

Saving Slave Houses: Slave House Exploration and Evidence Tracing Field School

2025 Application Guidelines



Kitchen-Hospital-Quarter at Pharsalia Plantation, Tyro, Virginia

Slave House Exploration and Evidence Tracing Field School (SHEET)

Collecting and telling the stories of enslaved people in America requires specialized skills, interdisciplinary research, innovative thinking, and collaboration. The Slave House Exploration and Evidence Tracing (SHEET) Field School is a pioneering intergenerational and transdisciplinary experience for independent family researchers, students, academic scholar-practitioners, and the public. Hosted by Saving Slave Houses (SSH) this hybrid field school and public workshop at Pharsalia Plantation in Nelson County, Virginia explores the intersections between the built environment, history, humanities, community, and storytelling. It is designed to teach its participants how to use the data they collect (e.g., fieldwork, archival research, and genealogy) as effective storytelling tools that can reach a wide, diverse audience. Through intensive examination of the built environment participants will gain necessary skills to recognize and interpret the landscape of slavery from the perspective of enslaved people.

SHEET's 2025 season will build on last season's archaeological discovery and help preservation efforts through hands-on preservation, restoration and rehabilitation of the Kitchen-Hospital-Quarter at Pharsalia. The field school will consist of two sessions. Each session will include a Masonry Workshop, an Archaeology Workshop and also incorporate building archaeology. Building archaeology is a process used to identify details that represent hidden messages of resistance, strength and perseverance – clues that enrich the stories of enslaved people's lives. It is necessary for collective storytelling of the Kitchen-Hospital-Quarter at Pharsalia. This process will also teach participants how to recognize changes made to structures during the transition from slavery to freedom.

The Masonry Workshop will focus on hands-on masonry repairs that will help preserve the building for another 200 years. Participants will learn how to remove modern materials that are damaging the building, repoint mortar joints, repair brick walls and whitewashing. During the 2024 season SHEET participants discovered what is believed to be the foundation wall of an earlier kitchen. The Archaeology Workshop will continue excavations of this feature and compare the evidence to similar architectural features on the site, such as an intact subfloor pit. Participants will learn how to conduct archaeological excavations and understand this evidence in relationship to the existing built environment.

SHEET OVERVIEW

Field School Dates

The 2025 SHEET field school consists of two 1-week sessions.

- Session 1: Sunday, July 6 through Saturday July 12, 2025
- Session 2: Sunday, July 13 through Saturday July 19, 2025

Eligibility

All applicants must be 18 years of age or older. No prior educational training or professional experience is required. Special consideration will be given to applicants who are descendants of enslaved communities with ancestral ties to Virginia.

Application Window

Thursday, March 27, 2025 to Friday, April 25, 2025.

Applications are due by 12am (midnight) EST on Friday, April 25, 2025.

Application Process

Admission into SHEET will be granted through a public application process. Selected candidates will be offered an opportunity to participate following an application review and a virtual (Zoom) interview. Each session can accommodate up to six participants.

Questions?

Please submit all questions using the [SHEET Inquiry Form](#).

IMPORTANT DATES

Thursday, **March 27**, 2025: Application opens

Friday, **April 25**, 2025: Applications due by 12am (midnight) EST

Monday, **May 12**: Interview notifications sent by email

May 19 – 24 (Monday-Saturday): Zoom interviews

Monday, **May 26**: Admitted participants notified by email

Monday, **June 02**: Signed acceptance forms due

HOW TO APPLY

A completed application includes:

- SECTION 1: Field School Attendance
- SECTION 2: Personal Information
- SECTION 3: Educational Backgrounds
- SECTION 4: Short Answers
- SECTION 5: Additional Information

Applications Due Friday, April 25, 2024, at 12am EST

General Instructions:

Please prepare responses to *SECTION 4: Short Answers* prior to beginning the application to assist in complying with the 500-word limit. The application cannot be saved or completed in multiple consecutive sessions.

See the **Application Guidelines** for detailed instructions and **Frequently Asked Questions**.

APPLY NOW

* Required Field

SECTION 1: Field School Session

The 2025 SHEET field school includes two separate sessions. If your schedule allows you to participate in either session, please check both options and the selection committee will place you in the session that results in the most optimal learning experience for participants.

