

# Preserving Mulberry Grove For Future Generations

## Background

The Mulberry Grove Foundation retained a consultant to research and prepare a white paper on the future project plans for Mulberry Grove. The white paper will include background information, issues and facts about the project, recommended solutions, cost estimates, suggested timelines, action steps, and reference materials.

### *Mulberry Grove Foundation*

The Mulberry Grove Foundation was established in 1997. Its mission is to preserve and promote Mulberry Grove as a cultural and educational center, which includes the protection of the natural environment. With a broad base of support, and coast to coast membership, the Foundation volunteers are focusing their work on preserving, protecting and enhancing this historical site for current and future generations.

Until 1997, the local community was not aware of Mulberry Grove and its historical significance. “I found the information about Mulberry Grove and the invention of the



cotton gin while researching the history of the Port Wentworth area. I recruited a group of community leaders who went out and walked the site with me. We accessed the site by boat and landed at the bluff. During our visit, we found the 19<sup>th</sup> century Exley house ruins at Oak Grove and the foundation of the colonial plantation house at Mulberry Grove. You could feel the magic of the site, just standing there at Mulberry Grove, realizing the historical significance of the site,” said Jodi Hawks, who at the time was president of the Port Wentworth Chamber of Commerce.<sup>1</sup> After the site visit, elected officials, the media, and the local community became very excited about Mulberry Grove.

Soon thereafter, the Mulberry Grove Foundation, Inc. was formed by a small group of community leaders led by Wade Waters. Their goal was to recruit a group of volunteers who were dedicated to preserving Mulberry Grove. At that time, the Mulberry Grove site was at risk of losing its historical significance. The dedicated volunteers quickly embarked upon a community awareness campaign to keep the historical significance of Mulberry Grove visible in the community.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Jodi Hawks on October 30, 2006.

“What happened over on that bluff on the Savannah River changed the entire history of the world. The invention of the cotton gin revolutionized the industrial world. No single item has so changed our history. Preserving Mulberry Grove will help us celebrate this significant historical event. This significance is what got me excited about Mulberry Grove and why I could not stand aside and not work hard to preserve this special site,” said Mulberry Grove Foundation Chairman Wade Waters.<sup>2</sup>



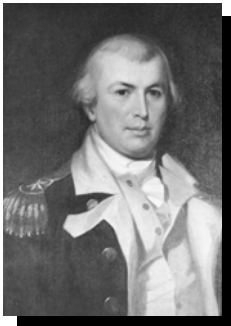
*Eli Whitney*

The Foundation has been instrumental in raising the public awareness of the historic value of this site. Living descendants from Mulberry Grove are engaged in this project. Their stories are being documented through an oral history project, which is currently sponsored by the Foundation. Audilee Boyd Taylor, children’s author and foundation member, is writing a children’s book, “The Mulberry Connection.” Targeting children ages 8 to 12, this book tells the story about Eli Whitney’s invention at Mulberry Grove and the historical significance of the site.

Anticipated scholarly works include “Mulberry Grove: Life and Times on a Tidewater Georgia Plantation,” by Dr. Nicholas Honerkamp and Dr. Robin L. Smith. This book will focus on the rich history of Mulberry Grove, including General and Mrs. Greene and George Washington.<sup>3</sup>

### *State of Georgia’s Role*

The State of Georgia has maintained a longstanding role in the affairs of Mulberry Grove. Beginning in the late 1700’s, the State of Georgia confiscated the property from loyalist



Lt. Governor John Graham. The property was subsequently awarded to Major General Nathanael Greene in support of the personal assets used to supply his army. During the War Between the States, December 1864, the 27th Battalion of the Georgia Militia tried unsuccessfully to prevent a wing of US troops under General William T. Sherman from advancing on Savannah. The Confederate battery in Monteith was outflanked and Mulberry Grove plantation house was subsequently burned by Union soldiers – a symbolic ending to the war at the place where the struggle, in many ways, began.

