

## Old Town Plantation

Historic Old Town Plantation was built in 1785 by Jacob Battle on the family's Cool Spring Plantation in Edgecombe County, North Carolina. Old Town Plantation is on the National Register of Historic Places and has been restored including sensitive additions on the rear of the house incorporating historic woodwork. The house sits on 10 acres of the historic Battle plantation land just outside the city limits of Rocky Mount, North Carolina, in a rural setting near the Tar River. There are 2 other historic structures on the property including a studio/guest house which is an original structure from Old Town, perhaps mid-18<sup>th</sup> century and an early 19<sup>th</sup> century small office or home from Warrenton, NC, associated with the Montmorenci School of Federal Style architecture. There is also a tool shed with some historic elements and a fenced garden with raised beds. There are 17 additional acres available through Preservation NC which holds covenants on the house and the property. Old Town Plantation has been featured in numerous publications, presentations, and video productions.

Once thought to have been built in 1742, Old Town Plantation is a pure Georgian gambrel roof story-and-a-half structure, a form favored by Eastern North Carolina planters in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The front piazza rooms were restored during the initial phase of the 1983 restoration when the house was relocated along with another original structure for preservation to the only part of the plantation then owned by Battle heirs.

The house was a substantial structure in its day and has many elements that convey the status of the Battle family in the region. The house has a hall-and-parlor plan with much original raised panel wainscot of two registers in the principal room and original beaded sheathing in the parlor, hall, shed rooms, and second story. The parlor retains its original mantle with raised beveled panels and a large working fireplace that is arched. There are a total of four fireplaces in the house. The original rear stair hall retains its original beaded sheathing, newel and rail, and is connected through the restored double back doors to the rear addition which repeats the use of beaded sheathing on the walls and ceiling for unity. On the west side of the stair hall is a small room that retains much original woodwork and on the east side the other room was increased in size shortly after the original 1785 construction. The second floor of Old Town Plantation retains much original woodwork and some original paint and has three pedimented dormers on the front and three on the rear. The house has late 18<sup>th</sup> century glass in the restored window sashes and the original paint colors have been restored.

The additions on the rear of Old Town Plantation were constructed in two phases. In 1983, a great room was constructed connected to a new kitchen with a laundry and pantry on the main floor with another bedroom and bath above. There is much historic woodwork in this addition including wainscot from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century section of the Warrenton, NC, home of Judge John Hall (1767-1833) and beaded beams from an 18<sup>th</sup> century Nash County home. Hall's house may be seen in a Google book *The County of Warren, North Carolina 1586-1917* by Manly Wade Wellman between pages 114 and 115. Judge Hall was one of the first Justices of the North Carolina Supreme Court serving from 1819-1833. The second

stairwell added to Old Town Plantation leads to the second floor bedroom in the 1983 addition and is finished with wainscot also from Judge Hall's home. In the second floor bedroom is early 19<sup>th</sup> century poplar wainscot from the Lawrence homestead in Edgecombe County near Leggett.

In 2004, a second addition was added on the rear of the first addition to create a master suite. The master suite has a vaulted ceiling and large windows with views of the wooded, natural setting. The bathroom in the master suite is ADA compliant with wheelchair accessibility. Attached to the master suite is a side porch echoing features of the original plantation house.

There was a very large pre-historic settlement along this section of the Tar River with the original English structure on the plantation being built by Samuel Holliman in 1742 with a grant from the Lord's Proprietors and purchased by Elisha Battle of Nansemond County, Virginia, in 1747. Elisha Battle and his descendants have achieved importance in North Carolina history; Elisha being on the Committee of Safety during the Revolution and being a signer of the Halifax Resolves representing Edgecombe County. The Halifax Resolves are commemorated on the North Carolina State Flag with the April 12, 1776, date of signing, which is one of the early declarations of separation from Great Britain in the nation. Elisha's son, Jacob Battle (1754-1814), built Old Town Plantation in the year of his marriage. Numerous other structures were built at Cool Spring Plantation with only a few surviving. *The Battle Book Update* is online and gives background history and an updated genealogy of the descendants of Jacob Battle's only son James Smith Battle (1786-1854). The *Update* traces the descendants whose home place was Old Town Plantation. There are a number of historic cemeteries associated with Elisha Battle, Jacob Battle, James Smith Battle, and his descendants, and his slaves, near Old Town Plantation on the Cool Spring property. Since 1983, Old Town Plantation has been the home and studio of artist J. Chris Wilson and his family, who purchased the land directly from the heirs of Jacob Battle and restored the home to its current state. Wilson has done numerous paintings of the historic fields, the historic house, and the historic cemeteries of the plantation. During the 1980s, Wilson also sold antiques and commercially grew herbs and everlastings at Old Town Plantation.

Old Town Plantation is in Edgecombe County in a rural setting immediately adjacent to the city limits of Rocky Mount, North Carolina. Rocky Mount is at the intersection of I 95 and US 64 and is one hour east of the Raleigh/Durham international airport and two and a half hours from the coast. Tarboro, the county seat of Edgecombe County celebrated its 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2010. In Tarboro is the Battle mansion, The Barracks, designed by William Percival, and Battle descendants of Old Town Plantation are also buried in the churchyard of Calvary Parrish. Tarboro has the second oldest Town Common in the nation and just across the Tar River is Princeville, originally Freedom Hill, the oldest incorporated Black Community in North Carolina. While Rocky Mount is an economically diverse city of 60,000, Tarboro is a quaint village rooted in history with a population of 10,000. Tarboro is a 15 minute drive from Old Town Plantation. Both Rocky Mount and Tarboro offer numerous opportunities for cultural and educational enrichment and community involvement including North Carolina Wesleyan College with its Dunn Center for the Performing Arts, and the Rocky Mount Arts Center and Children's Museum in the Imperial

Center for the Performing Arts. While the setting is idyllic and has mainly be used as a family home in recent years with a studio in the rear, this property is ideally suited for development as a small specialty farm or as a horse farm, both of which would be allowable in its A1 zoning classification. Seventeen additional acres are available from Preservation North Carolina flanking the driveway.