and White Tailed Deer among few. Common plantings to be found are Boxwoods, American Hollies, Oak Trees, and various other understory plantings. Common materials to be found are various bricks, woods, gravels, concrete, and crushed oyster shells. The topography within the site overall is leveled considering the previous agricultural use. However there are spaces within the site that may be considered elevated. Weather in the area is like that of most of Delaware having a temperate climate with varying humidity throughout the year. To the left I have included imaging from the various site visits we have taken this semester. The key can be found below. Red arrows show the direction in which the photo was taken.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.

- Agricultural field
- Trail space
- Grassed field
- Forest entrance
- St. Jones River outlook
- Agricultural Field
- John Dickinson Mansion
- Visitor center
- Driveway

Site Analysis



Movement Through Site

With the proposed plans from the Bernardon Firm and The JDP Master Plan, along with my proposed area of reflection, the diagram to the left shows prescribed movement through the entire site. Visitors will enter from Kitts Hummock Road (northeast/top of image) onto the original driveway. There will then be a branched driveway leading to the newly proposed visiting center and parking lot. After the visitors conclude with exhibitions, they will leave out the back of the center and head through the forested trail and past the amphitheater. The visitor will then have the chance to choose between heading to the mansion tour or heading down to the nearest boardwalk along the trail system. From here the trails reunite and head to the landing platform (southwest/bottom of image). Here the visitor will see the marshlands of the plantation and the St. Jones River in the far distance. Wrapping around, the visitors then have the option of viewing the area of reflection, entering the St. Jones Reserve, or heading towards the burial ground. With the conclusion of the site experience, visitors are able to return to the visitor center parking lot via the same trail systems.

Conceptual Plan

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The Awakening

As defined by the Oxford Dictionary, the term awakening is defined as 1. “an act of waking from sleep” (noun), 2. “an act or moment of becoming suddenly aware of something” (noun), 3. “coming into existence or awareness” (adj.). While slavery and bondage are not concepts that many are unfamiliar with, they are true experiences that only very few left on the earth can speak on. That is the ultimate purpose of my area of reflection. I want to create a space where visitors are physically and psychologically sent through a paralleled experience and reflection.

For so very long, we as a country have ignored the rippling impacts of slavery. While those impacts can in no way, shape, or, form be fully recognized within this one site, I hope to build on the movement of wokeness.

I welcome you to The Awakening and its design process.

The Awakening

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Mission

The Awakening seeks to create a space of commemoration for the enslaved peoples of the John Dickinson Plantation through paralleled experience and reflection.

Goals

- Create a sense of realization and understanding of the slave experience.
 - Allow a varying experience based on audience.
 - Provide a designated space for reflection and ease.

Objectives

- Disorientation with maze like display.
- Close spaces within maze through vegetation.
- Lack of control with relation to the John Dickinson Mansion.
 - Closeness to water emphasizing importance.
 - Open maze technique.
 - Individual and grouped seating space.
 - Weeping wall.
 - Orchard view.

Hallowed Grounds Project



- Placing a band-aid on history
 - Bought or sold no matter the status
 - Forms of modern day slavery
- The Changing Landscape of the St. Jones Neck Under the Influence of The Dickinson Family 1680-1850: An Exhibit Script By Rebecca J. Siders and Pamela C. Edwards
 - Excavating the Spaces and Interpreting the Places of Enslaved Africans and Their Descendants by Garrett Fesler
 - Freedom and The Slave Landscape Rebecca Ginsburg
 - Whitney Plantation Louisiana
 - Holocaust Monument Berlin By Peter Eisenmanns
 - With People in Mind By Stephen and Rachel Kaplan

Given that we have had the semester to work on the reflection site, we have also had the pleasure of researching a variety of related topics and resources, many of which led to various forms of inspiration to be found in the presented reflection site. Some of which include the Hallowed Ground Project at The University of Alabama, WB DuBois' Home of the Slave, and Neil Drumming's 'We are in The Future' Podcast. The remaining design inspirations can be seen below the mentioned resources. From each individual project and research completed, I gathered slightly different design ideas to be further explained in detail with each design iteration.