In 1975, the State of Georgia’s Department of Natural Resources nominated 153 acres of Mulberry Grove for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. This action was an unprecedented move for the State of Georgia since the land was not owned by the state at that time. Mulberry Grove was purchased by the Georgia Ports Authority in 1986.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Wade Waters, Mulberry Grove Foundation Chairman, on October 18, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Honerkamp, Nicholas and Robin L. Smith, 2006 *Mulberry Grove: Life and Times on a Tidewater Georgia Plantation*. Advance contract, UT Press. In preparation.

In 1998, the state legislature approved House Bill 499 which authorizes a municipality to levy and collect a one cent hotel tax to support the development of Mulberry Grove into a heritage tourism site. In 2003 Mulberry Grove was declared as surplus state property. That same year, the Georgia Ports Authority authorized the subdivision of the Mulberry Grove site resulting in placing half the property in protective covenants that will prevent any future development.

## **Mulberry Grove**

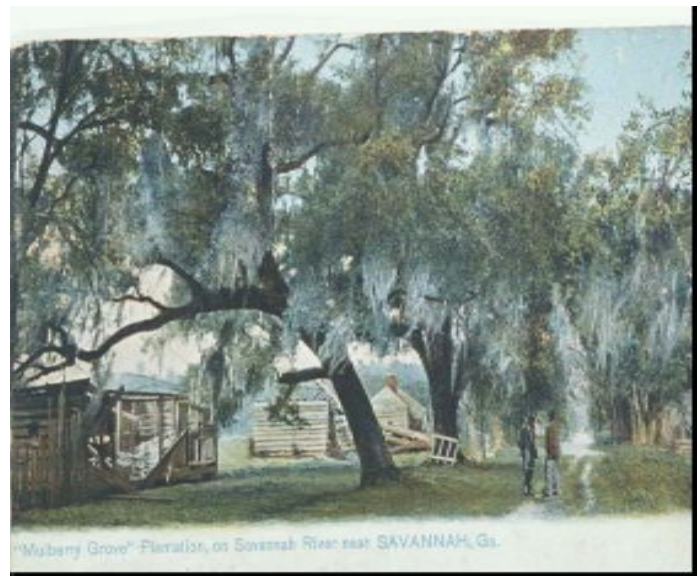
### *Historical Significance of Site*

Mulberry Grove sits on a scenic grassy bluff surrounded by 2,200 acres of wetlands, wildlife, scenic wonders and historical significance. Best known for the site where Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin more than two centuries ago (1790's). The history of this site dates back to the early 1700's and the founding of Savannah.

“Mulberry Grove exists as a remarkable historical microcosm of Georgia's and the Nation's historical development. It encompasses Native peoples, a series of extraordinary independent colonial women and men, the eventual conflict between England and the “fledgling colony,” and the development of a rice and cotton antebellum plantation economy that was based entirely on slave labor. It also symbolizes the end of that particular historical trajectory by its destruction by Sherman's forces at the end of the Civil War, and the new economic order that replaced the slave-based regime. And if that's not enough, Eli Whitney invented the first patented cotton gin at Mulberry Grove, and George Washington visited Catherine Greene at her home twice,” said archaeologist Dr. Nicholas Honerkamp.

Mulberry Grove was an active plantation from 1736 through close to the end of the civil war. The great plantation house was destroyed in 1864 by General William T. Sherman during his march to Savannah and sea. Rich in history, this site may have hosted the first indentured servants in Georgia. The Mulberry and its neighbor, Drake Plantations, were once an integral part of Georgia's First City, growing the crops and creating the technology necessary to make Savannah an important international port.

An archeological assessment was completed of Mulberry Grove in 1976 by the University of Florida. This assessment confirmed that Mulberry Grove embodies the distinctive characteristics of a significant and distinguishable entity in the southern



plantation system. Mulberry Grove includes remnants of rice mills, the dry beds of canals used to transport rice, unmarked slave graves and slave cabin sites, and foundations from the plantation house and outbuildings.

Representing an important period in our national development, the site offers an opportunity for the application of the settlement pattern approach in the explanation of internal, local and regional populations. The site is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history and with the lives of persons significant in our past. Based on documentary evidence, Mulberry Grove had a long and distinguished history beginning in 1736 and continuing through 1864.

