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ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVIEWS OF FIVE COMMUNITY LEADERS PRESERVING
AFRICAN AMERICAN HERITAGE IN THE LOWCOUNTRY

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science
Historic Preservation

by
Paige Elyse Regna
May 2024

Accepted by:
Jon B. Marcoux, Committee Chair
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Darcy Neufeld
Tara White

ABSTRACT

As more African American communities pursue preservation initiatives in their communities, it is becoming increasingly important to examine why the leaders of these communities preserve their heritage, what projects they undertake, and how they accomplish their preservation initiatives. This thesis aims to answer the question: How do five current leaders of preservation in African American communities in Charleston compare in terms of their preservation sites, motivations, goals, and strategies to each other and early preservationists in Charleston? The author used an interview methodology for this thesis and asked fourteen core questions to five preservationists in African American communities. The analysis of the oral history transcripts compares all five preservationists with each other and two early preservationists in Charleston: Susan Pringle Frost and Frances Edmunds. Through this analysis, common themes were determined for the preservation sites, motivations, goals, and strategies of the early and modern preservationists, and they speak to the evolving nature of the field of historic preservation. These themes centered around sovereignty, family legacy, community protection, the threat of a structure's collapse, and the importance of African American history. Additional themes drawn out from the interviewees included discussions on property ownership, heirs' properties, incorporated towns, and creating their own nonprofits. This thesis not only aims to fill a void in the research of preservation projects in African American communities being pursued by community leaders but also to look at personal motivations and how people are advancing the movement to help characterize the new chapter of the discipline.

DEDICATION

For Gran. Without you, none of this would be possible.

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Thank you to Greg Estevez, Richard Habersham, Ernest Parks, Cubby Wilder, and Pernessa Seele for agreeing to be interviewed. Speaking with each of you was the best part of this process, and I learned so much from all of you about why preservation matters.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Charleston is known for being a leading city in the early preservation movement. It is also a place where individual leaders and visionaries stand tall in the origin stories of the preservation movement and are anchor points for understanding the development of the field over time. These figures reflect national trends and preservation ideologies and also shape the discipline locally and nationally. High profile individual preservationists bring different preservation causes to the forefront with their advocacy, interpretation, and place or culture-based work.

This study compares today's Charleston-based preservation movement to its origins, focusing upon the backgrounds of prominent preservationists, the demographics of the movement at select time periods, and the respective goals of the movements. This thesis aims to answer the question: How do five current leaders of preservation in African American communities in Charleston compare in terms of their preservation sites, motivations, goals, and strategies to each other and early preservationists in Charleston? The analysis will lend itself to documenting the challenges that come with saving African American heritage and the paths that these preservationists have taken, as well as reflect on changes in the field.

Preservation's Origin in Charleston

Beginning in the early twentieth century, service stations threatened streetscapes and historic buildings in downtown Charleston. This kickstarted individuals, largely

white women of means, taking an interest in preservation. Susan Pringle Frost became one of the most well-known preservationists from this time due to her establishing her own restoration business, founding a preservation organization, and involving herself with the 1931 zoning ordinance. In 1920, Susan Pringle Frost founded the Society for the Preservation of Old Dwellings (SPOD), today known as the Preservation Society of Charleston.

Frost became a grassroots preservationist when she fought to save the Joseph Manigault House from the threat of being demolished “to make way for an expanding Ford automobile dealership.”¹ A gas station was already located next to the Joseph Manigault House, and the increased number of filling stations on the peninsula is what sparked many women to take an interest in saving historic buildings.² Susan Pringle Frost



Figure 1.1: Susan Pringle Frost. Source South Carolina Hall of Fame.



Figure 1.2: Joseph Manigault House. Source Historic Charleston Foundation.

¹ Sidney Bland, *Preserving Charleston's Past, Shaping Its Future: The Life and Times of Susan Pringle Frost* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 68.

² Bland, *Preserving Charleston's Past*, 65.

succeeded in raising enough funds to purchase the Joseph Manigault House and turned it into a house museum, which is discussed in detail in Chapter Four. She also purchased other dwellings on the peninsula, restored them, and sold them as part of her real estate business.³ In 1947, over two decades later, Historic Charleston Foundation was founded, and in 1957, they started a revolving fund to revitalize the Ansonborough neighborhood, also known as the Ansonborough Rehabilitation Project. The Preservation Society of Charleston and Historic Charleston Foundation are the two preservation nonprofits that presently make up the preservation landscape in modern day Charleston.

Historic Charleston Foundation was established in 1947 when the Carolina Art Association decided to expand and involve itself with planning and preservation in Charleston.⁴ Frances R. Edmunds was the first staff member and director of Historic Charleston Foundation.⁵ Her involvement with Historic Charleston Foundation differs from Susan Pringle Frost because she did not start the nonprofit herself. However, she was pivotal in the organization's revolving funds and advocacy efforts. One of her first projects was the Ansonborough Revolving Fund, which successfully saved many historic buildings in the neighborhood.⁶ J. Myrick Howard defines a revolving fund as being, "used by organizations to buy historic properties, place restrictive covenants on those properties, and later resell them with the preservation restrictions.... By using the same money again and again as properties are bought and sold, a revolving fund can secure the

³ Bland, *Preserving Charleston's Past*, 63.

⁴ Robert R. Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 23.

⁵ "Frances Edmunds Obituary," *Charleston Post & Courier* (Charleston, SC), May 3, 2010, <https://obits.postandcourier.com/us/obituaries/charleston/name/frances-edmunds-obituary?id=9645500>.

⁶ Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, 55.

preservation of many more properties than can a preservation organization that buys and retains ownership of properties.”⁷

Early Preservation’s Scope

The houses Susan Pringle Frost restored herself were concentrated in the South of Broad neighborhood around Tradd Street, St. Michael’s Alley, and East Bay Street. At the time she purchased these structures, the area was considered a slum, but many of the buildings had been constructed in the 18th century. Although the structures had fallen into a deteriorated state, they were still considered high-to-medium style. The SPOD primarily focused on high-style architecture by raising funds to save the Joseph Manigault House and Heyward Washington House in the 1920s.

Early Preservation’s Motivations

In the 1910s and 1920s, Charleston was at risk of losing some of its most historic structures to make way for filling stations. However, filling stations were not the only threat to historic buildings in Charleston. In the 1920s, art collectors descended on Charleston, and homeowners sold historic architectural details, such as mantels and wood paneled interior room finishes, from high-style residences to them to make a profit.⁸ Frost was even approached by people wanting to purchase interior features from the houses she

⁷ J. Myrick Howard, “Revolving Funds: In the Vanguard of the Preservation Movement,” *North Carolina Central Law Review*: Vol. 11: No. 2, Article 11, 1980.

⁸ Max Page and Randall Mason, *Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States* (New York, NY: Taylor and Francis Books, 2004), 259.

was restoring.⁹ Although she used salvaged features in her restoration work, moving them from building to building, she noted that she wanted to keep these features in Charleston.¹⁰

The desire to save these buildings stemmed from ancestor worship. The term ancestor worship is used in this thesis to describe the main motivation of the early preservation movement not only in South Carolina but also throughout the rest of America. Ancestor worship refers to when one person or a group of people sought to revert one or more buildings to a time they were nostalgic for in remembrance of their ancestors. This was done with little regard for accuracy and instead came from a place of feeling or ideas about what a building would have looked like.

A precedent had already been established in Charleston by the National Society of Colonial Dames, who purchased the Powder Magazine, and the Daughters of the American Revolution, who bought the Old Exchange Building.¹¹ At the beginning of the twentieth century, both groups had the intention of turning their newly acquired buildings into museums to teach about “the beginnings of American nationalism.”¹² This theme of exclusively advocating for buildings because of their relation to historic people, grand architectural features, or depiction of what Charleston should look like continued for most of the twentieth century, and it still continues today. Vernacular architecture on and off the peninsula was not the main focus of Charleston preservationists during this time.

⁹ *Charleston News and Courier* (Charleston, South Carolina), February 24, 1941: 5. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*.

¹⁰ *Charleston News and Courier* (Charleston, South Carolina), February 24, 1941: 5. *NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current*.

¹¹ Page and Mason, *Giving Preservation a History*, 258.

¹² Page and Mason, *Giving Preservation a History*, 259.

First Major Historic Preservation Reform

The field of preservation continued to evolve throughout the twentieth century to broaden its scope to be more inclusive of buildings and people. Vernacular architecture now plays a more prominent role in the study of the built environment. This change in the preservation movement took place in the 1970s, and the Vernacular Architecture Forum was established in 1980.¹³ In light of this more inclusive trajectory, organizations are beginning to study African American heritage and how to preserve significant structures and places as cultural resources.

Charleston nonprofit organizations or institutions such as the Preservation Society of Charleston and Historic Charleston Foundation have started to fundraise and use grants to allow them to place more emphasis on preserving African American heritage. For example, Historic Charleston Foundation is involved with preserving buildings on Mosquito Beach, which is part of Sol Legare Island. The Preservation Society of Charleston received a grant to document Black cemeteries.¹⁴ The National Trust in Historic Preservation has worked to develop more grants that aim to save African American cultural heritage as part of the modern movement in preservation.

While nonprofits are playing an increasing role in preserving African American heritage sites, individuals within those communities have also contributed much to the

¹³ Thomas Carter and Elizabeth Collins Cromley, *Invitation to Vernacular Architecture* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2005), 1.

¹⁴ “Preservation Society of Charleston Gets Support for Documenting Black Cemeteries,” Preservation Society of Charleston, May 9, 2023. <https://www.preservationsociety.org/preservation-society-of-charleston-gets-support-for-documenting-black-cemeteries/>.

effort. Individuals still play an important part in advocating for important cultural sites, especially when that place plays a role in their community.

Charleston Preservation Leaders

To answer the research question, the author interviewed five preservationists: Dr. Pernessa Seele (Lincolntonville Preservation and Historical Society), Bill “Cubby” Wilder (Mosquito Beach), Ernest Parks (Seashore Farmers Lodge), Greg Estevez (Hutchinson House), Richard Habersham (Phillips Community). The interviewees are considered to be preservation leaders in their respective communities, and they have each worked on preservation initiatives for either a specific site in their community or the community as a whole. Their projects are evidence of how significant African American history and resources are to the preservation landscape in Charleston. The larger goal of this study is to use the interviewees’ own words to see how their motivations and actions compare to others and show the evolution of the field of preservation.

Phillips Community

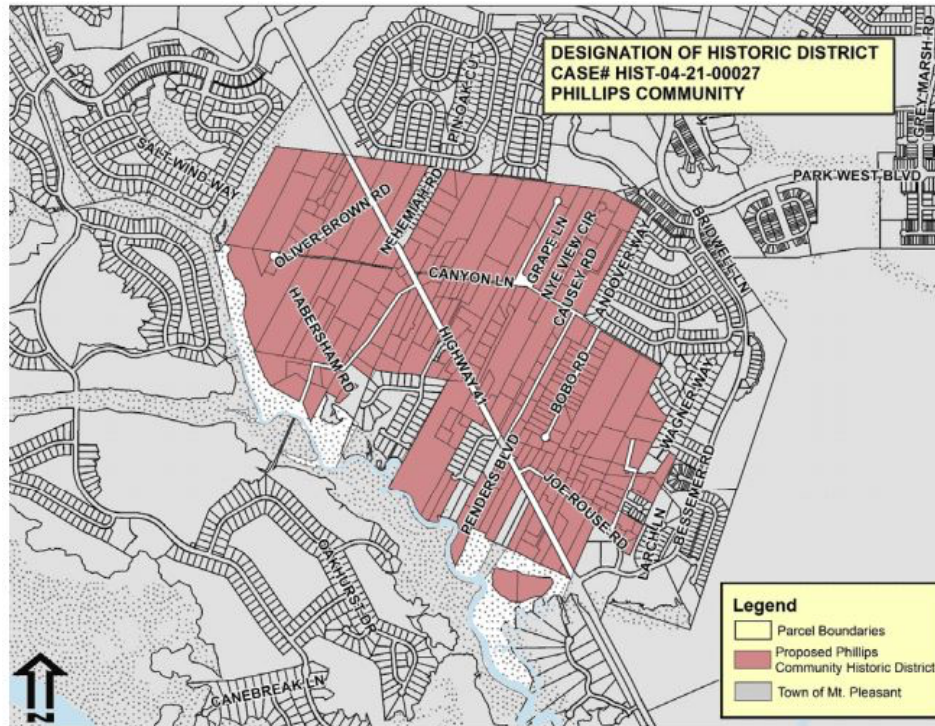


Figure 1.3: Map of the Phillips Community depicting the community’s boundaries and lots. Source: Preservation Society of Charleston.¹⁵

The Phillips Community is a settlement community that was created in 1878 by freedmen on land that was previously part of the Laurel Hill and Boone Hall plantations.¹⁶ It is currently located along Highway 41 near Horlbeck Creek in Mount Pleasant. With the expansion of Mount Pleasant, the community has faced multiple

¹⁵ “The Map of the Phillips Community Shows the Community’s Boundaries,” Accessed via the Preservation Society of Charleston on March 18, 2024. <https://www.preservationsociety.org/settlement-community-seeks-county-historic-designation/>.

¹⁶ Summer Ciomek, Mary Beth Reed, and Patrick Sullivan, *Charleston County Historic Resources Survey Update*, (Stone Mountain, G.A.: New South Associates, Inc., 2016), 20. [https://scdah.sc.gov/sites/scdah/files/Documents/Historic%20Preservation%20\(SHPO\)/Research/CharlestonCounty2016.pdf](https://scdah.sc.gov/sites/scdah/files/Documents/Historic%20Preservation%20(SHPO)/Research/CharlestonCounty2016.pdf).

threats to the landscape and historic resources over the past several decades. The expansion of Highway 41, which has already split the community, is an ongoing threat to the landscape and residents' properties. Although the community and its advocates recently won a battle by stopping the widening of the road, there is a high likelihood that the matter will be brought up again in the future.¹⁷ The Phillips Community is still mostly composed of African Americans whose families have owned land since the community was formed. In 2023, the Phillips Community was listed as a traditional cultural property on the National Register of Historic Places. This is the first listing of its kind in South Carolina.

Throughout all of the challenges the Phillips Community has faced in the past twenty-five years, Richard Habersham has led the community in resisting development and threats to the livelihood of residents. He is the President of the Phillips Community Association and is recognized around Charleston as a leader for the preservation initiatives for Phillips. His interview sheds light on how the landscape and built environment of historic Black communities has been erased in Mount Pleasant and why he has fought to ensure the same does not happen to his community.

¹⁷ "Phillips Community Reached Compromise on Highway 41, Now Faces Opposition," Southern Environmental Law Center, July 14, 2023. <https://www.southernenvironment.org/news/phillips-community-reached-compromise-on-highway-41-now-faces-opposition/>.

Lincolnvilleville



Figure 1.4: Old Jail in Lincolnvilleville, SC. Photo by author.¹⁸

Lincolnvilleville is located further inland at the border of Charleston and Dorchester counties near Summerville. Lincolnvilleville was established by Reverend Richard Harvey Cain and six other members of the African Methodist Church in 1867.¹⁹ In 1889, Lincolnvilleville became an incorporated town, and this charge was led by Samuel J. Lee, who had previously been a speaker of the SC House of Representatives during the Reconstruction Era.²⁰ Lincolnvilleville has been associated with several significant Black leaders in the field of education. The town currently has a Rosenwald school, as well as a

¹⁸ Robert Behre, “The Name Lincolnvilleville is the First and Surest Sign this SC Town is Different,” September 24, 2022, *Post & Courier* (Charleston, SC), Accessed on March 18, 2024, https://www.postandcourier.com/opinion/commentary/behre-the-name-lincolnvilleville-is-the-first-and-surest-sign-this-sc-town-is-different/article_74ec57ae-3ad3-11ed-a8a7-2771f6582beb.html.

¹⁹ “The Founder of Lincolnvilleville,” Lincolnvilleville Preservation and Historical Society, accessed February 15, 2024, <https://www.lincolnvillevillesc.org/bishop-richard-harvey-cain>.

²⁰ “History of Lincolnvilleville,” Lincolnvilleville Preservation and Historical Society, accessed February 15, 2024, <https://www.lincolnvillevillesc.org/history-of-lincolnvilleville>.

historic jail and church. The streetscape and layout has hardly changed since the town was founded.

Despite its historical significance, Lincolnville has not been extensively researched or documented. Pernessa Seele, who grew up in Lincolnville and has a family legacy associated with the founding of the town, has recently started preservation efforts to research and protect Lincolnville. She created the Lincolnville Preservation and Historical Society in 2021, and she has already formed partnerships with the National Park Service and Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor and started preservation projects to adaptively reuse the Old Jail as a town archive, restore the Wesley Baptist Church, and create a park for the community.²¹

Sol Legare Island: Mosquito Beach and Seashore Farmers Lodge

Sol Legare Island is located within the boundaries of James Island along the marsh. Historically part of a plantation owned by Solomon Legare, the land was given to freedmen after the Civil War. Sol Legare became a settlement community for African Americans who used the land for farming and the marsh for fishing and shrimping. The island is still largely an African American community that keeps its Gullah Geechee roots intact. The culture is still prevalent on the island, and the long, narrow property lines serve as evidence of a historic agricultural community.²²

²¹ Pernessa Seele interviewed by author, January 11, 2024.

²² “The Seashore Farmers Lodge: Preserving the Past to Educate the Future,” International African American Museum, accessed February 15, 2024, <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/the-seashore-farmers-lodge-preserving-the-past-to-educate-the-future-international-african-american-museum/HAWxdXPoKWQHIw?hl=en>.

The Seashore Farmers Lodge 767 is a significant building for the community, and many residents have generational ties to the structure. The Lodge was constructed c. 1915 by the island's residents to serve as a Mutual Aid Society. African Americans could not access banks and other resources at this time, so people paid their dues to the Lodge in order to support the community and act as an insurance policy for their times of need. This historic structure has been used for the same purpose throughout its existence, but hurricanes and a lack of funding for repairs caused the Lodge to become dilapidated. After a fundraising campaign led by Cubby Wilder and Ernest Parks, a restoration campaign on the Lodge began in 2009 and lasted approximately three years. The building is still used for community purposes, and it is also a museum and cultural center where artifacts from the Battle of Sol Legare (1863) and other historic pieces are housed.²³

Also located on Sol Legare and serving the same community, Mosquito Beach is also recognized as a historic and significant site. Mosquito Beach was one of the Black Beaches in the Charleston area, and it also served as a commercial section and gathering place for Black Charlestonians.²⁴ Surviving historic buildings like the Island Breeze restaurant and Pine Tree Hotel are currently being restored. Cubby Wilder owns these buildings and is leading the charge to restore Mosquito Beach to what it used to be in the mid-20th century.

²³ "The Seashore Farmers Lodge: Preserving the Past to Educate the Future," International African American Museum, accessed February 15, 2024.

²⁴ "The Black Beach," Historic Mosquito Beach, Historic Charleston Foundation, accessed February 15, 2024, <https://www.historicmosquitobeach.com/home/history/the-black-beach/>.

Both Cubby Wilder and Ernest Parks grew up on Sol Legare and have formative memories of the island. Cubby Wilder has been advocating for the community since he moved back to Sol Legare after serving in the military, and Ernest Parks became involved in preservation during the restoration of Seashore Farmers Lodge, and he has continued to play a role in the Lodge since then.



Figure 1.5: The Seashore Farmers Lodge on Sol Legare Island. Photo by author.



Figure 1.6: The Pine Tree Hotel on Mosquito Beach. Photo by author.

Edisto Island

Edisto Island is a barrier island along the South Carolina coast that has several nonprofits doing advocacy work for the land and historic buildings. The Edisto Island Open Land Trust and Edisto Island Historic Preservation Society have overseen several projects in recent years, but the one that is the most tied to Greg Estevez is the restoration of the Hutchinson House. The Hutchinson House was constructed by Henry Hutchinson in 1885. It is one of the oldest remaining structures on the island, and it is a significant

aspect of African American heritage on the island.²⁵ Born in 1860 on Peter’s Point Plantation, Henry Hutchinson was enslaved for the first five years of his life. Upon being freed due to the Emancipation Proclamation, his father, James Hutchinson, purchased 30 acres of land on Edisto Island and created his own business that focused on agriculture. Henry Hutchinson inherited his father’s land and continued his legacy by selling Sea Island Cotton and other crops. He built the Hutchinson House after his father’s death.²⁶

The Hutchinson House was constructed on Point of Pines Road as a four-bedroom, two-story frame dwelling on a masonry pier foundation with a side-gable roof. It was used as a residence for the Hutchinson family for almost one hundred years before it became vacant in the 1980s and fell into a dilapidated state.²⁷ The Edisto Island Open Land Trust purchased the building in 2016 for \$100,000 and bought a neighboring ten-acre lot in 2018. The fundraising campaign to restore the Hutchinson House began shortly after it was purchased, and the final phase of the restoration campaign should be completed in 2024.

Greg Estevez is Henry Hutchinson’s great-great grandson and has had a role in genealogical research for his family, restoring the Hutchinson House, and researching African American history on Edisto Island. He is the author of *Edisto Island: The African-American Journey*. While conducting research for the book, Estevez conducted

²⁵ “Hutchinson House History,” Edisto Island Open Land Trust, accessed December 13, 2023, <https://edisto.org/history/>.

²⁶ “Hutchinson House History,” Edisto Island Open Land Trust, accessed December 13, 2023.

²⁷ Joe Sugarman, “The House That Hutchinson Built: Preserving a Touchstone to Edisto Island’s Black History,” National Trust for Historic Preservation, *Preservation Magazine*, Winter 2021, <https://savingplaces.org/stories/the-house-that-hutchinson-built-preserving-a-touchstone-to-edisto-islands-black-history>.

personal interviews with Edisto Island residents with generational connections to African American heritage on the island.²⁸



Figure 1.7: Hutchinson House in 2021. Source: Edisto Island Open Land Trust.



Figure 1.8: Hutchinson House in 1900. Source: Edisto Island Open Land Trust.

Research Objectives

Interviews were used as the data collecting method for this study, and the answers served as the data set. The specific questions are listed in the methodology chapter, but they generally cover topics about each person's background, goals, motivations, preservation projects, strategies and partnerships, funding sources, and visions for the future. In order to ensure consistency and provide reliable data, each person was asked the same core set of questions. This thesis utilized primary and secondary sources when making comparisons between today's preservation movement and the early preservation movement in Charleston.

These five case studies reflect ongoing preservation efforts in the Charleston area, and they speak not only to how preservation has become more inclusive but also the

²⁸ Gregory Estavez, *Edisto Island: The African American Journey*, self-published, 2019, 2.

challenges faced when advocating for African American heritage. These sites are also associated with Gullah Geechee heritage and are located within the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor. This thesis aims to emphasize how each person became involved in the field, what led them to advocate for something meaningful to community members, and how this work is shifting the scope of what preservationists care about.

This thesis found that each person has a generational connection to their site, and the main motivation for their preservation work is to be able to keep the site or community intact for future generations. Some interviewees did note that they have felt pressure from developers, and this threat poses a risk to the integrity of the community and the livelihood of residents. The threat of development and the demolition of historic buildings were the main motivators for early preservationists. Grants are the primary funding source for all of the preservation projects, and these grants are often managed by an organization partnering with the preservationists. This differs from the early preservation movement because grants for preservation efforts did not exist, and there was not an abundance of local and national nonprofits to advocate for this work. Additional themes and comparisons are discussed in Chapter Four, as well as the comparison to early preservationists.

Chapter Overviews

Chapter Two uses relevant literature to provide the necessary background information for this thesis. Sources gathered for the literature review focus on the history of the Preservation Society of Charleston and Historic Charleston Foundation, inclusivity

in the field of preservation, and the shift in preserving vernacular architecture instead of only high style. The literature review includes additional information on conducting interviews and how oral histories are used in the field of preservation. Literature pertaining to who is looking into the next phase of preservation and who is studying nonprofit management is also assessed.

Chapter Three focuses on the methodology of this thesis and how the data was collected. This chapter explains why interviews were used as the data collection method. A list of the questions asked is included in this chapter, as well as a description of the setting of where each interview took place and how long the interview lasted. Chapter Three also discusses how the data analysis methods for the interviews, primary sources, and secondary sources.

Chapter Four analyzes the interviews and compares the results. The chapter begins with an analysis of Susan Pringle Frost and Frances Edmunds. Each interviewee's answers are compared to the others next, and any trends within the data, meaning any similar answers, are identified. The differences between the answers are also discussed. A comparison of the themes between the early and modern preservationists ends the chapter.

Chapter Five discusses the significance of this thesis and how it can be used as a tool to document the challenges faced by people who are preserving African American heritage. Areas of future research are also included in this chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The attempt to understand how modern African American preservation movements in the Lowcountry fit into the larger historical narrative of historic preservation requires engaging with three scholarly areas of study: the early preservation movement in Charleston, how the field has become more inclusive, and the role grassroots movements play in modern preservation efforts. This chapter begins with a discussion about the early preservation movement in Charleston and the people who were key figures in starting organizations that would serve an integral role in preserving the city. The relevant literature recounts preservation efforts in the 1920s and 1930s in Charleston is then examined by the author. This literature focuses on how the preservation movement was started by elite white women who had racial prejudices and a desire to save ancestral heritage. The chapter then transitions to discussing how the field of preservation became more inclusive starting in the 1970s and 1980s and cites modern literature that offers advice on how the field can continue to diversify in regard to the sites studied and the people included in preservation efforts, particularly African Americans. The chapter ends by discussing grassroots preservation in African American communities and how oral histories have been utilized. The last paragraph of this chapter briefly summarizes how this thesis will contribute to literature about preserving African American heritage. The growth of the African American heritage movement around Charleston is a significant historical process, and it needs to be incorporated into the larger historical narrative of preservation in Charleston.

The Start of the Preservation Movement

When describing how historic preservation began in the United States, the story of Ann Pamela Cunningham and the founding of the Mount Vernon Ladies Association in 1853 is often the starting point. In the nineteenth century, women began to form voluntary organizations for a variety of interests. Historic preservation began when Ann Pamela Cunningham established the Mount Vernon Ladies Association (MVLA) in order to raise enough funds to purchase and restore George Washington's house.²⁹ Although it took years of work, the MVLA was able to acquire Mount Vernon and restore it. Other networks of women in the nineteenth century attempted to form their own preservation groups that emulated the MVLA.³⁰ These preservation efforts usually focused on restoring a house that was associated with a famous American military figure as a form of ancestor worship.³¹ Ancestor worship is generally thought of in historic preservation as white women or men who are concerned with honoring their white ancestors for their role in history.³²

In the twentieth century, the model for preservation organizations changed slightly when Susan Pringle Frost founded the Society for the Preservation of Old Dwellings (SPOD) in 1920. Frost was still trying to save buildings that had deep ties to white Charlestonian heritage, but she was also responding to the threat of development in Charleston. Filling stations were being built in the most historic part of the peninsula, so

²⁹ Barbara J. Howe, "Women in Historic Preservation: The Legacy of Ann Pamela Cunningham," *The Public Historian* 12, no. 1 (1990), 33, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3378321>.

³⁰ Howe, "Women in Historic Preservation," 35.

³¹ Howe, "Women in Historic Preservation," 36.

³² Howe, "Women in Historic Preservation," 44.

Frost formed the SPOD in an effort to save the Joseph Manigault House.³³ The idea of some of Charleston’s most significant buildings being demolished spurred women in Charleston to come together to form the SPOD.³⁴ Susan Pringle Frost also purchased and repaired historic buildings on Tradd Street and other areas south of Broad Street.³⁵

A More Inclusive Movement: 1970-1990

The field of preservation has changed dramatically since the early movement. The steady increase in government protection and regulation over preservation contributed to a shift from a grassroots movement to a recognized profession.³⁶ The Antiquities Act of 1906 and the Historic Sites Act of 1935 were laws that helped shape historic preservation.³⁷ However, the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 has the most robust regulations and established agencies compared to past acts. One of the results of this act was the creation of the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP).

The National Park Service’s National Register Bulletin 15 states, “The National Register of Historic Places documents the appearance and importance of districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects significant in our prehistory and history.”³⁸ The

³³ Robert Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City: Historic Charleston Foundation 1947-1997*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 2-4.

³⁴ Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, 1.

³⁵ Bland, *Preserving Charleston’s Past*, 58.

³⁶ Erica Avrami, “From Passion to Public Policy: Making Preservation More Sustainable,” in *Bending the Future: 50 Ideas for the Next 50 Years of Historic Preservation in the United States*, Max Page and Marla Miller (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts, 2016), 49.

³⁷ John H. Sprinkle Jr., “Historic Preservation was Never Static,” in *Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States*, second edition. Randall Mason and Max Page (New York: Routledge, 2020), 371.

³⁸ National Register Bulletin 15, National Park Service, revised 1995, i.

properties nominated for the NRHP must be evaluated on their significance and integrity. The significance of the property must fall within at least one of four criterion: Criterion A is a place “associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history;” Criterion B is a property “associated with the lives of persons significant in our past;” Criterion C is a place that has “distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components many lack individual distinction;” Criterion D properties “have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.”³⁹

Traditional Cultural Properties

Although the NRHP has been a helpful tool for historic preservation, the four criteria did not capture all of the aspects of significance a place can have. In 1990, Patricia Parker and Thomas King wrote National Register Bulletin 38 where they identified what a traditional cultural property (TCP) is and how to evaluate its significance.⁴⁰ According to Bulletin 38, “The traditional cultural significance of a historic property, then, is significance derived from the role the property plays in a community’s historically rooted beliefs, customs, and practices.”⁴¹ Allowing a property to be nominated as a TCP broadened the range of properties being listed on the NRHP. Although not the only type of property that could be listed as a TCP, sites historically or

³⁹ National Register Bulletin 15, 2.

⁴⁰ National Register Bulletin 38, National Park Service, 1990, 1.

⁴¹ National Register Bulletin 38, 1.

currently used by indigenous peoples for religious or cultural traditions could be nominated for the NRHP.⁴² The introduction of TCPs was a step towards making the NRHP more inclusive and expanding the properties that needed to be preserved or protected. It caused change in the movement and was a reflection of the changing priorities of the field of preservation.

Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act

In addition to TCPs being established in 1990, the Native American Graves Protection Act (NAGPRA) was passed the same year.⁴³ NAGPRA “has provided for the repatriation and disposition of certain Native American human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony.”⁴⁴ The enactment of this federal law demonstrates that people recognized that academia, museums, and the government had abused their power and were attempting to correct their mistakes. Although NAGPRA is more commonly used in the fields of archaeology and anthropology, it is still heavily connected to preservation law. NAGPRA itself shows that perspectives on Native American heritage and practices had shifted in the twentieth century because of the differences between it and the Antiquities Act of 1906, “which defined Native American human remains found on federal land as objects of antiquity, not as people.”⁴⁵ The

⁴² National Register Bulletin 38, 1.

⁴³ Stephen E. Nash and Chip Colwell, “NAGPRA at 30: The Effects of Repatriation,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 49, no.1 (2020), 225, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-010220-075435>.

⁴⁴ “Facilitating Respectful Return,” National Park Service, updated May 23, 2022, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nagpra/index.htm>.

⁴⁵ Nash and Colwell, “NAGPRA at 30,” 227.

National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 also helped set up future federal legislation for the protection of Native American heritage preservation.⁴⁶

Inclusion of African American Heritage

During the 1950s to 1970s, the United States experienced many social movements that “have reshaped American culture, including the field of historic preservation.”⁴⁷

Steps towards diversifying the field were taken in 1984 with the publication of *Historic Black Resources: A Handbook for the Identification, Documentation, and Evaluation of Historic African-American Properties in Georgia* by Carole Meritt at the direction of the Georgia State Historic Preservation Office. Around the same time, other state and federal entities also reached out to previously ignored communities.⁴⁸ Some State Historic Preservation Offices, such as Georgia’s and Alabama’s, created committees for African American minorities to have a say in preservation efforts.⁴⁹

The Modern Preservation Movement and Oral Histories

Modern Movement to Preserve African American Heritage

As preservation has expanded to survey African American communities, the literature has also continued to grow. This literature serves as a point of reflection on how

⁴⁶ Nash and Colwell, “NAGPRA at 30,” 227.

⁴⁷ Gail Dubrow, “From Minority to Majority: Building On and Moving Beyond the Politics of Identity in Historic Preservation,” in *Bending the Future: 50 Ideas for the Next 50 Years of Historic Preservation in the United States*, Max Page and Marla Miller (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2016), 72.

⁴⁸ Antoinette J. Lee, “The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Historic Preservation,” in *A Richer Heritage: Historic Preservation in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Robert E. Stripe (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 358.