W.B. DuBois - Home of The Slave

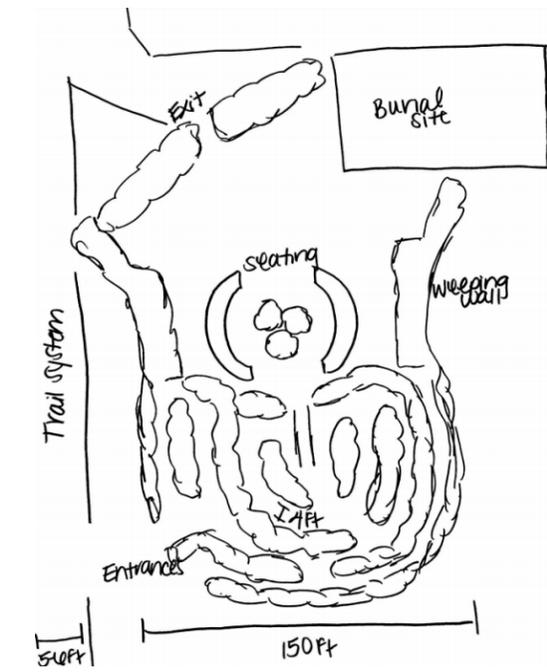


- Lack of comfort
- Control within and without the Big House

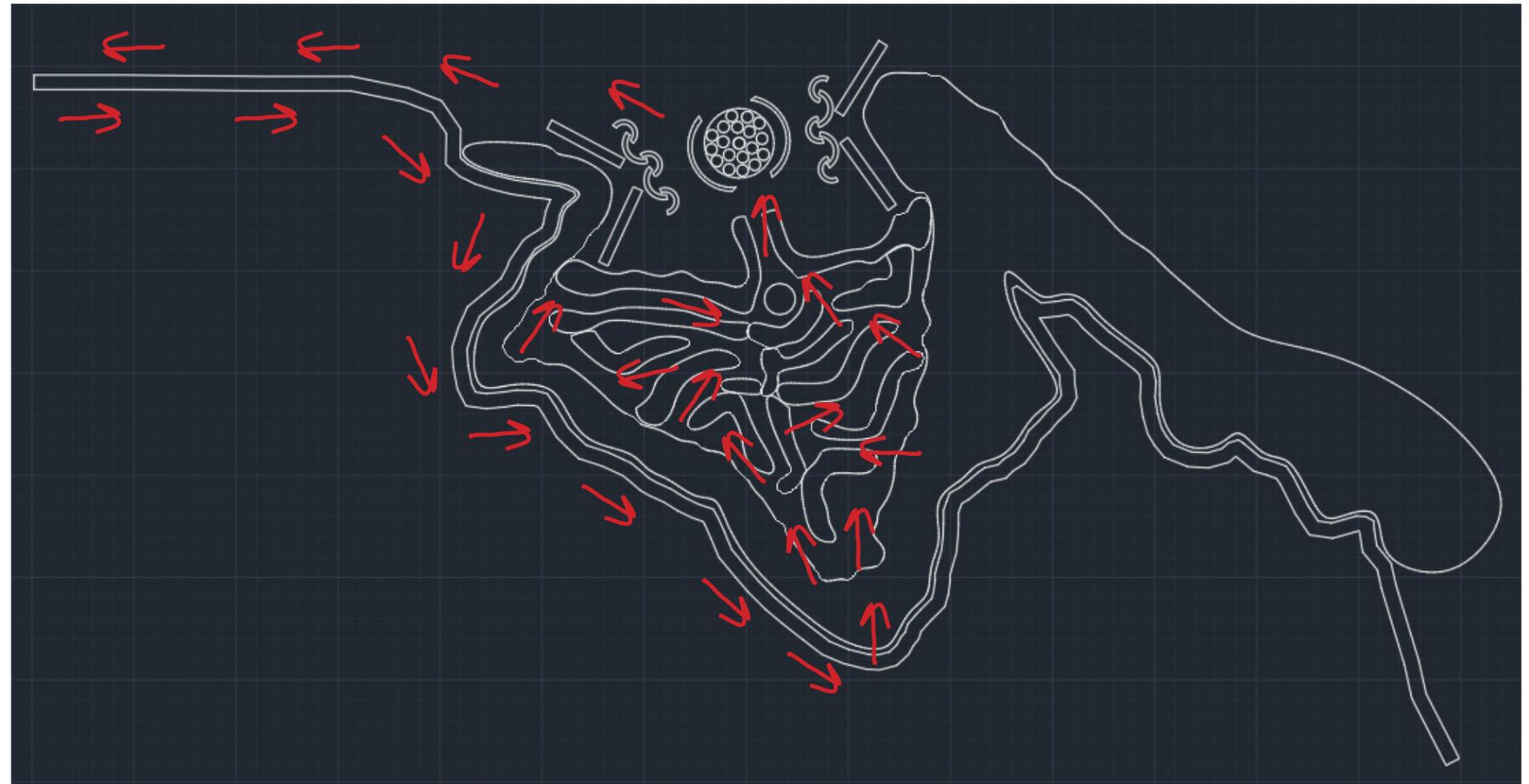
We Are In The Future Neil Drumming



- Modern day blackness
- The Black Sea babies
- Role of the slave actor



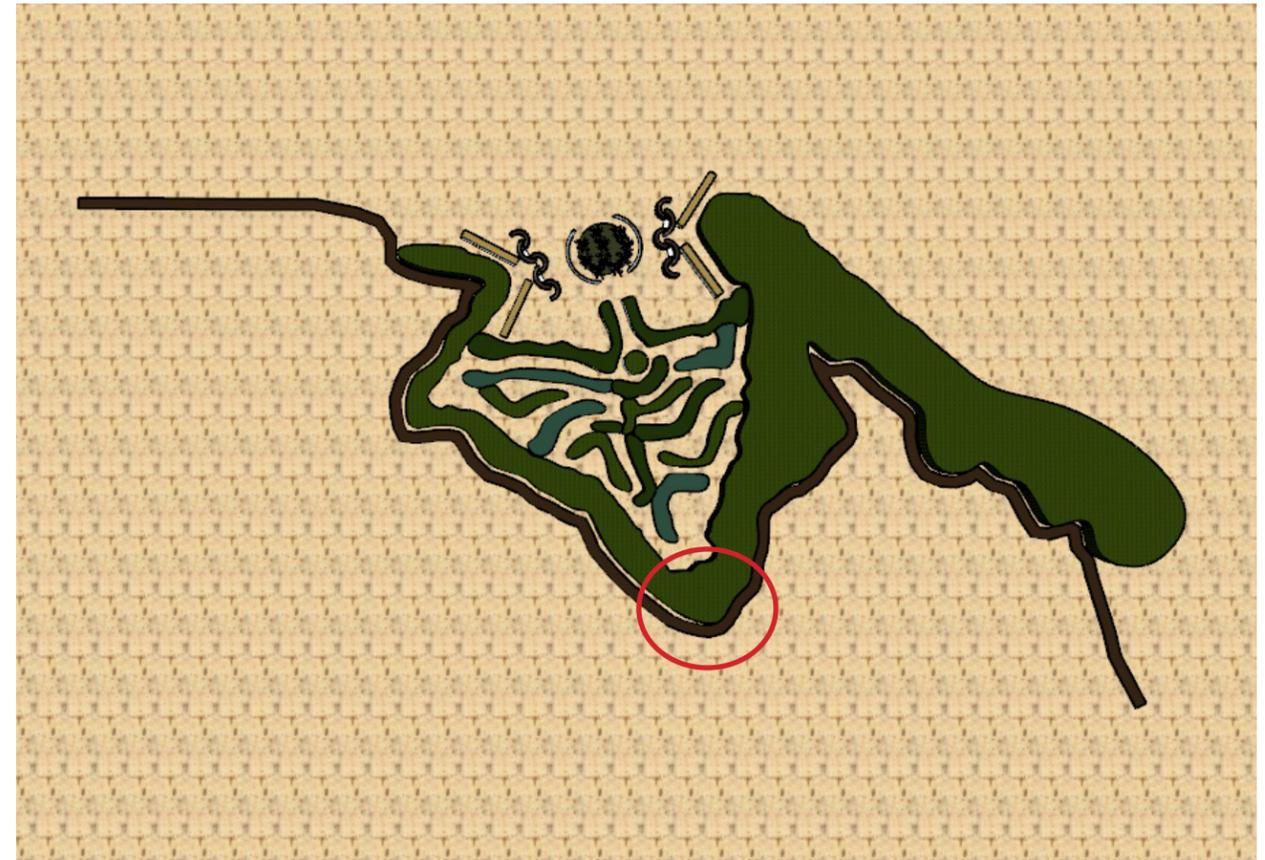
Movement through The Awakening will begin on the proposed trail system. There will be a branch off from the trail leading onto a forested pathway which will open to the entrance of the site. From that entrance, there will be two openings. Visitors will be prompted to choose between the left and right path. With each individual direction chosen there will be different encounters and engagement pieces before heading out into the courtyard where reflection will occur before exiting to experience the remaining exhibits on the site.