Mulberry Grove is rich with archeological resources. Two sets of slave cabins have been identified providing a resource of archeological information on slave life. Undisturbed slave community sites are limited in number, therefore making Mulberry Grove an invaluable resource to this field. Occupied from 1775 to 1864, the main house foundation and surrounding area represents a wealth of information on the material culture of the Georgia planters.

Another strong association of the site to African American history is found at the Captain Patrick Mackay home site on Oak Grove plantation, just yards north of the Mulberry house ruins. Here one can find the tabby piers of the house of Capt. Mackay, straddling the rising bluff. A map by Surveyor General William G. De Brahm, dated 1758, clearly marks the ruins as Mackay's house and his landing on the Savannah River.<sup>4</sup>

Mackay was a leader of the "malcontents," colonists who complained bitterly to the Trustees about deprivations in Georgia. Mackay's main gripe was the lack of slavery to work his vast land grants. He solved this problem by buying a nearby South Carolina plantation and based slaves there. He then purchased rev. Whitefield's sloop *Savannah*, the fastest ship in the colony. Under the cover of darkness he moved his slaves illegally into Georgia at the Oak Grove site from 1738 to 1751, when slavery was permitted in the colony.<sup>5</sup> Although some Carolina slaves had been utilized in the first building of Savannah, Mackay's defiance of the slavery ban qualifies the site as the spot where large-scales slavery in Georgia was introduced.

All of these features have the potential of yielding new information about the old South. Considered as a whole, the plantation at Mulberry Grove may represent a distinct variation of the characteristic plantation system arrangement described for the Georgia Sea Islands. Further investigations of the site will identify whether this is due to Mulberry Grove's proximity to the river or the exigencies of the rice culture as opposed to other forms of agriculture. The significance of Mulberry Grove can only be assessed

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<sup>4</sup> Georgia Society of the Colonial Dames of America, *Chatham County Map Portfolio*, (Writers Program of the WPA, 1942), from Plat Book C – Office of the Sec. of State of Ga., p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> Granger, Mary, Ed., *Savannah River Plantations*. (Savannah Writers Project, 1947) pp. 96-98.

after placing it in perspective on the Savannah River as a private enterprise, a local culture, and a regional system over an extended period in American History.<sup>6</sup>

The archeological study documents the history of the site and will help guide the development of the interpretive plan and messages for Mulberry Grove. The Foundation has obtained an inventory listing items once found on the plantation.<sup>7</sup> The question is whether these items are still available or if they have been lost over time. Any future site development will include staged archeological assessments.

In 1975, a 153 acre tract of land, including Mulberry Grove and Oak Grove Plantation, were placed on the National Record of Historic Places by the State of Georgia. The 153 acres tract includes 144 acres owned by the Georgia Ports Authority and 11 acres owned by the Savannah Economic Development Authority. The National Register of Historic Places is the Nation's official list of cultural resources worthy of preservation. Listings in the state and national register helps preserve historic properties and provides recognition of a property's architectural, historical, or archaeological significance. In Georgia there are 1,942 listings in the National Register of Historic Places and 49 in Chatham County.<sup>8</sup>

### *The Current Land Owners*

The Mulberry Grove preservation project includes 2,200 acres of land currently under ownership by two public agencies, Georgia Ports Authority and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service; and one private owner, Savannah Economic and Development Authority. The future preservation and interpretation of this historic site is contingent upon the landowner's



commitment to historic preservation. One of the goals of this project is to facilitate the transfer of ownership of Oak Grove, Mulberry Grove and Drakie Plantation to a responsible agency who will work in partnership with the Foundation to preserve and interpret the site. The Foundation is also interested in exploring ownership of these properties.

The Georgia Ports Authority purchased the Mulberry Grove Plantation site from BASF-Wyandotte Corporation in 1986. The original plantation is now part of a larger 2,200 acre tract of land that includes Drakie Plantation and the Thompson tract.