⁴⁹ Lee, “The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Historic Preservation,” 359.

the field can become more diverse not only in what it preserves but also in who is doing the work. Ideally, as the field of preservation professionals diversifies, preservationists will better represent the demographics of America.⁵⁰ A term that is also being used in literature is the “democratization of preservation,” which “suggests we must move the protection and reuse of older and historic environments from the purview of the few to work that all of our citizens can embrace.”⁵¹ This term also calls for interpretation of sites to include the history of minorities in an effort to reflect on America’s difficult past.⁵² Democratizing preservation can also refer to making the information on resources more accessible to the general public and create transparency about what preservation programs are being emphasized.⁵³

The literature acknowledges that the field has become much more diverse by prioritizing traditionally marginalized communities and by emphasizing the preservation of cultural heritage in addition to buildings. The National Park Service and National Trust have promoted programs that encourage researching cultural heritage and saving vernacular architecture in African American communities, and it is a topic of discussion at the National Trust’s conferences.⁵⁴ This is important because when preservationists

⁵⁰ Antoinette J. Lee, “From Historic Architecture to Cultural Heritage: A Journey Through Diversity, Identity, and Community,” *Future Anterior: Journal of Historic Preservation, Theory, and Criticism* 1, no. 2 (2004), 22.

⁵¹ David J. Brown, “A Preservation Movement for All Americans,” in *Bending the Future: 50 Ideas for the Next 50 Years of Historic Preservation in the United States*, Max Page and Marla Miller (Amherst: University of Massachusetts), 59.

⁵² Brown, “A Preservation Movement for All Americans,” 60.

⁵³ Allison Arlotta and Erica Avrami, “Appendix: Preservation Engagement in Questions of Inclusion: A Literature Review,” in *Issues in Preservation Policy: Preservation and Social Inclusion*, Erica Avrami (New York: Columbia Books on Architecture and the City, 2020).

⁵⁴ Dubrow, “From Minority to Majority,” 72-73, and Lee, “From Historic Architecture to Cultural Heritage,” 17.

began studying vernacular architecture, the surrounding area was not interpreted as a significant “Black landscape.”⁵⁵ During the 1980s when this started, “cultural diversity may have seemed like a controversial topic,” but by the start of the twenty-first century, it had become “mainstream in numerous government programs at the local, state, and national levels, as well as non-profit sector organizations.”⁵⁶

The literature also views modern preservation efforts as a “social reform movement.”⁵⁷ Preservation can be used nationally or at the community level as “vehicles for positive change, to give voice and spatial recognition to the underrepresented and the disempowered, and to challenge hegemonic narratives.”⁵⁸ In *Issues of Preservation Policy*, Erica Avrami views historic preservation as a social justice movement where individuals should be the ones enacting change due to the government being slow to alter policies.⁵⁹ While the government does not implement new policies quickly, national organizations such as the National Trust have influenced inclusivity at the community level.

Grassroots Preservation in the Modern Movement

The National Trust for Historic Preservation has established itself as a national proponent of inclusivity and diversity in the field by consistently introducing new

⁵⁵ Walter Hood, “Introduction,” in *Black Landscapes Matter*, Walter Hood and Grace Mitchell Tada (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2020), 3.

⁵⁶ Lee, “From Historic Architecture to Cultural Heritage,” 17.

⁵⁷ Max Page and Randall Mason, “Rethinking the Roots of the Historic Preservation Movement,” in *Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States*, first edition, Max Page and Randall Mason (New York: Routledge, 2004), 11.

⁵⁸ Erica Avrami, “Preservation’s Reckoning,” in *Issues in Preservation Policy: Preservation and Social Inclusion*, Erica Avrami (New York: Columbia Books on Architecture and the City, 2020).

⁵⁹ Avrami, “Preservation’s Reckoning,” in *Issues of Preservation Policy*.

research and grant programs that focus on African American heritage. The emphasis on inclusivity in preservation has trickled down to influence local organizations. In addition, grassroots preservation still occurs in communities and is led by “minority organizations and individuals.”⁶⁰ These individuals are doing preservation work in their own communities, but they are usually not trained in historic preservation. “Traditionally marginalized communities, including African Americans, as well as immigrants and first-generation Americans, have had to work out-side of the formal preservation system to control their stories.”⁶¹

This brings up the question of who should be doing preservation work and if individuals doing grassroots preservation need to partner with other non-profits or consultants.⁶² It is common for the people who do grassroots preservation work to not consider themselves preservationists.⁶³ In “Getting to the Heart of Preservation,” Kristen Deathridge refers to grassroots as only describing “preservationists who consciously work to preserve the history of their own communities, even those who choose to partner with government or entrepreneurial entities.”⁶⁴

These partnerships are reflective of the modern preservation movement because they often involve a “mainstream preservation group” attempting to diversify their

⁶⁰ Lee, “From Historic Architecture to Cultural Heritage,” 22.

⁶¹ Kristen Baldwin Deathridge, “Getting to the Heart of Preservation: The Place of Grassroots Efforts in the Contemporary Preservation Movement,” in *Radical Roots: Public History and a Tradition of Social Justice Activism*, edited by Denise D. Meringolo, 555-574. Amherst College Press, 2021, 556. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3998/mpub.12366495.25>.

⁶² Lee, “From Historic Architecture to Cultural Heritage,” 22.

⁶³ Deathridge, “Getting to the Heart of Preservation,” 556.

⁶⁴ Deathridge, “Getting to the Heart of Preservation,” 557.

preservation work. In turn, this provides “resources and legitimacy” to individuals and groups that have taken a grassroots approach to preservation.⁶⁵ These “alliances” can lead to more recognition for grassroots movements, thereby educating a wider range of people about the issues a marginalized community is facing.⁶⁶ A partnership could also serve as an opportunity to expand the organization’s mission and create a preservation plan “independent of the interests of established preservation groups.”⁶⁷

Oral Histories

Oral histories are being used more and more to document how individuals preserve heritage within their communities. Some communities lack a robust built environment that retains a lot of historic fabric, but oral histories help establish the relation someone has to a site.⁶⁸ Oral histories are also associated with “memory work,” which is important for community members when assessing their own identity.⁶⁹ Although there is an array of literature on oral histories and many universities have oral history programs, there is a limited amount of relevant literature on oral histories used to document preservation practices.

⁶⁵ Dubrow, “From Minority to Majority,” 74.

⁶⁶ Dubrow, “From Minority to Majority,” 74.

⁶⁷ Dubrow, “From Minority to Majority,” 74.

⁶⁸ Arlotta and Avrami, “Preservation Engagement in Questions of Inclusion.”

⁶⁹ Arlotta and Avrami, “Preservation Engagement in Questions of Inclusion.”

Case Study: Charleston and Susan Pringle Frost

The case of prominent figure Susan Pringle Frost exemplifies the change that has occurred in preservation in Charleston. Susan Pringle Frost and the early preservation movement in Charleston serve as a case study for examining a critical versus uncritical approach to how this movement has been interpreted. The two authors utilized for this comparison are Robert Weyeneth, author of *Historic Preservation for a Living City: Historic Charleston Foundation, 1947-1997*, and Stephanie Yuhl, author of *A Golden Haze of Memory: The Making of Historic Charleston* and “Charleston is Largely a Matter of Feeling” in *Giving Preservation a History*. These sources help demonstrate the alternate lenses that have been used when viewing the preservation movement in Charleston, and Yuhl’s work paints a picture of how Frost’s preservation efforts impacted the city’s African American population.

Weyeneth’s recounting of preservation in Charleston during the 1920s depicts it as a timeline with little information on the social issues happening in the city at the time. He acknowledges the deteriorated state of Charleston, and many Charlestonians were so desperate for money that they were selling architectural features from their homes to northern tourists.⁷⁰ However, race was not discussed as much as it is in critical literature even though African Americans made up the majority of the population south of Broad Street.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, 3.

⁷¹ Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, 3.

Weyeneth describes Frost as “a dynamic and unorthodox real estate agent, suffragist, and feminist,” but he does not mention any prejudices or unethical motives that she had.⁷² Although Frost started SPOD and laid the foundation for preservation in the city, Albert Simons and other Charleston men played a vital role in preservation by passing a zoning ordinance in 1931.⁷³ This ordinance differed from any other preservation government intervention that had previously occurred because “Charleston sought to target a whole neighborhood, not just individual buildings.”⁷⁴ While there are many more details that could be covered on the early preservation movement, uncritical sources repeat the same timeline and do not emphasize the people negatively impacted by some of these policies.

Yuhl’s critical interpretation of the early preservation movement in Charleston also begins with a synopsis of Susan Pringle Frost. Twentieth-century literature about Frost celebrates her for restoring houses on Tradd Street and rescuing the built environment south of Broad Street. However, more recent literature published in the twenty-first century provides a modern interpretation of Frost’s motives and how her work impacted the different demographics in Charleston.

In *A Golden Haze of Memory*, Stephanie Yuhl emphasizes that Susan Pringle Frost and her circle of like-minded women had a strong desire to save the buildings that served “as a concrete reminder of traditional cultural customs and values that were

⁷² Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, 4.

⁷³ Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, 15-16.

⁷⁴ Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, 18.

synonymous, in their hearts and minds, with Charleston.”⁷⁵ The buildings that Frost and the other SPOD members advocated for and purchased were directly tied to their background. These were elite women who wanted Charleston to have the appearance and prosperity of the Antebellum years, and they achieved that vision by restoring residences with high-style architecture south of Broad Street.⁷⁶ Some authors considered Frost an “urban preservationist” because she did not want to save one structure- she was concerned about an entire city.⁷⁷

Frost was familiar with the South of Broad neighborhood that was home to many African Americans.⁷⁸ Structures in the area that were originally built by wealthy individuals as single-family residences had been converted into apartments or were vacant. It was common to see dilapidated structures in Charleston due to the Civil War and the earthquake of 1886 because the city had obtained a lot of damage, and people had very little money to make repairs. Susan Pringle Frost was vocal about needing to save the structures in the neighborhood or risk having Charleston lose its historic character. “Frost further appealed to her listeners’ racial and class anxieties by underscoring the ‘imminent danger of further deterioration on account of the tenants now occupying it,’” says Yuhl.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Stephanie Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory: The Making of Historic Charleston* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 24.

⁷⁶ Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory*, 31.

⁷⁷ Howe, “Women in Historic Preservation: The Legacy of Ann Pamela Cunningham,” 39.

⁷⁸ Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory*, 31.

⁷⁹ Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory*, 26.

It is interesting to note that although Frost had racial prejudices, she hired an African American craftsman, Thomas Mayhem Pinckney, to restore her properties on Tradd Street.⁸⁰ Frost seemed to have a deep appreciation for Thomas Mayhem Pinckney's work, but the SPOD did not have the same gratitude for the "enslaved black labor" that helped build high-style architecture.⁸¹ This became more apparent throughout the 1920s and 1930s when preservationists called for the destruction of "modest vernacular, usually working-class and black-occupied, structures."⁸²

By the end of the 1920s, preservation in Charleston was beginning to change. In 1928, Captain Alston Deas became the president of SPOD, and the organization began to formally work with the Charleston Museum.⁸³ What was once a hobby taken up by a group of women had transformed into a genuine concern over the future of the city. Men, such as Albert Simons and Alston Deas, began to control the preservation efforts in Charleston, and the fight to save the Heyward-Washington House demonstrated just how much preservation had evolved in Charleston. The SPOD worked with the Charleston Museum and male leaders in planning and the government in order to acquire the Heyward-Washington House in an attempt to turn it into a house museum.⁸⁴

This event marked a shift in who held the power in the preservation movement. Historic preservation in Charleston was no longer just a grassroots movement started by

⁸⁰ Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory*, 31.

⁸¹ Stephanie Yuhl, "Charleston is Largely a Matter of Feeling," in *Giving Preservation a History: Histories of Historic Preservation in the United States*, second ed. Randall Mason and Max Page (New York: Routledge, 2020), 200.

⁸² Yuhl, "Charleston is Largely a Matter of Feeling," 200.

⁸³ Yuhl, "Charleston is Largely a Matter of Feeling," 210.

⁸⁴ Yuhl, "Charleston is Largely a Matter of Feeling," 210.

women. Rather, it had become a field that architects, urban planners, and government officials wanted to control, and it demonstrated the power dynamics of the city. Elite women would have contacted other socialites for help with fundraising for preservation efforts, but men reached out to other professionals for assistance, and the preservation movement started to become more formalized.⁸⁵ This was seen in 1931 when the city adopted zoning laws that created the Old and Historic District and established the Board of Architectural Review as a way to enforce the ordinance.

However, preservation in Charleston in the 1930s was still deeply rooted in nostalgia.⁸⁶ Albert Simons led the Board of Architectural Review for decades and sculpted the city into his own perception of how it should look. The Board of Architectural Review did provide regulations over how the exterior facade should appear from the streetscape. This desire to promote historic preservation was reinforced by the amount of tourism Charleston started to have in the 1930s. While this was good for Charleston's growth, it negatively impacted the African American demographic on the peninsula. Although Simons considered himself progressive, "he struggled with 'instinctive racial prejudices hard to overcome even with the best intent.'"⁸⁷ Simons' policies actively gentrified downtown Charleston and displaced African Americans. Black residents were moved up the peninsula to affordable housing funded by the New Deal.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Yuhl, "Charleston is Largely a Matter of Feeling," 211.

⁸⁶ Yuhl, "Charleston is Largely a Matter of Feeling," 213.

⁸⁷ Yuhl, "Charleston is Largely a Matter of Feeling," 213.

⁸⁸ Yuhl, "Charleston is Largely a Matter of Feeling," 213.

This early preservation movement is often remembered as being great for saving Charleston's built environment, but the impact it had on African Americans is often still overlooked. This movement was not inclusive, and Susan Pringle Frost's SPOD began as an organization for women from wealthy families. Saving the historic fabric of high-style buildings also preserved the workspaces associated with Black people, but this was a collateral positive benefit and not initially part of the narrative. However, these spaces are being reinterpreted now to include stories on the enslaved population and freed Black workers. It took decades for preservation to begin to diversify, and it took even longer for it to be incorporated as part of the history of preservation in scholarly literature.

How this Thesis Fits into Current Literature

This thesis contributes to the more recent literature being published about oral histories used for preservation purposes. Originally, literature about preservation efforts focused on the roots of the movement rather than the future of preservation. More recently, books such as *Bending the Future* and the second edition of *Giving Preservation a History* have helped fill this void. This thesis ties the early grassroots preservation movement in Charleston to preservation efforts happening today in African American communities. This thesis uses the information gathered from interviews to analyze how individuals are completing preservation work using grassroots methods. There is some literature on modern grassroots movements, but this has also not been written about in depth in scholarly literature.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The data collection and analysis methods used in this thesis aimed to gather information on the preservation work happening in African American communities and compare it to the work early preservationists did in Charleston. This study involved interviewing five grassroots preservationists who are leading the efforts to save African American heritage in their communities. The National Trust for Historic Preservation defines grassroots advocacy as a “collective citizen action to influence decision makers” with the mission to “activate a broad group of people to take action on an issue and to give those people the tools to communicate to their elected officials effectively.”⁸⁹ The definition of cultural heritage has changed as society has become more inclusive, and it now “encompasses architecture, both monumental and vernacular, gardens, industrial facilities, cities, and whole landscapes.”⁹⁰ In this thesis, “heritage” refers to tangible resources that are either a building or an existing community.

The oral history best practices noted by the Oral History Association guided the process of scheduling, conducting, and transcribing the interviews.⁹¹ The purpose of using this methodology was to effectively document the preservation work being done while also noting each individual’s motivations and goals for saving their community’s

⁸⁹ Rhonda Sincavage, *Developing a Grassroots Network*, (Washington D.C.: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2020), 2. <https://cdn.savingplaces.org/2023/05/22/09/21/33/688/Advocacy-Toolkit-202007.pdf>.

⁹⁰ Marta de la Torre, “Values and Heritage Conservation,” *Heritage & Society*, Volume 6, Issue 2 (2013), 155-166, DOI: [10.1179/2159032X13Z.00000000011](https://doi.org/10.1179/2159032X13Z.00000000011).

⁹¹ “Best Practices,” Oral History Association, accessed November 29, 2023, <https://oralhistory.org/best-practices/>.

heritage, as well as to use the individual's own words to access information about the motivations. Oral histories have been used for a multitude of reasons, but best practices have not always been used when conducting interviews. It is common for interviewers to have preconceived notions about the interviewee, especially if it is being done for survey purposes, which was the case for the first round of oral histories conducted by New South Associates in the Stoney Community in Beaufort County, South Carolina.⁹² There is also mixed information on the impact that the differences between the interviewer's and interviewee's race, gender, and age can have on the oral history.⁹³

The data collection method relied on interview questions being open-ended to allow for people to fully answer the questions. Data collection was completed in two phases: first interviewing modern preservationists in African American communities and then using primary and secondary sources to gather information on early preservationists in Charleston. The data analysis method takes a narrative approach by comparing each person's answers in terms of their background, goals, motivators, preservation work, funding sources, partnerships, and vision for the future. The similarities and differences between today's leaders and early preservationists were then analyzed.

⁹² Emma Grace Sprinkle, "An Investigation of Community-Defined Boundaries and Important Sites," *Tiger Prints* (2023), 19. https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/all_theses/4018.

⁹³ Kenneth R. Kirby, "Phenomenology and the Problems of Oral History," *Oral History Review* 35, no. 1 (2008): 24. muse.jhu.edu/article/241266.

Data Collection

Modern Preservationists

Five interviewees were selected to try to provide a representation of different grassroots preservation efforts centered around African American historic places in the Lowcountry. For this study, the interviewees were selected because of their relation to an African American community, ongoing heritage preservation in the community, and their role in the preservation work. Each person has led a preservation project either for a single building or for a larger portion of a community and landscape. The five people interviewed were: Dr. Pernessa Seele (Lincolntonville), Bill “Cubby” Wilder (Mosquito Beach, Sol Legare), Ernest Parks (Seashore Farmers Lodge, Sol Legare), Greg Esteves (Edisto Island), and Richard Habersham (Phillips Community). Each person is well known in the preservation field in Charleston because they appear in the media, and they also have a history of working with Clemson University’s historic preservation program or the Warren Lasch Conservation Center.

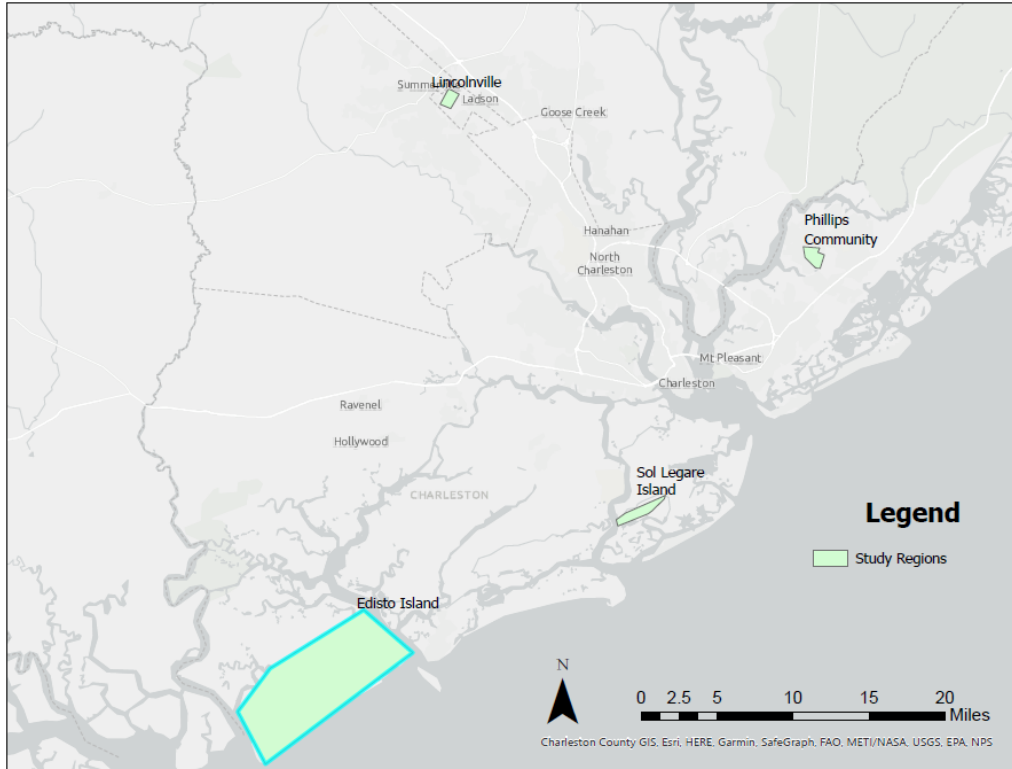


Figure 3.1: Map of study communities. Created by author.

The questions asked at each interview were:

1. Can you please confirm your preferred title with respect to the project?
2. Before talking about your preservation work, I am hoping that you can tell me a little about yourself, and your path to your work at [individual site]? What would you like us to know about you and your background?
3. What skills do you draw from your personal or professional experiences in your preservation and advocacy work at [individual site]?
4. Do you have any formative memories of [individual site]?
5. Will you please tell us a little about your project or site and what makes it important?
6. What motivated you to start working at [individual site]?
7. Do you consider yourself a preservationist?
8. What are your goals for the work you're doing at [individual site]?
9. Will you please tell us about the projects you have done at [individual site]?
 - a. Was restoring the [individual building] to a specific period important to telling its story?
10. To do all of these preservation initiatives, what tools have you used?

11. Have you partnered with another organization or network of people for your work at [individual site]?
12. Have you been able to find funding sources for this project?
13. Have you found colleagues or counterparts doing this type of work in related places?
14. Do you have a vision for the future of preservation of African American heritage in the Lowcountry?

Their oral history transcripts make up Appendix A through E.

The interview questions for oral histories are open-ended and allow for the interviewee to speak on a subject as much as they want. These questions were created with an emphasis on their backgrounds, goals, motivations, funding sources, and preservation efforts in order to make comparisons for the analysis. The list above includes the core questions that were asked to each interviewee but not any follow up questions that occurred on a case-by-case basis.

The interview questions were given to each interview ahead of time along with an informed consent form. All of the interviews were conducted in one session that varied in time from forty minutes to ninety minutes. Interviewees sometimes answered multiple questions with one response. Prior to conducting interviews, approval was required from Clemson's Institutional Review Board (IRB). IRB approval was secured in early December 2023. Two interviews took place at the Clemson Design Center in Charleston, one interview was conducted via Zoom, one took place at the Seashore Farmers Lodge, and one was conducted at the Lincolnville Town Hall. An iPhone was used to record each interview. Rev was used to transcribe two of the recordings, Otter.ai was used to transcribe two of the recordings, and a transcript was provided by Zoom for the interview

conducted on that platform. For all of the transcripts, the author made edits to make sure the transcript aligned with the audio recording.

Early Preservationists

Primary and secondary sources were used to collect data on Susan Pringle Frost. Due to time constraints, extensive archival research on Susan Pringle Frost could not be done for this thesis. Secondary sources, such as *Preserving Charleston's Past, Shaping Its Future* by Sidney Bland, were interpreted to make up for this. Although past interviews of Frost could not be located, two letters that she had written were analyzed. One was from Susan Pringle Frost to the county of Charleston in 1922 mentioning the state of Tradd Street and Bedon's Alley, and the other was a letter written by Frost for the Charleston News and Courier in 1941 describing her preservation work. All of these sources were analyzed in order to find information on Frost's background, preservation sites, goals, and motivations. Primary sources accessed from Historic Charleston Foundation's archives were used for the analysis of Frances Edmunds. These primary sources consisted solely of speeches she gave in the 1960s and 1970s where she spoke about her own goals and the work of Historic Charleston Foundation. Robert Weyeneth's *Historic Preservation for a Living City* was used for additional information about the Ansonborough Rehabilitation Program and urban renewal.

Data Analysis

Narrative Description

Individual narratives were constructed for each early and modern preservationist and then comparisons were made. An analysis of the data about Susan Pringle Frost is discussed first to provide context for the current preservation initiatives in Charleston, followed by an analysis of Frances Edmunds. Separating this discussion into two sections provides a midpoint to compare and contrast how the preservation movement has evolved in Charleston. Then, each modern preservationist's answers are compared to each other's, and themes are identified amongst their answers. An overall comparison between the themes from Susan Pringle Frost, Frances Edmunds, and the modern preservationists ends the chapter.

These methods of data collection and analysis were selected in order to have as much material in the preservationist's own words as possible. Conducting oral histories of modern preservationists allowed for each person to elaborate on each topic, and analyzing the transcripts using a narrative approach meant that they were quoted throughout the chapter. By using primary sources of Susan Pringle Frost and Frances Edmunds, their own words could also be used to analyze her preservation work. Secondary sources provided supplemental information that was necessary for the data analysis. The analysis portion of this thesis primarily focuses on identifying themes within the interviewees' answers and making comparisons to note the preservation efforts happening in African American communities today.

Thematic Coding

Thematic coding was done for the modern preservationists' motivations, goals, and visions for the future in order to complement the narrative description with a quantitative analysis. This was completed to get a more objective basis for comparison. The process of thematic coding started with the author reading the interview transcripts with an inductive approach, where common themes were then identified amongst the answers. Then, the frequencies of these themes were quantified by counting the sentences that related to each theme to obtain a raw frequency, which is displayed in a table. A percentage of how much of each person's answer consisted of certain themes was then determined and displayed in a chart. Each preservationists' answers for their motivations were thematically coded by the following themes: community infrastructure, family legacy, community legacy, threat of development, importance of African American history, and threat of structural collapse. Their goals were categorized by economic sovereignty, community legacy, heritage sovereignty, and property ownership. Their visions were split into six categories: community protection, property ownership, community legacy, control over development, the importance of African American history, and communicating with African American preservationists. Table 4.1 in the Analysis chapter provides the definitions for each of the themes.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter analyzes data by using primary and secondary sources about Susan Pringle Frost, primary sources about Frances Edmunds, and interviews conducted by the author of five modern preservationists. The twentieth-century preservation movement in Charleston is analyzed at the beginning of the chapter in order to provide context for the preservation initiatives seen today. A discussion of the similarities and differences between the interviewees makes up the second part of this chapter. This portion of the analysis covers which interview questions directly pertain to answering the research question of this thesis. The goal for this chapter is to analyze how modern preservationists compare to each other and Susan Pringle Frost and Frances Edmunds in terms of their preservation sites, motivations, goals, and strategies.

Analysis of the Early Preservation Movement in Charleston

One secondary source and two primary sources are used for this analysis. Sidney Bland's *Preserving Charleston's Past, Shaping Its Future: The Life and Times of Susan Pringle Frost* is a biography of the founder of the Society for the Preservation of Old Dwellings (SPOD). Bland cites an array of primary sources in his book, making it a valuable resource for anyone studying the early preservation movement in Charleston. Two primary sources were found to contribute to this analysis: a letter Susan Pringle Frost wrote to the Charleston News & Courier in 1941 and a letter written by Frost to the State of South Carolina in 1922, both accessed through the Preservation Society of

Charleston's archives. All of these sources combined help analyze Frost's preservation sites, motivations, goals, and strategies.

Preservation Sites

Susan Pringle Frost is well known for starting the SPOD in 1920, but her real estate career began over a decade earlier in 1909, where she bought and restored historic buildings and then sold them as single-family residences. These structures were initially located on East Tradd Street, but her focus area expanded to eventually include properties on St. Michael's Alley, Bedon's Alley, and East Bay, to name a few. These streets were located in a dense, urban environment on the Charleston peninsula. As her preservation career continued, she became involved in advocating for the preservation initiatives in the entire Old and Historic District, which was established in 1931.

Motivations

Her desire to succeed in real estate was motivated by a lack of personal funds and her father's poor health.⁹⁴ At the time Frost stepped into real estate, many other realtors did as well with the hope of taking advantage of the booming market.⁹⁵ Susan Pringle Frost was motivated by this competition at the beginning of her real estate career, and as her career continued, her primary motivation was to save Charleston's historic buildings with little regard for making a substantial profit.

⁹⁴ Bland, *Preserving Charleston's Past*, 46.

⁹⁵ Bland, *Preserving Charleston's Past*, 47.

Susan Pringle Frost's goals and motivations for her preservation work are entwined with a romantic view of Charleston's history and the city she knew as a child. In addition to wanting to save Charleston's architectural features, she worked to save the character of the city and revive the streets south of Broad.⁹⁶ Her ideals about Charleston's character stemmed from how the city appeared during the Antebellum Era with its streetscape and mixture of residential and commercial buildings. Frost sought to revive the streets south of Broad that had become dilapidated and also prevent historic buildings from being demolished to make way for urban renewal efforts, such as the construction of filling stations.

With many of the buildings south of Broad being used as tenements and the owners not taking care of their properties, they had fallen into a dilapidated state. African American tenants had made up the majority population of the neighborhood since the Civil War ended. As a consequence of Frost restoring houses south of Broad, the African American population was displaced.⁹⁷ In 1922, Frost wrote to the County of Charleston about her experience with Bedon's Alley, stating that:

There are some negroes in the neighborhood but these negroes are of a very respectable class and this deponent has never seen nor heard of any disorder or disturbance in the said neighborhood. This deponent knows that Tradd Street in this vicinity is being reclaimed and established as a white neighborhood.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Bland, *Preserving Charleston's Past*, 50.

⁹⁷ Bland, *Preserving Charleston's Past*, 52.

⁹⁸ Susan Pringle Frost to County of Charleston, October 23, 1922, Susan Pringle Frost correspondence 1920-1927, accessed from Preservation Society of Charleston January 31, 2024.

The language in this statement is telling of Susan P. Frost's motivations at removing the African American population from Tradd Street. It was not an inadvertent consequence of her work, but a target aspect of the neighborhood change she sought. Although Frost cared deeply about saving historic buildings, it would be impossible to analyze her work without mentioning how race played into her motivations. In addition to the streetscapes and architecture of Charleston, she viewed race as a key element of the character of the neighborhood. This quote supports the theory that she desired to revert the south of Broad neighborhood back to how it would have appeared during the Antebellum period with White people not only owning but also living in these historic buildings.

Goals

Susan Pringle Frost's goals centered around saving architectural features and halting the destruction of historic buildings for modern filling stations. In a 1916 letter from Frost to W.W. Ball quoted in *Preserving Charleston's Past*, Susan Frost described her ultimate goal for Tradd Street,

It is one of the very oldest streets in the city, and was originally occupied only by the best people, as the fine character of the old brick houses there testify.... It is my firm purpose to redeem the whole street from end to end from the horrible conditions that parts of it have been in for so many years, and put it back where it was for so many years before my knowledge.⁹⁹

Frost thought highly of the historic buildings on Tradd Street and associated them with a quality of person highly tied to race. She believed that she needed to save the

⁹⁹ Bland, *Preserving Charleston's Past*, 50.

buildings and the character of the neighborhood from the slumlords that owned them and the largely Black inhabitants within it. The statement “occupied only by the best people” implies both class and likely racial differences. The end of her quote where she refers to wanting to “put [Tradd] back where it was for so many years before my knowledge” implies that she wants to restore the buildings back to single-family residences, which would ultimately displace the Black population.

Frost created her own revolving fund and owned multiple properties at once. Since Frost’s purpose was to save structures even if that meant losing money, she would wait for the right buyer who appreciated the historic iron and woodwork. In the meantime, she purchased more properties to keep the cycle going.¹⁰⁰ This suggests that financial gain could not have been a goal or motivator for her work.

Strategies and Partnerships

Despite being from a prominent family, Susan Pringle Frost did not have the capital at hand to fund all of her real estate ambitions. Instead, she relied on loans from Irene DuPont and Ernest and her cousin, Nell Pringle, to continue purchasing properties that were at risk of demolition.¹⁰¹ For her entire career, Frost was constantly battling debt while simultaneously taking out more loans for her projects. The ups and downs of the Charleston housing market between the 1910s-1940s made it even more difficult for her

¹⁰⁰ Bland, *Preserving Charleston’s Past*, 51.

¹⁰¹ Bland, *Preserving Charleston’s Past*, 56.

to combine business with preservation.¹⁰² However, the lack of profit margins never deterred Susan Pringle Frost from saving some of the city's most historic residences.

She purchased many houses throughout her real estate career, but she did not completely restore all of them. Instead, most were stabilized and sold to a buyer to be restored.¹⁰³ Frost continued her real estate business once she founded the SPOD in 1920 with the help of her cousin, Nell Pringle.¹⁰⁴ The creation of the SPOD was prompted by the threat of the Joseph Manigault House being destroyed to make way for a filling station. The strategies of buying real estate were relevant skills and shared motivations with those she exhibited in starting a preservation organization. Her real estate was not cost effective, though many restorations would be considered successful. Today, in a world where grants are a primary tool for historic preservation, it is hard to conceive of a time when every effort to save a building relied on frantic fundraising from personal acquaintances or taking out personal loans. Frost was called to do preservation because of her family's history, which was racist and built on inflexible views of social order tied to white supremacy. Her language in letters gives the impression that she wanted to revert Charleston buildings back to when historically significant Charlestonians owned them pre-Civil War.

¹⁰² Bland, *Preserving Charleston's Past*, 59.

¹⁰³ Bland, *Preserving Charleston's Past*, 61.

¹⁰⁴ Bland, *Preserving Charleston's Past*, 65.