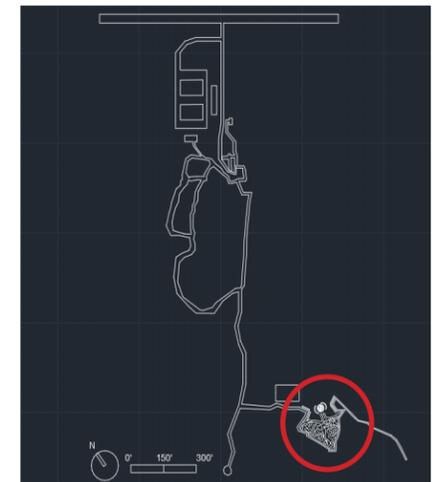
Prescribed Movement

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Upon entering the site from the southern entrance (red circle to the right), the visitor will take a journey similar to that of a purchased slave who came off of a boat on the St. Jones River. Entering an unfamiliar space, the visitor will be enclosed by nature by way of hedges. These hedges will be low maintained to mimic an escape through the woods of the deep south. They will also vary in height to emphasize that separation between visitors, being able to see but never touch their loved ones. In the first stages of growth, these hedges will be placed on dirt mounds to prohibit visitors from passing through them. Eventually, some of these hedges will be lifted slightly to allow ground dwelling wildlife to maneuver through the spaces. The outer wall of the maze will follow the natural wooded line of the surrounding forest. Given that the forest opens to either the boardwalk or the plantation, this will allow loose children or visiting animals to pass through freely. During various points along the maze, there will be signage on the hedges in which give an account from an enslaved person via primary or secondary recount. These narratives will give visitors a sense of how the enslaved may have felt at a time similar to this so that one may understand the concept behind the maze and its features.



Placement of the maze has various meanings behind it. As mentioned before, closeness of the nearby water body to the maze starts the journey while also emphasizing the importance of water to the slave journey. Placed far south from the historic corridor but still in view of the big house, plays on the sense of control. Those from the mansion can see the maze along with the happenings within. Those within the maze cannot see the big house. The maze is also far removed from the mansion in terms of reflection given that few senses of comfort came from the big house. An inspiration from W.B. Dubois' Home of The Slave.



Design Concepts

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The Awakening

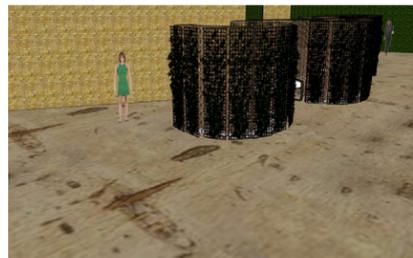
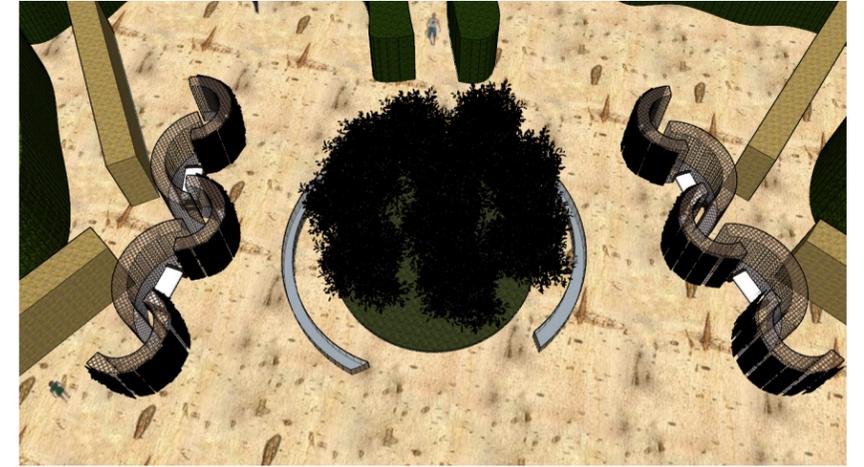
The maze concept in itself was meant to create a sense of forced disorientation and discomfort, it was also meant to serve as a technique of separation from those around you. This feature plays on the physical and psychological experience to be taken with you. Given that not everyone is impacted or stimulated by the sense of touch, I have also incorporated other techniques for remembrance. The written narratives are meant to play on those further stimulated by feeling and script. Sound will also play on the narrative given the audience rotation. School groups walking through the maze will hear a JDP recording once played in the existing visitor center. The average visitor would encounter a mix of either negro spirituals such as Wade in The Water by Ramsey Lewis or more modern bondage lyricals such as Strangefruit by Billie Holiday. The beauty of the songs will emphasize the beauty of the reflection site. However, the songs will be meant to symbolize horrific encounters much like the maze. America has a history of sugar coating the slave experience, as seen in the University of Alabamas Hallowed Grounds Project. This maze seeks to rip off that band-aid.