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<sup>6</sup> Robin Smith and Nicholas Honkerkamp, *Archeological Assessment of Cultural Resources at Mulberry Grove Plantation*, submitted March 1976.

<sup>7</sup> Audilee Boyd Taylor, writer of historical children's books, has the inventory list of all the items on the plantation when it was owned by Lt. Governor John Graham.

<sup>8</sup> National Register of Historic Places Listings in Georgia as of September 20, 2006.

“Georgia Ports Authority purchased the land with the goal of marketing sections of the land to its large port users. The plans include developing the property in a way that will preserve the historical significance of the property. “In 2003, the Georgia Ports Authority placed half the property, including the area where the original plantation stood and where the cotton gin was invented, in protective covenants that will prevent any future development” said Georgia Ports Authority Executive Director Doug Marchand.<sup>9</sup>

Protective measures have been implemented on the site to ensure that the archeological remnants located on the property are protected from unwelcome intruders. Any future development of Mulberry Grove will coexist with Georgia Port Authority’s ongoing preservation efforts for the site.<sup>10</sup>

The Savannah Economic Development Authority purchased a 563 acre tract of land in Port Wentworth from Burke Wall in January 2005. The land purchase included permanent preservation of 142 historical acres on the bluff, including 11 acres of Oak Grove property placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Oak Grove property is located North of Mulberry Grove. Other plans for the land include the development of 325 acres on the west end of the property along Highway 21 for port related facilities and designating 96 acres as untouched wetlands and buffers. These plans will make Oak Grove productive economically while preserving the natural environment.

By 2007, the Savannah Economic Development Authority plans to finalize the subdivision of the Oak Grove property including the preservation of the river bluff and wetlands.<sup>11</sup>

The Georgia Ports Authority began developing the 865 acre tract of the Mulberry Grove uplands that were set aside for port related business in September 2005. Planned improvements to the property include the construction of roads, water and sewer lines, and other infrastructure. The site is being developed for the Savannah International Trade Park which will house distribution center operations to accommodate record tonnage at the port of Savannah. Target and IKEA have constructed distribution centers here. Where it is shown to be necessary, visual screening and sound buffers will be developed to protect Mulberry Grove from the planned improvements.

This development is the result of careful analysis, strategic thinking, and a strong commitment to strike a healthy balance between economic development and environmental stewardship by the Georgia Port Authority. On September 1, 2005, the Georgia Ports Authority presented the Mulberry Grove Foundation with a \$10,000 contribution to help develop the Eli Whitney Center, an historic interpretive and education center at the site.

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<sup>9</sup> Mary Carr Mayle, “Looking for a win-win” *SavannahNOW*, September 1, 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Mulberry Grove Plantation, Georgia Ports Authority publication.

<sup>11</sup> Georgia Ports Authority, “SEDA and GPA Collaborate to Acquire, Develop and Preserve Oak Grove Plantation,” *Georgia AnchorAge*, 44:4 (60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Issue), 16.

Mulberry Grove is bordered by land owned by the Savannah National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge's 28,168 acres include bottomland hardwoods and a tidal freshwater marsh. A 3,000 acre fringe area of upland hardwoods exists along the eastern boundary. An additional 3,000 acres forming an impoundment system are managed for migratory wading birds and waterfowl. These freshwater impoundments were formerly the rice fields of plantations, like Mulberry Grove, dating back to the mid or late 1700's. Many of the dikes enclosing these pools were originally built during the rice culture era. The refuge is building a 6,628 square foot visitor center scheduled to open in 2007. The interpretive themes for the visitor center include the cultural history of the area. The Savannah National Wildlife Refuge has expressed an interest in collaborating with the Mulberry Grove Foundation to offer educational and interpretive opportunities at Mulberry Grove and at the refuge.



The Mulberry Grove Foundation is currently working with the Georgia Ports Authority and the Savannah Economic Development Authority to facilitate the transfer of ownership of the land to an entity who will work to interpret and preserve this site for present and future generations.