Which session are you applying to?

- Session 1: Sunday, July 6 through Saturday July 12, 2025
- Session 2: Sunday, July 13 through Saturday July 19, 2025

In which of the Vernacular Architecture Forum (VAF) African American Field Schools have you participated or plan to participate?

(Check all that apply)

- Black Life in Bellevue: Documenting African American Cultural Landscape Along the Chesapeake Bay (2022 & 2023)
- Johns Island Community Field School: Documenting the Built Environment of a Gullah Geechee Community (2023 & 2024)
- Slave House Exploration and Evidence Tracing Field School (SHEET) (2024)
- None

SECTION 2: Personal Information

Full Name *

Preferred Name

Your Pronouns

Mailing Address *

- (include city, state, & zip code) *

Phone Number *

Applicant Group (check all that apply)

- Student
- Professional
- Community member
- Descendant with ancestral ties to Virginia

Name and location of the site(s) where your ancestors were enslaved.

Current Age

(To ensure diversity of age) *

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65 and older

Race/Ethnicity

How did you learn about the SHEET field school? *

(Check all that apply)

- Email
- Word of mouth (friend, family member)
- Colleague
- Professor
- Newsletter
- Social Media
- Bulletin Board
- Website
- Other

If website or other, please specify:

SECTION 3: Educational Background

Select the highest level of your completed education.*

- High School/GED
- Associates (2 yr)
- Bachelors
- Masters
- Doctorate
- Other

If other, please specify:

Are you currently enrolled in school?

- Yes
- No

Name of institution where you are currently enrolled?

SECTION 4: Short Answers

Short answers are limited to a maximum of 500 words.

Question 1 *

Describe your personal, scholarly, and/or academic interest in historic sites of slavery.

Question 2 *

List and briefly describe any previous experience you have in the areas of history, historic preservation, cultural heritage, public interpretation, and/or genealogy. Include scholarly, personal, and/or professional experiences in your response.

Question 3 *

How do you envision applying what you learn through your participation in SHEET to your personal/professional projects or research?

SECTION 5: Additional Information

The answers to these questions are for planning purposes and will not influence the selection process.

Will you need housing during the field school?

- Yes
- No

Describe learning, environmental, and/or physical accommodations that you require.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Who can participate in SHEET?

Participants must be 18 years of age or older. Priority admission will be granted to slavery descendants with ancestral ties to Virginia. Due to limited space and funding, an admissions committee will evaluate all applications and select up to six individuals for each session. The admissions goal is to identify a group of participants that represent a diverse range of ages, genders, and backgrounds, who demonstrate an intense interest in history, preservation, innovative thinking, and a passion for collective storytelling.

What does it cost to participate in the SHEET field school?

The field school has been designed to be a zero-cost experience for participants. The program includes lodging (from the University of Virginia) and meals. It also comes with a stipend to cover travel costs and participants will be compensated for their time.

What will I learn during the SHEET field school?

Participants will be working with SHEET partners who represent diverse programs, organizations, and companies that have significant impact on how history is documented, communicated, distributed, and understood. SHEET partners will provide skill training and resources relevant to the study, documentation, and storytelling of enslaved people in America.

Can participants receive school/professional credit?

Students are responsible for arranging school credit through their home institutions. Professionals are responsible for arranging continuing education units (CEU) through their licensing authority.

What is the work environment like?

Fieldwork will take place between the hours of 8:00 am to 5:00 pm (Monday-Friday). Participants will work in a team environment with shared workloads and responsibilities. Summers in Virginia are generally hot and humid. Fieldwork generally requires work pants, sturdy shoes/boots, and sun and bug protection. Participants will be working outdoors and in buildings that are not temperature-controlled. Public restrooms are available on the site.

Do participants need to have their own car?

SHEET will provide transportation to and from Pharsalia each day. Participants are allowed to drive themselves back and forth if they choose.

Pharsalia Plantation's history.

