



Statement from the Executive Director of Locust Grove

Historic Locust Grove, like many historic sites throughout the country where human beings were enslaved, takes seriously the responsibility to reckon with the impact of this enslavement in historic time and in the present. We are here to tell the stories of the lives of the people who lived on this land, as fully as we can. Through programs, tours, publications, exhibits, and theatre, we strive to present the lives of the men, women, and children who lived in bondage here in their full humanity, not just as workers but as people with hopes, pain, family, traditions, and culture - with souls. Their stories are now central to our work here.

For those of you who may have come for past Jane Austen Festivals held on this site: the story of the enslaved was always told here for those who looked or asked, but was not a major part of the event. The Festival's attention was focused elsewhere.

This year Locust Grove has taken over the direction of the Festival from the local JASNA organization. That is why we decided it was time to present this reckoning with slavery and race as a central theme. These conversations are going on everywhere in this year of outcry against injustice; we can contribute a historical perspective. The distinguished speakers we have lined up for the 2021 Festival will examine the transatlantic slave trade and race relations in context of both Jane Austen's England and Locust Grove's America.

We have been talking during this planning process with people within JASNA who are doing anti-racism work, as well as our partners in local organizations who have been walking this path with us for years. We may not always get it right in every detail, but we are committed to the journey, and we hope that those who are skeptical will come along with us as we try to create space to talk openly about the injustices and racism that existed in both Austen's world and in our own.

Carol Ely, Ph.D.