Analysis of the Preservation Movement Between the 1940s-1970s

This portion of the analysis aims to provide another comparison point to show the evolution of preservation movements in Charleston. Susan Pringle Frost's work in the 1910s and 1920s is what started preservation in Charleston, and the establishment of the SPOD was the start of a more organized grassroots movement in the city. This section focuses on another prominent figure in preservation and her respective organization: Frances Edmunds and the Historic Charleston Foundation. For the discussion on Frances Edmunds, the author reviewed speeches Edmunds had given in the 1960s and early 1970s when she was the Director of Historic Charleston Foundation.

Frances Edmunds became the first Director of Historic Charleston Foundation in 1948 after initially volunteering with the organization.¹⁰⁵ She worked to advance the Ansonborough Revolving Fund, open the Nathaniel Russell House as a house museum, and expand the Old and Historic District.¹⁰⁶ Although she worked for a nonprofit organization throughout her involvement with preservation initiatives, she was recognized as an individual force and public figure in the field of preservation. Frances Edmunds was not a preservationist by training, but she did feel that she earned the title of "architectural historian" through her work with Historic Charleston Foundation.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Frances Edmunds Obituary, Charleston Post and Courier, May 3, 2010. <https://obits.postandcourier.com/us/obituaries/charleston/name/frances-edmunds-obituary?id=9645500>.

¹⁰⁶ Speech by Frances Edmunds, November 18, 1977, HCF.FRE.02.3, box 36, folder Speeches 1, p. 1. Frances Edmunds Papers, Historic Charleston Foundation Archives, Charleston, SC. Accessed February 23, 2024.

¹⁰⁷ Frances Edmunds Papers, Historic Charleston Foundation Archives, Charleston, SC. Accessed February 23, 2024.

Preservation Sites

The preservation sites Frances Edmunds worked on during her time as the Director of Historic Charleston Foundation were all on the Charleston peninsula. The organization's first revolving fund was located in the Ansonborough neighborhood, but the Home Ownership Program, which occurred in the 1970s and 1980s, was located in the Wraggborough and Radcliffeborough neighborhoods.¹⁰⁸ Many of these structures were Charleston single houses that had fallen into a dilapidated state.

Frances Edmunds' preservation sites are quite similar to Susan Pringle Frost's because they both focused on the Charleston peninsula in urban residential neighborhoods. Historic Charleston Foundation's revolving primarily focused on medium-style architecture in these neighborhoods, such as Charleston single houses. Susan Pringle Frost's preservation sites also consisted of medium-style architecture in the South of Broad neighborhood.

Motivations

Based on speeches that were read in Historic Charleston Foundation's archive, it appears that Frances Edmunds was motivated in her preservation work because she truly believed that Charleston benefited the most from a preservation mindset when

¹⁰⁸ "Home Ownership Program Collection Archive Record," Past Perfect Online, Historic Charleston Foundation. Accessed on February 23, 2024. <https://charleston.pastperfectonline.com/Archive/59162030-6DAD-4D8A-ACC7-924851664580>.

planning.¹⁰⁹ In one of her speeches, she said, “I personally believe that in the instance of my city, that preservation... is one of the ingredients that’s essential to the health of the city.”¹¹⁰ Frances Edmunds aligned with Susan Pringle Frost in believing that Charleston was meant to be a living city. Knowing that house museums were not the only way to preserve the built environment, Edmunds advocated for restoration and adaptive reuse. Frances Edmunds was not only trying to preserve Charleston’s historic buildings and architecture but also its street patterns.¹¹¹ She poetically stated, “The skyline of the past is the present in Charleston,” meaning that much of the city had remained unchanged since its establishment, and she was working to ensure that continued for the future.¹¹²

Susan Pringle Frost’s motivations stemmed from her love of Charleston’s buildings and architecture, which is one of the reasons why she chose to become a real estate agent. She also had a deep reverence for Charleston’s history and how buildings could be associated with significant people. Frances Edmunds appears to have shared her sentiment on this matter by declaring, “The permanent technique of preservation in my

¹⁰⁹ “Techniques of Preservation in Charleston,” Speech by Frances Edmunds, January 1971, HCF.FRE.02.3, box 36, folder Speeches 1, p. 1. Frances Edmunds Papers, Historic Charleston Foundation Archives, Charleston, SC. Accessed on February 23, 2024.

¹¹⁰ Speech by Frances Edmunds, undated, HCF.FRE.02.3, box 35, folder Lectures, Speeches, and Notes, p.2. Frances Edmunds Papers, Historic Charleston Foundation Archives, Charleston, SC.

¹¹¹ “Techniques of Preservation in Charleston,” Speech by Frances Edmunds, January 1971, HCF.FRE.02.3, box 36, folder Speeches 1, p. 1. Frances Edmunds Papers, Historic Charleston Foundation Archives, Charleston, SC. Accessed on February 23, 2024.

¹¹² “Techniques of Preservation in Charleston,” Speech by Frances Edmunds, January 1971, HCF.FRE.02.3, box 36, folder Speeches 1, p. 1. Frances Edmunds Papers, Historic Charleston Foundation Archives, Charleston, SC. Accessed on February 23, 2024.

opinion is a desire to remain here in or near the same lovely dwellings and churches that have been an inherited way of life for generations.”¹¹³

Goals

As the Director of Historic Charleston Foundation, Frances Edmunds pursued the preservation initiatives that she personally believed in. Her goals of revitalizing neighborhoods, fundraising, and playing a role in the city’s architectural regulations defined the trajectory of the organization and preservation for decades to come. Historic Charleston Foundation is a mission driven nonprofit organization, but they were being led by a dedicated and passionate woman at the time. In her speeches, Edmunds primarily spoke of the goals for the Ansonborough Rehabilitation Project. “Once a fine residential section, still containing more than a hundred antebellum homes, by neglect and deterioration it was hardly a step removed from becoming a slum. This was to be- we still hope it will be- a demonstration project.”¹¹⁴ By calling this a “demonstration project,” Frances Edmunds was saying that the goal for the program was to restore and sell these structures with the hope that private owners would start to do the same. The ultimate goal was to “create a very nice residential neighborhood.”¹¹⁵

¹¹³ “Techniques of Preservation in Charleston,” Speech by Frances Edmunds, January 1971, HCF.FRE.02.3, box 36, folder Speeches 1, p. 1. Frances Edmunds Papers, Historic Charleston Foundation Archives, Charleston, SC. Accessed on February 23, 2024.

¹¹⁴ Speech by Frances Edmunds, 1962, HCF.FRE.02.3 Lectures, box 36, folder Speeches 1, p.1. Frances Edmunds Papers, Historic Charleston Foundation Archives, Charleston, SC. Accessed on February 23, 2024.

¹¹⁵ Speech by Frances Edmunds, undated, HCF.FRE.02.3, box 35, folder Lectures, Speeches, and Notes, p. 10-11. Frances Edmunds Papers, Historic Charleston Foundation Archives, Charleston, SC. Accessed on February 23, 2024.

The Ansonborough Rehabilitation Project was one of two urban renewal efforts that took place in the 1960s. Historic Charleston Foundation and the city worked together to revitalize the area with the nonprofit focusing on its revolving fund and the municipality building a civic auditorium today known as the Charleston Gaillard Center.¹¹⁶ These two urban renewal projects were done with the intention of ridding the neighborhood of its slums in order to not only create a safer neighborhood but also to increase private investment in the area.

The goal of revitalizing Ansonborough was great for the buildings, but it led to the displacement of occupants. Very little consideration was given to where renters would go, and they were given six months to find a new place.¹¹⁷ Ultimately, “seven hundred people were eventually displaced” as a result of both the Ansonborough Rehabilitation Project and the construction of the civic auditorium.¹¹⁸ The construction of the auditorium also created a physical divide between the Ansonborough neighborhood and the Eastside neighborhood, which was also considered a slum. This barrier created a defining line between a neighborhood experiencing urban renewal efforts and another neighborhood that had absorbed the displaced residents.¹¹⁹

By comparing the goals of the Ansonborough Rehabilitation Project with those of another Historic Charleston Foundation revolving fund, the Home Ownership Program, it is clear that Frances Edmunds and the entire organization began to consider the social

¹¹⁶ Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, 64.

¹¹⁷ Speech by Frances Edmunds, undated, HCF.FRE.02.3, box 35, folder Lectures, Speeches, and Notes, p. 10-11. Frances Edmunds Papers, Historic Charleston Foundation Archives, Charleston, SC. Accessed on February 23, 2024.

¹¹⁸ Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, 65.

¹¹⁹ Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, 65.

implications of their preservation efforts. The intentions of the Home Ownership Program, created in 1972, greatly differed from those of the Ansonborough Rehabilitation Project. The goal of the Home Ownership Program was to restore historic houses in the Wraggborough and Radcliffeborough neighborhoods without displacing residents.¹²⁰ Frances Edmunds acknowledged on several occasions that the issue in these neighborhoods was slum lords, and another goal with the Home Ownership Program was to ensure each property did not fall back into their hands.¹²¹ When each of the Home Ownership Program properties were rehabilitated, a rental unit was created as well in order to help the new owners have an additional source of income.¹²²

The timing of the creation of the Home Ownership Program aligned with when the field of preservation started to become more inclusive. This revolving fund also shows how Historic Charleston Foundation began to consider the wellbeing of a neighborhood's residents- not just the neighborhood's architecture. According to *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, "Historic Charleston Foundation purchased small landlord-owned buildings, undertook rehabilitation, and then sold them to owner-occupants from the community."¹²³ In addition to minimizing displacement, this program emphasized the importance of home ownership for low- to middle-class residents, who could typically only rent property. "Priority was given to tenants of the building at the

¹²⁰ "Home Ownership Program Collection Archive Record," Past Perfect Online, Historic Charleston Foundation. Accessed on February 23, 2024. <https://charleston.pastperfectonline.com/Archive/59162030-6DAD-4D8A-ACC7-924851664580>.

¹²¹ Speech by Frances Edmunds, undated, HCF.FRE.02.3, box 35, folder Lectures, Speeches, and Notes. Frances Edmunds Papers, Historic Charleston Foundation Archives, Charleston, SC. Accessed on February 23, 2024.

¹²² Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, 115.

¹²³ Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, 114-115.

time it was purchased by the foundation, other tenants of the neighborhood, and people from similar nearby neighborhoods, in that order.”¹²⁴

Helping Black neighborhood residents purchase property was a specific goal of the Home Ownership Program, vastly differing from the Ansonborough Rehabilitation Project.¹²⁵ Robert Weyeneth quotes Frances Edmunds in *Historic Preservation for a Living City* when she remarked, “We have not been able to find suitable smaller houses for resale to black owners... but I believe we can.”¹²⁶ Historic Charleston Foundation’s commitment to assisting all residents no matter their race demonstrated a pivotal moment in Charleston’s preservation history. The conversation of how to avoid displacement, especially in regard to Black residents, did not occur when the Ansonborough Rehabilitation Project started in 1957.

The shift between the goals of the Ansonborough Rehabilitation Project and Home Ownership Program demonstrates that Historic Charleston Foundation recognized that the consequences of their revolving funds were negatively impacting neighborhood residents. Historic Charleston Foundation’s change in goals aligned with a more inclusive understanding of how preservation programs affected people of different classes and races that began in the 1970s. This is a stark contrast to the preservation work completed by Susan Pringle Frost in the 1910s and 1920s since she continued to restore buildings despite the displacement of African American residents.

¹²⁴ Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, 115.

¹²⁵ Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, 115.

¹²⁶ Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, 112.

Frances Edmunds worked on countless projects to advance the mission of Historic Charleston Foundation all while another preservation organization operated in Charleston- the Preservation Society of Charleston. Edmunds summarized the goals of the respective non-profits in a 1962 speech:

There is some wonder about two preservation societies in one city. There is thought that they duplicate, conflict, fail to cooperate; and certainly there are a few misunderstandings. But in the overall picture, there is room and need for a large membership organization, the watchdog of preservation, the arouser of public opinion, the fighter for every brick and beam, the educator of the general public. This is the Preservation Society, with more than a thousand members, holding regular program meetings and special called meetings open to the public, with an invaluable news sheet, and behind it forty years of experience and success. There is also the need for a corporation managed by its Board of Trustees, to pursue the cause of preservation as a business- a raiser of funds- a buyer and seller of property- a giver of professional advice and assistance. It is thus that our two organizations are working successfully in Charleston.¹²⁷

By referring to Historic Charleston Foundation as a “corporation,” Edmunds differentiated the organization from the Preservation Society of Charleston’s grassroots origins. Frances Edmunds emphasized the importance of buying and selling property for its revolving fund and fundraising for its preservation initiatives, which could also be considered tools for preservation.

¹²⁷ Speech by Frances Edmunds, 1962, HCF.FRE.02.3 Lectures, box 36, folder Speeches 1, p. 4-5. Frances Edmunds Papers, Historic Charleston Foundation Archives, Charleston, SC. Accessed on February 23, 2024.

Strategies and Partnerships

Frances Edmunds used multiple tools to advance the goals of Historic Charleston Foundation including fundraising and grants, property ownership, and partnering with prominent Charlestonians. Fundraising was by far the most important tool that Historic Charleston Foundation used, and this was primarily used for the organization's revolving funds. For the Ansonborough Revolving Fund, a starting amount of \$100,000 was required. Historic Charleston Foundation received a grant from the Richardson Foundation for \$25,000 to get the fund started, but the remainder of the fundraising goal relied on pledges from individuals and organizations around Charleston.¹²⁸ Member dues also contributed to the fundraising goals. Historic Charleston Foundation utilized its connections with homeowners on the peninsula by hosting an annual Spring Festival of Houses where residents and tourists purchased tickets to tour private historic houses. Events such as this one became one of the organization's largest fundraisers.

Like Susan Pringle Frost, Frances Edmunds used property ownership as a tool for preservation and heavily relied on it for restoring and selling houses. Both women also seem to have been well known in Charleston, and their connections with prominent Charlestonians no doubt helped bring attention to their preservation work.

¹²⁸ Frances Edmunds Papers, Historic Charleston Foundation Archives, Charleston, SC. Accessed February 23, 2024.

Conclusion

Frances Edmunds retired from Historic Charleston Foundation in 1985, making her the director for thirty-eight years.¹²⁹ When Edmunds first became the director in the late 1940s, the preservation efforts in Charleston were remarkably similar to the early preservation movement. Although Frances Edmunds was not a major player in preservation in the 1920s, other founding board members of Historic Charleston Foundation, such as Albert Simons and Alston Deas, had already been a part of the preservation movement for several decades. Frances Edmunds was one of the leaders of the organization's revolving funds, but the mission behind these types of programs changed over the course of Edmunds' time as director.

Analysis of the Similarities and Differences Between Modern Preservationists

The five people interviewed by the author were each asked the same fourteen core questions. These questions helped provide context about each person's preservation initiatives. Seven of these core questions directly pertain to the main research question:

1. What motivated you to start working at [site]?
2. What are your goals for the work you're doing at [site]?
3. Will you please tell me about the projects that you have done at [site]?
4. To do all of these preservation initiatives, what tools have you used?
5. Have you partnered with another organization or network of people for your work at [site]?
6. Have you been able to find funding sources for this project?
7. Do you have a vision for the future of preservation of African American heritage in the Lowcountry?

¹²⁹ Frances Edmunds Obituary, Charleston Post and Courier, May 3, 2010.
<https://obits.postandcourier.com/us/obituaries/charleston/name/frances-edmunds-obituary?id=9645500>.

The additional core questions and any follow up questions provided background information about the person, projects, and sites, which was also helpful for this analysis. A transcript of each interview can be found in Appendix A, and all of the direct quotes and information in this chapter are from these transcripts.

An overview of each person's background and their connection to their community precedes the comparison of their responses in order to provide context for the remainder of the chapter. A discussion of the similarities and differences between the modern preservationists using direct quotes from the transcripts then follows. This chapter ends by reviewing the broader themes noticed in the interviews and analyzing how today's preservationists compare to Susan Pringle Frost and Frances Edmunds.

Themes	Definitions
Community Infrastructure	Advocating for roads, sewage, and other features of a community that are essential for the residents' livelihood
Community Legacy	Preserving aspects of the community for future generations and retaining the character of the community
Community Protection	Advocating against the encroachment of developers or municipalities on boundary or property lines; ensuring residents can continue to afford to live in their communities
Communicating with African American Preservationists	Partnering with other African American community leaders to learn about other ongoing preservation efforts and hear about the tools and strategies they are using
Control over Development	Implementing ordinances or guidelines in an effort to preserve the character of African American communities and slow the rate of development
Economic Sovereignty	Community members and leaders pursuing opportunities within their community to increase tourism and investment while being able to use the profits to go towards community-wide efforts
Family Legacy	Preserving sites and communities because of a generational connection or personal memories of people; the desire to memorialize a site because of its significance to one's family
Heritage Sovereignty	Having ownership over how the history of a site or community is told and being able to tell one's own story from their perspective
Importance of African American History	Recognizing that African American history is American history and needs to continue to be researched and taught to everyone
Property Ownership	Owning property as a tool for preservation and navigating heirs' properties
Threat of Development	A motivating factor to start and continue preservation work in order to stop external developers from encroaching on a historic community
Threat of Structural Collapse	The potential for a building to collapse as a result of storms or not being maintained due to vacancy or lack of funds

Table 4.1: Definitions of the themes identified amongst the interview transcripts.

Background Information on Modern Preservationists

Greg Estevez is an author and historian on Edisto Island. He is involved in restoring the Hutchinson House and telling the story of African American history on Edisto Island. He used genealogical research to determine that his family has been on Edisto Island since 1683. Greg Estevez is also a descendant of Henry Hutchinson, who constructed the Hutchinson House approximately twenty years after the Civil War ended. Greg grew up on Edisto Island, and he has memories of spending Christmas at the Hutchinson House and being with his family members. He was in the Navy and traveled extensively, and he now lives in Jacksonville, Florida.¹³⁰

Richard Habersham has been the President of the Phillips Community Association since 1999, and he is still advocating to protect the Phillips Community from an expansion of Hwy 41 in Mount Pleasant and seeking ways to preserve any historic fabric in the community. The Habersham family has been a part of the Phillips Community since Richard Habersham's great-grandfather acquired property there, and Richard grew up in the community and has always considered it home. Richard Habersham was in the military and then became a truck driver. He has spent the past twenty-five years attending City Council meetings on behalf of the Phillips Community and making connections with people and organizations in the Charleston area.¹³¹

Cubby Wilder is a resident of Sol Legare Island and has had a large role in all preservation efforts that have taken place on Sol Legare Island. He has multiple titles

¹³⁰ Greg Estevez interviewed by author, December 15, 2023.

¹³¹ Richard Habersham interviewed by author, January 3, 2024.

including: President of Seashore Farmers Lodge; Co-Chairman of the Concerned Citizens of Sol Legare Foundation; and the owner of Pine Tree Hotel and the Island Breeze restaurant. Cubby Wilder spent part of his childhood in Harlem before moving back to Sol Legare Island as a teenager. He was in the military and traveled extensively during that part of his life. He was involved in the Town of James Island becoming an incorporated town and even served as a councilman. The Wilder family has owned property on Sol Legare for generations.¹³²

Ernest Parks is the Curator and Caretaker of the Seashore Farmers Lodge on Sol Legare Island. He helped Cubby Wilder in the later stages of fundraising for the restoration of the historic lodge, and, more recently, he worked with Clemson University and the Warren Lasch Conservation Center to catalog the museum's collection and learn how to teach other community members to do the same. Ernest Parks vividly remembers growing up on Sol Legare Island, segregation in Charleston, and what integration was like in schools. Ernest Parks left South Carolina to go to college in Tennessee, and he lived in New York, California, and Atlanta before moving back to Sol Legare later in life. He lives on the same property that has been in his family for generations.¹³³

Dr. Pernessa Seele is the founder and president of the Lincolnvile Preservation and Historical Society. She was born in Lincolnvile and spent her childhood there before moving to start her career. She has a strong connection to Lincolnvile since her mother wrote her master's thesis on Lincolnvile in 1955 and her uncle was the mayor for forty-

¹³² Bill "Cubby" Wilder interviewed by author, January 8, 2024.

¹³³ Ernest Parks interviewed by author, January 4, 2024.

four years. Dr. Seele founded the Balm of Gilead thirty-six years ago as an international organization to help bring awareness to HIV with the help of the faith community. Dr. Seele moved back to Lincolntonville several years ago and has been working on preservation initiatives around the town for the past two years. She is not only tied to the places in the community but also the people. She works closely with residents of Lincolntonville and the Town of Lincolntonville.¹³⁴

How do their Preservation Sites Compare to Each Other?

With the evolution of the preservation movement has come a wider variety of sites and cultures at the focus of modern preservation initiatives. The current preservation sites not only consist of individual buildings but also landscapes and communities. The purpose of this question is to compare the location of the preservation sites and identify whether a building, landscape, or community is the focus of the preservation initiatives.

The preservation sites are all located in the Lowcountry, no more than an hour from downtown Charleston; therefore, they are all part of the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor. The tie to Gullah Geechee culture is an important theme in this analysis, and it plays a large part in the significance of each site. All of the interviewees are African Americans with ties to this region, so Gullah Geechee culture also plays a role in their personal backgrounds.

The Hutchinson House (Greg Estevez) and Seashore Farmers Lodge (Ernest Parks and Cubby Wilder) have a lot in common because they were both historic,

¹³⁴ Pernessa Seele interviewed by author, January 11, 2024.

dilapidated structures that were at risk of collapsing. The restoration of Seashore Farmers Lodge was completed in 2012, and the work at the Hutchinson House will likely end in 2024. The historic uses of the buildings are different, but both will be museums once the Hutchinson House is fully restored. Both structures are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



Figure 4.1: Landscape surrounding the Hutchinson House. marked in red. Aerial from Google Earth.

The preservation work happening at Mosquito Beach (Cubby Wilder) focuses on restoring historic commercial buildings to once again be used as restaurants and a hotel. This preservation initiative does involve the landscape though because the integrity of the district must remain intact, including the viewshed. Mosquito Beach is listed as a historic district on the National Register of Historic Places.

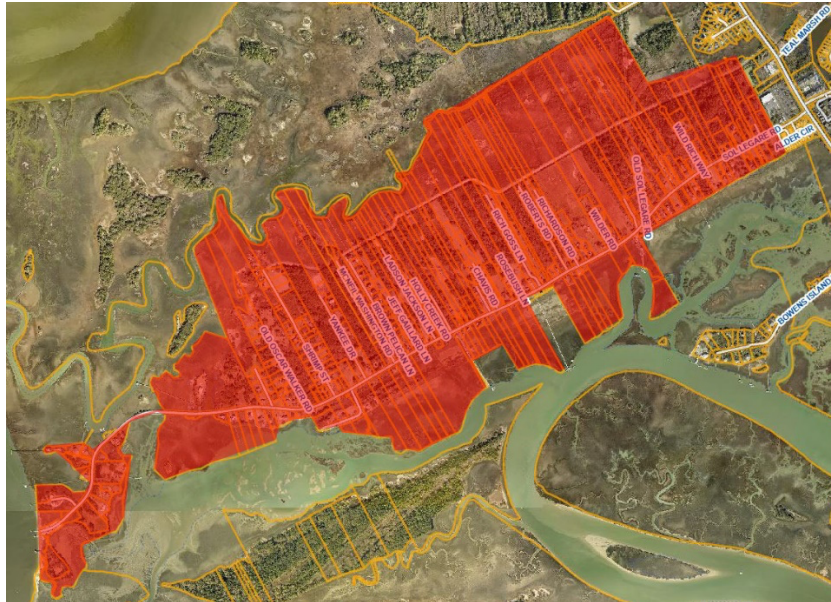


Figure 4.2: Aerial with Sol Legare Island's boundaries highlighted in red. Aerial from Google Earth.

Richard Habersham's work for the Phillips Community has centered around preserving the landscape in order to save the properties that have been in families for generations. Not many historic buildings remain in the Phillips Community, but future preservation projects will involve reconstructing a historic bridge and preserving a tomb. In 2023, the Phillips Community was listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a traditional cultural property.

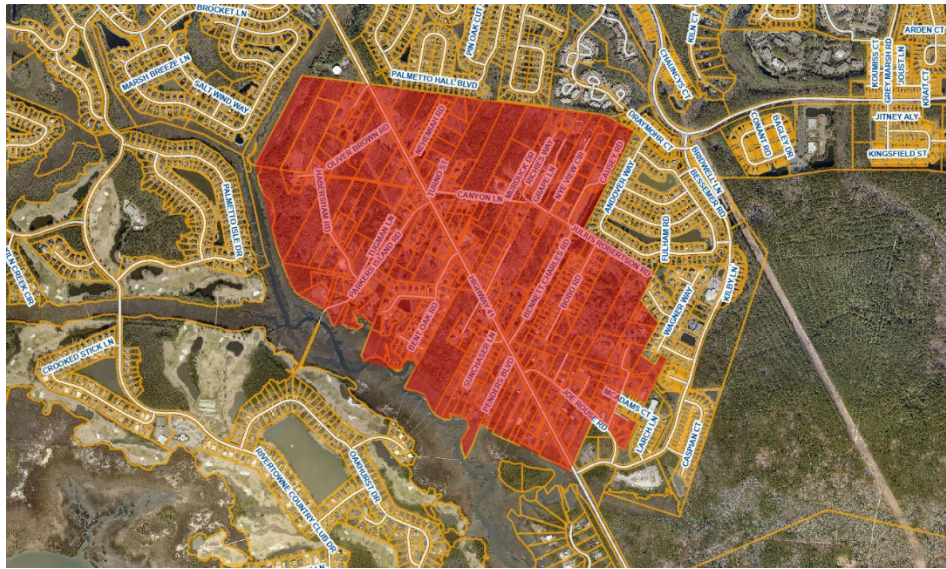


Figure 4.3: Aerial with the Phillips Community's boundaries highlighted in red. Aerial from Google Earth.

Despite being further inland than the other preservation sites, Lincolnvilleville (Pernessa Seele) is still a part of the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor. Lincolnvilleville is located in a more suburban area near historic railroad tracks. Dr. Seele's work in Lincolnvilleville the past two-three years has primarily focused on researching the history of Lincolnvilleville and identifying the significant people that have lived there. There are several historic buildings that Dr. Seele would like to adaptively reuse. In addition to this, the preservation work in Lincolnvilleville focuses on keeping the character of the town intact. This is similar to the work Richard Habersham is doing in the Phillips Community.

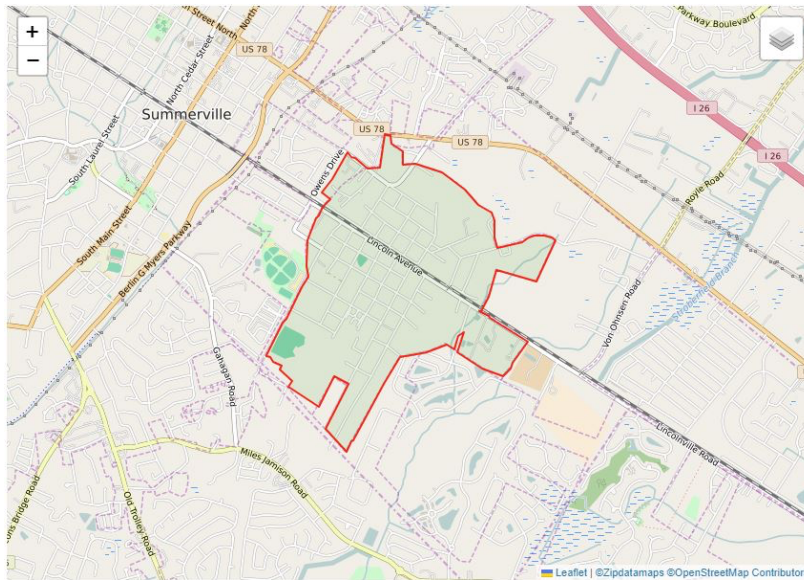


Figure 4.4: Map depicting the boundaries of the Town of Lincolnville.
Source: zipdatamaps.com

How do their Motivations Compare?

At their respective preservation sites, each interviewee has been motivated to be a community leader in preservation efforts. Motivations are inherently tied with the goals one has for their work. The motivators that each person discussed tended to have a deep personal connection to family, place, and history. These motivations tie into a crucial theme that carries throughout this analysis: each leader is preserving a piece of their community’s heritage to maintain sovereignty over their story.

The defining motivator for Greg Estevez’s preservation work is to carry on a legacy and his family roots. His grandmother, Myrtle Hutchinson, motivated him to get involved with heritage conservation work on Edisto Island. When asked about what motivated him to begin working on preservation projects, Greg stated, “Well, my grandmother’s name was Myrtle. She lived to be 97. She was the matriarch of the family.

Her passion was trying to memorialize her family legacy. It kind of fell to us, so she was a great inspiration for me to become involved in this work. And after her death in 2014, I took up the family legacy that she kept alive through her tireless efforts.” His motivation came out of an understanding that if he did not help tell the story of African American history on the island, it likely would not happen. The same goes for the restoration work at the Hutchinson House. The Edisto Island Open Land Trust owns the property and is leading the restoration project, but the nonprofit has been intentional about involving the Hutchinson and Estevez families at every step of the way.

Pernessa Seele became involved in preservation in Lincolnville because she was motivated by a sense of rootedness in place and a love for the community and uncovering its history. She felt a deep connection to the town and always considered it home. Dr. Seele said, “No matter where I went in the world, I was always from Lincolnville. And so after a while, it was like, okay, it’s time to go home and start doing this because I can’t die until this is done.... I have to make sure that the town is preserved in a way that it can be all that it needs to be for the next century.” Dr. Seele started her preservation work in Lincolnville by researching everything she could about the town including how it was created, the significant people who lived there, and the historic buildings and features of the town.

Like Pernessa Seele, Ernest Parks lived in various cities for his career before moving back to Sol Legare to get involved in preservation work. The motivation for Ernest Park’s preservation work came from his interest in a particular historical event that occurred on the island. Prior to moving back to South Carolina, he lived in Atlanta. When

he made the decision to move back and help with the Seashore Farmers Lodge, Cubby Wilder and the Sol Legare community had already started fundraising to restore the Lodge. Ernest Parks moved back to Sol Legare because it had always been his home. He also felt a need to restore the Lodge because his forefathers had helped build the original structure in 1915. His roots on the island and his appreciation for the history of Sol Legare motivated him to stick with the project. Ernest Parks also participates in reenactments of the 54th Regiment in Charleston and has extensively researched this regiment for the museum at Seashore Farmers Lodge. Unlike the others, Ernest has a particular interest in this event, “On July 16th of 1863, they had their first skirmish and it was on Sol Legare.... It’s such an American story to me, and that’s what drives me to keep the Lodge and preservation going,” which adds another dimension to his story.

The largest motivation for Cubby Wilder’s preservation work on Sol Legare is to bring economic development to the island and ensure that residents have access to modern infrastructure. Cubby Wilder has been involved with advocacy efforts for infrastructure and preservation on Sol Legare for longer than any of the other interviewees, meaning he has an extensive list of projects he has been involved in. Although Cubby Wilder lived in Harlem as a child and was in the military, he returned to Sol Legare in 1984. He has not only helped preserve heritage but also improved the infrastructure on Sol Legare through countless lobbying efforts. Cubby Wilder’s first step was forming the Concerned Citizens of Sol Legare Foundation in 1995, which is a 501(c)(3), in order to get Charleston County to add sewage lines to Sol Legare. He has

been involved with every effort to help the residents on Sol Legare since he moved back here.

The 2009 restoration of Seashore Farmers Lodge was the first project that Cubby Wilder began fundraising for in the late 1990s, and his current preservation projects at Mosquito Beach are ongoing. A large motivator for restoring historic structures is the threat of collapse. Any storm or high winds threatened to destroy what was left of the buildings. When speaking about why getting Mosquito Beach listed as a historic district on the NRHP was so important, Cubby stated, “I had to convince the people that it needs to go on... that way you could try to get it preserved.... To try to preserve their culture and history, because once it’s gone with the wind, it’s gone.”

Richard Habersham’s motivations stem from trying to ward off the destruction of the community to improve infrastructure for rapidly developing communities surrounding the Phillips Community. He became President of the Phillips Community Association in 1999 and began going to county council meetings to try to stop Mount Pleasant Waterworks from putting a water tank in the community. In addition to this, the county wanted to change the zoning from residential to commercial along Hwy 41. While the water tank was ultimately installed, he has been successful in preventing the expansion of Hwy 41. Richard Habersham knew that the Phillips Community was at risk of vanishing because of what had happened to other Black communities along Hwy 17. Richard declared:

You go down 17 to Mt. Pleasant Town Centre. That was the Four Mile Community. You see any houses on 17 in that area now? No. It's all businesses. You have very few people in that area, and it's mostly on Venning Road or Labor Camp Road, that's the one that's left. Seven Mile Community is the same thing. Where 41 and 17 intersect, look at how many houses are on that road now. See, all of that was Black-owned, and you had homes all along that area. We looked at that stuff and said, wow, we have to be proactive.

These motivations can be broken down into four categories: a need to have sovereignty over their history, a calling to continue a family legacy, the threat of collapse of a building, the need to safeguard a community for future generations. Multiple motivations were identified in each person's answer, and Table 4.1 breaks down what percentage of their answers fell into which category. Each person has motivations that can go into multiple categories because there were multiple reasons why they chose to get involved in preservation and community advocacy.