*“Mulberry Grove is a beautiful wilderness site with scenic vistas, significant archeological sites, and wonderful recreational and interpretive opportunities. The site is rich in our history and boasts wonderful educational opportunities. Now the community must work together to find an agency or group to preserve this site for present and future generations,” said local historian and community leader Hugh Golson.*

## **The Plan**

The Mulberry Grove Foundation is working hard to preserve Mulberry Grove. The plans over the next six years include building the Eli Whitney Center; developing educational and recreational opportunities; and preserving the wetlands and wildlife habitats.

Preserving and promoting Mulberry Grove as a cultural and educational center is a multi-year effort that will require commitments from all the community partners and stakeholders. Following are the recommended action steps to achieve this goal:

1. Ensuring the cultural resources are protected before development activities begin on other parts of the property. This involves limiting land access to the site, and fencing or security patrol of the site including river access.

2. Re-engagement of local, state and national leadership in the preservation of Mulberry Grove.
3. Retaining a project manager or staff to assist the Mulberry Grove Foundation with the implementation of these plans. Options include retaining the Coastal Heritage Society, a consultant or staff.
4. Beginning a marketing and public relation program to keep all the stakeholders and leadership informed of the progress of the project. Use Mulberry Grove Foundation website as a communication tool.
5. Ensuring that the Savannah Economic Development Authority (SEDA) completes the subdivision of the 563 acre tract including the preservation of Oak Grove, the river bluffs, the wetlands and buffers.
6. Facilitating the transfer of ownership of Mulberry Grove and Drakie Plantation to a responsible entity who will work to interpret and preserve this site for present and future generations.
7. Completing a site plan for Oak Grove, Mulberry Grove, Drakie Plantation and the Solomon tract in the Savannah National Wildlife Refuge with the cooperation of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife.
8. Developing an interpretive plan for the site.
9. Developing and implementing land and water trails, interpretive kiosks, and public recreational and educational opportunities.
10. Building the Eli Whitney Center and access docks on the river.
11. Collaborating with tourism agencies and community organizations on the programs offered at Oak Grove, Mulberry Grove and Drakie Plantation.

### *Timeline*

#### **2006-2008**

- Complete oral history project.
- Implementation of HB 499.
- Savannah Economic Development Authority completes the subdivision of Oak Grove.
- Begin holding community planning meetings to develop the future plans for the site.
- Formalize partnership with Savannah National Wildlife Refuge and pursue funding for interpretive trails.
- Clarify the proposed owner/operator model for the sites including Oak Grove, Mulberry Grove and Drakie Plantation.



- Foundation hires project manager and begins the capital campaign for the Eli Whitney Center.

### **2009-2010**

- Finalize the site plans.
- Complete a five year operating plan for the Eli Whitney Center once the site plans are finalized.
- Develop interpretive plans for the site.
- Obtain transfer of ownership of Mulberry Grove and Drakie Plantation from the Georgia Ports Authority to an entity committed to preserving and interpreting the sites.
- Complete the capital campaign for the Eli Whitney Center.
- Develop and pilot educational programs to schools and other youth organizations.

### **2010-2011**

- Begin construction on Eli Whitney Center.
- Begin offering formal programs on site.

This timeline is tentative and contingent upon funding and other available resources.

### *The Eli Whitney Center*

The Eli Whitney Center will cost about \$9.0 million to build and will serve as the focal point for the site. Options for the new interpretive center will be explored during the development of the master plan for the site. Design options range from a trail system with interpretive signage marking significant events, to a working history plantation replicating the original plantation including the house.



Several design options have been developed by students from the Savannah College of Art & Design (SCAD). In 2005, SCAD hosted the Legacy Charette, a planning process, with students from three schools of architecture in Georgia. The charette involved the design of the proposed Interpretive Center and walking trails on the bluffs at Mulberry Grove. The previous year, students from SCAD submitted designs in a student competition for an Interpretive Center at Mulberry Grove. The winning team was awarded a scholarship co-sponsored and underwritten by Lummus Corporation. The President of SCAD authorized an additional matching award of 100% to the winning design team.

