Proposal

*Etched in Stone?: Governor Charles Aycock and the Power of Commemoration*
—a permanent exhibition to open in UNCG Auditorium—April 17, 2018

UNCG History/Museum Studies Graduate Program
May 2017

**Project History:**
In the summer of 2016, the Board of Trustees charged UNCG’s History/Museum Studies program, under the guidance of Director of Public History Benjamin Filene, with creating a plan to interpret the history and legacy of Governor Charles B. Aycock in the auditorium that formerly bore his name. This document represents the culmination of the Preliminary Development phase of this project.

Our program’s Museum Studies graduate students, class of 2018, spent the fall semester exploring the power of commemoration on campus, creating an interactive website that maps building namesakes and their histories. In the spring semester, these same students applied these questions and approaches more specifically to the history and legacy of Governor Aycock. We crafted a statement of project purpose and identified the main message or “big idea” for the exhibition (see below). We then explored how an on-site exhibition could most effectively engage the campus community with these core themes.

Across this semester, we met several times with representatives of Design Dimension, Inc., a Raleigh-based exhibition-design firm that helped us refine our design concepts and decide how best to place them in the public spaces of the auditorium. We also met several times with auditorium manager Brian Fuller, who conveyed the multiple ways in which the auditorium spaces are used across the year. Recently we met with Provost Dunn and Dean Peter Alexander (College of Visual and Performing Arts) and shared this plan; both were very supportive of it.

**Work Plan:**
The ideas here are preliminary in their details but reflect the core themes and approaches that we hope to deploy. We seek approval from the Board to further develop and implement these concepts next semester and to fund Design Dimension’s work on the project (see budget estimate, attached). Following this Preliminary Development phase, the fall semester will be spent completing Detailed Development for the project, a phase during which these same students will complete research; gather and finalize all images, objects, and audio; write and edit all exhibit text; and work closely with Design Dimension to finalize design details, including completing the floor plan, laying out graphic panels, and configuring interactive and media components. To gather feedback, we anticipate having a Detailed Development review meeting in mid-semester with the Provost and any other interested parties. We propose submitting materials to
receive sign-off from the Board (or representatives) on our Detailed Development work in December 2017.

In spring 2018, Design Dimension will take the lead in fabricating and installing the exhibition, working closely with project director Filene and in consultation with Brian Fuller and others as needed. Meanwhile, Museum Studies students will work with students in art professor Lee Walton’s course on Art, Education, and Social Practice to plan a multidisciplinary public program to accompany the exhibition opening, scheduled for April 17, 2018. This collaboration emerged from conversations with Dean Alexander and Associate Dean Lawrence Jenkens in the College of Visual and Performing Arts.

**Project Purpose:**
The Aycock Public Memory Project will create an exhibition about Governor Aycock and Aycock Auditorium that illustrates the governor’s complex legacies and the history of commemoration on campus, showing that whom we memorialize matters. Encouraging public dialogue among students, faculty, and alumni, the project will help empower the UNCG community to pursue diversity and inclusion with understanding and purpose.

**Main Point/”Big Idea” for the Exhibition:**
Our heroes change: even as Governor Aycock advanced public education in North Carolina, he designed the legal framework of white supremacy—a legacy that was hailed in the decades after his death but raises troubling questions today.

**Overview of Design Approach:**
*Etched in Stone* encourages visitor exploration and reflection. The exhibit is presented in five separate sections—three that focus on Aycock’s actions and their effects and two that center on the process of historical commemoration and public memory. Each section includes interactive and graphic elements along with explanatory text. We want visitors to form their own opinions. We have tried to portray Aycock in his words whenever possible. Each section incorporates primary sources to do so. Having considered traffic flow and use of the building, we feel the second floor of the auditorium will provide the best visitor experience. Additionally, we propose to include smaller introductory and way-finding elements in the first-floor lobby and stairwells. As visitors approach the space from the stairs, they will see the whole exhibition before them. They can then choose whether to explore it sequentially (left to right) or just to browse individual sections.
Exhibition Sections:

I. Etched in Stone?: Governor Charles Aycock and the Power of Commemoration

Tentative Location: This introductory section will be located on the wall to the right of the south, second-floor mezzanine entrance, visible straight ahead as auditorium visitors arrive at the mezzanine-level landing of the south staircase.

Core Message: Visitors will leave this section of the exhibit with a basic understanding of who Aycock was, the steps that led to his name being removed from the auditorium, and the core goals and approach of this exhibition.

Section Components:

- What’s in a Name?
  - This mural serves as an eye-catching opening to the exhibit as a whole. The design will feature an image of the name being physically stripped from the exterior of the building, with the physical letters that were removed from the building being incorporated into the design. The mural also features the name of the exhibit.

- Our Heroes Change – Main Introductory Label
  - This graphic panel gives visitors background on the project, including why Aycock’s name was removed and the core questions the exhibit will explore.

- The Man behind the Name
  - This graphic panel features a short biography of Aycock.