Upon exiting the maze and entering the courtyard of reflection, visitors are met with a swept yard (inspired by Garret Feslers Excavating the Spaces and Interpreting the Places of the Enslaved Africans and their descendants) which served as an extension of the average slave quarter. Here, a clean space was kept for gathering and other forms of leisure.



Design Concepts

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The Awakening



The visitors are then greeted by an orchard space which once served as a site for slave quarters during the Dickinson era (Rebecca J. Siders and Pamela C. Edwards: *The Changing Landscape of the St. Jones Neck Under the Influence of The Dickinson Family 1680-1850: An Exhibit Script*). The orchard serves as a beautiful center piece for the grouped reflection seating which can be seen surrounding the trees. The base of the seating will be encrusted with ceramic and oyster pieces found in the archeological excavation. Behind either side of the grouped seating is individual seating space. These benches are enclosed by a wooden gate like crossed material in which over grown vines will grow throughout. The shape and placement of the vining walls are meant to symbolize waves in an effort to express that water importance. Neil Drumming's *We Are in the Future* podcast served as an inspiration based on the third act: *The Black Sea*. Here a myth is explained where at the bottom of the ocean live slave babies thrown overboard slave ships. They exist underwater unbeknowing of all that has taken place on ground. When looking through the vined wall, I hoped to continue this sense of disorientation. Lastly, the vining walls serve as a means of privacy for the weeping wall which sits right along the forested exit of the courtyard. Here visitors can fully engage with the site, placing small written reflections within the wall similar to that of the Weeping Wall of Jerusalem. The hope is that the visitor can leave a little piece of themselves here while taking a piece of their experience with them.

With the end of the reflection area, the visitors may exit to the right where they can rejoin the boardwalk and head towards the St. Jones Reserve connection. The visitors may also exit to the left where they can then see the burial ground continuing the Awakening experience before their final departure.

Design Concepts

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Promoting Wildlife



Given that my career interest lies in creating green spaces for wildlife, I thought it of utmost importance to mention a few design iterations that promote wildlife activity and conservation on the site. Find them below:

The Awakening

- Varieties of native plantings in hedges
- Pollinator promoting plant species
- Detached maze sections
- Raised hedges
- Naturally wooded surroundings
- Nearby water source
- Connection to St. Jones Reserve

John Dickinson Plantation

- Continuous green spaces across plantation
- Designated pest attracting space
- Sustainable expansion
- Native plantings
- Safe plantings
- Pollinator promoting plantings
- Nearby water source
- Connection to St. Jones Reserve

Proposed Habitat

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The Awakening

<https://www.archives.gov/nhprc/projects/catalog/john-dickinson>
<http://udspace.udel.edu/handle/19716/1597>
<https://www.google.com/earth/>
<https://hgreen.people.ua.edu/hallowed-grounds-project.html>
<https://www.dadot.com/foster-auditorium>
<https://www.thisamericanlife.org/623/we-are-in-the-future-2017>
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43323753?seq=1>
<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/>
<https://history.delaware.gov/john-dickinson-plantation/>
<https://eisenmanarchitects.com/Berlin-Memorial-to-the-Murdered-Jews-of-Europe-2005>
<https://www.whitneyplantation.org/>
<https://dnrec.alpha.delaware.gov/coastal-programs/research-reserve/st-jones/>

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University of Delaware
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The Awakening