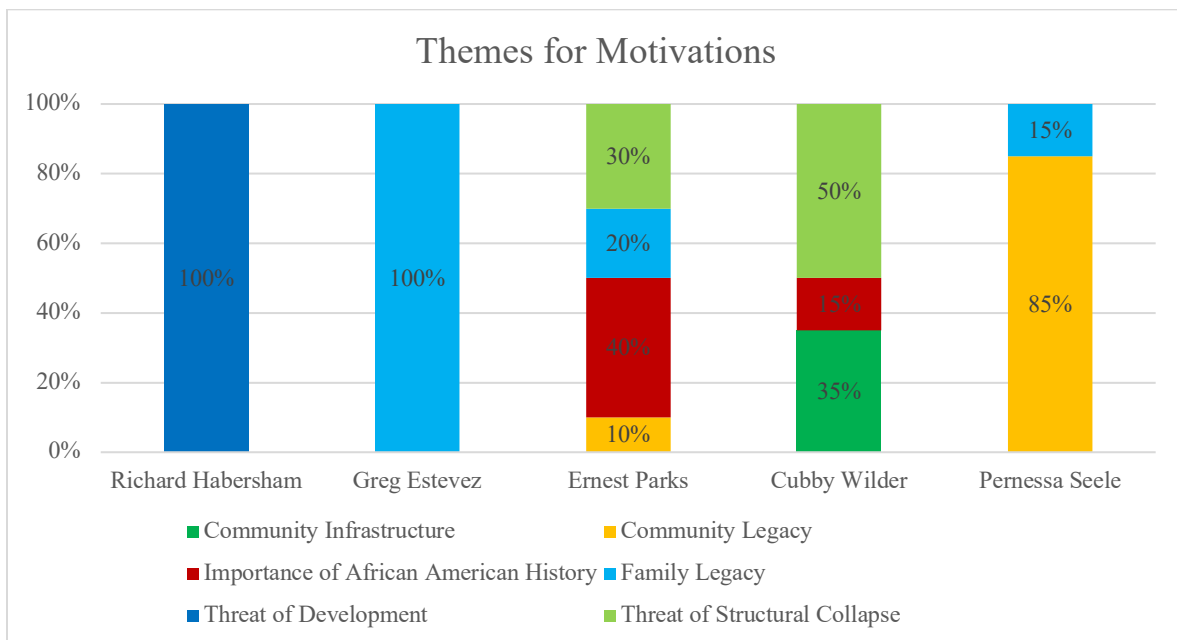


Figure 4.1: Graph depicting the percentage of the themes identified as motivations.

Motivations						
	Community Infrastructure	Family Legacy	Community Legacy	Threat of Development	Importance of African American History	Threat of Structural Collapse
Richard	0	0	0	23	0	0
Greg	0	13	0	0	0	0
Ernest	0	7	4	0	18	11
Cubby	8	0	0	0	3	12
Pernessa	0	2	10	0	0	0
Totals	8	22	14	23	21	23

Table 4.2: Table showing raw frequencies of themes for motivations by counting sentences.

Figure 4.1 visually represents the percentage of the main themes that they discussed in each of their answers to the question: What motivated you to start working at [site]? These percentages were determined through thematic coding with the themes selected to be community infrastructure, family legacy, community legacy, threat of development, importance of African American history, and threat of structural collapse. This chart quantitatively supports the discussion of how some of the interviewees' answers consisted of multiple themes. Family legacy was a theme discussed by three of the five respondents while community legacy was also discussed by two of those three interviewees. The threat of development was a theme only seen in Richard Habersham's answer, but it was the only theme he discussed. The threat of structural collapse was only mentioned by Ernest Parks and Cubby Wilder in regard to structures on Sol Legare being damaged by hurricanes. However, it is known that the Hutchinson House was also on the verge of collapse, but Greg Estevez did not identify this in his answer for his motivations. The importance of African American history was mentioned by Ernest Parks and Cubby Wilder.

How do their Goals Compare?

An overarching theme that connects each preservationist's goals for their work is sovereignty over telling their own history. Each person had clear goals for the preservation work they are doing at their sites, and their work is directly tied to the history of their site and a desire to interpret this for future generations. This common goal of telling their history themselves will guide future preservation projects in their communities.

Greg Estevez works as a researcher and author with the goal of addressing the gap in education that he experienced in school. He said, "My goals are to continue to tell the story. Like I said, sadly, when it comes to African American history, one of the three things tend to happen. Number one: our histories, our history and achievements, are often suppressed or downplayed. Number two: they don't tell our story right. Number three: they leave us out completely." Greg Estevez's observations of how African American history has been told stem from trying to learn about his heritage as a child and finding that this history was not included in textbooks. He is trying to fill a void in the research about African Americans on Edisto Island by writing books, conducting oral histories, and restoring the Hutchinson House. It is important to him that the history of the island be told by a descendant.

Ernest Parks, Pernessa Seele, and Richard Habersham all spoke about their goals centering around wanting to preserve their sites for future generations to be able to know their history. Ernest Park's goal is to establish a legacy and "preserve [the Seashore

Farmers Lodge] upright so that she can be passed on.” Pernessa Seele and Richard Habersham reiterated this sentiment about their respective sites, but they each voiced how they want to make sure their communities will continue to exist in the future. Dr. Seele emphasized:

The past and preserving the past is critical, but it's also important that we do what we need to do to grow Lincolnville for the future and bring people in who are going to be the mayor, be the town council. Lincolnville is still run by Black folks, which is 157 years, we still run by Black folks. Amen. Hallelujah. Praise the Lord. And that in itself is a story, but without a strategy of bringing new people and new voices into the conversation, it's not going to be sustained.

These intentions are clearly seen in the projects Dr. Seele is tackling and in the partnerships she is building with the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor and the National Park Service.

The notion of figuring out a strategy to make sure a community stands the test of time continues with Richard Habersham’s goal, which is, “To let Phillip be self-sufficient and self-sufficient with all its history. We don't want to keep it to ourselves. That would make no difference. We don't want to keep our story. What we want to do is have a path to the tourism sector.” This quote supports the major theme of sovereignty over one’s heritage and story. Richard Habersham and the Phillips Community want to take advantage of the Lowcountry’s tourism industry, but they want to do it on their own terms.

While Richard Habersham is the only person who directly mentioned increased tourism as a goal, people wanting visitors to come to their sites was a commonality

throughout the interviews. The Hutchinson House will be a museum, and Greg Estevez wants kids on school field trips and other tourists to visit the building once it is open. Lincolnville is now a part of the Reconstruction Era Network that is managed by the National Park Service, and there might be opportunities to increase tourism in the future. Once the Mosquito Beach restaurants are restored, Cubby Wilder hopes “to serve the public with some good food, good dancing, and culture.” In addition to wanting Mosquito Beach to once again be a gathering place, Cubby Wilder also shared the desire to get younger people to move back to Sol Legare. He admitted, “The community is getting really old because the young people are not coming back to the community and missing out on their cultural heritage, but we're just getting better now, people will start moving back to try to be included in their community.”

These goals are closely related to one another and give the impression that even though the five preservationists are working in four different communities, they have a lot in common. Greg Estevez aims to provide resources that aid in the interpretation and understanding of African American history on Edisto Island. Ernest Parks wants to establish a legacy on Sol Legare by continuing to act as a caretaker for the Seashore Farmers Lodge and the collections housed in the building. Richard Habersham has the goal of educating others and utilizing history to establish economic prosperity. Pernessa Seele is uncovering the history of Lincolnville with the hope of restoring buildings and keeping the community intact for future generations. Cubby Wilder wants to revitalize Mosquito Beach by restoring the buildings and bringing economic development to the island. When discussing their goals, they also highlighted a common risk their

communities are faced with an aging demographic. As Richard Habersham noted, they are not doing preservation work for themselves. They are doing it so future generations can appreciate their heritage and have a physical place to come back to. This is the primary goal of each person’s efforts.

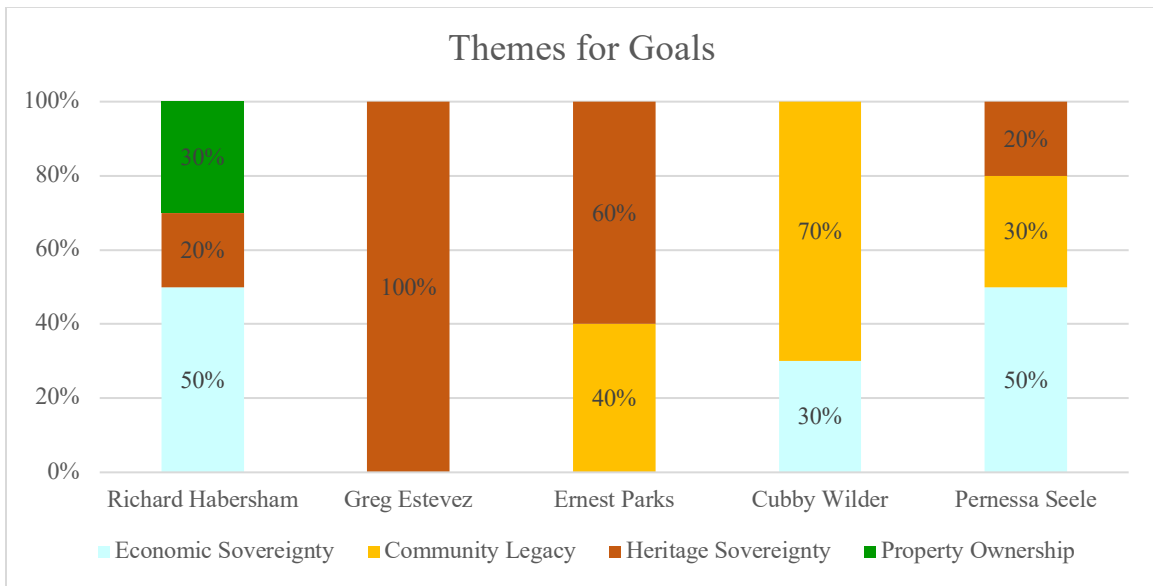


Figure 4.2: Graph depicting the percentage of the themes identified as goals.

Goals				
	Economic Sovereignty	Heritage Sovereignty	Community Legacy	Property Ownership
Richard	8	4	0	5
Greg	0	6	0	0
Ernest	0	6	4	0
Cubby	4	0	11	0
Pernessa	5	2	3	0
Totals	17	18	18	5

Table 4.3: Table showing raw frequencies of themes for goals by counting sentences.

Figure 4.2 shows the distribution of the themes economic sovereignty, community legacy, and community protection amongst the interviewees' answers to the question: What goals do you have for your work at [site]? Heritage sovereignty appeared in four of the five respondents answers due to them wanting to have control over telling their own stories and interpreting their community's history. This theme is different from economic sovereignty, which was discussed by Richard Habersham, Cubby Wilder, and Pernessa Seele, because economic sovereignty refers to interviewees wanting to pursue their own investment opportunities by creating businesses and increasing tourism in their communities. Community legacy was discussed by three of the five interviewees who spoke about wanting to preserve the site or community for future generations. 60% of Richard Habersham's answer consisted of him speaking about his goals for wanting to make Phillips a self-sufficient community, which aligned with him also discussing his goal to protect the community from future developments. Pernessa Seele's answer included the themes economic sovereignty, heritage sovereignty, and community legacy as she expressed her goals to help Lincolnville grow, tell Lincolnville's story, and preserve its character for the future. Ernest Park's answer for his goals revolved around an interest in heritage sovereignty and preserving the Seashore Farmers Lodge for generations to come. Cubby Wilder's goals of restoring the buildings at Mosquito Beach encompass the themes economic sovereignty and community legacy because he discussed wanting to bring businesses and socialization back to Mosquito Beach.

How do their Strategies and Partnerships Compare?

Although the threat of development and an aging population could seem daunting to these preservationists, there is a silver lining: they are not doing this work alone. An important component of their work has been forging partnerships with other organizations and people. This question is answered by first discussing the partnerships and then other strategies and tools that have been used, including funding sources.

Partnerships with nonprofit organizations and academia have served as the most useful tools for these preservation projects. Preservation nonprofits in Charleston are engaged with advocacy work in Black communities, and these interviews serve as examples of how impactful this advocacy work has been up to this point. The ongoing work of Charleston's preservation nonprofits involves them obtaining grants to help Black communities survey their cultural resources, advocate against external developers, and research the history of their sites. The Preservation Society of Charleston received a grant to survey Black cemeteries in Charleston, and the organization also has an ongoing project to conduct oral histories with Black business owners to help tell the story of African American history in Charleston. Historic Charleston Foundation has used grants to help restore the buildings on Mosquito Beach, which Cubby Wilder spoke about. Historic Charleston Foundation also used grant money to pay a consultant to nominate the Phillips Community for the National Register of Historic Places.

Over the past twenty-five years, Richard Habersham has formed many connections in the Charleston area with nonprofits and the media that he has utilized to accomplish his goals. He has received continuous support from the Community

Foundation, the Coastal Conservation League, the Lowcountry Land Trust, the Heirs Property Foundation, the Law Center, and Historic Charleston Foundation. He has had close relationships with individuals involved with these organizations including Jennie Stephens, Jane Lareau, and Chris DeScherer. Richard Habersham noted that one partnership often led to another, but he emphasized that, “We didn’t go to these people when we needed something. We were there before we needed something.” His mindset for his partnerships is to continue to develop connections with organizations to remain in touch and have ongoing support– not just to approach people when the Phillips Community needs help to fight against a specific threat.

These organizations have helped advocate for the Phillips Community to oppose the Highway 41 expansion. Historic Charleston Foundation and Brittany Lavelle Tulla recently helped get the Phillips Community listed as a Traditional Cultural Property on the National Register of Historic Places, the first listing of its kind in South Carolina. The Law Center has helped Richard Habersham secure grant funding for upcoming projects, such as the restoration of Dr. John Rutledge’s tomb, and Clemson University’s Warren Lasch Conservation Center will be helping with those as well.

In addition to partnerships and grants being important tools for preservation, Richard Habersham also pointed out how the media has helped a larger audience learn about the issues the Phillips Community is facing. He praised Robert Behre for his interest in the community in the early 2000s and for continuing to write articles for the *Post and Courier* about today’s preservation news. Prior to this interview, the media had

not been considered as a tool for preservation by the author, but each preservationist discussed how their site has benefitted from media attention.

Greg Estevez's main partnerships have also centered around nonprofits and the media. The progress of the Hutchinson House restoration has been reported by the *Post and Courier* over the years. Unlike Richard Habersham, Greg Estevez has partnered with one primary nonprofit to accomplish his goals instead of multiple nonprofits. When asked about the partnerships forged for this project, Greg Estevez spoke of his family's relationship with the Edisto Island Open Land Trust and its Executive Director, John Girault, and the Hutchinson House Director, Sarah Stroud Clarke. This nonprofit has worked closely with the Hutchinson and Estevez families to restore the Hutchinson House. The Land Trust owns the Hutchinson House and the surrounding land and has been instrumental in fundraising and managing the restoration of the historic structure. Greg Estevez could not speak more highly of this nonprofit by stating,

The Edisto Island Open Land Trust and the Hutchinson family- we enjoy a great partnership. We really do. We have worked in tandem together from day one to make this important project a resounding success. I believe our strong alliance has contributed to the exponential growth and excitement up to this point. In other words, John Girault, who is the Director of the Edisto Island Open Land Trust, he makes no decisions without consulting the family first.

In addition to this, Greg Estevez is a board member of the Edisto Island Open Land Trust, and other family members are also involved in decisions regarding the Hutchinson House. Greg Estevez views the relationship between his family and the nonprofit as a true partnership where both parties have been able to benefit. He further added, "I want to say this: we benefit mutually from that. What I mean by that is we

couldn't have done it without them because they had the financial backing, and they had the support to make it happen. But they couldn't have done it without us because what good is it to own a house and the land and not have the story?" The Land Trust has helped secure over \$1 million in funding for this project. They have received grants from the Mellon Foundation and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, as well as generous private donations.

Cubby Wilder and Ernest Parks have both worked with other organizations to help with the preservation work on Sol Legare. Cubby Wilder has partnered with government agencies, nonprofits, and the media throughout his time advocating for Sol Legare. The preservation projects for the Seashore Farmers Lodge and ongoing projects at Mosquito Beach have been extensively covered in the media, and the attention has helped bring awareness to the history of Sol Legare and its built environment. Cubby Wilder started the process of fundraising to restore the Seashore Farmers Lodge. He is similar to Richard Habersham in that he has formed many connections with other preservationists and politicians over the years. The first grant Cubby Wilder received for the Seashore Farmers Lodge was for \$50,000 from the Town of James Island, and they continued to receive grants from other organizations after this. Many people did pro bono work to help with the Lodge, and Ernest Parks was tasked with leading the ad hoc committee for the Lodge's restoration. Ernest Parks emphasized that the Seashore Farmers Lodge was able to be restored because of the community's persistence and everyone's generosity. In 2009, enough money had been secured through grants and donations to begin restoring the Lodge.

Ernest Parks has continued to forge new partnerships with academia to preserve the Seashore Farmers Lodge. He has recently partnered with Dr. Jon Marcoux, the former Director of Historic Preservation, and Dr. Stephanie Crette, the Director of the Warren Lasch Conservation Center, to help with collections management in the museum and teaching other community members how to care for the artifacts. This partnership with academia has not only helped Ernest Parks and the Lodge, but it has also helped educate students about preservation and the importance of conserving this heritage.

Cubby Wilder's most recent partnership has been with Historic Charleston Foundation for the work at Mosquito Beach. This nonprofit secured a \$500,000 grant from the African American Civil Rights Grant Program in 2020 and has since been working with Cubby Wilder to restore the Pine Tree Hotel. Cubby Wilder is also working to restore two other buildings on the beach, and he received a \$250,000 grant administered by the South Carolina Department of Archives and History due to damage sustained during Hurricane Irma. These partnerships and grants have been instrumental in the preservation initiatives on Sol Legare. Cubby Wilder spoke about continuing to search for other grants and potentially partnering with more organizations to receive additional funding to finish the projects.

Pernessa Seele has also utilized partnerships and grants to expand her preservation efforts in Lincolnville. Within the first year of starting the Lincolnville Preservation and Historical Society, Dr. Seele formed a partnership with the National Park Service and the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor. With the help of Nathan Betcher, Lincolnville became part of the Reconstruction Era National Historic Network.

Victoria Smalls, former Executive Director of the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor, has also been a valuable connection for Dr. Seele. Nathan Betcher introduced Dr. Seele to Dr. Jon Marcoux and Amalia Leifeste with Clemson University. Dr. Marcoux mapped a historic cemetery in Lincolnton, and students in Amalia Leifeste's Paying for Preservation class wrote a grant for the old jail in Lincolnton. Dr. Seele has also recently written and received a grant to create a public park in Lincolnton, which was reported on in the *Post & Courier*. Dr. Seele has made rapid progress in her preservation initiatives despite only starting them two years ago, and she recognizes that her partnerships and relationship with community members has extensively helped with these efforts.

Number of Partnerships Discussed			
	Government	Academic	Nonprofit/Museum
Richard	1	1	4
Greg	0	1	1
Ernest	0	2	1
Cubby	1	0	1
Pernessa	1	1	1
Totals	3	5	8

Table 4.4: Table depicting the types and number of organizations the interviewees have partnered with.

The interviews with the modern preservationists for this thesis highlight how crucial external partnerships and funding sources are for preservation projects in African American communities. Some preservationists utilized partnerships to raise awareness, others to get money, others for services. All, however, aid in the goal of self-sufficiency. Without grants, Cubby Wilder, Ernest Parks, Greg Estevez, Pernessa Seele, and Richard Habersham would not have been able to successfully restore structures and continue preservation projects in their communities. This is based on their answers to the questions

about partnerships, funding sources, and the tools used for their preservation projects, which can be seen in the Appendices. The partnerships and grants they each have secured have had a huge impact on the efficiency of their projects and have allowed them to undertake initiatives that they would not have been able to fundraise for alone. Cubby Wilder even stated that he is currently searching for additional grants to pay for the restoration of the Pine Tree Hotel since unforeseen costs have pushed the project over budget. These partnerships connect to the theme of sovereignty and community leaders being able to pursue preservation projects that are the most meaningful to the people who have a generational connection to these buildings and landscapes. This goal is the driving force for their preservation work because it shapes how their communities and sites will function and appear in the future.

How do their Visions for the Future Compare?

Each person spoke directly about how important they believe their work is for the future and how they hope more African Americans will continue to explore their own history and have sovereignty over how their stories are interpreted. They all also mentioned how they have felt that African American history has not been treated as a significant part of history until recently. Greg Estevez stated, “The state of South Carolina has historically had a way of downplaying the contributions and also the achievements of African Americans. But I believe that’s changing.” Pernessa Seele mentioned, “I think we’re all struggling with archiving our history, we’re all struggling

with uncovering the history. Because we didn't grow up believing that our history was important... African American history has not been that important until now.”

When answering this question, Ernest Parks and Cubby Wilder both emphasized how important this history is for all Americans. Ernest Parks declared, “Because we go out and we talk about great African Americans, you know, through color and like the great Robert Smalls. You know, he's an American hero that happened to be Black, but he's an American hero all the same.” Cubby Wilder echoed this thought by stating, “I want to continue as long as I can to preserve African American culture and heritage, and let the story be told that we contributed a lot to American history, we are the true American.”

Greg Estevez has a vision for African American preservation movements across the state to collaborate on their shared mission to have sovereignty over their history and stories. Greg Estevez stated, “Yes, my vision is for other African American heritage projects not only in South Carolina but throughout the United States to come together to be able to inspire and educate future generations for years to come.” This vision aligns with Greg's goals of filling gaps in education about African American history and his interest in storytelling.

Their visions reinforce why they are doing preservation work and the steps that can be taken to better protect their heritage. Richard Habersham has a vision that involves partnering with the state of South Carolina to advance measures to protect Black communities. Richard Habersham envisions a comprehensive plan being adopted by the state government to enforce protections for African American resources. “I want all of

them to get together and come up with a comprehensive plan. So, we say a comprehensive plan is what we want for the whole area. And then we can take that to Charleston County, and put that in some regulation, and then take it to the State. Because without the local level and the state level, it's not going to work.” Richard Habersham noted how he has witnessed plans be implemented for one municipality, but if it is not adopted by all of them, the ordinance cannot be enforced effectively. He further elaborated:

Well, the Town regulation and the County regulation are different. The Town does what they want to do. So, what it does, it's like that cancer I told you about with commercialism. Just one developer gets in and changes zoning. Instead of having large lots with less houses, they got smaller lots, but a lot of houses. You know, and in our community, we don't build five houses at a time. We build one house at a time.

Richard’s vision to have a statewide ordinance to protect communities is a direct outflow of his particular experience with the threats Phillips has faced and the erasure of the built environment of other Black communities in Mt. Pleasant as a result of development.

Richard added that the goal of the comprehensive plan would not be “to stifle development” but rather “to slow it down” so “the people in the community can really adjust to growth.”

Each person recognizes that their work is part of a larger goal that will bring communities together in order to protect African American resources and educate others about the significance of Black settlements and their culture. All of their visions align with the theme of sovereignty over their site or community and protecting it for the

future. They all speak to the importance of representing African American history, keeping communities together, and preserving both oral histories and the built environment for future generations to continue their family legacies. Although all of their visions highlighted the same key points, they diverged at times when speaking about the scale and specificity of future initiatives.

Greg Estevez's vision for leaders of preservation projects focused on African American heritage across the United States is large scale, but it matches with his goals of educating the public about African American history and continuing a family legacy. Richard Habersham has a government-centered initiative, wanting a state-approved plan to protect African American communities to provide a common ordinance instead of different local regulations. Although Ernest Parks, Cubby Wilder, and Pernessa Seele did not name specific initiatives they have in mind, their answers all consisted of the same themes of sovereignty, family legacy, and setting their community up for the future.

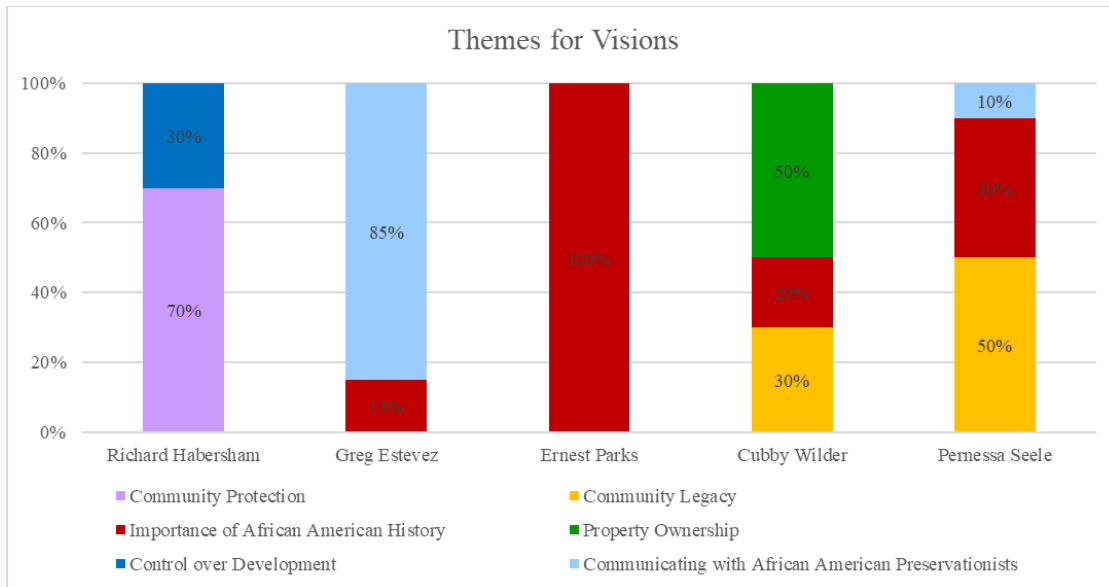


Figure 4.3: Graph depicting the percentage of the themes identified as visions for the future.

Visions						
	Community Protection	Property Ownership	Community Legacy	Control over Development	Importance of African American History	Communicating with African American Preservationists
Richard	15	0	0	7	0	0
Greg	0	0	0	0	1	6
Ernest	0	0	0	0	14	0
Cubby	0	7	4	0	3	0
Pernessa	0	0	8	0	7	2
Totals	15	7	12	7	25	8

Table 4.5: Table showing raw frequencies of themes for visions by counting sentences.

The categories for the overarching themes of their visions are community protection, property ownership, community legacy, control over development, importance of African American history, and communicating with African American preservationists. Communicating with African American preservationists was mentioned by two of the five interviewees in regard to wanting to build partnerships and learn from other community leaders who are engaging in similar preservation initiatives. Richard Habersham’s answer balanced wanting to not only protect the Phillips Community from

development but also have an ordinance in place save the character of the community. Property ownership was a theme only noticed in Cubby Wilder's answer because he discussed wanting to ensure that future generations could still buy property on Sol Legare. The most dominant theme for this answer was the importance of African American history as it was discussed by four of the five respondents. This theme stood out because it related to their visions of wanting future generations to understand all African American history and for this history to be discussed more everywhere.

The preservation projects mentioned in this chapter are examples of sites associated with African American history that are receiving attention and are being prioritized in the field of preservation. This is not only demonstrated by grants that are directly for African American heritage but also the importance placed on these sites by local organizations. The nonprofits that have partnered with these preservationists have additional advocacy and community outreach programs. These interviews are evidence of how much preservation and society has changed just in the interviewees' lifetimes.

Ernest Parks, Cubby Wilder, and Richard Habersham spoke of segregation and "Black Beaches" that they had memories of as kids. Now, the field of preservation recognizes that the structures and landscapes associated with these beaches are significant. The buildings that were constructed in African American communities and discussed in this thesis are now receiving close to \$1 million in grants for restoration. The respective sites of all five preservationists have already been significant for their communities, but with the effort to preserve this heritage ignited just recently, hopefully

these sites will continue to gain attention and momentum to pursue more preservation initiatives.

Discussion of Additional Themes

While conducting the interviews, several topics that influence preservation work were discussed, but these were not initially thought of when creating the interview questions. Including these themes in this chapter allows for a better understanding of subjects that contribute to the ability to successfully preserve a site but do not directly pertain to the research question. The topics discussed in this section include property ownership, incorporated towns, the creation of nonprofits, and the rising importance of preserving African American communities.

Property Ownership and Heirs' Properties

Property ownership became a significant theme in these interviews because each interviewee had grown up with their family owning property at their respective site. Although each person moved away for college, the military, or another career, their families continued to own property in their communities. Upon each person's return to their community, they took over the property that had been in their family for generations. The only person who does not live at their preservation site is Greg Estevez, but he spoke of being a direct descendent of Henry Hutchinson and the significance of the land his ancestors owned on Edisto Island, as well as his childhood memories at the

Hutchinson House. The other four preservationists currently reside in their communities and have formative memories of the property they have known since childhood.

As a subset of property ownership, heirs' property was also a topic that came up in the interviews. The *Heirs' Property and the Uniform Partition of Heirs Property Act: Challenges, Solutions, and Historic Reform* defines an heirs' property as the following:

Heirs' property constitutes a very common legal form of family property ownership within the African American community as well as within other socioeconomically disadvantaged communities. It is a problematic form of ownership that mostly arises when someone dies without having made a will or other type of estate plan.¹³⁵

Developers take advantage of heirs' properties, threatening generational ownership in African American communities. "One of major problems with heirs' property ownership is that it represents the most insecure form of common real property ownership in this country."¹³⁶ Cubby Wilder spoke to the additional issues that people who own an heirs' property face when they attempt to take out a loan to build a house by saying, "The heirs property became detrimental to us because the bank ain't gonna loan you no money with no heirs.... Why the Blacks are losing so bad now, with heirs' property, you can't borrow no money to build a house." There is a large "will-making gap" in America between African Americans and other ethnicities that has led to a high number of heirs properties in Black communities.¹³⁷ This gap could be due to a lack of faith in the legal system, a

¹³⁵ Thomas W. Mitchell and Erica L. Powers, *Heirs' Property and the Uniform Partition of Heirs Property Act: Challenges, Solutions, and Historic Reform*, (La Vergne: American Bar Association, 2022), ProQuest Ebook Central, 20.

¹³⁶ Mitchell and Powers, *Heirs' Property and the Uniform Partition of Heirs Property Act*, 26.

¹³⁷ Mitchell and Powers, *Heirs' Property and the Uniform Partition of Heirs Property Act*, 26.

lack of access to affordable lawyers, or a “social norm of not making a will or estate plan.”¹³⁸

Cubby Wilder and Richard Habersham both spoke of this issue, but they also described a family’s reasoning for having an heirs’ property. Cubby Wilder explained, “What happened, why we got so much heirs' property, the older people believed that if you go away and make some money, you come back and you want to build a house, you asked for a spot, they give you a spot, you was going build your house.” Richard Habersham had the same explanation for why heirs properties exist, “They did it because they didn't want one family member to own all the property, they always wanted- that no matter if you went someplace or you had a hard time, you always had a place to come back to.” Both agree now that the Heirs Property Foundation and other people that help Black communities navigate property rights are necessary because it has become difficult to protect, build on, or sell land that does not have a clear title. However, this issue is also evidence of how important property ownership has been in these communities for generations.

Incorporated vs. Not Incorporated

A topic that had not been considered at all before the interviews but has proven to have had a significant impact on the preservation sites is whether or not they are in an incorporated town. This is best shown in the Town of Lincolnton. Pernessa Seele discussed how Lincolnton still has the same layout, historic structures, and street names

¹³⁸ Mitchell and Powers, *Heirs’ Property and the Uniform Partition of Heirs Property Act*, 26.

it did when it was founded by Richard Harvey Cain in 1889. When asked what has protected Lincolnville for so long, she had a quick response,

I think that incorporation. We are an incorporated town, you know. Other Black settlements in Charleston, we're in Charleston County, but they've had to rely on Charleston County's policies and protecting them. And they're fighting new zoning laws right now that a settlement doesn't get to set. The County gets to set. Lincolnville, an incorporated town, sets its own laws, you know what I mean? So, I think that has been the biggest piece that has saved us.

The threats a Black community faces when it is subjected to a larger municipality's policies can be seen with settlement communities in Mt. Pleasant. The Town of Mt. Pleasant and Charleston County have annexed significant amounts of land. There have been few initiatives for protecting African American communities until recently. Richard Habersham's interview is evidence of this. Cubby Wilder also spoke about the importance of having an incorporated town. Although Sol Legare lies mostly within unincorporated Charleston County, Cubby Wilder fought to break away from the City of Charleston to create the Town of James Island. The effort to incorporate James Island was attempted three separate times before it finally worked. Cubby Wilder tried to tell a peer on Johns Island that he needed to do the same thing.

And on Johns Island, I was trying to tell Bill Saunders, since he had some influence, Johns Island should be incorporated, but at the time, he didn't have the vision to see. He said, 'I got a 501(c)(3).' I said, 'Listen, you need to get Johns Island incorporated because Mayor Riley's coming.' But anyway, I was trying to get the outsiders and some of the Black leaders to incorporate. With an incorporation you have more control of who you are, and you have your own government.