II. The Finale of Fusionism

Tentative Location: This section will be on the second floor to the right of the introductory section of the exhibit, past the water fountains on the south side of the building.

Core Message: Visitors will leave this section understanding that the Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 was a political coup that had personal effects. They will understand that the Democrats took control of North Carolina politics through extralegal means during the riot which not only paved the way to Aycock’s tenure as governor, but legalized white supremacy.

Section Components:
• Shedding Light on Party Platforms
  ○ This interactive light board allows visitors to match political parties of the
time to their historically held ideologies, illuminating not only historic
party platforms, but also the presence of an important third party, the
Fusionists. This component also features newspaper headlines from the
Wilmington Race Riot so users can see how different parties reacted to the
riot.
• Coup d’Etat
  ○ This graphic panel gives a summary of the events of the race riot and how it
set the stage for Aycock’s ascendancy to the governor’s office
• Lives Changed
  ○ This interactive flip book features short biographies of people affected by
the riot, to humanize the event and illustrate its tangible effects.

III. Legalizing Racism: Governor Aycock and the Launch of Jim Crow in North Carolina

Tentative Location:
This section will be located on the wall to the right of the south, second-floor entrance,
visible straight ahead as auditorium visitors arrive at the mezzanine-level landing of the
south staircase.

Core Message:
Visitors will understand the 1898 and 1900 campaigns of Charles B. Aycock and the white
supremacist platforms on which he and the Democratic party ran and won the
governorship. This will help visitors further understand the chain of events that led to the
passing of Jim Crow laws in North Carolina. These laws effectively prevented African
Americans from exercising their right to vote in a democratic government. Visitors will
view how these laws deployed literacy-test requirements and poll taxes.

Section Components:
• The Campaign Trail: Aycock’s Political Platform
  ○ This panel explains the Democratic Party’s 1898 and 1900 campaigns and
the political platforms through which Aycock eventually became governor
of North Carolina in 1901. It explains how Aycock became governor and
why the Democratic Party decided to focus on white supremacy as a
predominant issue.
• Aycock and Disenfranchisement in North Carolina
  ○ This panel introduces the rise of Jim Crow and features a scanned copy of
the original Jim Crow law passed under Aycock’s governorship. It also
includes excerpts from Aycock’s speech “The Negro Problem” in audio form using headphones.

- Aycock’s Legal Legacy at the Ballot Box
  - This panel explores how literacy tests and poll taxes disenfranchised African Americans. It shows the cost of a poll tax in relation to today's currency and to a sharecropper's average wage, illustrating how cost prohibitive these taxes were for both African Americans and poor white farmers.

**IV. Long Division: Aycock and the Rise of Segregated Education**

**Tentative Location:**
The location for this section will be on the second floor to the right of the introductory section of the exhibit just before the water fountains on the south side of the building.

**Core Message:**
While Governor Aycock is credited with creating modern public education, his education reforms were built on a base of white supremacy and had long-term economic effects. This section will demonstrate how Aycock’s education policies favored white children, both in terms of funding and facilities, and show how his policies reinforced disenfranchisement, envisioning North Carolina’s African American population as a second-class workforce to power the state’s rapidly industrializing economy. Visitors will leave this section understanding the complexities and consequences of this policy.

**Section Components:**
- Jars of Inequality (three dimensional models)
  - Three sets of see-through “mason jars” filled with pennies show how money allocated for African American education compared to white education from 1900 to 1910. The jars illustrate the increasing disparities between black and white education, even as North Carolina’s overall education budget increased.
- Mapping the Education Gap (graphic panel)
  - During his tenure as governor, Aycock built 700 new schools in North Carolina. “Mapping the Education Gap” shows where those schools were built, as well as population and racial demographics of the area. This panel provides a clear picture of how North Carolina’s African American community was underserved by Aycock’s education reforms.
- Divided Learning (graphic panel)
  - African American and white schools taught very different curricula intended to prepare students for very different futures. “Divided Learning”
displays excerpts from textbooks and other curriculum material, demonstrating how different races received different educations. The panel also includes quotes from Aycock and other leading Democrats discussing how African American schools should be geared towards improving industry in North Carolina.

- Preparing for the Future (light-up interactive)
  - This light-up infographic shows the historic percentages of African Americans and whites in different jobs, highlighting how the different curricula taught at black and white schools disproportionately funneled the races into particular sectors of the economy.

- Man of His Time (graphic panel)
  - Aycock’s racial views are often excused as being the product of his time, but in 1900, public thought about race relations covered a wide range of opinions. “Man of His Time?” seeks to show the full range of opinions about African American education at the turn of the century. The panel showcases opinions about African American education ranging from more extreme white supremacists to the moderate Fusionist policy to liberal education reformers such as Booker T. Washington, Charlotte Hawkins Brown, W. E. B. Du Bois and William Henry Baldwin, Jr.

V. Constructing the Education Governor

**Tentative Location:**
This section of the exhibit will be on the columns opposite the “Long Division” section (and across from the restrooms).