Specific activities during the first phase of work includes developing the master plan for the site, building the access roads, installing the utility infrastructure, developing the interpretive plan and completing the initial interpretive trails and kiosks. The master planning process will include community meetings with neighbors, stakeholders and

agency partners to collect their input on this project. The Mulberry Grove Foundation campaign team will implement their capital campaign during this same period of time. The first phase of work will cost approximately \$1.0 million and will be completed by 2009.

The second phase of work includes building the Eli Whitney Center and completing the second phase of the interpretive trails and kiosks. The fundraising efforts will focus on raising \$500,000 in endowment funds during this phase. Current design plans for the Eli Whitney Center include a 12,000 square foot building, auditorium, exhibit area, offices, lab space, storage and support service area, gift shop, research library, and caretaker facilities. The goal is to open the Eli Whitney Center to the public by 2012.

The final phase of work focuses on restoring the old agriculture buildings and equipment in the Black Water area. This work includes rescuing and collecting endangered farm buildings and equipment from the local area to expand the agriculture collection available at Mulberry Grove. Visual screening and sound buffers will be installed to protect the site from traffic on I-95 and other planned improvements. These barriers will help preserve the site and ensure the visitor has a positive experience.

*Project Budget*

**Phase I (2007-2009)**

Access road	\$450,000
Utility infrastructure	\$80,000
Architecture and engineering	\$250,000
Master planning	\$80,000
Interpretive trails, kiosks and elevated walkways (phase I)	\$150,000
Interpretive plan	\$100,000
Contingency fund	\$91,000
Total Phase I	<u>\$1,201,000</u>

**Phase II (2010-2011)**

Site work	\$180,000
Building -12,000 SF	\$2,400,000
Furnishings and equipment	\$350,000
Building and installation of docks	\$60,000
Interpretive plans & exhibits	\$250,000
Interpretive trails, kiosks and elevated walkways (phase II)	\$350,000
Legal fees, consulting	\$220,000
Noise barriers	\$600,000
Misc. startup and first year operations	\$400,000
Endowment	\$500,000
Contingency fund	\$479,000
Subtotal Phase II	<u>\$5,789,000</u>

**Phase III (2012-2013)**

Rehabilitation of agricultural buildings	\$1,500,000
Contingency fund	<u>\$210,000</u>

Subtotal Phase III

\$1,710,000

**Total Project Budget**

**\$8,700,000**

*Programs, Educational Opportunities and Tours*

Mulberry Grove’s marshes and uplands provide valuable habitat for deer, alligators, migratory birds, and waterfowl. Bald eagles, wood storks and manatees, all threatened species, have been sighted on the property. Future plans include recreational opportunities that are compatible with the wildlife and wetlands habitat. Examples include hiking, canoeing, kayaking, and birding.

***“Only an important contribution to society as a whole could justify the expenditure of time, effort and money the project would demand. The aim must be to utilize the property in such a manner as to improve the quality of contemporary life,” said Raymond McLain, quoted in Restoring Shakertown by Thomas Parrish.***

The Foundation plans to partner with local organizations and public agencies to offer an array of educational and recreational opportunities at the Eli Whitney Center. The core focus of the Eli Whitney Center is to promote and demonstrate the value of education. For example, Wilderness Southeast is interested in basing their headquarters and offering expanded educational programs at Mulberry Grove. Wilderness Southeast specializes in providing exciting opportunities to learn about nature and wildlife. They offer personalized and scheduled programs to individuals, families, groups and schools. Their programs integrate information from many fields; biology, ecology, geology, astronomy, natural and cultural history. Over 1,500 individuals and 500 children from three schools participate in their programs each year.

The Foundation is exploring the opportunity to offer programs based on the curriculum concepts offered at the Eli Whitney Museum in Hamden, CT. Their educational programs are classic projects that begin in play and grow into art, architecture, engineering and science. The workshops and lab based experiences will be an interface between society and inventions. The plans include providing pilot educational programs to schools and other youth organizations while the Eli Whitney Center is under construction.<sup>12</sup>



The Savannah River Keepers offers one day and multiple day trips on the Savannah River to approximately 200 guests per year. The trip itineraries include paddling past Mulberry Grove with an oral narration of the site. Future trips could include stopping at the site for interpretive walks and tours. The development of docks and visitor services could enhance the experience for their guests.