Johns Island was never incorporated, and the majority of the island has been annexed to the City of Charleston. Incorporating a town requires a tremendous amount of work, especially today, but it could help other communities that are at risk of being developed.

Preservationists Creating their own Organizations

The core interview questions focused on partnerships the preservationists have made with non-profit organizations. However, a common theme amongst the interviewees was that most of them had started their own organizations. Pernessa Seele started the Lincolnton Preservation and Historical Society, which is classified as a 501(c)(3). When asked about if starting a non-profit has helped her goals with preservation in Lincolnton, she said,

Yes, yes. In terms of I mean, I'm a nonprofit guru. So yes, having a nonprofit helped in terms of applications to the National Park Service, you know. Getting this designated Reconstruction [Era Network], have a grant from them.... And so yeah, in that perspective, absolutely. Yes. But at the end of the day, even with the organization, it's people who do the work. So having that structure is critical, but it doesn't prevent anybody from doing the research and the work.

Dr. Seele has recognized that starting her own organization serves as a tool for her preservation efforts in the town.

Cubby Wilder also emphasized the importance of starting a non-profit in order to advance one's advocacy efforts. Cubby Wilder founded the Concerned Citizens of Sol Legare Foundation, which has helped him with being able to get attention from municipal officials. It also helps other residents of Sol Legare feel like they have an avenue to involve themselves in standing up for their communities. The same can be said for

Richard Habersham and the Phillips Community. Richard Habersham helped start the Phillips Community Association in 1999, and he has been the president of it ever since. By starting an organization, Richard Habersham has been able to be a representative for the community. He recalled that there are many more African Americans who attend County Council meetings now than when he first began going to them because they now have a better understanding of the process.

This theme is important to note because it demonstrates that while partnerships have been a great tool for the preservationists, starting their own organizations has been a pivotal first step in advocating for their communities. It has served as a means for them to apply for grants or accept donations, which are the main funding sources for their efforts. Most importantly, the purpose of each nonprofit has been to bring together residents to create a unified voice of descendants.

Analysis of Comparisons Between Early and Modern Preservationists

Susan Pringle Frost and Frances Edmunds fought to preserve Charleston's built environment through saving the physical fabric of the city. However, their preservation efforts focused on only telling one side of the story, ignoring African American history that has also been an integral aspect of Charleston's past. They were hyper-focused on restoring historic buildings and removing blight from neighborhoods on the lower peninsula. Their preservation initiatives never focused on other cultures in the Lowcountry. Today, the Preservation Society of Charleston and Historic Charleston Foundation, are aware of the need to preserve Gullah Geechee communities and heritage.

More importantly, and the focus of this analysis, there are numerous African Americans who are leaders in their own communities, and they are preserving and advocating for sovereignty over their heritage.

Motivations Stemming from Ancestor Worship vs. Family Memories

As demonstrated in the analysis of the modern preservationists and the attached transcripts, family legacy is a large component of their motivation for preservation work. The emphasis on family legacy and preserving their community for future generations differs from the ancestral ties that motivated Susan Pringle Frost to revert buildings to what she imagined they would have looked like historically. Although she still had an appreciation for the past and architecture, Frances Edmunds does not fit into the discussion of ancestor worship the same way the Susan Pringle Frost does. The interviewees spoke of their direct relation to their preservation sites, whether from their personal memories or from their parents' or grandparents' stories. In the case of Cubby Wilder, he is restoring Mosquito Beach to be what he remembers it as from his childhood. Ernest Parks is interested in preserving the Seashore Farmers Lodge to have a piece of the built environment that represents the sense of community that has stayed with Sol Legare since its establishment as a settlement community. Pernessa Seele went to school in the same building as the Rosenwald school, and she has family ties to one of the founders of Lincolnville. Richard Habersham remembers how members of the Phillips Community have always interacted and wants to preserve what is left of the community for the residents. Greg Estevez has memories of being at the Hutchinson

House with his family and grandmother, and he is a direct descendent of Henry Hutchinson who built the structure after Emancipation.

Susan Pringle Frost's motivations and goals were tied to her family's past in Charleston, but they were based on an idea of what Charleston looked like instead of personal memories. She sought to revert buildings and entire streets back to what she imagined they looked like before the Civil War, ignoring all histories except those of historic, prominent white Charlestonians. This ancestor worship is different from what guides the interviewees' preservation initiatives. They want to tell their communities' history that they believed to be insignificant for most of their lives. The interviewees want to preserve a piece of their history so future generations can have a physical connection to their past and understand how their forefathers cultivated their respective communities. This revered imagination of a place versus a site that evokes personal memories is how Susan Pringle Frost and the modern preservationists differ in terms of their motivations and goals.

Creating Organizations, Partnerships and Funding Sources

Susan Pringle Frost and Frances Edmunds shaped preservation in Charleston throughout the 20th century. In this analysis, they act as local representations of how the preservation movement evolved from the 1910s to the 1970s. When Susan Pringle Frost founded the SPOD in 1920, it was an example of an organized grassroots preservation movement. The SPOD originally consisted of white, wealthy women. Frances Edmunds, also a wealthy, white woman, became the Director of Historic Charleston Foundation in 1948. During the time in between the creation of the two organizations, the Charleston

preservation movement had been led by prominent male architects and city officials, and Historic Charleston Foundation represented how preservation had become of interest to businessmen in addition to female volunteers and advocates.

As a contrast to the early preservation movement, the emphasis of the contemporary preservation movement is placed on including other races and cultures, while also understanding what heritage means to an entire community. Because these are issues that are being addressed nationally, the African American preservationists have had access to tools and partnerships that their predecessors did not. For today's preservationists, creating nonprofits, partnering with other organizations, enlisting the media, and applying for grants are all strategies that have propelled their work forward. The interviewees all discussed partnering with a combination of preservation nonprofits, academia, and even the South Carolina Department of Archives and History. These partnerships have been fundamental in helping to secure grants for preservation projects in their respective communities.

Instead of partnering with organizations, Susan Pringle Frost had connections with other Charlestonians and used her network of allies to propel her preservation agenda forward. Like today's preservationists, she involved herself with city policies and served on the Board of Adjustments from 1940-1949 to enforce the zoning ordinance that established the Old and Historic District in 1931.¹³⁹ Since Frances Edmunds was already the Director of Historic Charleston Foundation, partnerships were not as crucial for her as continuing to fundraise and secure large and small donations for the nonprofit's

¹³⁹ Bland, *Preserving Charleston's Past*, 61.

initiatives. However, she did help advise the changes to the city's policies in regard to Charleston's Old and Historic District. Cubby Wilder, Richard Habersham, and Pernessa Seele work closely with town officials for their respective communities.

The differences between partnerships and funding sources are due to the changes in time periods and how these strategies have evolved with the preservation movement. When Susan Pringle Frost started her restoration work, grants were not being offered by the government or nonprofits for preservation initiatives. In lieu of grants, she was soliciting funds from individuals and using personal networks and connections. When the SPOD raised money for their preservation projects, they also relied on donations and did not have access to grants. The lack of a variety of funding sources hindered their efficiency, making the process of acquiring properties to save them from demolition a slow one.

Frances Edmunds serves as a transitional figure to assess the impact of grants on preservation. Historic Charleston Foundation received grants from the Carnegie Corporation, Rockefeller Foundation, and the America the Beautiful Foundation in the 1960s.¹⁴⁰ The organization also received grant money from the federal government and the City of Charleston to contribute to its revolving fund programs, initially supporting urban renewal then transitioning to combat displacement with the Home Ownership Program.

The breadth of grants offered from federal, state, and local governments, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and other nonprofits have grown since the

¹⁴⁰ Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, 146.

Frances Edmunds Era. The interviewees have all been able to utilize a variety of grants, as well as donations, for their preservation initiatives. The partnerships they have built have had a massive impact on the success of administering grants to fund their projects.

Property Ownership

Property ownership has also played a pivotal role in preservation efforts since the early preservation movement. Susan Pringle Frost and Frances Edmunds used property ownership as a tool for preservation by acquiring properties for their revolving funds. They viewed property ownership as a means for restoring historic buildings while also acting as a business model, but this perspective on property ownership was not as enduring as the interviewees' views on ownership. To them, property ownership is a part of their family legacy, and they want future generations to be able to own property in the communities they grew up in. Cubby Wilder owns multiple properties and is in the process of restoring the commercial buildings on Mosquito Beach, making him the only interviewee who spoke about combining preservation with a personal business model. His business plans are also linked to his family's legacy.

Analyzing these two movements highlights how much the field of preservation has changed over the past 100 years. Preserving African American heritage is now pursued at the national level, and organizations now consistently fund these projects, even at the local level. Susan Pringle Frost was a grassroots pioneer for preservation in Charleston, but the grassroots preservationists of today are still making their voices heard to help their communities. That being said, today's preservationists agreed that there is

more work to do to preserve African American sites and more people must continue to get involved in these initiatives.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This thesis sought to show how the field of preservation has evolved in Charleston by comparing current preservationists with each other and early preservationists based on their preservation sites, motivations, goals, strategies, and visions for the future. This was accomplished by interviewing five African American preservationists who have started preservation initiatives to restore significant buildings or landscapes in their communities. Then, secondary sources were consulted to determine the preservation sites, motivations, goals, and strategies of Susan Pringle Frost. Speeches by Frances Edmunds were also examined for the same categories. All of these answers were compared, and larger themes were established from the interviews and discussed in Chapter Four. The results of these interviews demonstrated that the five preservationists have their own stories for why they are involved in preservation, but their goals and motivations are remarkably similar. They all want to contribute to keeping parts of African American history alive, and preserving the built environment is one way for this to happen. They also want future generations to be able to grow up in the communities that their ancestors helped establish after the Civil War. The modern preservationists also have similar partnerships, and all of the interviewees spoke about how critical grant funding and donations have been for their projects.

Susan Pringle Frost also heavily relied on funding sources, but these were mostly loans and some donations from family members and close friends. Frost was instrumental in making preservation a priority in Charleston, and her preservation efforts are still

discussed in the city today. The modern preservationists are also leaving their mark in the Lowcountry by advocating for their communities and African American heritage. With the help of local, state, and national organizations, Black communities have been able to receive grants to research and preserve sites in order to accurately tell their stories and use the built environment and surrounding landscape to educate others.

Preservation Sites

The community leaders' sites are all associated with Gullah Geechee culture and a rich history. Their sites are representative of their family legacy, and they have retained integrity despite the surrounding landscape changing. Susan Pringle Frost and Frances Edmunds focused their preservation efforts on the peninsula and sought to save high- and medium-style architecture typical of Charleston's historic, urban residences. A key difference between their preservation sites was that Susan Pringle Frost and Frances Edmunds restored a structure one at a time while considering the character of the neighborhood. However, the interviewees' preservation sites are rooted in the history of the landscape, and they are advocating to keep their heritage intact at the community level. This demonstrates the meaningfulness of the built environment and cultural landscapes to today's preservationists as opposed to the preservation initiatives of Susan Pringle Frost and Frances Edmunds, which saw them prioritize Charleston's architectural features.

Motivations

As shown in Table 4.1 in the previous chapter, the interviewees are primarily motivated by a family legacy, sovereignty, community protection, and the threat of a structure's collapse. These motivations are derived from a generational tie to a site and the hope to preserve it for the future. One could argue that Susan Pringle Frost's motivations contain the same themes. However, her motivation is rooted in a desire to celebrate Charleston's past in a way that reverted the built environment to the Antebellum Era. This motivation is the opposite of the interviewees' intentions, which is to figure out a way for their sites to be a part of the future.

Goals

The interviewees have goals that center around the themes of sovereignty, legacy, and community protection (Table 4.2). Family legacy was discussed the theme discussed the most, but this also still relates to the goal of each community wanting to have sovereignty over their heritage and story. The interviewees want to be able to protect their sites and share their stories with a wide audience. Unlike Susan Pringle Frost, their goals are not exclusionary by nature. Richard Habersham and Pernessa Seele, who both discussed protecting their communities for the future, never mentioned displacing residents due to their race or class. During his discussion about the lack of affordable housing in Charleston, Richard Habersham stated, "And I'm not talking about just a Black resident because we got White residents too. Like I said, my neighbor's White, the

lady at the end of the street, and these people won't move... They would rather stay in Phillip than go to Park West." Although this quote is not referring directly to a goal, it is telling of Richard Habersham's attitude toward all residents of the Phillips Community who respect the character of Phillips. In contrast to this inclusive perspective, Susan Pringle Frost had intentions of removing Black tenants from south of Broad to revert the area back to a White neighborhood. This is an exclusionary goal that was an inherent part of her preservation work.

Strategies

The strategies for all of the preservationists centered around funding sources. For the modern preservationists, they form partnerships as a means to find funding for their projects and to increase the visibility of their initiatives. The early preservationists relied heavily on private donations, and in the case of Susan Pringle Frost, loans from family and friends. The change in strategies in terms of fundraising methods, and the increasing variability in grants demonstrates how the field of preservation has evolved. The growing attention on preservation efforts in African American communities reflects the recognition amongst a larger audience of how important this preservation work is. All of the early and modern preservationists have used media attention to their advantage to increase awareness for their projects. Susan Pringle Frost and Frances Edmunds were both public figures while they worked on preservation initiatives, and the modern preservationists' projects have also been reported on extensively.

Study Significance and Implications

This study is significant in several ways: it provides examples for why partnerships between organizations and Black community leaders are important; it fills a void by interviewing grassroots preservationists in Black communities; and it includes transcripts that can be used for future research. This study examined how the early preservation movement in Charleston compared to the modern preservation movement. The modern preservation movement is more focused on being inclusive, which differs from the 1920s preservation movement. The early preservation movement provides context for why prioritizing African American heritage is important. Without the progress society and the field of preservation have made, the built environment associated with African American history would not be thought of as significant by organizations offering grants. This means that preservation projects in Black communities would not receive adequate funding. People will continue to advocate for their communities, but it is imperative that they continue to have the tools necessary to preserve significant places. This includes partnerships, grants, and public interest in preserving the built environment and landscape in order to protect them from external threats.

By using an interview methodology, modern preservationists could explain their work in their own words. The questions were open-ended in order for the interviewee to have the opportunity to elaborate on their past experiences, their community's history, and their concerns about the threats posed to their sites. By interviewing five people, a small collection of oral histories of Charleston's African American preservationists now exists. Other local non-profits, such as the Preservation Society of Charleston and

Historic Charleston Foundation, have also recently conducted oral histories of people associated with Black history in Charleston. However, this study focuses specifically on preservationists in Black communities and their experiences with the field of historic preservation. By determining the best strategies that have worked for these preservationists, organizations can learn how to improve their advocacy programs or other grassroots preservationists can use these strategies in their own communities.

Oral history has commonly been used in public history and other fields as a way to hear from one person's perspective about an event. It is becoming more common in preservation to interview people as a way to piece together the past. However, a greater emphasis needs to be placed on interviewing people who are attempting to preserve sites in their communities that have traditionally been marginalized. This study aimed to fill a small part of that void in the Lowcountry. This thesis and the attached transcripts could help with future research into preservationists in African American communities.

Areas of Future Research

This study serves as a starting point for analyzing the work of modern preservationists in the Lowcountry. Many more people could have been included in this study, but due to time constraints, only five people could be interviewed. This study could be increased to include more people in order to represent more communities and age ranges. Four communities are discussed in this study, but there are many more in the Gullah Geechee Corridor that should eventually be analyzed.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Transcript: Greg Estevez

Transcribed on December 15, 2023, by Paige Regna

Paige Regna:

Before we get into the majority of the questions, I was just wondering if you could confirm if you have a preferred title with respect to the project.

Greg Estevez:

Well, I really don't go by any title. Most people know me as an author and historian on Edisto Island. Since I've authored three, you know, historical books and have done extensive research about the African American experience and culture on Edisto Island. So no, no. Just call me Greg. That'd be fine.

Paige Regna:

Okay. You just said that you have done a lot of research, and you're considered a historian for the island. What skills have you drawn from your personal or professional experiences in your work for the Hutchinson House or your other work on the island?

Greg Estevez:

Well, I definitely draw from my personal experience. Since my roots on it trace back to approximately 1683, and that was when the first land grant was appropriated. Also, in addition to that, I am a direct descendant of Henry Hutchinson, who built the Hutchinson House. That was built in 1885 as a wedding present for his wife, Rosa. Now, I remember my late grandmother, and she died in 2014. She was telling me that, you know, she watched her grandfather, which was Henry Hutchinson, work the land until his hands were bleeding. So the blood of my ancestors are literally on the land where the Hutchinson House is. So that is how personal it is to me.

Paige Regna:

Wow. I think I've read somewhere else that you were in the Navy. Have you taken away any skills from there about how to write or be a historian, or any genealogical research? Or was that all post Navy? Just things you picked up?

Greg Estevez:

Well, I mean being in the Navy, you know, I was afforded the opportunity to travel extensively. That helped me broaden my perspective and gave me a worldwide view and helped me see other cultures and languages and things of that nature, but that certainly contributed as well.

But I would have to say one other thing that contributes to my curiosity because I've always been curious. As a child, I believe I was in the fifth grade if I'm not mistaken. But

anyway, we had this course, and it was U.S. history, and I was really excited about it. The teacher said, okay, you can take the book home and bring it back over the weekend. So, I was wanting to learn more about U.S. history because that was a subject that was really intriguing to me. You have to remember that I was in the fifth grade, so I was ten years old, and I opened the book. Ms. Paige, I was floored that the African Americans in this country was only regulated to a half a paragraph in the entire book.

I guess that started my journey of trying to learn more because that's the way I'm wired. You know I was. I'm very, I guess you can the word, I'm very inquisitive. My father was an investigative reporter, and I think just about the same way. So, I wanted to know more. So, the more I learned, the more I wanted to know. So that started my journey with historic preservation, and, you know, trying to find out more because as a kid, I was very disappointed that the African American history was regulated to a half a paragraph out of a whole entire book.

Paige Regna:

Yeah, that seems wild, and I think that it really highlights how important the books that you've written are for Edisto Island and the African American legacy there. You mentioned your grandmother, and do you have any other memories of the Hutchinson House that have been formative for you?

Greg Estevez:

Yes, I have memories of the Hutchinson House. As a child, we spent Christmases there. We often played in the yard, you know, swinging from the huge vines. We picked apples, pears, peaches, plums, and figs off the tree because they had a lot of fruit trees. They also had a lot of nut trees, pecans or walnuts, and sometimes as a kid, we would help feed the chickens or hogs. This was in the early seventies. We would fetch water from the well, which was different. And we even used the outhouse. Now, that's an experience within itself. Most people these days don't even know about outhouses. Many of the homes back then didn't have running water or indoor plumbing.

Paige Regna:

Well, will you elaborate a little bit more about the projects that have happened at the Hutchinson House and what makes the place important?

Greg Estevez:

Well, in 2016 the Edisto Open Land Trust acquired the Hutchinson House and the surrounding property. But to tell you a little bit more about the Hutchinson House, it is considered one of the oldest freedmen homes that was built in 1885 on Edisto. It was built barely twenty years after the Civil War ended. So, this historic treasure serves as an endurance symbol of economic empowerment and resilience of the newly freed enslaved people of the Lowcountry. It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1987. So, it has a great significance in this area.

Paige Regna:

When researching this site, I was kind of stunned by how much history is associated with the landscape around the house, as well as the structure itself. I think you mentioned that the Edisto Island Open Land Trust purchased the house. I think by purchasing the land around it, hopefully that'll open up for a lot of interpretation in the future if people visit the Hutchinson House. Maybe you can speak to this.

Greg Estevez:

Well, I mean I would say thank God for the Open Land Trust for taking this project on, which was actually my grandmother's wish. Had they not come in, we feel certain that the house would have crumbled to the ground, and we would have lost it forever. So, they came in, and they've been working with the family, and we're thankful for that.

You alluded to the landscape. Don't get offended, but when the Europeans came initially, and they got land grants, that's when the first enslaved people came along with them. They started to clear the land and things of that nature. So, that was probably about a mile or two from the Hutchinson House. The whole area has historic implications, and interpretations that we can look at. So yes, there's a lot of history there.

Paige Regna:

Yes, definitely. You've alluded to your grandmother and it being her wish to take the project on. But what motivated you to start working on this project?

Greg Estevez:

Well, my grandmother's name was Myrtle. She lived to be ninety-seven. She was the matriarch of the family. Her passion was trying to memorialize her family legacy. It kind of fell to us, so she was a great inspiration. For me to become involved in this work, and after her death in 2014, I took up the family legacy that she kept alive through her tireless efforts. She passed down to me all of the historic photos. We have photos that go all the way back to probably the 1800s and up until today. So, there's a lot of history there.

Ancestry.com contacted me, and they said I have the largest African American family tree on ancestry that features the African American community. I have over 5,000 people on that tree. It includes pictures and documents and all kinds of records. So, a lot of people like to go to that tree and figure out a little bit more about their family and their ancestral roots and things of that nature.

Paige Regna:

That's crazy because on Ancestry there really aren't a lot of documents that African Americans can use to trace back their family legacy. Was that mostly done through interviews and you knowing your family members and being able to plug them in? Or was it all research you did yourself on Ancestry?

Greg Estevez:

I guess it's a mixture of both. Even though you have the records, a lot of times the records can be wrong. For instance, a census taker might go to the family and say how many kids live here? And they'll say five. Well, that might have been a time when some neighbors kids from across the street or in the neighborhood were at the house. So, they weren't necessarily their biological kids, but they were taking care of them at the time that the census taker was there. A lot of that was due to language barriers. So, it's important that when you do have records, you have to verify them with individuals.

When I was writing the book *Edisto Island: The African American Journey*, which was my first book, I think I interviewed close to seventy long-time Edisto Island residents. I was able to garner a lot of information. With that information and all of the records, you get a much more complete picture. If that makes any sense.

Paige Regna:

It does. For the work being done at the Hutchinson House, do you consider yourself a preservationist? Or are you really more of an author and historian?

Greg Estevez:

Well, I think it goes hand-in-hand, and I would say, yes, I do consider myself a preservationist. You know, people tend to preserve what they think is important or what they care about. And that could be good and bad. For instance, South Carolina or Clemson University still has a monument to a man called Pitchfork. Pitchfork was his nickname, and he was a state senator, and he eventually became a governor. He advocated strongly for the killing of black people, and he still holds a place of honor at the South Carolina capital. So, I say this to say that people tend to preserve what they think is important. Another example is John C. Calhoun. There was a towering statue of him in Charleston for many, many years. If you study his life, who was it important to?

I'm not trying to advocate one way or the other, but people tend to preserve what they care about or what they think is important, and I'll leave it like that. So yes, I am a preservationist. I believe that there are stories that have not been told or have been suppressed or left out. These need to be preserved as well, and I believe that Hutchinson House is one of those stories.

Paige Regna:

I think that makes sense. Going back to Pitchfork-

Greg Estevez:

Ben Tillman. Have you ever heard of Ben Tillman? I think he has a building at Clemson.

Paige Regna:

Oh, yeah. Tillman Hall.

Greg Estevez:

Do your research on him, and see what he was about.

Paige Regna:

Will do. Can you name some of the goals you have for the Hutchinson House and the work that is being done there?

Greg Estevez:

Absolutely. My goals are to continue to tell the story. Like I said, sadly, when it comes to African American history, one of the three things tend to happen. Number one: Our histories, our history and achievements, are often suppressed or downplayed. Number two: They don't tell our story right. Number three: They leave us out completely, and those are the three things that tend to happen. And when I say, "Leave us out completely," that's in the American history books.

Paige Regna:

Like the book you read when you were ten.

Greg Estevez:

Yes, ma'am.

Paige Regna:

I know that there is actually restoration work being done at the Hutchinson House. Now, I know they just received more money to do the last stage. Is it completely done?

Greg Estevez:

It is not. They've been waiting for the approval of plans and things of that nature. But we fully expect it to continue in 2024. They've already picked a construction company. They're supposed to be doing some interior work, and they're also going to be adding a wraparound porch and doing some other things with the roof. So, we're almost there. I would say right now we're probably about halfway, but it's coming along really good.

Paige Regna:

And that's after you guys have already done the exterior restoration. What other projects have been done for the campaign?

Greg Estevez:

Well, the land around it had a lot of growth. We had to clear the brush and clear it out. Also, they went in with some heavy equipment and made places for parking and things like that. So, I would say that project is moving along really good. I would suspect that it would be finished hopefully next year.

Paige Regna:

Was restoring the building to a significant period important for the structure's story? Maybe stretching it a bit further, would you say it's important for the African American legacy on the island as well?

Greg Estevez:

Absolutely. For a long, long time, we were told and made to feel like we were only slaves, and that we didn't have any real talents or anything like that. But that couldn't have been further from the truth. We were builders. We were lawyers. We were teachers. We were judges. We were fishermen and farmers and things of that nature. So yes, I believe that it helps for people to experience history and bring it to life because there's nothing like going to see a history that is alive and breathing. It's like a living classroom that you couldn't get from a traditional classroom. You get to see and touch it. So, I think the Hutchinson House will absolutely do that, and it will be an interactive experience for visitors. So yes, we're excited.

Some of the things I participated in when it comes to the Hutchinson House are many, many oral history projects to assist in telling the whole story. I also help in galvanizing the support of the entire community for many on-site cultural events that take place at the Hutchinson House. We've already had several events. The Land Trust is very careful to include the family, and we certainly appreciate and respect that. I think our partnership is a marriage made in heaven.

Paige Regna:

That's really good to hear. So, all the oral histories and community outreach you do sound like really impressive preservation initiatives that you're taking on. Have you used any tools to do that? In addition to the partnership.

Greg Estevez:

Well, I would have to say mostly the oral histories because I'm almost sixty. I'll be fifty-nine on Christmas Eve. But anyway, my history only goes back so far. As I interviewed the elders and heard some of their stories of what their parents and grandparents had told them, it's almost like a window into the past. It helps us to understand the days gone by. So, you get a window into the past and that's how I was able to fill in a lot of what's not recorded.

Because if you look for most African Americans, you know we don't have birth certificates. Most of us were born by midwives and things of that nature, especially in rural areas like Edisto Island. So, it's very hard to piece together any real recorded history because we weren't in newspapers. We weren't in magazines. You get what I'm saying? So oral history becomes paramount when you're talking about African American history. You'll have people say, 'Well if it wasn't recorded, it didn't happen.' No, that's because we were left out.

Paige Regna:

Again, I think I've said this many times, but I think that's why the work you're doing there is so important. I know that the Edisto Island Open Land Trust is a big partner for this project. Have you been able to partner with any other organizations for your work? Or any other networks of people?

Greg Estevez:

Oh yeah, of course. I have certainly partnered with various organizations. But I do want to state that the Edisto Island Open Land Trust and the Hutchinson family- we enjoy a great partnership. We really do. We have worked in tandem together from day one to make this important project a resounding success. I believe our strong alliance has contributed to the exponential growth and excitement up to this point. In other words, John Girault, who is the Director of the Edisto Island Open Land Trust, he makes no decisions without consulting the family first. Now he doesn't have to, but he does it because he understands the importance of having the family involved.

Now I want to go one step further. Not only are we involved, but we are in positions where we are to make decisions. I am a board member of the Edisto Island Open Land Trust, and a lot of my other family members have been on different committees when it comes to the Hutchinson House and things of that nature. So, I believe that partnership is really what has made this whole project as successful as it has become.

Paige Regna:

I agree. It seems like they're doing really great work for the structure, but it's better to hear that they are consulting your family and descendants when making decisions. They aren't just doing it blindly.

Greg Estevez:

I want to say this: we benefit mutually from that. What I mean by that is we couldn't have done it without them because they had the financial backing, and they had the support to make it happen. But they couldn't have done it without us because what good is it to own a house and the land and not have the story? You get what I'm saying? So, now you have the story and the financial backing and the support. It's all wrapped into one, which has really propelled everything forward.

Paige Regna:

Yes. For the financial part of it, what funding sources have been used for the project? To get a little more specific, is it mostly grants or donations?

Greg Estevez:

Well, it's a combination of both. We've enjoyed incredible continuous support from the private donors. I won't give the amounts, but some of them have been quite substantial. Maybe \$100,000 or \$50,000. Also, we had funding through various grants like the Mellon Grant. The last grant that we got from the Mellon Foundation was close to \$1

million. That's enabled us to do a lot of things. We had one from the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Paige Regna:

That's so impressive that so many grants have come through for that, and the private donors as well. That's amazing that there's a combination of both for the project.

Greg Estevez:

I want to plug or shout out to Dr. Jon Marcoux. You know, he's very humble, but he's a phenomenal individual. He's a good friend. We worked together last summer with Amalia Leifeste. More recently, there was a discovery of an African American cemetery that dates back before the Civil War that is less than an eighth mile away from the Hutchinson House, right across on the other side of the creek. Dr. Jon Marcoux brought out ground penetrating equipment. We did see one visible headstone, but he was able to see sixteen additional bodies underneath the ground. So, that was a major discovery for Edisto Island. So yeah, I want to give him a shout out for the incredible work that he does.

Paige Regna:

Yeah, he does really impressive work. He loves his GPR, that's for sure. Through this work, and maybe any other organizations or partnerships you've come across, have you found any colleagues or counterparts doing this type of work in related places?

Greg Estevez:

Oh, yeah. I've forged great relationships with people throughout the Gullah Geechee Corridor, and I certainly look forward to collaborating on various initiatives in the future. You know, certain projects like Sol Legare, Mosquito Beach, Johns Island. There's a praise house on Johns Island, and the Progressive Club. So we have collaborated and we've done different things together because we realize that the culture and some of the customs are exactly the same. They originated from the West African coast.

Paige Regna:

Great. Yeah, I am familiar with the work happening at Sol Legare and Mosquito Beach and Ernest and Cubby.

Greg Estevez:

Yeah, I know Cubby Wilder. They do great work out there as well. As a matter of fact, and there's another plug. My niece, her name is Cartier Brown, she works for the Food Network. I don't know if you've heard of *Delicious Ms. Brown*, but she has a TV show. But anyway, we did one segment out at Mosquito Beach with Cubby Wilder and some other people that are important in that community, and that was televised nationally.

Paige Regna:

That's so cool. I didn't know about that.

Greg Estevez:
Small world.

Paige Regna:
And the last question here, it's kind of a big one. Do you have a vision for the future of African American heritage in the Lowcountry?

Greg Estevez:
Yes, I would have to say, and don't get offended when I say this, but the state of South Carolina has historically had a way of downplaying the contributions and also the achievements of African Americans. But I believe that's changing. So, yes, my vision is for other African American heritage projects not only in South Carolina but throughout the United States to come together to be able to inspire and educate future generations for years to come. So that is my vision. I don't look at the Hutchinson House as an isolated thing. There are probably seventy other Hutchinson Houses or African American heritage projects throughout the state of South Carolina itself, but we just haven't heard about it yet. So, I want that to continue.

Paige Regna:
Yes, I think there are also a growing number of tools to use for these, and more grant funding. I think these are a really important part of these heritage projects, especially to spread the work about them. Hopefully, this can increase private donations as well. Well, thank you so much, Greg, for speaking with me today. This was such a pleasure.

End of Recording

Appendix B

Transcript: Richard Habersham

Transcribed January 3, 2024, by Otter.ai

Paige Regna:

Okay, Richard I'm recording now. So, getting into the first question here, can you just confirm what your preferred title is with the advocacy work for the Philips Community?

Richard Habersham:

Alright, I'm the Community President of the Phillips Community Association, but they know me as Mr. Habersham or Richard, you know. It don't bother me because when you talk to people and you say Phillip, they're gonna mention my name.

Paige Regna:

And what skills do you draw from your personal or professional experiences in preservation or advocacy work for Phillips?

Richard Habersham:

Okay, I have three. Before, being in the military, while being aware and seeing other communities and seeing how other communities developed and what happened, and some other communities took away from that. Then being a truck driver, a lot of things like going on the Interstate, myself, I just like driving to the back roads, and then you see America, you know, and you see how real people live in the communities there. And it's really just like my community. So, you know, you look those two things, you see the little bit of the world and you see the communities, and, you know, I can bring that back home, you know, for the Philips Community. And I remember my childhood and everything and how everything was.

Then after that, I got involved with the Community Foundation, that helped build a small organization, and from that organization, and you know, my contacts and you know, relationship with people, they opened my eyes up, not just looking at one thing, you look at the whole picture, you look at the community, the people, how you can get in and organize, how you relate to people. So, all of that brought it into focus.

Paige Regna:

I've read some of your other interviews, where you say that, I believe that your family has been in the same place since your grandparents—

Richard Habersham:

Great-grandparents.

Paige Regna:

Great-grandparents. Do you have any formative memories of the Phillips Community?
Richard Habersham: I don't remember my grandparents and stuff they said. I actually met my grandfather, but I really don't remember him. But the biggest thing you know, growing up in here, I took for granted the whole community was my playground. And the whole community knew me and knew my family and everybody. So, it wasn't that when I left home that my parents worried about me because they knew I was in the community. Believe it or not, I don't know how they did it without a telephone, but if you did something wrong, before we got home, they already knew. That's the darndest thing.