**Core Message:**
This section will examine the history of how Governor Aycock has been commemorated from his death into the present day. Visitors will see that Aycock’s role in disenfranchising black voters in North Carolina was central to the original decision to celebrate him and how, as time passed, the racist elements of his platform were minimized.

**Section Components:**
- Governor Aycock Comes to UNCG?
  - When we surveyed the campus community, respondents frequently assumed that Governor Aycock was either an alumnus of the university or had donated money to the school. These answers reveal assumptions about who buildings are named after: Governor Aycock was neither an alumnus
nor did he directly donate to the university. Instead he was a close friend of Charles McIver, the college’s founder, and shared McIver’s belief in public education. This panel highlights Aycock’s connections to UNCG to showcase that the auditorium was named for him for symbolic reasons.

- In Their Eyes: Aycock Auditorium, 1928-2016
  - This panel shares alumni experiences of Aycock Auditorium. It includes quotations and pictures, showcasing the different roles the auditorium has served. This panel acknowledges the auditorium as space with its own history that has had personal meanings to people over the years.

- Finding the Words
  - This is a word-cloud projection that compiles the words used to describe Governor Aycock. The first projection focuses on the 1910s-1930s. These words are pulled from memorials dedicated to Governor Aycock, the speeches given at these dedications, and books written about him. The size of the words will correlate with their prevalence. The second projection focuses on contemporary discussions of Governor Aycock and again will pull out the most prominent words. The two word maps show how the ways that people talk about Aycock and his commemoration have changed between the time when the auditorium was named and today.

- Writing Governor Aycock
  - This component is a panel that shows excerpts from North Carolina history textbooks from 1907 to 1999. Visitors can read the excerpts and then lift a flap to reveal the source of the text, additional context, and commentary. This interactive panel will show visitors how textbook treatments of Governor Aycock’s legacy have changed over time.

VI. Our Heroes Change: Understanding Our Commemorative Landscapes

Tentative Location:
The main body of this section will be across from the “Constructing the Education Governor” section. The “Keep the Conversation Going” components (see below) will be located in the seating nooks to the right and left of the staircases.

Core Message:
Visitors will leave this section with an understanding that whom commemorate constantly changes on our campus, in North Carolina, and nationally. Additionally, visitors will walk away with the notion that they can change commemorative landscapes.

Section Components:
● UNCG’s Commemorative Landscape
  ○ This component consists of a digital map (created last semester) that details UNCG’s commemorative landscape, displayed on a touch-screen monitor. A panel further discusses what commemoration on campus looks like and poses questions to help visitors to explore the map in more detail.

● Who’s Next?
  ○ This graphic panel features the names, pictures and brief biographies of influential men and women from UNCG’s past and present who could be candidates to be building namesakes. An example might be Ezekiel Robinson. By inviting visitors to contemplate different names for UNCG’s buildings, this panel demonstrates that people can create change and foster a more inclusive campus landscape.

● North Carolina and Memorialization
  ○ Either as a physical flipbook or as one displayed on an iPad, this component highlights statues, buildings and other symbols across North Carolina that have been contested or changed.

● Look Beyond the Name
  ○ This component features an image of a generic building façade, printed on sturdy material and mounted on the wall. Next to the image are a collection of rectangular magnetic strips that visitors can affix to the building’s façade. One side of each strip shows a name (e.g. John C. Calhoun or Woodrow Wilson) while the other side gives a short blurb about the person and the controversy associated with him or her. A panel invites visitors to affix the magnetic strips to the building and envision the meanings of names when they are in prominent places.

● Keep the Conversation Going
  ○ On tables in the two seating areas, boxes hold cards designed to prompt conversation and reflection. Each card has a question on one side and an invitation to share one’s reflections on an iPad in the space and to read other visitors’ reflections. As well, the cards contain prompts inviting visitors to respond via hashtag or through Facebook, Tumblr, or Instagram. Sample questions could include: What kind of people should we name our buildings after? What are your thoughts on renaming buildings? When does “revising” history turn into “erasing”?

VII. Identities Across Time

**Tentative Location:** “Identities Across Time” will be a narrative feature interspersed throughout the entire *Etched in Stone?* exhibit.
**Core Message:** “Identities Across Time” will present a set of biographies, four in number, integrated across the exhibition, with content tied to each exhibit section. These profiles will feature African American and white men and women of different socioeconomic backgrounds. Together, these narratives will illustrate the range of personal repercussions of the events discussed, providing human narratives to animate the legal, economic, and statistical information the exhibit presents.

**Section Components:** “Identities Across Time” consists of sidebar-style graphic panels, accompanying the main panels described above. Each sidebar has a unique graphic cue that ties the components together and allows visitors to easily identify them.

**Budget:** Design Dimension has reviewed the above plans and proposes a total budget of $88,350-$135,650, with the range depending on the degree of complexity and the use of technology in the final designs. This figure includes all consultations, meetings (including onsite meetings with student development team), materials, fabrication, and installation and allows a 10% contingency fund for any potential overruns and repairs after opening. An itemized budget is attached.