Local tour operators are interested in offering river and land tours to Mulberry Grove and excited about the opportunities available at Mulberry Grove. Tour operators frequently

<sup>12</sup> Program outline for Project Centered Learning at the Eli Whitney Center, Conway Barker, November 20, 2006.

receive requests from visitors wanting to visit plantation sites in Savannah. For example, Coastline Travel/Old Savannah Tours estimates offering four tours per month to Mulberry Grove. The tours would include youth groups and adult tours with approximately 2,000 guests per year. In order for the operator to begin offering land tours, the site needs road access, parking for a motor coach, and interpretive trails and kiosks.

Accessing Mulberry Grove via water will give the visitor an opportunity to experience the traditional form of river travel along the beautiful Savannah River. Bull River Cruises sees the opportunity to immediately offer four trips per month to Mulberry Grove without much marketing effort. Annual projections include 1,920 guests visiting Mulberry Grove and generating \$48,000 in revenue.<sup>13</sup> Docks and walking trails are needed for water tours.

### *Visitors*

This culturally diverse site will attract user groups from the public schools and universities, preservation and conservation groups, tourists and vacationers, water sport enthusiasts, and provide recreational opportunities for local communities.



Annual visitor projections for Mulberry Grove are 20,000 to 50,000 based on visitation at other historic properties and sites in the surrounding area.<sup>14</sup> Savannah receives approximately 4.9 million leisure travelers annually. Visitors choose Savannah for its scenic beauty, visual appeal and historic district. Savannah visitors are loyal with 61% intending to visit again within two years and nearly 70% of the 2005 visitors recommend Savannah to other travelers.<sup>15</sup>

Marketing efforts will focus on encouraging leisure travelers to visit Mulberry Grove as well as attracting visitors traveling on Hwy 21 and I-95. Daily traffic counts on Hwy 21 average 6,530 cars and 35,300 on I-95.<sup>16</sup> Visitors to Mulberry Grove will have the greatest

economic impact through the travel service business. Based on current trends, visitors could generate from \$2.0 to \$3.2 million annually for the local economy.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Michael Neal, Owner of Bull River Cruises, Savannah, Georgia, on November 11, 2006.

<sup>14</sup> Annual visitor projections based on historical visitor statistics at the Mighty Eighty Museum and other historic properties in Savannah.

<sup>15</sup> Savannah Tourism 2005 Report completed by the Savannah Convention & Visitors Bureau.

<sup>16</sup> State of Georgia Department of Transportation traffic counters data for 2005.

<sup>17</sup> The average length of stay for the 6.35 million annual person stays in Savannah is \$109 per night. If visitors extend their visit by one day to visit the Eli Whitney Center and approximately 20,000 stay in paid accommodations, the economic benefit is estimated at \$2.0 to \$3.2 million. Savannah Tourism 2005 Report.

A major tourism development strategy today is historic restoration and interpretation. An important trend is the adaptation of historic sites for visitor use, while retaining the original architectural elements with modifications so visitors can observe and understand the site's role in history.

It is true that tourism has significant economic benefits, but the continued success of the Eli Whitney Center will depend upon the level and sustainability of visitor satisfaction. The tourism planning goals for the Eli Whitney Center will focus on visitor satisfaction, operating a sustainable operation, sustainable resource use and the integration of the project into the local community.<sup>18</sup>

“Building Mulberry Grove will enrich the visitor experience in Savannah and the surrounding communities. Visitors may stay an extra day to visit Mulberry Grove or visit Mulberry Grove on a repeat visit to the area,” said Tony Schopp retired President of Savannah Convention & Visitors Bureau.<sup>19</sup>

### **Project Goal**

To raise \$8,700,000 to build the Eli Whitney Center and to preserve Mulberry Grove for present and future generations.