And shrimping and stuff, you know, going out in the creek with my father. I thought it was fun, but it was a source of food. Shrimp, you know, that's a meal. Crabbing. Fishing. Some people take it for granted and say, "we need to go fishing and all this." But, to me, I took it for granted. That's what we did. I didn't really look at it as a necessity of getting food, right. I looked at it as an adventure, going into the creek with my father and his friends, you know?

Paige Regna:

Mm-hmm. And will you please speak a little bit about the Philips Community and what makes it important?

Richard Habersham:

Well, I learned more about the Phillips Community in the last 20 years than I did my whole life. Like I said earlier, I took a lot of stuff for granted. We had one problem where Mt. Pleasant Waterworks put a water tank in our community, and that's what got me and some other people interested. They wanted, well, they did put the water tank in. But at the time, they wanted to get the water tank put in and change zoning from residential to commercial in that area. And if you notice down 17 or in Mt. Pleasant once they started commercialism in the community, it's like a cancer that eats away at everything. And from that, we got interested and said, "No, we don't want that." This is a residential community and this is what we want.

And from that, that's when we start digging into the history of the community. That's when we found out that we have Civil War veterans in the community. We had the Rutledge family. Rutledge Avenue down there, that came out of Philip. They talk about Rutledge in McClellanville. That family started in Phillip. And from that, we start digging in more, you know. When was it established? Who came here? The original residents, not the plantation, but really who started the Philips community. The family who didn't who's still in Phillip. You know, it got really interesting. The more we look into things, the more we find out about Phillip. Like right now, the big thing is Highway 41. A lot of people don't realize the Phillips Community schoolhouse was in the middle of where Highway 41 came through. They had to move the schoolhouse to one side of the road and the outhouse on the other side. You know, little things like that, I mean, just to learn the history of that road, it makes a difference.

And getting back to the Civil War veterans, I always knew that we had one, but I thought we had two, and I found out that it was pre-Civil War veterans in the community that helped make Phillip, Phillip. From that, I thought there are other communities too that had Civil War veterans. The 120th Colored Infantry out of Beaufort, that settled here. So, it's not just Phillip. When you learn the history, and then you start branching out and start talking to other people, you say, "Wow, we all have a centralized issue that ties all of us together."

Paige Regna:

And you mentioned the Waterworks project from 20 years ago on Highway 41. What else motivated you to start your work with Phillips?

Richard Habersham:

Well, the Waterworks lit the fire, and then, we started seeing what happened to some of the other communities. You go down [Highway] 17 to Mt. Pleasant Town Centre. That was the Four Mile Community.

Paige Regna:

Really, that's where it was?

Richard Habersham:

That's right. You see any houses on 17 in that area now? No. It's all businesses. You have very few people in that area, and it's mostly on Venning Road or Labor Camp Road, that's the one that's left. Seven Mile Community is the same thing. Where 41 and 17 intersects, look at how many houses are on that road now. See, all of that was Black-owned, and you had homes all along that area. Now, in Ten Mile further down in Awendaw, it's the same thing. If you go over there now, you see this big development in the middle of the community, and they're fighting to save what's left of the community.

We looked at that stuff and said, wow, we have to be proactive. We have to look at it a different way. We can't wait until it happens and then jump on board. We've got to do it now if we want to save it for the next generation. Look at 41, well, people think that it started five years ago, but 41 started in 1999 with the Comprehensive Plan for a long-range plan. And that's when we got on board when we first heard about it, and we got proactive in that. I think that was some of the stuff that gave us credibility. That and our Waterworks project. They said, wow, the Phillips Community is standing up to this. Yes, yes we did. Like the Waterworks, we didn't win. We didn't win that battle, but for 41, right now, we are winning that battle.

Paige Regna:

Okay. How long have you been president of the Phillips Community Association?

Richard Habersham:

Too long! [laughter]. Too long! No, I've been president since we started in '99.

Paige Regna:

Oh, wow.

Richard Habersham:

Yeah, like I said, too long. I'm trying to pass the baton. I'm not bragging on myself, but the connection that- that I've made, and some of the people that I'm involved in and in contact with- I don't know if you know Jennie Stevens? She's with the Center for Heirs Property.

Paige Regna:

I've heard of her, yes.

Richard Habersham:

Yeah, well I met her when she first graduated from the College of Charleston, and she worked with the Community Foundation. And she told me something a couple of years ago, she said that, Mr. Habersham, you know one thing about you, when you call- people do call- to answer the phone and call you back. And, you know, I took it for granted. I thought everybody does that. But she said, No, you know, because we got a purpose, and I can talk to people. And it is not that we tried to make things better or make things seem better than what it is. We try to be direct. And keep, keep it focused, with the issue there, try to stick with the issue, not make it glorified or not making it seem worse than it is. We just tried to keep with the issue and a lot of people appreciate that. And don't get personal with people. We stick with the issue. And because I see some people get personal, well, you did this. No, it's not you. It's the policy that we fight, not the person itself.

Paige Regna:

You've been doing this for a long time, as you just said. Do you consider yourself a preservationist?

Richard Habersham:

When I started, no. I just looked at it as this is my community. If I don't fight for my community, who's gonna fight for it? And being in some of the meetings- well, I can't say I disagree with it, but they said silence is consent. And I heard that and said, wow, if you don't say nothing, it means that you are going along with it. That baffled me, you know, because a lot of people really just don't know, you just don't see it. But from that, it went

into being a preservationist. Where, like I said, just to understand Phillip, to understand that people, just to understand why my ancestors settled in Phillip.

The other part was, why they left property without a deed or a will and everything. You know, a lot of people say, well, man you got an heirs property. That's a hindrance. No, you have to understand why they did it. They did it because they didn't want one family member to own all the property, they always wanted- that no matter if you went someplace or you had a hard time, you always had a place to come back to. That's why heirs property is here, it went to something else later on, but just that and same thing with the community. No matter if you went off making millions, that's good. If you went off and you didn't make your millions, and you fell on a hard time, you always have a community to come back to, you always have that safety net. And that's why I look at Phillip and trying to really save the relatives, but give the next generation a chance to live there. So from that, and I found out that I can't look at just the Black side, that's the Black side, the Black history side, I got to look at the community itself, you know. The good and the bad.

Like I stated earlier about the Rutledge. They don't want the plantation. But Sarah Hex, that's the daughter of John Boone. That's where we got the connection with Boone Hall Plantation. They owned Phillip. I think they were the second—Sarah Hex was the second owner of the Phillip Plantation. Was it Sarah Hex? No, it was Sarah Boone Hex. She got the property, but during that time, a female couldn't own property. So, her husband got control of the property, and he gave it to his daughter, which was the granddaughter of John Boone, you know. So, all of this, you know, when you start to understand the whole dynamics of the area and what happened, you know, you say, wow. I mean, it's unique and it's interesting to me, you know, to find all this stuff out. Then like a few- I think it was last month, yeah I think it was last month, I met a Horlbeck, which owned Phillip when Phillip was the last plantation. I met one of the descendents of the Horlbecks because that's who my great-grandfather bought the property from, one of the Horlbeck family. Yeah, see it's not just one part, when you do it, and you start meeting people in this, and he was interested in Phillip too. And he was telling me some things that I didn't know about Philip. So, we will get back together and you know, discuss it some more. But being a preservationist is understanding history, to me, you know. And then you sell that. But I think a lot of other people too are getting interested into that.

Paige Regna:

Yeah, I would agree. I think it's becoming a little bit more well-known.

Richard Habersham:

Yes, and people, really, if you tell the story correctly, and like I said, you don't put nothing more into it than what it is. Because I see some people get here and say, well we did this, and my family did this. No, that ain't what the record shows. Because some

things I thought was, and I found out later, no, I was wrong. But I got the information I had at the time. But later on, it sort of changed when you get the documentation with it. And, and that's another thing with us. Some of the other communities-- we can document these things, you know. Other communities, some of the other communities, you know, there's word of mouth, you know, oral history. And we've got that, too, now, don't get me wrong. But a lot of the stuff, we've got documentation to show that. Just like I told you about the three soldiers that fought the Civil War. We've got documentation to show that. We've got documentation to show when the community was established. We've got documentation of how the community was divided. We've got documentation, who was the first residents community? See, that makes a big difference. A lot of communities don't have that, but we do.

Paige Regna

Yeah, that makes a big difference. What are your goals for the work that you're doing with Phillips Community and the work that you have been doing for 20 years now?

Richard Habersham

The goal is to let Phillip be self-sufficient and self-sufficient with all its history. We don't want to keep it to ourselves. That would make no difference. We don't want to keep our story. What we want to do is have a path to the tourism sector. And why I said we want the tourism sector is because \$12 billion come through this area. \$12 billion, you know, and we don't want to be another little community that are gonna be out there looking for handouts every year, you know, for this little project. And then the money that comes in is not going to be enough to do nothing with. There'll be enough, you know, to go to the grocery store or whatever. But the biggest thing now is homes, you know. If you don't get enough money in for the young people to build a house, and I ain't talking about no half a million dollar house, you know, but something comfortable to the area. So, if we can get tied into that and bring enough money, finances into the community, I think that young people would stay. It's like yourself-- you say that you gotta move because it's so expensive. It's the same thing in my community, you know, but if they can build or get affordable housing in the area, it'll be good. And that's where the tourism come in. Being able to bring all the tourism dollars in, and everyone say, well, Phillip this is what they're doing to sustain themselves. That's the biggest thing is trying to sustain Phillip.

Paige Regna:

Yeah, I think that with the Phillips Community, it's a really interesting case of not just trying to restore or preserve one building, but you're trying to keep a community together and sustain it for generations. I think that that's different from other communities I've studied and have looked at is that you're trying to build something for the future for future generations.

Richard Habersham:

Yeah, you can't live in the past. You just have to face it. Everything is moving. Like I told you earlier, I rode through South Street and Drake Street coming up, and it looks totally different from ten years ago, five years ago it looked totally different, you know. I still own a piece of property downtown, but everything around that house down there is different. So we have to realize, the young people is not going to stay in that old mode, that, you know, everybody wants to move out, they want their chance, everybody wants to have a piece of rock, you know. So if we can do that, if we can get the young people interested in all this, we can get the young people to say, okay, well, I can afford to stay here. I mean, it makes a big difference. Like right now in downtown Charleston. Where I live at, I live in Phillip, you have River Town, Dunes West, Park West. If you go in and take a survey, I bet that you don't have no more than 20 people that lives in those communities from the Charleston area. You know, that's it. Everybody else came here because they're seeing the beauty of Charleston, and wherever they come from, they got more property from where they came from, from up north, when you used to have a little piece, you know, and now you have a half-acre. You got a yard. You got a place where your kids can go in the backyard, and it costs a whole lot less. But then again, it drives up the price for the people that's here.

Paige Regna:

Yeah, and the taxes.

Richard Habersham:

I'll say, me and my son just bought a piece of property in the Phillips Community, you know. And it's a mobile home, and we renovated the mobile home to rent out. The taxes, it's \$2,200 on a mobile home. It's a little bit more than a half-acre. But the taxes are \$2,200. I don't know, that's a lot to me. And then getting back to the heirs property thing. We got people that are clearing titles that had acreage, you know, 10 acres or whatever, paying a few hundred dollars. Now, once they cleared a title and subdivided the property, that one piece, they pay \$2,000. This was a small portion of that large track.

Paige Regna:

It's crazy.

Richard Habersham:

That's right. You know what that did? If I'm paying \$2,000 a year in taxes, you think I want to keep that property? Because it costs me. I want to sell it and move on. And that's what a lot of people don't realize with all this, you know. But if the young people-- getting back to the tourism-- and we can bring in some money, and be able to help with

the taxes. And we can help them, you know, develop their property where they can, you know, get a little money off it to sustain themselves. All that would be pretty good.

Paige Regna:

And I think you've covered this with other answers, but are there any other projects that you've worked on with the Philips Community in addition to the Highway 41 expansion? I know that this year, Phillips was listed as a TCP with the help of Brittany Lavelle Tulla.

Richard Habersham:

That's right. Well, that was a big one when we got on the historical register. But now, we got three projects in the works. One of them, we own 10 acres in the community. When I say we, the Community Association owns 10 acres. And we want to build a community center and a replica of the old schoolhouse, and that goes back to the tourism part. That'd be an anchor then or the schoolhouse. Another one is the tomb of Dr. John Rutledge. Yeah, we got the Greenbelt Grant to purchase a property, but Charleston County said that the amount of property we want, they don't want to subdivide it, so we have to do a planned development, and we are working with the Lowcountry Land Trust to do that. So, once we get that property, we're going to restore the tomb with the help of Clemson. I don't know if you know, Stephanie Crette?

Paige Regna:

Yes, I know her. Yes.

Richard Habersham:

Yeah, we'll be working with her, you know, to restore the tomb.

Paige Regna:

Oh, okay. I didn't know about that. That's neat.

Richard Habersham:

Yeah, yep. And then this tomb was dated back to 1700. So, that's another project that we will want to work on. And the Old Parker's Island Bridge. You know, it's in bad shape. And why the bridge is so important is a lot of family members in Phillip came off Parkers Island. And that was, that was our road, their road to freedom. That one road that when they was living on the plantation on Parker's Island, and they purchased the property in Phillip, they left the island and came into Phillip. And that bridge was that roadway to get over there.

Paige Regna:
Wow.

Richard Habersham:

Yeah, yeah. See, a lot of people don't realize that. But you're just looking at a bridge over a creek, but it got a whole lot more sentimental values, and a lot of history behind that one bridge. Yeah, so we've got those three things. And the community center site, once the engineer makes the decision on 41, and we can do the mitigation part with the county and get the money to do that. The tomb, we got some of the money to renovate. When I leave here, I'm going to the law center to pick up the check for that. But we got the money to renovate that, and we're working with Clemson. And the bridge, that's another project. We're gonna see if we can work with Clemson on that one too.

Paige Regna:

Yeah, that's great that you have so many projects in the works. That also means you're gonna have to keep being the president for a while.

Richard Habersham:

No, no [laughter]. I want to be more in the background. I'll tell you what, I got drafted into it. This wasn't something that I'd seen for myself. This isn't something that I wanted, but I accepted it. And I mean, I did the best I could, you know, but I think it's time for somebody else to take the reins. You know, I don't want to be all about me because if something happened to me, I don't want the organization to die. And you know, everything goes away. You know, I want to leave somebody else that can be behind me to carry it on.

Paige Regna:

Yeah, that's a good point.

Richard Habersham:

Let me show you too, our organization was never the first one in the community. When I was a child, my dad and them, they had an organization called The Society. And they got that from his father, you know, and The Society was just a community organization that helped out. Like if somebody was sick. Got the group—it was a man-orientated organization that the woman was in support of, but it was more male. Someone was sick, this group came in, help out where they could. Something happened to your home, you had a fire, or you needed help with home repair, they did that. Before 41 became 41, Deacon was the backroad, and the main road was Habersham Road. Habersham Road along the creek side. They did the maintenance of the road and everything. So, we always had a community organization. And then when, you know, when all of that died out, we had a couple other little organizations. But we are the association's second longest-running organization in this community besides The Society. I just had to put that into

perspective because a lot of people think it was just us, but no, we just follow the path, you know.

Paige Regna:

Yeah, I didn't know about that. That's an interesting history to just see the evolution of how preservation has been--

Richard Habersham:

Yeah, how it came on. Like I said, people say, oh, the Association did this. No, we weren't the first, you know. And the Society, three things that they always did every year, three main things. You went to Atlantic Beach, you know, for recreation, because you know, the beaches around, you couldn't go to then-- you called it bus excursions. You get a ragged bus on the interstate with a bunch of people, you know, bunch of kids and everything. You go up there and you play in the water and everything else. Next one, on Memorial Day, you went down to Beaufort because you had people from this area that died in certain wars and were buried down in the National Cemetery. So, they never forgot the people who died. So, they had Memorial Day, jumped on that bus, go down there and put the wreath or whatever on the grave site. And another one that you had people in the state hospital. They always went to Columbia. They never forgot the sick. So, they never forgot the dead, they never forgot the sick, and it also gives you a little bit of recreation. So that was the three main things. And they had other little trips and everything, but those three things you knew they did every year. Yeah, they always kept everybody in focus. And they always made sure that people remember, you know, remember what happened.

Paige Regna:

And this was for the whole community? For the Phillips Community?

Richard Habersham:

Yeah, for the Phillips Community. Now, the other communities did some of the same things too, but the Society did that here.

Paige Regna:

Wow. Getting back to the preservation initiatives that you've been a part of, what tools have you used? I know, you mentioned grants and other partnerships. Are there any other tools that you've used for the advocacy work?

Richard Habersham:

Well, the partnership was the biggest thing. And then the media. That was another one, but the partnership that we got, when we got—like I said, the Community Foundation was one. Heirs Property. Then it was Conservation League. Yeah, those ones were on board at first. And let me show how that worked. Community Foundation gave us our foundation, you know, to startup this organization. Jennie Stephens was a part of the Community Foundation, we always had a good relationship with her. When this road thing came through, and we didn't have an attorney, and we was told we need to call Chris DeScherer at the Law Center. Right? Give me the number, called Chris. At first, they didn't want to take us on because he was saying, well, we don't do this, you know. And then I mentioned the Conservation League. And I was telling him that, you know, I knew Jane Lareau and all that, and they took us on back in 2000 when we heard about the road.

So, we had a good, long-term relationship with Conservation League. And then when they heard the Conservation League, then, he took a second look at us. And from that, from one organization to the next to the next, you know, we made that connection. And that would help us, you know, jump on the highway part. And everybody came in and we had other people coming after that. We had the League of Women Voters coming. You had this one come in and you had this one coming in. Even had the [inaudible] come in. So, that connection, that connection from these early groups. We didn't go to these people when we needed something. We were there before we needed something, you know. And maybe they've seen something in me and maybe they've seen something in the community that they liked. Like I said earlier, you know, we didn't try to oversell ourselves. You know, we just put up what we knew at the time. And it was good. You know, we tried. Well, with Conservation League, we did come when we needed help. We did come to them. But Jane Lareau, before she died, I think she was a really good advocate for us. Really good.

Paige Regna:

Yeah, I think the partnerships are great, but also the media attention on the Phillips Community has, it seems like it has grown a lot within the past couple of years. And I think that that's interesting that you say that's a tool for preservation because I didn't even really think about that.

Richard Habersham:

Yeah, it was. News and Courier. The TV station, and we have relationship with the News and Courier. And this was back in 2001-2002. And I forgot the gentleman's name now.

He's no longer a reporter, but he's still with the newspaper. We had a relationship with him.

Paige Regna:
Was it Robert?

Richard Habersham:
Yeah, Robert Behre. Yes, yes. We had a relationship with him, and he come out to see the community and all that. And, you know, I think he was sort of impressed. You know, it really was a lot to see, but he understood what we was going through and what we wanted. You know, it made a difference. I think he was behind a lot of the press that we got from the News and Courier. You didn't see it, but I really believe that.

Paige Regna:
Yeah, that's really neat. So, you've mentioned some of the non-profits like the Coastal Conservation League. I know that you've also partnered with Historic Charleston Foundation recently. You also mentioned Lowcountry Land Trust. Are there any other organizations that are nonprofits or other, like, networks of people that you've partnered with recently?

Richard Habersham:
Well, we were with Mt. Pleasant Land Trust, which went into Lowcountry Land Trust. Historic Charleston Foundation. Yeah, with them. Who else? Well, I don't want to leave nobody out.

Paige Regna:
Well, it sounds like you've partnered with a lot over, I mean, 20 years, that's a lot. That's a lot.

Richard Habersham:
Yeah, but it's like I said, you know, when you get to people-- what I found out, people help people who they know. And people would work with people who they know. And that made a big difference too, you know, and the partnership. And then who we don't know, somebody else that we know, knows. So, all of that makes a connection. We got the introduction to other organizations for now a partnership.

Paige Regna:
Yeah, Charleston is a small world.

Richard Habersham:

So I found out. So I found out because I got an award. The Peter McGee Award, right? Yeah, it's a presentation award from the Charleston Foundation.

Paige Regna:

Yes, I think I heard about that.

Richard Habersham:

Yes, well I got that. Me and this other gentleman from Savannah Preservation. But what I didn't know is Madelaine McGee used to be the head of the Community Foundation. That is her father, Peter McGee. Yes, you see? Now you see where I'm coming from? Yeah, and he was one of the top lawyers in the Charleston area.

Paige Regna:

Small world.

Richard Habersham:

Yes, small world. Yeah, and she's also the sister-in-law of—he's on TV at night. Oh come on, late night show on Channel Five on ABC. Oh, Lord, I forgot his name. I had his name on my mind. I'll remember it, but she's the sister-in-law of this person, and they got connections to the Ravenel family over here. I hate to throw names out there like that. But just having that connection with Madelaine, and like I said, we had a really good close relationship from the Community Foundation. But I didn't know that she was that connected in Charleston. I hate to get off that subject, let me show you this. When they first started the Gullah Geechee Corridor, and they had the meeting and everything. at the church downtown where they had the massacre. And I would walk across the parking lot. And Mayor Joe Riley was walking. I said, have a good evening, sir, how you doing? He said, hey, Mr. Habersham, what are you doing at Phillip? How did he know me? And how did he know about Phillip? Think about that now. You know, it shocked the heck out of me when he called my name and asked me about Phillip. I said, wow, you know, people are paying attention.

Paige Regna:

Yeah, that's neat.

Richard Habersham:

Yeah, like I said, it shocked me because I'm saying hello, being courteous and everything, and he called my name and asked about Phillip. I said, wow.

Paige Regna:

People are paying attention. Yeah. Especially, I think at the local government level. People do know about it.

Richard Habersham:

I think at the state level too.

Paige Regna:

Yeah, they would be.

Richard Habersham:

Because Larry Grooms is our Senator in the area, and when we were going up for the historic designation, he's had a conversation with Archive and History, the State Archives, and he was saying, yes, I heard it's a big deal. Y'all gonna be the first with this and that. I said, wow, they're paying attention. And some of the other legislatures are paying attention to what we're doing in Phillip, which shocked me. Just this little community, this little community, and they're paying attention to what we're doing, and how we're doing it. We've not been radicalized, we're not being, you know, boisterous and disrespectful. We're just going through the process. But I should name Archive and History was a part of this too. Two years ago, when we went up there and we got the designation as a community of interest, even before 41 became a big issue. It was there, but it wasn't a big issue. So, all of these, all these players knew about us.

Paige Regna:

Have you been able to find funding sources for your projects? Or are the partnerships that you have, those organizations, are they the ones who are primarily looking for the grants and things like that?

Richard Habersham:

Both. It's like I said earlier with the Law Center, they helped us with this grant with the tomb. And then we have other funding sources too that we went out looking for sources. We had this one gentleman that lives in Park West. And we made a connection with him through the other people that was talking about Phillip, and he wanted to help. And he gave us a \$50,000 grant this year. And what it was for, we got water sewer on the Community Center site, which we didn't have. So, we got a water sewer. We got these bathrooms, you know, these portable bathrooms we got out there now that will be connected. We're doing the parking lot and the driveway, even though we got a driveway, but it's not a sanctioned driveway, you know. So, all of that money that we got from him is gonna make our little park area better, you know, for the community. And other little grants and stuff they got from Community Foundation, and we got a little

money from the Donnelly Foundation. What's this other group that gave us money? They're dealing with Spoleto. I forgot. Yeah, they gave us seed money. And some other groups that gave us money when we first started to get this thing off the ground because it takes money to make things work. But yeah, but we go out and look for money.

Paige Regna:

Do you ever get like private donations for the projects that you're working on? Or is it like grants that you are having to apply for?

Richard Habersham:

No, we get donations too. Just like, we had a big celebration for being on the historic register. We got Boone Hall to give. We got Donnelly Foundation to give. We got the Town of Mt. Pleasant to give. We got a bank to give. I don't want to miss anyone. We had some private people in the community that gave money for this event. The idea-- maybe about a month ago, I would've invited you to it. But it was a real nice event. We got letters from Tim Scott, we got a letter from Nancy Mace. The Town couldn't come out because the mayor said he had other obligations, but we did have someone from the Town come out and speak. We had somebody from Tim Scott's office that came out. But they see the importance and they gave. Our goal was \$6,000, and we reached \$7,000.

Paige Regna:

That's good.

Richard Habersham:

Yeah, in a short period of time.

Paige Regna:

Right.

Richard Habersham:

Yeah. A short period of time, and like I said, we tried to make it an eventful evening, you know. We didn't just want to throw something together. And you know, the rental of the space, the food and everything, you know, the food was the most expensive part. That was the most expensive part, but, you know, the decorations, and then people did a little bit more, even some of the other communities, they helped out, even did a little bit more than what they charged us for. When people see good things, you get a little bit more help. And we don't try to get credit for everything. Like we always tell people, you know, we open the door, but we don't want to be the only one on the other side of that door. We want other communities to come through it and be a part of it. So, when they help us, I think they're helping themselves too.

And getting back to the donation and stuff, they see it and then you know, like I said, we asked and people do. I'll show you our biggest one. Every August, we have a family day. One of our biggest contributors to that day was the Buffalo Soldiers. That's a motorcycle group, a lot of them are older guys, a lot of them are professionals, a lot of them got their little businesses and stuff. But they're one of the big sponsors for that because we give out school supplies, you know. And then we have other organizations come out to give information and all this. But the school supplies, they came out in the first couple of years. And you know, they came out and joined us after it and food and everything, but they saw what we were doing, and they took control of that part for school supplies.

Paige Regna:
Wow, that's neat.

Richard Habersham:
Yeah, so people see this and see the importance of what we're doing, and they jump in and help too.

Paige Regna:
That's great that you're able to bring in so many different organizations and communities with what you're doing.

Richard Habersham:
Yes.

Paige Regna:
Have you found any colleagues or counterparts doing this type of work in related places?

Richard Habersham:
Yes, there's a lot of people. The first, you know, we just dealt with a lot of people east of the Cooper. Like I said you got the CAGE organization over there, you got the Ten Mile Association, you got the Four Mile, you got Scanlonville now, you know. All these other little communities they're doing about the same thing. Some of them do it a little bit different because their problems might be a little bit different. And they're trying to deal with different issues. But now, reaching out, I talked to people on Johns Island, James Island, Hollywood, Parkers Ferry, North Charleston, you know. A lot of people want to know, what are y'all doing? Why y'all did this? What's the process? You know, and what I found out is all these Black communities have the same problem. And some of that problem is the gentrification part of it. Trying to, you know, keep the community up. They don't want the community to fall into despair where only people in the community are the ones who can't leave. You've got some communities around here, you know, you really can't go nowhere. And for myself, if I want to move someplace, I can. And some of my friends in the community. We don't live in Phillip because we can't go nowhere. We

live in Phillip because we want to be there. That's a big difference. And you got problems in building these high dollar homes that don't look like the rest of the community, changing the atmosphere, the character of the community. We have a problem with flooding because of what the new homes did. They come in and backfill and raise the elevation of their property. When most of the time, they probably was the lowest part of the community. And so now when they clearcut and backfill, the water comes in and affects the surrounding communities. So, some of the same things that we got in my community, we got in these other communities too. So yeah.

Paige Regna:

Let me also ask, have you noticed a growth in other communities doing this work from when you first started doing yours to now?

Richard Habersham:

No, I've seen growth. Everybody's getting more proactive. You know, instead of waiting for things to happen, they're getting out to see the problem. And they go to more meetings and stuff because they're like, oh, county council. When I first started, there wasn't that many Black people going to county council meetings, you know, very few of us. And when we went, there was a problem. One problem. But now if you go to a county council meeting, a lot of times it's more Black folks in the county meeting or it'll be 50/50. So, people are taking—they're being more politically astute, you know. So they're sort of understanding the process or understanding that, well, I need to make my voice heard if I want this. And then we feed off of that, because some of the community did some other stuff, and I'm saying what they did. Getting on the historical register in Charleston County, everybody saying that Phillip was the first one. No, well, we might have been the first one that got that. But we followed Parkers Ferry. A lot of people don't realize that Parkers, what makes us different from Parkers Ferry, they got an overlay district. And we got on the historical register, you know. The only reason why we did that, it took us two, maybe three years to complete. The historic district took less time, and it still had about the same effect. But I always tell people we followed Parkers Ferry. They say, oh, but what about Phillip? No, Parkers Ferry.

Paige Regna:

Wow, I also didn't know that.

Richard Habersham:

See! [laughter] A lot of people don't. They give us all the credit. But I would always tell them, No, this was Parkers Ferry who made the way. You know, we just did a little bit different, but they lead the way. They started the fight.

Paige Regna:

Yeah, and I think that your listing on the National Register as a TCP will hopefully lead the way for other communities here, as well. And this is the last question. It's kind of a broad one, but do you have a vision for the future of preservation of African American Heritage in the Lowcountry?

Richard Habersham:

Yes, I do. I want all of them to get together and come up with a comprehensive plan. So, we say a comprehensive plan is what we want for the whole area. And then we can take that to Charleston County, and put that in some regulation, and then take it to the State. Because without the local level and the state level, you know, it's not going to work. It's not it's not going to work. And because I've seen that in the Sweetgrass Basket Overlay District in Mt. Pleasant. If you look at it as a regulation, it sounds good on paper. It may meet all the requirements, but it didn't work. It didn't work because what Mt. Pleasant did—when a developer buys a piece of property, it goes into the Town. Well, the Town regulation and the County regulation is different. The Town does what they want to do. So, what it does, it's like that cancer I told you about with commercialism. Just one developer gets in and changes zoning. Instead of having large lots with less houses, they got smaller lots, but a lot of houses. You know, and in our community, we don't build five houses at a time. We build one house at a time. So, if we can get together and come up with a comprehensive plan, and go to the County and the State, and say, okay, this is my community. This is how the community can survive. This is how the community can be developed, not to stifle development, to slow it down. That way the people in the community can really adjust to growth. And so that's what my outlook is.

Paige Regna:

Yeah, so thinking about the residents that have been there long-term, and thinking about wanting to keep future generations here as well.

Richard Habersham:

Yes, so that they have a chance now. And I'm not saying that they should just hold on to property just to hold on to property. But if they want to sell, they still could sell if they want to, but they wouldn't be forced to sell their property. And they wouldn't be forced to give up their birthright. You know, but if they want to do it, that's fine with me, but the people coming in, they shouldn't have the right to change the character of the whole community. Because they say, I can make more money this way. And shouldn't be that way. The community should have the bigger say-so. It's like me going into Dunes West or Park West. I can't go in and build a ranch style house. They won't allow it. You know? So why should they come in and change ours. And like I say that if communities get together, and you know, get political with this. It'll not just help Phillip. It'll help all the communities. Notice now, I tell people this, on Six Mile Road, there was this trailer park, mostly white folks in there, you know, it wasn't no rich people, but they had a quality of life. It was comfortable in that area. They sold the property a couple of years ago. And

people that were in there said, where do I go now? Where can I go? I can't afford Mt. Pleasant. I had this quality of life, I knew my neighbor. I knew the neighborhood. I didn't have to worry about somebody breaking in my house. I don't have to worry about who's walking over here. Everybody knew everybody around, you know. Now, they sold it, and they're going to build houses there. They got forced out. And not saying that a trailer park is bad. I got a mobile home in my community too, but that's affordable housing. And people think a mobile home is cheap. It's not. My neighbors bought one for \$150,000. Think about that. I mean, a few years back, not that long ago, you got a \$150,000 house in Mt. Pleasant, that was a big deal. That was a big deal. But now, a mobile is \$150,000. My neighbor bought a \$120,000 mobile home, and he don't even own the property. But that's affordable to him. You see what I'm saying? It's something that he can afford, and you couldn't get him to move out of Phillip, and he's a white guy. You couldn't get him to move out. He raised his family there. He's still there. And he'll tell you in a minute. He don't have no problem. He knows everybody around there. He knows me, he knows the neighbor over here. When his daughter was small and my granddaughter was small, they used to play together and all that, you know. This is something else, you know?

Paige Regna:

Yeah. It's important to think about putting long-term protections in place.

Richard Habersham:

Yeah, if we can get that and do something with the taxes too, you know. Don't tax us like the people down the street because they really can't afford it. But if we can do that, I think some of these communities will be around for a little bit longer. It'll come down to affordability. And I'm not talking about just a Black resident because we got white residents too. Like I said, my neighbors white, the lady at the end of the street, and these people won't move. And you know, talking to them all the time, they would rather stay in Phillip than go into Park West. This year, another young lady, she was a schoolteacher at Wando, and she used to live in Park West. When a piece of property came available in Phillip, she bought it because she didn't want to live in Park West. She got her little farm and everything, a garden. There's a big difference between living in Phillip and living in Park West.

Paige Regna:

Yeah. Great, well, I'm going to go ahead and stop the recording.

End of Recording

Appendix C

Transcript: Ernest Parks

Transcribed on January 10, 2024, by Rev.com

Paige Regna:

Okay, Ernest. I've started the recording. Okay, so getting into the first question here, can you please confirm your preferred title with respect to the work at Seashore Farmers Lodge?

