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MORVEN
MUSEUM & GARDEN

New Exhibition Opens November 6: *Northern Family, Southern Ties*

On view in Morven Museum & Garden's new gallery through 2028

PRINCETON, NJ (November 6, 2025) — The result of three years of research, Morven Museum & Garden's special exhibition *Northern Family, Southern Ties* will open on November 6, 2025. **It is the first exhibit examining the overlooked connections between families straddling the Mason-Dixon Line**, the division on the borders of Pennsylvania and Delaware that became a symbolic demarcation between “free soil” and “slave” states. This exhibit complicates the more traditional understanding of the “North” and “South,” by following two families before, during, and after the Civil War.

Marriages that joined elite Northern and wealthy Southern families were not unusual in the nineteenth century, connecting political and economic interests, which included the preservation of slavery. ***Northern Family, Southern Ties* focuses on one such marriage between a son of Princeton's most powerful family and a wealthy planter's daughter from Charleston.** Naval Lieutenant Commandant Robert Field Stockton and Harriet Maria Potter came to own Morven in New Jersey and a plantation in Georgia. Harriet's parents followed the couple to Princeton, bringing with them staggering wealth made from their ever-expanding rice plantations powered by hundreds of enslaved people on the Savannah River. The effects of this influx of capital are still visible in the Princeton landscape today: from Trinity Church, to Prospect House and even the Delaware & Raritan Canal.

This new exhibition explores why New Jersey aligned more closely with southern states than its northern neighbors on practices and ideologies regarding slavery. It aims to show how the Stocktons' influence changed the landscape of New Jersey, while examining the lives of those whose freedom was on the line as the debate over slavery unfolded on the national political stage. The exhibit includes the names of those recently discovered in coastwise manifests, like Georgiana Gould, who was moved by the Potters between their Charleston, Savannah, and Princeton homes, from the age three, until she was 25 years old.

Visitors can experience an interactive feature showing this interstate movement of enslaved people, and are invited to take an optional self-guided walking tour of Princeton that stops at sites linked to the Stockton-Potter families.

The exhibition includes a small number of loans from public and private collections. Perhaps the most striking is a recently discovered painting of Colerain Plantation on the Savannah River.

“For years we have searched for views of the Potter’s Colerain Plantation in Georgia,” shares **Jesse Gordon Simons, Morven’s Curator and Registrar**.

“This spring we came across a black and white photograph of a painting of Colerain in the collection of the Georgia Historical Society, however the location of the painting was unknown. After numerous dead ends, a final internet search revealed that the painting had gone up for auction less than a year earlier after staying in the Potter family ownership since the 1840s. We wrote to the auction house to ask that they pass along a letter to the successful bidder. Almost immediately the new owner responded and generously agreed to lend the painting to the exhibition.”

On view for the first time, the painting is remarkable because it shows the Potter family alongside six men they enslaved, who prepare to row them in a boat down the Savannah River. While the enslaved men remained unidentified, James Potter at the center of the picture was the brother-in-law of Commodore Stockton, and spent his summers in Princeton at what is now known as Palmer House on the corner of Bayard Lane and Stockton Street.

“In a time when difficult history is being flagged and questioned daily, we are honored to give space to the histories of people who have often been omitted. Morven is committed to accurate history and sharing authentic stories,” states **Elizabeth Allan, Morven’s Deputy Director and Curator**. “This story, through the lens of two families’ experiences, illuminates why powerful people like Commodore Robert Field Stockton played both sides, and how fortunes generated by slavery funded northern interests.”

Concurrently on view at Morven is the special exhibition *Morven Revealed: Untold Stories from New Jersey’s Most Historic Home* (through March 1, 2026) and the permanent exhibition *Historic Morven: A Window into America’s Past*. This winter, visitors will also be able to enjoy *Festival of Trees*, Morven’s annual holiday display of creative trees and mantels throughout the galleries (November 19, 2025-January 11, 2026).

This exhibition is made possible by Lisa and Michael Ullmann. Additional support has been provided by Liza and Schuyler Morehouse, Colleen Goggins, Helen R. Buck Foundation, and The George H. and Estelle M. Sands Foundation.

Curation and research is by Elizabeth Allan, Jesse Gordon Simons, and Sharece Blakney. Curatorial assistance is provided by Stephanie Wang and Emily Marturano.

Exhibit design is by Olivia de Salve Villedieu, Annaka Olsen, Ian Keliher, Madelyn Albright, and Wei-Hao Wang. Graphics are by Hiroshi Kumagai, Full Point Graphics.

CALENDAR LISTING

Northern Family, Southern Ties

Morven Museum & Garden's new exhibition gallery opens with *Northern Family, Southern Ties*, which reveals the overlooked connections between families straddling the Mason-Dixon Line.

Learn how a marriage between a son of Princeton's most powerful family and a wealthy planter's daughter from Charleston changed the landscape of New Jersey. Discover how the fate of the people they enslaved was on the line as the debate over slavery unfolded on the national political stage.

Dates/Times: Opens November 6, 2025; on view through 2028. Open Wednesday-Sunday from 10 am-4 pm. Closed Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, New Year's Day, and Easter Day.

Location: Morven Museum & Garden, 55 Stockton Street, Princeton, NJ 08540

Tickets: \$12 for adults; \$10 for seniors (ages 60+), youth ages 7-18, students with ID, and active military or veterans with ID. Free for Members and ages 6 & younger. **Reserve tickets at** www.morven.org/visit

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About Morven Museum & Garden

Most historic sites celebrate a single notable resident—Morven is different. Built in the 1750s by Founding Father Richard Stockton, Morven was the home to five generations of the Stockton family; the innovative industrialist and humanitarian Robert Wood Johnson, Jr.; and later became New Jersey's first Governor's Mansion. Over nearly 300 years, its walls have witnessed the lives of governors, political leaders, celebrities, and everyday families alike. Today, Morven Museum & Garden welcomes visitors to explore this layered history through exhibitions, programs, and historic gardens.

55 Stockton Street, Princeton, NJ, 08540

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