### **Objectives & Outcomes**

1. *To secure, enhance and promote Georgia's heritage*  
Mulberry Grove is a completely unique site offering unparalleled perspective into the colonial and ante-bellum (old south) plantation life. Launching a high-profile capital campaign to make people aware of the preservation opportunities at Mulberry Grove will engage visitors of all ages, and others who care about and understand its historic significance. New and updated interpretive displays will provide citizens with an enhanced learning experience and greater appreciation of Georgia's heritage. The campaign will produce an increase in the number of advocates for similar projects around the state.
2. *To preserve a historical site for present and future generations*  
Raising \$8,700,000 to build the Eli Whitney Center will preserve a significant Georgia and national historic landmark for present and future generations. Current and future preservation needs will be documented with cost allocations identified for future projects.
3. *To offer educational and recreational opportunities to residents and visitors*  
New partnerships will be formed to offer an array of educational and recreational opportunities at the Eli Whitney Center that are compatible with the wildlife and wetlands habitat. Local residents will have expanded recreational opportunities and more green space surrounding their communities.

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<sup>18</sup> Clare A. Gunn, *Tourism Planning*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Taylor & Francis Books, 2002) 3-30, 356-357.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Tony Schopp on October 16, 2006.

4. *To support and sustain the local and statewide economic base derived from tourism*

The Eli Whitney Center will host 20,000 – 50,000 visitors annually and may be an important part of the tourism industry for the local area. This project will actively involve the public in the preservation project through tours, on site interpretive programs and stakeholder meetings. Mulberry Grove and the new Eli Whitney Center will serve as a destination for the leisure travelers who include historic sites in their vacation experience.

**Project Effectiveness**

The following outcomes will be achieved at the conclusion of this project:

- A minimum of \$8,700,000 will be raised from public and private sources.
- Leveraged limited public resources to preserve a significant historic site.
- Current and future preservation needs documented with costs identified.
- Mulberry Grove preservation project will serve as a model for other preservation projects in Georgia.
- Artifacts and cultural remains successfully inventoried and preserved for present and future generations.
- Regional schools and area community members will have an enhanced learning experience at the Mulberry Grove.
- Local and national visitors will gain an increased understanding of their own heritage and background.
- Local and regional school children will have an enhanced learning experience at the Eli Whitney Center.
- Generate \$2,000,000 to \$3,200,000 annually, for surrounding communities, through visitors to the Eli Whitney Center.
- Increase the number of advocates for Georgia’s Old South heritage.
- Serve as destination for visitors who include historical sites in their vacation experience.
- Project partners will benefit from increased public awareness and have improved relationships with all key stakeholders.



**Mulberry Grove Plantation House circa 1774**

## **Funding**

The funding plans for Mulberry Grove includes raising capital resources needed to build the Eli Whitney Center and for raising funds for ongoing operational support.

The Mulberry Grove Foundation is taking the lead role in raising \$8,700,000 to build the Eli Whitney Center. Income for operational support includes revenue from the endowment, gift shop revenues, annual membership program and revenue from House Bill 499 and other public funding opportunities. The annual operating budget is estimated to be \$300,000.

In 1998 the Georgia General Assembly approved House Bill 499, a one percent hotel tax aimed at aiding efforts to turn the Mulberry Grove Plantation into heritage tourism site. The measure will increase the hotel tax from five percent to six percent in Port Wentworth, with the extra money going to preserve Mulberry Grove. The measure takes effect once the local officials agree on the future use of the site currently owned by Georgia Ports Authority. The Mulberry Grove Foundation is working with the City of Port Pentworth and representatives from the hospitality industry to gain local support for this tax. In Port Wentworth, for example, the tax could generate approximately \$100,000 per year to support marketing outreach, and the preservation and interpretation of Mulberry Grove.

The Foundation will continue to pursue new funding opportunities and partnerships for Mulberry Grove. The Foundation is pleased with the community's support of this project and confident that future resources are available, from the public and private sectors, to preserve Mulberry Grove.