Ernest Parks:

Yes, my name is Ernest Parks and I am the curator/caretaker at the SeaShore Farmers Lodge Museum and Cultural Center, James Island, South Carolina, 29412.

Paige Regna:

And what skills do you draw from your personal or professional experiences in your preservation and advocacy work at Seashore Farmers Lodge?

Ernest Parks:

What skills do I draw from? Communication from all levels and all perspectives. That may be different from yours. I think communication is the main key, and then trying to understand the culture to which you are trying to relate to, or be inquisitive about. Okay?

Paige Regna:

And because you haven't always lived on Sol Legare Island, right? You grew up there, but then moved away for awhile.

Ernest Parks:

Yes, I was born on Sol Legare Island, South Carolina, at the Naval Hospital. US Naval Hospital, North Charleston, South Carolina. My father was a World War II veteran, the greatest generation, so they say. And I was born here in Charleston, South Carolina. My grandfather was born on [inaudible 00:01:58] South Carolina, on Sol Legare, for which I live at right now. So he established that property that he bought, that Harrison Wilder bought, post Civil War.

After the Civil War, African Americans were free and the first thing that we wanted to do as military men who fought for the Civil War for the Union and South Carolina, we

wanted to buy our own land. The military helped us to have the money in order to buy that necessary property. Because prior to, we were bartering, or we had to work all the way through the slave system to get the extra money to buy land, which is hard to do because it was owned by someone else.

So our thing was, after we had the moneys and after we became fighting, free Americans for the United States of America, we used those money to buy property. You know, so we bought the property down in South Carolina; farm land, marsh land, swamps. But we turned that around and used those natural things in order to grow. We became farmers, became fishermen. That's how we made money. That's all we had to give back to America after post Civil War. You know, brick masonry, metal works, heavy iron works, those lines. And we wanted to buy our own land, so we bought our own land down here and kept it through the generations. Actually what you call it? Land rich and cash poor.

Because the area we live in is beautiful, it's scenic, it's on the waterfront, everybody wants waterfront properties on the marshland. Access to Atlantic Ocean. Hell, you're on the damn Atlantic Ocean. You know? We're right there, so they had the vision to get that and hold that and give it to the next generations. So after the Civil War and us getting our freedom, we became kind of business men because out there when we were done selling, you had to build your own. So we run our own businesses, we had to sell what we got. We had to sell it. Fish? Sell it. Field, greens, vegetables, farming? Sell it. Ferry it down to the market with a horse in back, sell it. It's called business.

And so they say, "Oh, okay. This is how we going to make our living." So we did that through the neighborhood, okay? The further inland men, they had a vision on it for some of the ferries to give the properties or [inaudible 00:04:56] to the Seashore to make a Lodge, an institution to which we can grow from. Everybody in one community, it's everybody on the same page. And how would we do that? We would do that by joining the Lodge, paying the dues, and then let the Lodge be the bank for the community at large.

You got to pay your dues? If you don't, I can give you some money. Just pay your dues, and everybody join the Lodge, okay? And that's how they... And it was out here, it was the great American way, to be quite frank about it. I look back at it now because our forefathers wanted us to go get an education and get a good job. Their thing was, they wanted us to have our own business. So they were light years ahead of us because they kind of set us back a little bit if you think about it. Because they wanted us to go get a job, instead of saying, "Well, you got a job. Build your job, build your company grow, build your oyster company grow. Be your own business." They were their own business men through farming and fishing, and that's how they kind of grew, but we built that foundation and that foundation has stayed around post Civil War until present.

The Seashore Farmers Lodge still has a function, and that's kind of like I'm talking about the Gullah Geechee people. That's the thing of language, the thing of food, the thing of religion. It's a thing of community oneness, and sometimes it seems like it could be almost intangible to touch because it gets to be from deep within, from your DNA of you're Black and they're white. It's like a deep Black thing, because it come from where it comes from. You might be a deep white things because you're of the white people, I'm of the Black people. So it's in us and Gullah.

See? Sometimes I have a hard time defining what Gullah Geechee is right now, but it's so in depth to the DNA. It was really advanced at the time, because you can't kind of touch it. So, I'm on them lines.

Paige Regna:

Mm-hmm. Do you have any memories when you were a kid growing up on Sol Legare, about the industries you just talked about and then the Lodge as well?

Ernest Parks:

Oh, yeah. Yeah, definitely. The Lodge was the heartbeat of the community. Lodge was where everybody would be, where the money would get exchanged. And really, the women really handled all the money. The man would say, "Okay, here it is. Raise the kids." You got a three room house that's got 12 people in it, so figure that out. Do the mathematics. How tight you had to be as a family to keep on that and then grow out of it.

And you know, for the community for post Civil, I mean, through the segregationist period, through the Jim Crow era, through the reconstruction era, after being through it we grow with each level. Through the Civil Rights era in the '60s, right on through at the different levels that we get into. So, I have deep, fond memories because I can remember my first experience with going to church. My father's from Georgia and my mother's from here. She grew up on the peninsula of Charleston. Not the island, but on the peninsula of Charleston; "in the city", so we say. And she met my dad who was in the Navy and they got married young, 18. He went to Navy, stayed in the Navy all his life. Retired from the USN.

So, with him going in the USN, they stayed here, but my grandfather said, "Okay. Come on out the city, y'all and I got this house that Jean and I built. Y'all can stay here, grow your families here. This is ours forever, just got to pay your taxes. Because you know, you don't pay your taxes, that's yours." And my memories go from there. Going to the first grade elementary school, and be reminded that during this period I was in the segregation period of America. So, I came up in the era where all the Blacks was over here and all the Whites was over there, and there was no interaction. You know, I look at

my grandkids now and they kind of can't perceive that because it's a different kind of America now. But they'd be taught how we came to be as one, an America.

You know, "What? You actually was segregated?" Yeah, we was segregated America. Sol Legare was a Black neighborhood and grew from the Civil War. We bought the properties from the white landowners who were slaveholders.

Paige Regna:

And was the Lodge in use during this time? Throughout the 20th century?

Ernest Parks:

Yes, yes. The Lodge, everything because the Lodge was like our insurance policy. Because we couldn't get insurance because of integration and the kind of society we were in at the period. We couldn't get insurance, so that was our insurance policy. So that was how we used the Lodge money, so yes. They would have everything was there. The Lodge was a church, was a school, was a meeting place, was the burial ground and the wake at the church service we would have for the burial. It was everything.

I could remember going to the Lodge, to burials, and how we would view. We call it the wake. The body would lie in state at the Lodge, you would view the body and visit them in that way. And then the body would stay at the Lodge until when they bury it. And see, back then, you know I mean, as African Americans the body would stay out the ground for like, two weeks because people was away in New York. They're going up way north and you had to give them time. It's not like this in the world anymore. This cell phone, it's like I can call you in two seconds, but then it would take two or three days to get a phone call to New York City and find you in New York City, because that was the trek north. We migrated north for better jobs, better treatment away from the south, and to make more money. A lot of us made money up there.

So that became our traffic up in New York City. I remember this whole transition. I remember in August of 1968, we got a letter two weeks to go into school that said, "Because the full integration of America, you will now be going to James Arnold High School." Which was the White school. And our high school, William Gresham Meggett, which is still in existence today by the way, "Will now be closed down. You will go to that to achieve full integration."

So we were the first schools to integrate in 1968, and I was 13. All the year we in eighth grade, 13. I saw it and all this is from a solitary perspective now because my parents moved from the city, once they got married, to the islands. Then we still on the islands, we moved from the islands. Dad retired. Took a job with the federal government, retired 2020. So I lived kind of a life like I saw it from both sides of the pendulum. I saw the

segregated side, the country side, the fishing side, the farmer side, but I also saw the side that was America too because dad was in the military, right?

So I really integrated before integration because when you're in the military you see people from every race and denomination. When we go to the naval base, the naval hospital, the commissary, which we had the right to go to because we were military brats. We saw every race, so really when everybody had to do it, I was kind of ahead of the curve because I had been there already. I mean, all our friends were White back then when we were segregated. And all of that ran through the Lodge. Hell, that kind of ran through the museum because all the mission came through the Lodge. Everybody's business was at the Lodge. The families were like, what?

So you got the famous families, you got the Gayheart family, got the Wilder family, got the Richardson family, [inaudible 00:14:33] family, you got the Greer family, you got the Gayheart family, you got the Brown family, got the Wallace family, got the Parr family, got the Grant. You know? A lot of those still blocks of property that people still own down in Sol Legare. It's kind of like, the last bastion of the Gullah Geechee neighborhood because like I said, it's gone now.

I've seen in the last 20 years, Sol Legare evolve, it's more like an island lifestyle, like a beach lifestyle. All the houses got to be up on stilts because where we live at go underwater. But the Lodge, it's still centered there and it keeps us in touch with our history. And I was so amazed when I got this program with Dr. Jon Marcoux because we going to mix history with preservation and architecture. And the land was so rich in artifacts that were like, from Civil War. The large houses, artifacts of the Civil War.

We found a sword, a guy literally picked it up off the ground on Sol Legare. He was foraging for some metal to sell, junk, you know? And he pulled it up and kept it because it was a sword. Well, fast forward, we had it appraised. It was 1863 Confederate sword found on Sol Legare, and then we give it to the Warren Lasch Conservatory, Clemson University, colony of Charleston Historical program and those guys, Warren Lasch Conservatory, they brought it back to life. It's beautiful. We got that housed now at the Seashore Farmers Lodge Museum and Cultural Center. We have that housed there and show, as well as other artifacts that were brought in through our collaboration with Clemson University and Warren Lasch Conservatory and the colony of Charleston. All those were entities that we really looked at.

I did, along with Dr. Marcoux, a summer intern program where we would look at the architecture of a building. And we had people like all of us look at the building and tell you what the building really looks like before they kind of modernized it, kept it a preservationist piece. We had doctors who came in, would peel the building back and tell you how it would look. And then we would find pictures of what the building looked like

then, as compared to now. And it was almost like every word she said, was like, “Damn, she actually like peeling the onion off.” Because I looked and it phase back to history. There’s always, the building preservation amazes me.

I think about Dr. Jon Marcoux, he’s like an archeologist, you know? But he bases history in it. Preservation in there. And through him, he touches every spectrum of mankind. People from Africa, to China, every walk of life is in the preservation/history/architecture/archeology genre, so to speak. You know? That’s really the skill set that Jon put down. I mean, it’s an amazing skill set.

Paige Regna:

It is.

Ernest Parks:

It is! I tell you. He has the patience for it.

Paige Regna:

Yeah, he does.

Ernest Parks:

You have to be a patient cat, man. And the first thing I told you was like, communication. You got to talk and listen, and give and take. Everything, yeah. So yeah, yeah. Growing up in Sol Legare, all the memories are there.

I remember the integration period where we went through the ‘60s movement and I remember I was in the third grade when my teacher ran to the office and she said, “Oh, my God. They started crying.” My first grade teacher and my second grade teacher came to my third grade teacher’s classroom when we were in school, integrated society. They ran to her classroom and they were crying. And I was a young student, this is in third grade, and they said, “President Kennedy just got shot.” And the look on their face, I was in that period.

So anything from that period, vivid in my mind. I remember Malcolm X got shot. I remember that Martin Luther King in ‘68. Hell, yeah we integrated 1968. He was killed in April, we integrated in August. He didn’t get to see it, but we did it. So all that is part of my story and history. I graduated from high school, went to college in Tennessee, all my treks up to New York all my life. We would get out, down here we would get out of school in May, on a Friday, and that Monday, hell, we in New York City til September.

Because that was our trek and all our people was there. My brother, my sisters, my aunts, my uncles, all of them moved to Harlem.

So we'd go up there in the summer times. And for the people who were up there in New York, from South Carolina, they would then come back down. And the kids who were living in New York would come down south for the summer and kids in the south would go up north for the summer. We brought all that culture back, different perspectives.

Because literally, we were living in New York City. Oh my gosh, when you open your apartment door and you literally meet the world. Think about it. Every denomination you can think about in the world is melting in New York City. So you bring all that back to spread around the world.

And all the memories would be positives. I loved Tennessee. I love country music. I love it, it's bad, it tells a story. You know? So all that picked up when we went away.

Everybody here was, "Oh, get a good job, get an education." The Lodge has all the history. "Get a good job, get an education," and built it from consolidating all walks of life. Talk to lawyers, engineers, judges, even.

Paige Regna:

What motivated you to move back to Sol Legare?

Ernest Parks:

That's home. It's home. I mean, the perfect weather. I mean, the weather's good, you get your little seasons, but you know, I just, it's my kind of lifestyle and where I'm from. From West Africa, I brought over to America, and Charleston being one of the number one ports where 40-80% of all Africans that came from West Africa came through the ports of Charleston to be sold.

Shit, that's all! That's a high number, so I'm very rooted here and the roots of it. You know, I don't know, I go and I lived in New York, Cali, Atlanta years. You know, I like it. I still got roots and I can go back, but I come back home. I kind of come back home to where I come from, you know? This my roots and this is what I give to the future.

Paige Regna:

And what was the moment when you decided to get involved with the Seashore Farmers Lodge restoration?

Ernest Parks:

Well, when I left Atlanta Georgia and came back to live in Charleston, the Lodge was in disrepair. When everybody migrated, going north, and the old system turning away and

nobody was paying their dues. They just supposed to [inaudible 00:22:13], but they still had the court meeting there, but the building itself went into despair.

And I remember, because the Lodge was the only place that had a cement porch that you could skate on, and that was the only spot in Sol Legare, because Sol Legare was dirt roads. Then we got pavement, but your pavement had little rocks into the tar. And you couldn't skate on it. It wasn't a smooth surface you could skate on, so the Lodge gave us our only track how to skate. All that's based at the Lodge. That went into despair.

I went away to college, I came back home and I saw the Lodge and I saw the Lodge leaning, and I could see my fore-parents with all they did, because they built the Lodge themselves. Their own hands, nobody helped them to do it. Some people built it, we had to have a building in order for it to be governed. You know, by the community, for the community. And I said, "They gave all that to us. Gave all that to us."

That's why when I came back and I saw the leaning and just ready to fall in, and I seen some pictures to the point where we had to put stilts on the side to hold it up. When I moved, I say, "Oh my God. I can't let my forefathers' Holy Grail be fall in on me, on my watch. While I'm alive, in my time while I'm here. I can't let it go." So I, you know, fortunately there was some of our forefathers, Bill Wilder and Anne Wilder, and the community was still holding the Lodge down and we put our history and our education to use by putting the community together that would bring the Lodge back. How do we do that? Well, we're going to do it the same way we do it in the beginning. We're going to do it 143 junctios. Then we found organizations to help us, that's when we started getting funding, stopped spending our own money.

So, we started doing the project and we wanted to do a renovation job, and a television company wanted to come down to us and shoot the rehabilitation of it. That's how we got started in the reality show. And it was a beautiful project. We didn't realize the deep, historical context to American history. I mean, you get really out of the community and you go national, because okay, this is the... When African Americans were finally allowed to fight in the Civil War in 1863, after they signed the Emancipation Proclamation during the war, one of the first Black United States Colored Troops soldiers that fought for America, the Massachusetts 54th Regiment, had its first battle on Sol Legare. Mind blowing, like wow. Wow. I wouldn't thought that history. I heard about it. Now, Robert Gushaw himself wrote about his first skirmish after he left Boston and came down and finally got to fight, they let the guy fight. Now, they fought [inaudible 00:25:45] in Darius, Georgia, but African Americans still weren't allowed to fight. Okay? Then we came down to Charleston, Robert Gushaw said, "My men are ready," and that was the 54th Regiment. On July 16th of 1863, they had their first skirmish and it was on Sol Legare.

That's why I know, this is how I know it because it's raw, historical fact. And this is other members of the community here today, they ain't know it. It's national, it's America! It's such an American story to me, and that's what drives me to keep the Lodge and preservation going. I was almost a history major. I always liked history, but I did government and public affairs and business is what I have my degrees in. Because I was practical. My dad was a practical kind of cat, so I used his practicality, "Boy, you got to get something you can fall back on and use. I don't care what it is, better do something. You got to be able to use what you can use, and got to get what you got to get."

And I look back on it now because it's good sometimes having a trade because what's the saying? "Feed me for a day, and I'm still be asking. But show me how to grow it, and I feed myself forever." You know, and a lot of the guys who worked out of that post Civil War period, out of that slavery period, they had the skills that they gave to America. Be it in carpentry, be it in painting, be it in plumbing, be it in welding. Those were all skills. Those guys didn't go to college, a lot of them guys didn't go to college like I went to college. They went to them trade school and look at them. Those guys got their own businesses. Way ahead of the curve, you know?

Paige Regna:

Yeah. So, for your motivation for wanting to get involved with the Lodge, it was the history of it, but also the memories that you had.

Ernest Parks:

That I came up with.

Paige Regna:

Yeah.

Ernest Parks:

And what grew me. I grew up through them. My eyes see what they seen, what they were. So when I came back, I couldn't let it go. So we put this community together and everyone started asking, "Well, what's it going to cost to renovate this Lodge?" That was the question posed to us, so we started lobbying for funds in order to get it, and we started getting figures like, \$300,000, \$400,000 getting it back to what she was.

"Where in the world we going to..." I said, "African American Cultural community is a large organization. Where we ever going to get a half a million dollars from?" I don't know, but the Lord works in mysterious ways because we said, "Well, we're going to build it ourselves." Then they wanted to do a television show on it, so I got that thing and

we applied for a grant for the town of James Island. James Island was giving out a \$50,000 grant for historical projects. And at the time, we was in the town of James Island, so we had some representatives, councilmen there, we applied for the grant. And we won \$50,000 to renovate the Lodge.

Well, at that time we had four people on the board. Two said yes, two said no. The deciding vote was the mayor of the city and she said yes to the grant because she was a historian and a preservationist. And we got the grant, and after when we got the grant, everything opened up. And I came home from Atlanta, Georgia and I became the head of the ad hoc committee. They elected me to be the head of the ad hoc committee, we started negotiating the funds, and what happened was, we became a 501C3 non-profit entity. That means we could get funded, people started donating.

This guy came in and said, "Hey, I got \$10,000. If you show me \$10,000, I'll show you \$10,000." What? Yeah, then we said, "Okay," and we matched it through funds, donations. We matched it and we got it. You know? And then the whole community came in. From that 200, 300, \$400 estimate that they had stated would cost to renovate the Lodge, we got it in at \$150,000 baby girl. You know? That's because we had community day where everybody came in. We just, Lord, they painted it. We pulled up, we had this young preservationist guy, Mr. Michael Wolfer, and he came in. He was young preservation guy and he wanted to make his mark as a preservationist. Specifically Charleston preservationist, because you know we're big on preservation here in Charleston, and he did that.

He started his own construction company and man, he's booming'now, because he's known as a preservationist contractor. He did it, but we got it in and the community did it. And I said, I went to the board I said, "You know what? This is such a beautiful space for a museum. It's going to tell such a story because it's in the neighborhood to which it was always in from the Civil War." Oh, wow. And this is a building that the elders made. They built it out of their own hands, with their own business sense of how to govern and people in the community Lodge kept it together and have some money come flowing through the neighborhood, by any means necessary. You had to have the money flowing, and that's what... All the memories that I have of the Lodge were they're just for the community.

Paige Regna:

Mm-hmm. What year did you start lobbying for money? And then what year did the actual restoration project begin?

Ernest Parks:

Well, we started lobbying Mr. Bill Cubby Wilder and the churches of Sol Legare. Mr. Andy Wilder started lobbying 1999, '98, '99.

Paige Regna:

Wow. Because-

Ernest Parks:

The hardcore money ain't coming until like, 2009.

Paige Regna:

Okay.

Ernest Parks:

Yeah, that's how it fell. That was a work in progress. Once that door opened up, things went fast. And then what I did as a historian, I mixed the preservation and the history of the Lodge, with the history of the community at large, because I'm a reenactor with the United States 54th Regiment here in Charleston, South Carolina. I'm one of the Black community actors and so I tell the stories. I go in depth to the stories, you know? And so I mixed that in with the Lodge story because it's part of the story.

Because my great-grandfather was a USCT soldier. He joined the Civil War after he got out of slavery. So actually came out of slavery and then went into the military and fought and then bought the land. I say, "Man, what an amazing damn journey." Wow, I mean the journey's... So, all those are the motivation why I have to keep her open to the world. And she's a very quiet museum. I wanted her to be a museum, she's very quiet, but if you look at her you see she really tells a story herself and will have you hear it. But just from the artifacts that were there, the artifacts come from the people in the community that go back.

When we started renovating the Lodge I was saying stuff like, "Okay. So let me go in your backyard, in your garage, your house. Any kind of piece you want to give to the Lodge, let me have it, I'm going to open up a museum." And people started giving stuff. Faces, pens, swords, gold coins, I mean, carts, furniture, bottles that they had for years that were of that period, from that period in their garages. Plows, hoes, everything, tools. All that stuff they had, it started coming at me, you know? To the point where I just said, "Hold on. I think I got a little bit too much here now." Start getting like that.

So all the things are original. With the school, the university, then when they came in, what Warren Lasch did, that the Donnelley Foundation allowed us to do through the grant that they got through the Donnelley Fund, is come in there, see those artifacts and

then preserve the artifacts. I went in there and we actually made her out a museum. We actually went in and we tagged, filed every artifact in there for the last year. It's an amazing process. You know, you tag everything, file everything, you record everything. How you keep going and it was an amazing journey. And as a matter of fact, I just got out of the two year program. It was a two year program and we did it two years, and it was such an amazing, giving gift. That's why I keep going.

My thing is too now, pass that on. Looking for all the young cats come on board. Come on, let me show you this because it's so embedded in who you are. I tell it to you. Now, you know, I have to be brutally honest sometimes about it, but sometimes outside people come in. They sometimes have more interest than people who are of it. And that sometimes is my concern, because when you're of it, you need to know it to be able to have it and pass it on. Be able to communicate it to the world. But I have academia comes in, they want to know. Academia asks specific questions so they want to know, you know? Now, but I [inaudible 00:35:51]. Get some young cats in here, my grandchildren included because they had to learn in depth about it. I'm teaching them to pass it on, keep the history going.

Like I said, I think that Sol Legare is about the last bastion that you got. Well Beaufort is rich and got to look at your history. Beaufort is rich because Buford was where, as far as the Civil War is concerned, that's where the Union Army could get to Buford. That's where they done post a lot, was Beaufort. They couldn't get any deeper, and Beaufort really had their real, deep down Gullah. It's like talking a damn different language because you know, you're down here we speak in kind of Gullah language. We have our own way of saying certain thing when we get 'In the community. We talk with a Gullah drawl and we talk Gullah.

You can go out in the beauty salon, somewhere, I go out and I have to speak to them, well you have to speak this way. Well, honey, da-da-da-da. That's how hard they speak like that right there, so. So when I'm in the neighborhood I have to talk like that, you know? So when I was in college in Nashville, Tennessee, where I went to college at, the café man, they have like... Nashville, those guys up there, they got a twang when they talk. And so, but I got a drawl when I talk. And everywhere we went, "Where you from, man? You from the island?" I said, "Yeah, James Island." And it's not a lie. And we're rich in culture, too.

But yeah, those are the memories I have of Sol Legare. Every moment is involved in the history of Sol Legare. Those first moments, and the passed on moments, and I do it for preservation and I do it for history and I do it for communication with other organizations like the academia world coming in. And then lay it out and give you the tools with which you can communicate, pass on and educate.

Paige Regna:

Yeah, let me ask you, do you consider yourself a preservationist now, after all the work you've done with the Lodge?

Ernest Parks:

Yeah, I have inklings in being one, but I think I am one because that's what I want to do to keep it going. Can you dig it? Someone says, "Well, let's be preservationists?" Yeah, man. Cats, whoo whoo preservationist, yay! But communication. And they show me and I have that enough to, I have the interest in order to... Because of my Gullah roots, I have my interest to keep that piece of artifact just the way that it is. Now that I have the tools to plug in and keep them, and that's amazing and beautiful. Because this is exactly what the schools want to do, and I want to give them that tool and spread the word.

So, I don't know whether I'd consider myself a preservationist. What's that? What's the Gullah Geechee community almost? So, I don't know whether I'd be considered that. Because see, coming here with the guys who really know the techniques, know all the tools and know all the architecture of it, engineering of it. You know, I just took a lot of love and took a lot of that.

Paige Regna:

But you've been the main figure in getting funds and getting attention on the Lodge, too. And I think that that's a huge part of preservation. I mean, the academia side of it's important too, and the professionals, but I think that there has to be a grassroots effort in order to get awareness.

Ernest Parks:

Yeah, you're right and I am that grassroots effort. You know, and I want the grassroots efforts to continue to go on. Go and grow, and then through the grassroots efforts... Because I got a phone call the other day and it was this little lady that I had met through the preservation program out on John's Island earlier this summer. Because we interchanged with some universities and scholars and teachers and all walks, and we did an intersection of architecture, and preservation and history, and it was a very rewarding experience to be in that period and do that with them. Very rewarding. It opened my eyes and showed me a lot of things.

And for all those people now who are kind of linked in, kind of speak on it. Because surely it could be [inaudible 00:40:55] who I would love to sit down and talk to, you know? So, that's why sometime I'd like to invite them to the Lodge. I'd like them in the Lodge, yes.

Paige Regna:

What were some of your goals for the work that you're doing at the Lodge?

Ernest Parks:

To preserve her upright so that she can be passed on. That simple. I mean, simple as that. I'll do whatever I got to do. Oh, Lord. In order to pass it on so she moves on down the line, to the next generation, you know? If that mean I go to the school, like I said, I can't stop saying communication. If I go to the school or something, I talk to the people. You open the door, let them come in and we had this real conversation. And everybody was genuine and what they wanted to do is learn, give and take. It'll move every time, you know? So, I'm not the super scholar. I'm this super story on this guy who loved the culture of which he's coming from and liked to kind of tell it to the world because it's so American, to me.

Paige Regna:

Did you ever think when the restoration project started back in 2009, that you would get so much attention from academia?

Ernest Parks:

No. No. But because historians were interested in the history of the Lodge and where we were located with history, simply the location of ours and because of the Civil War and the burials which we have a building on the backside of the secession right when Civil War started. Right there. Secession went right over there. Sorry, it'd be like, right there. So, Morris Island is like, right there. So I mean, yeah.

Paige Regna:

And I know that the initial restoration project was huge, and more recently, the work with Warren Lasch in creating a museum within the Lodge and teaching those skills-

Ernest Parks:

To the community. That's all the geniuses and doctors. Genius of Dr. Jon Marcoux. Seriously, [inaudible 00:43:37] man, because we met when he come through and bring a group of students to see the building and the architecture of the building. We met and that was about eight, 10 years ago. Every year he would come by and so each year we would have more of a conversation. Every time he brought more and more students with him,

said, "I'm a professor. Let's do this, let's see if we get that. Okay, you did this? Then I can do that. Look at Clemson and we can do that."

And we put together these, he constructed these grants and we'd get it. We qualify for it and like, the rest is history. We went out in the community, we'd get the community so we would get the grant, we'd get the program and then we would have community come in. And then we'd have people who do it professionally, educate the community members what to do. So, Warren Lasch came in here and set up a whole building and tell them, "Okay, it's time." And he gets right down to, "Hey, man. Go on and get the other pen and pencil."

And they got down to the pen and pencils of it, sure enough. Do that and walking them through the design and then we go through the technical part to the [inaudible 00:44:53] because they have to cure for a little while before it comes out. It's going to be a two year program. Yeah, I mean you know, and you walked the whole process. I enjoyed it, and that's what he did. So the community members can now come in and they know what to do now. And they got some money from that, so they help the community.

And it was also then as I always threaten them, "Hey, man. Look here, man. Man, I got some money for this training. Come on down here and let's work it out together." And we do every time. We get the girls and everybody in the community, and I got a picture of every walk of life in the community. From the educated, retired teachers, educators, down to the guy who got his own businesses, lawn maintenance. Down to the guy who got his own business in plumbing, because you always need something done. You know, at the Lodge, talk about preservation. Keeping it up, maintaining her.

Paige Regna:

Yeah. Is that the main project now with these two big ones being done? Is maintenance-

Ernest Parks:

Yeah, maintenance is always the problem because you have to keep her rocking and rolling. So maintenance is always a part of it. But now I was just talking about the Lowcountry, talking about moving into the future. How do we move into the future? Where's the preservation as far as futurism is concerned?

And in there, okay so I got a phone call and I was asked by Dr. Stephanie...

Paige Regna:

Crete?

Ernest Parks:

Yes. See, look at this program here. This program talks about resiliency and living on the island, and moving on the island using renewable energies. Kind of like, get off the electrical grid, man. You got to go solar because we living on the beaches and the beach is eroding. So we have to prepare this community to do that. You know, prepare it. Yeah, you have to look into the 21st century, you have to move on.

And so she called because they were coming and some of the pillars of the community made me adapt to the adjustment of solar energy at the community center, the Lodge, with solar energy. Even to the point of, like at the community center we had a whole thing when it comes to putting chargers and y'all, people can come and charge their cell phones. You have to think futuristic. And I say wow, what a beautiful concept, as we now take our building, talking about preservation and how we going to try and move preservation while we maintain it, because we're in the moment, trying to get there. But then look out with the vision, look and see where she would be and our environment and how the environment stands up to Mother Nature. How the environment stands up to Father Time.

Back to maintenance again, maintaining her and looking at the end. Because I can see me living there all my life, being my roots there. You can see how the landscape has changed. You can see how my house big in marshland. You can see how the lands come back.

Paige Regna:

Mm-hmm, the erosion.

Ernest Parks:

The erosion of it, you know? And it's like, wow. And then how do we move forward with goal? With trying to keep her as preserved as possible?

Paige Regna:

Mm-hmm. This is backtracking a little bit again to the restoration, but was restoring the Lodge to a specific period important to telling its story?

Ernest Parks:

Yeah, because by restoring the Lodge to a specific period, it tells the timeframe to which the Lodge came into being. So you can look at the Lodge and you can go from the Civil War, 1860s, right through to the present. But she's locked in that period of post Civil War, segregation, Jim Crow, the whole... She tells that whole story.

So the story's going and after the time periods are end, then we're locked right in that time period. So it's good that she maintain her as she is. And she's so unassuming. You ride by here and don't think about that.

Paige Regna:

I don't know. I think it's a really cool building.

Ernest Parks:

You think so?

Paige Regna:

I think people stop and look. They're like, "Oh, what is that?" Because it was built around 1915, right?

Ernest Parks:

Yes, actually the Lodge was built in... Yeah, 1915, the Lodge got the charter in 1912. She was there prior to 1912, but when she got her official paper that went up there, came back and I said we finally got that. We have that charter to the Lodge as well, September 1912. So we got that, but it was there prior to.

Paige Regna:

Right.

Ernest Parks:

So she was right there right at the turn of the century, almost.

Paige Regna:

Right. And I think that for a two story building to be constructed at that time is pretty significant. So, I think being able to restore it back to what it's always looked like is really important.

Ernest Parks:

It is very important because you almost step back in time. Because walk through there. When I would go to different museum and different places, you walk in there and you kind of like, you step back in time. You know, I did a little theater for the city of Charleston here. We did a Tea Party Revolution and we went down to the Exchange Building downtown. And when you walk in it, you walk back in time.

So I want people who come to Seashore Farmers Lodge to almost step back in time when you walk in there. And a lot of people say, "Yeah, I feel the vibes of it. Yeah."

Paige Regna:

I agree. I agree.

Ernest Parks:

Yeah, you know I think it's all how you give the history of it. How you let the story kind of unfold out there. Like Sol Legare itself was, like I say, once you turn off of Farley Road, onto Sol Legare Road, we're pretty autonomous. Because when we had the patio, it was like a little entertainment area on top of Sol Legare, and then you go on down and you got the Seashore Farmers Lodge. Then you had the barber shop; now the barber shop was the place to be at. The barber shop was the grapevine. You know what the grapevine is?

Paige Regna:

Yes.

Ernest Parks:

The barber shop was the grapevine and then you had Beckman's Seafood. That boy built a fleet of boats, okay? Then you go a little down and you had the school. Sol Legare's first school was 1911. So I can even show you... Did you show you pictures at the Lodge?

Paige Regna:

I think so, yeah.

Ernest Parks:

Yeah, on the wall. The classroom scene, yep.

Paige Regna:

Mm-hmm, yes. Yeah.

Ernest Parks:

1911, so the school was there and then the Lodge was 1912. So, okay. Oh, wow. So, you know, and then you go on there from the Lodge, from the school, we became one of the first areas to get in modern times, the school built for integration purposes. Well, the

White school got a school of teachers and they had the skills of the trade. So the Black school got to have one, the Black people got to have one. Sol Legare was that lady that built that school.

And this is 1940s, '50s, Sol Legare had that school, but the first school was 1911. Then you come down near the water and we had a Bubba Wilder, we had a Bubba Richardson's Store, a convenience store kind of almost like a bodega. You know, where you got everything, anything you need. What you need? I got that. And then he had a gas station there. Fuel, kerosene, gas. He had a gas truck. Built his own business now. And then you would go on down and then it would be we had another candy store. A store shelling out the candies, cakes, pies, and whatever else you could sell from there. moonshine. Because moonshine was a business too, now.