Pharsalia Plantation was given to William Massie and his bride, Sarah Steptoe, in 1814 as a wedding gift from William's father, Major Thomas Massie. The main house in which William and Sarah lived was built by enslaved workers from 1814 to 1816. In 1859 at the height of his landholdings William owned 9,725 acres and "62 hands were worked [in the fields]...of all sorts, & sizes." At the time of William's death on July 28, 1862, he owned 154 people and twenty-five slave houses. Today Pharsalia is just a fraction of its original size – with only 24 acres comprising the main house proper and 746 acres of surrounding agricultural land.

Pharsalia is considered a high integrity site of slavery with many extant historic buildings. Two slave houses survive (one of log construction and one framed construction), along with two other mixed-use enslaved buildings, the Kitchen-Hospital-Quarter and Weaving House-Quarter. Also standing is the Main House, an ice house, a privy, smokehouses, as well as barns and stables. Pharsalia is private property owned by a Massie descendant and operates as Pharsalia Events (www.pharsaliaevents.com). The Main House is unoccupied, and it is not available for overnight stays. The kitchen space of the Kitchen-Hospital-Quarter is interpreted and open to visitors. The two extant slave houses are acknowledged as such, and are identified through signage, but are closed to the public.

Learn more about Pharsalia at sah-archipedia.org/buildings/VA-02-051-0001 and the Kitchen-Hospital-Quarter building at sah-archipedia.org/buildings/VA-02-051-0003.

What are the deliverables of the SHEET field school?

Collecting and telling the stories of enslaved people in America requires specialized skills, interdisciplinary research, innovative thinking, and collaboration. SHEET strives to teach its participants how to use the data they collect (e.g., fieldwork, archival research, and genealogy) as effective storytelling tools that can reach a wide, diverse audience.

The 2025 season will focus on the Kitchen-Hospital-Quarter at Pharsalia Plantation. Intensive examination of this building and its surroundings will help participants and interns gain the skills necessary to recognize and interpret the landscape of slavery from the perspective of enslaved people. Pharsalia will be explored through four different lenses: people, landscape, details, and archaeology. The curriculum will include a series of hands-on preservation, restoration and rehabilitation techniques taught by professionals in the field. At the conclusion of SHEET participants will:

- Learn principles of design and construction of historic structures and sites.
- Conduct building archaeology to identify details that represent hidden messages of resistance, strength and perseverance – clues that enrich the stories of people’s lives.
- Practice identifying changes made to structures during the transition from slavery to freedom.
- Acquire the vocabulary to engage with preservation professionals and a framework to complete real-world site-based community outreach projects.
- Learn masonry skills such as how to remove modern materials that are damaging the building, repoint mortar joints, repair brick walls and whitewashing.
- Be able to identify archaeological evidence and architectural features found at historic sites of slavery.
- Learn how to conduct archaeological excavations and understand this evidence in relationship to the existing built environment.

CORE TEAM



Jobie Hill will serve as the program director. Ms. Hill is a licensed Preservation Architect and Slave House Expert with over seventeen years of professional experience. As the Founder of [Saving Slave Houses](#) and the creator of the *Slave House Database*, she has extensive building and landscape documentation experience having completed over fieldwork at over 150 sites of slavery. Ms. Hill is also a former Board Member and current member of the Vernacular Architecture Forum.



Star Reams (a descendant of Rachel Strange from Pharsalia) is a genealogist, and a Founding member and Board Secretary for the Descendants of Enslaved Communities at the University of Virginia. Mrs. Reams' additional role in SHEET is as a community partner. She will assist with planning fieldwork and interpretation activities.



Nina Polley (a descendant of Molly Brown from Pharsalia) is an African American History Museum professional, community outreach specialist, and a Founding member of the Descendants of Enslaved Communities at the University of Virginia. Mrs. Polley's additional role in SHEET is as a community partner. She will assist with planning fieldwork and interpretation activities.



Frederick Murphy (a descendant of Martha Moseley) is an African American Oral Historian, and a film Director and Producer. Mr. Murphy's additional roles in SHEET will be oral historian and interviewer.

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- History Before Us
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- Special Collections Research Center at the College of William & Mary
- The Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library at the University of Virginia Library
- John Hope Franklin Research Center for African and African American History & Culture and David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library at Duke University

SAVING SLAVE HOUSES