Paige Regna:

Mm-hmm.

Ernest Parks:

Prohibition type of things, yeah, it was the moonshine that we made. It is what it is, it's a part of history. And then so you go on down and then they had the church. Because we, our religion played a big part in the Black neighborhood and the church was really built there, but they got the [inaudible 00:54:48], we built our own church.

Now I step back and I say, "Oh, my God. I remember going to the church as a young kid, second or third generation, going to play after play. Going to church services, going to Easter Sunday at the church. Getting dressed in the finest Sunday best, with the bow tie. Sunday best, go down to the church on Sunday. Be a part, play a part in the play. That building, I am so sorry that building collapsed in the summertime. So I relate to why I didn't want the damn Lodge to fall in! Because my memories are very vivid of that period where the church was. You keep on, you leave the church and you go on down there was Skinner Beach Wharf, there was Skinner Beach.

Skinner Beach was the business innovation of a young Black guy, Andrew Apple Wilder. He was a visionary, one in the community right? But he knew that one and one is two, so if I give this, I expect to get that. So he said, "What I'm going to do?" He started out as like, a oyster house, you know, where they pick the oysters, shuck the oysters, put them in mason jars, sell it. Then he said, "Well, we'll get an entertainment center because we can go there on the beach." Because segregation, we can go. We can work there, take care of the baby, daddy drive the truck and come work in the restaurants. But used to get us there.

So, we had our own entertainment center and a pavilion over the water. It was on the beach, the pavilion over the water. Had a boardwalk, had hotels. We call them hole-in-the-wall or dirty low down pubs. You know, straight blues club, down dirty. Music playing, fish frying, people eating, beer, wine, the moonshine we made, we sold. The stores. And it was good. I mean, people would come from all around and then when we started migrating off, going out of our little world, what have you, then we would take us to them and then we would bring them to us.

So, we'd go up to New York, stay in New York, we'd get a New York style thing and we'd bring it back down and pass it. We, California guy be in Japan, guys in the military be over in another part of the world. France, never come back home, but when they do, they bring some of the French in the can. "Where you at? Bring it to the crib. We got all that in the mix." So, Sol Legare is all that and then the mix, trying to keep Sol Legare as a community and kind of tell that.

Like I said earlier, Sol Legare, I've seen it change right in front of my eyes. But change is a good thing because if we don't rise to the period in which we're in, in order to move to the future, you have to have growth. You have to have infrastructure. You know, you have to have things change. People change, time changes. You have to adjust accordingly. And I think with Sol Legare, like I say, we're the last bastion still have the small inkling, where you can get a little taste of the Gullah culture. Through language, through the Lodge still being here. Because everybody was a family of the Lodge, so when that generation died, I know my great-grandfather was in it, my grandfather was in it, belonged to the Lodge and it goes back generations.

Paige Regna:

Mm-hmm. To do all of these preservation initiatives for the Lodge, what tools have you used? I know you've touched on this a little bit, but...

Ernest Parks:

Yes, I used the tools of the schools. I used the tools of funding institutions. Okay? I used the tools that history allowed me to bring here, because I mean these guys would be, in a historical sense, come to see the Lodge, take pictures. We had a reenactment of the Battle of Sol Legare Island, July 16th, 1863. And we had the Confederates come in. When the Negro soldiers faced off on Sol Legare, okay, that's a tool. To bring awareness, to educate.

And then to bring whatever, the guy come over with the cannons? Oh my God. All those who had come for that day were the people [inaudible 00:59:58], make money, barbecue, people making money. You know, through history all that's kind of one of the tools you

use. Every tool you can get, they used it. School, churches, because we're all on the same page of maintaining this property and maintaining this history. So, every tool. We had theater, and the artistic world of the Lodge. You know, I think right now we're having a concert for Oscar Rivers, who's a well known jazz musician, pianist here, maestro here in Charleston, South Carolina. But you know, through the arts.

TV, the simple fact that they use the television, that's a tool. The simple fact that they used the television in order to show the Lodge being renovated, that's a tool that got her educated to the world, you know? So those are a couple tools I use.

Paige Regna:

You've spoken about your-

Ernest Parks:

Especially people.

Paige Regna:

... partnership with Clemson and Warren Lasch. Have you partnered with any other organizations over the years?

Ernest Parks:

Yes. Well, at the Presidents International African American Museum, partnered up with them. What you call it? The Charleston... Architectural School that renovates wood here. The Art Institute?

Paige Regna:

The ACBA-

Ernest Parks:

Right, right. You know, they come and did some work for us. Had some professors and doctors who were working there, doing that. So, yeah.

Paige Regna:

Mm-hmm. And for the funding for the Lodge, obviously you've used a lot of grants through Clemson and also through the Donnelley Foundation. Have private donations also been a huge part of the projects of the Lodge?

Ernest Parks:

Yes. We're a 501C3 non-profit, you know, so anybody come in. And you know, I mean, being of the nature to which I come from, every penny counts. So if you come to the Lodge, the average price of the tour would be \$20-\$25. You know, if you don't think that my museum, come to my museum and me telling you this piece of Americana are worth the same price you'd pay to go to see the Charleston Museum. Okay, I understand that, but give me a donation. I'm a non-profit, give me something.

Paige Regna:

Mm-hmm.

Ernest Parks:

And then I'll let the history speak for itself.

Paige Regna:

Was it difficult to find funding sources?

Ernest Parks:

Not so much difficult as it was, I mean we had... Because some of the ways we got it was through funding. You're competitive, some were too large for us to handle. We didn't qualify for others. You know, so we kind of try to find that fit. Something that wasn't too large. We got a grant for \$2500. Well, how about that? \$2500 bill, put it in our account and use it to maintain our quarterly, but you know what? The main thing that keeps it going now is still, once you get this down to the raw basics of the page, the main thing that keeps the Lodge still in existence is the little dues that we pay every year to keep it going.

Paige Regna:

That's great.

Ernest Parks:

It ain't big, like I say. It ain't big, but the people who are still a part of the Lodge now, we've been having a resurgence of people who moved away from the Lodge. Descendants of Lodge members, like my son and my grandson. And then you know, going back, because my great-grandfather was a part of the Lodge, and my grandfather was, and then my mother was, now I am. Now my son is. Now his son is. Look at that, you know?

So, you know, it just keeps on going. Keeps going on, keeps it interesting. Yes, ma'am.

Paige Regna:

Mm-hmm. Have you found colleagues and counterparts doing this type of work in other places?

Ernest Parks:

Yes, oh yes. Definitely. That's the interesting thing about it too, from all levels. You get the phone call from the guy who is the director of Smithsonian, okay? And you having a conversation like me and you sitting here talking right now. You tell them about [inaudible 01:05:21], so they're interested in the Seashore Farmers Lodge. History. Then he told me that he relate to this. We're up here; the Seashore Farmers Lodge is small, but it's so way up there too.

We're all walks, everybody. From the highest historical Smithsonian, the International African American came here, I always brag to them. When I was here first. And you know, it was a great partnership because the International African American came in and they called so many people. They came in and I've seen them, Dr. Matthew sent the whole staff in to visit, and talk, and feel. Because they're the descendants of, they're the product of the Lodge. The Lodge was a great duty, it put some kind of fashion, even the Gullah cultures be telling the stories.

So I always brag, "Wait a minute, the Lodge was here first. We're the first, we got the land y'all. You know?" But such an amazing story that we tell and I've had the honor of... Because of my film background, I had the honor of doing a film inside the International African American called Seeking, a film by Julie Dash. When you go in there, the International African American Museum, it's a film called Seeking, and Seeking is a term which was the African ritual where the young child at about 12, 13, 14 would go into the woods and stay in the woods and have a religious experience. This is part of the Gullah culture of it.

And Julia Dash, the young filmmaker that made it, Julie Dash and I met 30 years ago when we did Daughters of the Dust, and that was a story about the Gullah lifestyle, all the people moving to the mainland and leaving the Gullah lifestyle. Well, Seeking talked about the blessed experience of the large [inaudible 01:07:30] people at the Lodge, kids at the Lodge and they had the religious experience. When you come back, you'd tell the Lodge and the members and the elders about the experience you have through your religion. While you were seeking. It's the story.

And I can remember, there are people in the neighborhood right now, from the Lodge, who practice it. That did it.

Paige Regna:

That's incredible.

Ernest Parks:

The museum has it, it's called Seeking, and the film loops every 15 minutes. So if you ever get to the National Museum, check it out and go through. That's a tool. They get the Lodge in there, so because Julia Dash and I knew each other, she came and she gave me a part of the fisherman, apropos to where I come from. The fishermen threw in the net, my grandfather was a fisherman. He ain't never worked for nobody, he was a fisherman. So I got that part and then we talked about the Seashore Farmer Lodge coming from the Gullah Geechee community, along with the Gullah Geechee Heritage Corridor, talking about the Lodge. And I talk about the Lodge in that, so we are in there, in the American Museum now. Worked very closely with them and that was because of the tools we used. It all go through everyone who was in line with the museum in that one, we're in conjunction with now. So it's a very good interaction.

So the schools, too. The schools is just, this has been, the experience of Clemson University and Warren Lasch have been a real eye opening experience. To see the depth to which it goes, preservation, history. You know, human beings. All that come in well through engineering eyes. You know? Engineering eyes, you see that. So I just want to say congrats to you for choosing this direction in life because it's going to always be a relevance. Going to always be relevance.

Paige Regna:

Mm-hmm, yeah.

Ernest Parks:

You know, you was just telling me about mom and dad going down to Florida with the fam. See, all that's a part of your being, your existence. Now, were you came up in one particular neighborhood all your life? Like, I'm from there. My grandfather did, my papa did, my family built houses that lay there, and kin family that lay there. Are you locked into the area? Where'd you grow up at?

Paige Regna:

I grew up in Easley South Carolina. Yes, but my family both of my parents are military brats. So they-

Ernest Parks:

Right, so I relate right there.

Paige Regna:

... lived everywhere. My gran is from Glasgow, Scotland so my dad and his brother actually grew up in Scotland.

Ernest Parks:

Yeah, so grew up in Scotland. Do y'all go back?

Paige Regna:

No. Not anymore. My gran lives in Florida now, in Pensacola.

Ernest Parks:

Right, have you ever been?

Paige Regna:

I haven't. I've been to England, but haven't been to Scotland. I've been trying to convince her to get on a plane, and that's not easy.

Ernest Parks:

Yeah, how old is she?

Paige Regna:

She turns 76 today.

Ernest Parks:

Oh, 76 today?

Paige Regna:

Mm-hmm.

Ernest Parks:

Happy birthday. Oh my God.

Paige Regna:

Yeah, I've got to call her.

Ernest Parks:

Yeah, yeah. Drop your grandma line. Drop her a line and see what's happening. See, like we used to go back and I wonder, do you think that you could ever go back to Scotland? Check it out one day and stay there.

Paige Regna:

I know.

Ernest Parks:

Call me. When you get back there, girl, something going to grab you.

Paige Regna:

Mm-hmm.

Ernest Parks:

Because it's so inward. If you can dig what I'm saying.

Paige Regna:

Mm-hmm, yeah. It's like, my biggest goal to go back with her.

Ernest Parks:

Yeah, have you met Corey Hip?

Paige Regna:

Hmm-mm.

Ernest Parks:

Never heard her name before?

Paige Regna:

Hmm-mm.

Ernest Parks:

Corey's a young lady from Wheeling, South Carolina. Graduated college, went to college in Charleston. She's a marketing guru, she's a historian, preservationist. She was the one that really got the program going with the television group coming in and shooting the Lodge being renovating. Trademark, guru trademark. The Sol Legare Lodge trademark. Real estate. And they did a... Actually, if you want to be curious, go check it out. They

showed the whole, live renovation process being all the people. Yeah, check it out when you get the chance.

Paige Regna:

Yeah, I will.

Ernest Parks:

And then while you're staying here, you can check it out and get a kind of another perspective. Learn from people other than, you get it from the historian perspective, you get it from the guy who rebuilt it perspective, you get it from the volunteer perspective, you get it from the administrative, the producing side. You talk about producing film, Corey's along the producer line. She was on that stretch right there. I'm a introduce you to her b'cause she's a Greenville girl, too.

Paige Regna:

Okay.

Ernest Parks:

Yeah, check her out.

Paige Regna:

Yeah, I'll go see what I can find out. Well, Ernest I'll go ahead and ask the last question here. Do you have a vision for the future of preservation of African American Heritage in the low country?

Ernest Parks:

Well, of course. I have a vision of American history here in the Lowcountry, and its history just happened to be Black. Because we go out and we talk about great African Americans, you know, through [inaudible 01:13:13] color and like the great Robert Smalls. You know, he's an American hero that happened to be Black, but he's an American hero all the same.

When you look at somebody like Harriet Tubman, if you take out the Black, then you only see American. You say, "Wow, this cat was a great American." When you look at George Washington, he was a great American for a minute. He's just a great American. But anytime I look at them cats, they're great Americans. The stories just happen to be White. On the flip side of the coin, when you look at the stories of the great African American man Frederick Douglas, who fought on the same side, the Freedom Fighter, he

would be considered great if you take the color out. Take the color out. You know, he's a great American.

So, but yes. My vision is to keep great history alive for all walks of life. Because we talk about the experience of all the people around, look what the Native Americans have. The Native Americans, all that's in my DNA because the Black slaves, we mixed with the Native Americans here. And my great-grandmother was an Indian. You know? And wow, this story is... Wow, what a story. You talk about the movie Indian Nations; a lot of freedom was found down in Florida, you know? When they did the storming the Bay, they wanted to get down to Florida. They wanted to get down to Florida because that's where the feuding was at. And because of the close connection with the Caribbeans and that's their revolt mentality, and Haiti and the French, all that mixed together, that network was getting back because that was the run.

Now just imagine you owned a slave ship, I owned a slave ship. And they caught us and we in the bottom of the ship, and we get to the Caribbean and then they ship you off and they sold you to the Caribbeans. And then I come to Charleston. You know? And I never see you the rest of my life, we're connected. So when the words start getting back around, when they start making them runs around, before the slave trade was shut down, then we wouldn't have any way to find them. And we got there, "Baby, where you from?"

"South Carolina."

"Boy, I know this guy, man in Africa, man. This motherfucker looks just like you." He said, "Man, it's the spitting image." I tell you what, he might be my fam. Ain't no telling. You think about it now.

He might be your family, so think about it from the preservation in terms of being, not being connected to somebody who I don't even know, but we still got a feeling for another and the feeling comes from the inside of which you come from, because y'all still talk to each other kinetically. You know, something like a vibe. Talking without saying nothing. Sometimes you feel connected, and that's how certain relations be. It's like a, I just got to do it. I don't know why. Just got to do it. You know?

If I can pass that on to somebody, then that would be a great thing.

Paige Regna:

Yeah, I'm going to go ahead and stop the recording for this.

End of Recording.

Appendix D

Transcript: Bill “Cubby” Wilder

Transcribed on January 11, 2024, Rev.com

Paige Regna:

Alright, Cubby, I've started the recording. So just getting started here, can you please confirm your preferred title with respect to your work on Sol Legare?

Cubby Wilder:

My title so far in the Sol Legare community is, currently I'm the president of the Seashore Farmers Lodge, and I'm also the co-chairman of the Concerned Citizens of Sol Legare [00:00:30] Foundation. I've been working a long time in the community to try to bring the community up to date and to save the community culture and heritage.

Paige Regna:

Okay. Do you have a separate title for your work at Mosquito Beach?

Cubby Wilder:

I'm the owner of the property that's being renovated now, the old hotel.

Paige Regna:

Mm-hmm. Is it the Pine Tree-

Cubby Wilder:

Pine [00:01:00] Tree Hotel, and Island Breeze, or Lake House restaurant, or lounge. And when Mosquito Beach became a historical district, I was eligible for grants. So I put in for those grants. And now the Pine Tree Hotel is being renovated, and the [00:01:30] Island Breeze or Lake House restaurant is being also renovated. And that's going on as I speak to you.

Paige Regna:

Right.

Cubby Wilder:

Yeah.

Paige Regna:

And then what skills do you draw from your personal or professional experiences for your preservation and advocacy work at Mosquito Beach?

Cubby Wilder:

Well, not only Mosquito Beach, I also was instrumental in getting... This Lodge hall was built in 1910. At the time, I was a councilman [00:02:00] for the Town of James Island. And I saw the need for the Lodge hall to be renovated way before the storms started hitting it. So I met a young lady from SHPO. She came down here, and we talked about trying to get the Lodge renovated before it got in the condition it was in, being held up by stilts and [00:02:30] any means that that could be held up with, I saw the need for that to be done after all the storms hit us. The Lodge over there got damaged really bad from Hugo, and we tried to make repairs from it, but then there was many other storms that came behind, and then Floyd came behind that, Hurricane Floyd, and another hurricane, I can't think of the name of it, but there was many hurricanes. You can do the research. Between Hugo [00:03:00] and the present time, many hurricanes came through here, up to 2010.

So as a councilman for Town of James Island, I saw the need to update this Lodge hall. So lobby the mayor, who was Mary Clark at the time, I lobbied her, and the councilman, the councilman was Leonard Blank, Joe Qualey, Paris William and [00:03:30] myself, there were just four of us. And they saw that we got \$50,000 to start the renovation process of this Lodge hall. And that triggered that \$50,000, along with Michael Riff, who was a contractor on Mosquito Beach now for the Old Pine Tree Hotel, he did a lot of pro bono, and a young man named Corie Hipp. Corie Hipp was very instrumental, and Vance Savano. [00:04:00] We all got together, and a lot of folks from Folly Beach, and we did a lot of pro bono work to start the process of getting this Lodge hall renovated.

And then we formed a committee. And the committee, well, the ad hoc committee from the Lodge, which I told Ernest to take over because I had a lot on my plate. So Ernest took over the pro bono committee to get the Lodge hall renovated. So then, [00:04:30] I knew a lot of people, and of all the people I knew, they all jumping from Folly Beach, James Island. Trent Kernodle was an attorney at the time, he also joined on, and we got to working, and the Lodge hall got renovated. And as you saw from old photos, it was being held up by stilts. We got that done, and then I move on to Mosquito [00:05:00] Beach, after we got this renovated, because I currently had a lot of pressure on me about tearing down or demolish the old Pine Tree Hotel. And we had many meetings with the Architect Review Board that the hotel... Some of the board members wanted the Pine Tree Hotel to exist because it was the last of its kind. Is the sun bothering you?

Paige Regna:

A little bit, but it's okay.

Cubby Wilder:

You want to move down there?

Paige Regna:

No, it's good.

Cubby Wilder:

We can move down there.

Paige Regna:

Oh, it's fine, I'm good. It'll move in a few minutes.

Cubby Wilder:

But anyway, so the Architectural Review Board said, "Well, the Pine Tree Hotel is the last of its kind." And as you know, Mosquito Beach was formed because Blacks were not allowed to go to Folly Beach at the time. I think you know the history of [00:06:00] Mosquito Beach a little bit. So when I came home, I'm retired Air Force, I came home, didn't see nothing I like in the community. So I got involved, and then I realized that as an individual, one person can't get things done. And I when I used to go to the county to make my complaint, we can't get anything too much done, me as as an individual. So they say, "If you want to get things done..." From an old-timer, "... form an organization." [00:06:30] So then I got busy and formed the Concerned Citizens of Sol Legare Inc. And I was the president, and my niece was the treasurer, and Yvonne Rogers was the vice president. [inaudible 00:06:52] was the secretary. [00:07:00] Anyway, we formed the Concerned Citizens of Sol Legare Inc. And then we started getting things done. There was a need for the sewage through come to here. And there was no sewage when I came back home, so I got busy fighting for them to put the sewage through here.

Paige Regna:

And about what year was that?

Cubby Wilder:

1995.

Paige Regna:
Okay.

Cubby Wilder:

I came home, I stayed in Charleston for a bit. I came home in '84 [00:07:30] from Korea, and I was living with my mother temporarily until my wife came. So as I began my work with the citizens, I realized that individually you can't get anything done, you have to form a corporation. And that's why I formed the Concerned Citizens of Sol Legare. If you look at the charter, you'll see that I was the founding member of the Concerned Citizens of Sol Legare. Now [00:08:00] the Concerned Citizens of Sol Legare is a foundation, and we found that if you have a 501(c)(3), that you can get things done better. But anyway, from that point on, forming the Concern, the need for sewage, because when Hugo came in '89, there was no septic tank system. So they said, "You can't do anything because you're already below sea level, Mosquito Beach, and [00:08:30] the septic tank would not work." So then I start fighting to get the sewage. And what I did, I got my citizens together, the residents, and we flooded county council. We was right there, I mean a ton of us was down there, hundreds of folks, good followers, and we flood county council, and they, "Who are you?" "We're the Concerned Citizens of Sol Legare, we need sewage."

And then the other department that joined me was DHEC. DHEC realized that some people had well water through electric pump, and the septic tank was here, and the well water was here. That was really bad, because that was their bathroom. So DHEC jumped on the bandwagon, endorsed what we needed and put pressure on county council. And when they looked, we got \$350, [00:09:30] 000 from the county state government, and they give us a grant to start installing the sewage. And the \$350,000 was for the old people to tie in. Then we flood James Island PSD, because the James Island PSD is the organization responsible for the sewage. So we flood them out. When I looked, we got a \$1.4-million grant from HUD to start installing the sewage. So that was probably in 1995 or something like that, either 1992, '95, [00:10:00] '6. And then I became the project manager to instrument the sewage along with the contractor, to put the sewage through Sol Legare.

And we let the older people who didn't have the money, they tied them in with the grant money. And then the \$1.4 million was to run the sewage line down Sol Legare. So we got the sewage in place in Sol Legare. We already had the water from the Charleston water [00:10:30] system, that was put in 1976, that was before I came home. That was great, we had city water. So anyway, from that project, then I turned attention after Hugo... Mosquito Beach was in ruin, this was in ruined, and my work was really cut out for me.

And also decided to form the Town of James Island. So [00:11:00] we formed three Towns of James Island, I was a part of all that. Our first mayor was Mayor Joan Sooy, she was our first mayor. I decided not to run for councilman at that time, when formed the first time, because I was working so hard as the election commissioner to form the town, so I decided not to run for a council seat.

So [00:11:30] the first town lasted five years, before Mayor Riley decided that we didn't need a town. And the reason why we tried to form a town, we didn't want to be annexed into the City of Charleston, we didn't like what the county government was doing to US. County government, it ranges from McClellanville all the way down to Edisto, 30 miles in. So we wanted our own town because it would've been better for us to get things done with our own town. So that town [00:12:00] lasted five years, Riley sued us, we lost that town. So then we decided to form a second town. So I was part of that one again. So we formed a second Town of James Island, and that town lasted four years. Then at the time, Mary Clark became the mayor of the second town. And Mayor Riley didn't want us to have a tongue again because he wanted us for the tax base. So they sued us again, and [00:12:30] we lost. And then formed a third town. I was a county councilman for the third town. And we thought we were locked in with this third town, and we thought we were home free from Riley, came to find out we lost the third town and every time we lost the town, Riley was not annexing.

And if you see the trash cans on James Island, a green one and the brown one. Well, the brown garbage can is for the PSD, because we utilize the PSD to give our infrastructure, the sewage, the wastewater and all that stuff. And we had to get a letter from the James Town PSD, because the James Town PSD is their own little government, but [00:13:30] they have no power. So we utilized their service to do our infrastructure for that, which we're still doing that today. So anyway, we lost the third town. And then when we formed the fourth town, they left Sol Legare out, and Grimbball area, those are two Black areas on James Island. And so we were left out.

With the fourth town, Mayor Woolsey became, after Mary Clark, she was married for the [00:14:00] second and the third time, Mary Clark, and we were uptight like that. So Mary Clark, and at the time Woolsey was a council member like me, we served on the board of councilman. And then after Mary Clark helped out [inaudible 00:14:19], she decided not to run again for the fourth town. So Mayor Woolsey, he was a council member, he became the mayor of James Island. He just retired the end of [00:14:30] last year, he suddenly retired. I went to his retirement party, it was a little get-together, celebration. But anyway, they had the deepest respect, the county government, Town of James Island, they had the

deepest respect for Mr. Wilder, Bill Cubby Wilder because I'm a fighter and I don't take no, "It can't be done." Because I feel like this, " [00:15:00] It can be done. They're using our taxpayer money, and we got to get some results." So I don't never quit fighting, and I'm still fighting. So getting back, I lobbied the Town of James Island, they give me the \$50,000 to start getting this place here renovated. A lot of pro bono help, a lot of people jumped on the bandwagon, because they want to bring the Lodge hall back. And we did that I think in, I don't know the exact date, probably in 2012 or '13.

Paige Regna:

I think you did it starting 2009, the restoration.

Cubby Wilder:

Yeah. And listen, let me tell you about Corie Hipp, you met her yet?

Paige Regna:

I haven't met her, but I have-

Cubby Wilder:

You heard of her?

Paige Regna:

I've heard of her, yes.

Cubby Wilder:

When you do meet her, just ask her about Bill Cubby Wilder. Yeah. She live on James Island now, she just loves Jameson. So she finally moved, she got two fine boys. Got married and got two fine boys. But she was very instrumental [00:16:00] in helping us get this bit together. Many others, but she's a stickup because she never gave up, and we had a great rapport, fighting the battle to get things done. So then when I turned my attention to Mosquito Beach, she helped me, she had to come take some photos, because she's good with doing video. And she came down there when the county had me under the gun with demolishing the old [00:16:30] hotel. If you research the Post and Courier, a big thing coming up there, "Old hotel going to be demolished." Front-page news, that was on the front-page news, that the Pine Tree Hotel was going to be demolished. When them preservation people saw that on the front page, I was flooded, "Why they want to tear it down? That hotel's the last of its kind." And that came from the Jim [00:17:00] Crow area because we can go in the hotel or not like that, Black folks. No matter how many, the hotel

or motel, you can't go in it because of the color of your skin. So the preservation groups jumped down on that, and everybody surrounded me with love and kindness.

And guess what? Historical Charleston Foundation, they said, "This [00:17:30] building does not need to be torn down." And they came to my rescue, not only Preservation Society, all of them came to my... And they got with the county government. County government decided to form a historical... They just form the historical preservation group about maybe three or four years ago. And my project, Mosquito Beach, was the first on the list, preserving Mosquito Beach and the old buildings down there. And [00:18:00] finally Mosquito Beach went on the National Register of Historical Places, just like this building here. So anyway, we got that, and I put in for a grant, Historic Charleston Foundation, they assisted me with putting in for the grant, and we got a half a million dollars to restore the old hotel. So the county finally backed off, and we were allowed to put the building back in its the original structure, and the restaurant now [00:18:30] is being worked on. And it's a beautiful... You saw it, right? You been there?

Paige Regna:

I haven't, but-

Cubby Wilder:

We can go down there.

Paige Regna:

Okay.

Cubby Wilder:

It's a beautiful edifice, beautiful. And it's an [inaudible 00:18:44] structure. It's going to have nine rooms upstairs, small rooms, because it was a small building, and a handicapped room downstairs. And then we decided to have downstairs open bins [00:19:00] or suites for people who want to sell their product. One person I already contact, Sweet Basket, the ladies who do Sweet Basket, we have a bin for her, or suite. And then the lady who own Ravenel, she does peanut and pickle, any kind of pickle you want, she want a bin. And then there're going to be another lady in one of the suits [00:19:30] downstairs. She want to do a [inaudible 00:19:32], work at Mosquito Beach, probably get conch shell and oyster shell, put a little paint on them, sell little trinkets and stuff like that, and Welcome to Mosquito Beach and stuff like that. And the other bin, somebody want to do the T-shirts and stuff like that. So I think it's five bins, but the other bin, there's some people who want to do some local [00:20:00] stuff in the other bin. Anyway, there's a plan, and we don't

know when we're going to open up, but I think we want to try to open up from now to the spring.

Paige Regna:
Okay.

Cubby Wilder:
Yeah.

Paige Regna:
Yeah.

Cubby Wilder:
And the restaurant will be opened up too, trying to serve some good old Gullah Geechee food, stuff like that. One for instance, some good old shrimp and grits.

Paige Regna:
Can you talk a little bit more about what makes Mosquito [00:20:30] Beach so special?

Cubby Wilder:
Oh, yeah. Mosquito Beach was founded in 1953. I was 13 when I came from New York. I was raised in Harlem for a little while... Not for a little while, from six to 13, and then I came down here. But before I went to New York, [00:21:00] as a little child, I remember all the activities in the community, and before Mosquito Beach, used to be held right here at the Lodge hall, like Labor Day, 4th of July, Armed Forces Day, everybody would be up here, the whole community would open up. All the older people would be up here and the kids would be running around, and the Lodge be opened up. And I'll never forget, they used to make the homemade ice cream, the old thing that they turn... What you call it?

Paige Regna:
The crank.

Cubby Wilder:
The crank.

Paige Regna:
Yeah.

Cubby Wilder:

The little crank thing, they would make homemade ice cream, the good old food and everything like that would be here. And this Lodge hall was everything. It was a movie theater, the bank, and everything for the community. Well, this was a farming community, and fisher. So if something went down, [00:22:00] like a horse or a cow or mule, that would help with the farm, and didn't have the money, they would come to the Lodge, borrow the money, because at the time Black people couldn't go to the bank and borrow no money. So they would come in and get the money, and then they would try and reimburse them back the funds that they used to help with their farm.

Since the folks stopped farming, the community [00:22:30] grew up with bushels and debris and stuff like that. But back in the days, you could be on Sol Legare and look all the way to Grimball. Grimball Farm is the next farm over here. This was a plantation owned by Solomon Legare. The Legare family on Johns Island, their ancestors was always [00:23:00] a part this plantation, this was Solomon Legare Plantation. And they were Huguenots, French folks, and they were one of the few folks that sold to the Free Blacks, because my grandfather, when he came, Harrison Wilder, he was a Civil War veteran, he came here and bought a lot of land [00:23:30] from the Legare family. Yeah, Legare sold to a man named Seal. I can't think of his first name, but Seal and George Brown. George Brown was Black, Seal was white, but the land was sold to them. And then they in turn sold to the Free Blacks [00:24:00] that came down from up North to purchase land. And this was one of the few places that sold to Blacks. And the Grimball family, they sold the Blacks also. I think, according to Eugene Frazier, he wrote two books about the history of James Island, the Blacks, [00:24:30] and I think it was either 13 plantation owners over there. And Solomon Legare was one of the plantation owners. Grimball, the Dill sisters, they still got that, Riverland Drive. You familiar with James Island?

Paige Regna:

Mm-hmm.

Cubby Wilder:

You live in Johns Island. But that stretch over there, Riverland Drive is on the left side, that was owned by the Dill sisters. And Mary Clark, the mayor, [00:25:00] she was married to one of the plantation owners. She married into the family, the Clark family on Dill Bluff. And also the Stiles B. That's on the other side of [inaudible 00:25:13] Road. Stiles B was another plantation. There was a few other plantation owners over here.

But anyway, getting back to Mosquito [00:25:30] Beach. Mosquito Beach was formed in 1953. And when they opened on a Easter Monday, my uncle didn't know what to expect. People were hanging out on Mosquito Beach because years ago there was an oyster factory down there back in the 1920s, '30s. And Mosquito Beach always had a cool breeze. So after the oyster factory closed, they used to call Mosquito Beach The Factory, [00:26:00] it's short for the oyster, but we cut the oyster off and call it The Factory. And it was more or less for adults down there. The kids would be up here at the Lodge hall. And then my cousin, my daddy's first cousin, he had a two-story house down there on the beach. So the older folks would go down to Mosquito Beach, it was called The Factory [00:26:30] then, to The Factory and hang out.

And I guess it was mostly men folks, they would do their little moonshine, cook their little raccoons and possums and stuff like that and talk about the good old days. But anyway, in 1953 my uncle put up a pavilion over there, and the beach just took off with that pavilion. It was over the water, it was built something like the pavilion that was on Folly [00:27:00] Beach. Folly Beach had a larger pavilion, and that's where lot of entertainers used to go, to the pavilion on Folly Beach, people like Fats Domino and a lot of other artists. But anyway, it took off, and then my uncle made a lot of money, and other people saw what he was doing. So then people start building. Mosquito Beach is not owned by one person. It's [00:27:30] owned by, let's see, I would say four families, I can say five. But anyway, so the people who owned property down there, they start building these little juke joints, and it was a catch-on.

And it would be nothing. I mean, cars would come from here and from everywhere, in Lowcountry, Uppercountry, because they heard about Mosquito Beach on the water. And it was called the Factory [00:28:00] At first, The Factory. Then people started coming down here, and all the dancing and the good times was going on, then little bugs started coming called mosquitoes. And then people, "This is no factory, this is Mosquito Beach." And the name picked up and picked up, and they started calling it Mosquito Beach. It was Mosquito Beach because all that drilling and flying and all that stuff was going on. So the name catch on fast, Mosquito [00:28:30] Beach. And being that Folly Beach was right there, and we couldn't go to Folly Beach, I think by six o'clock, or when it get dark, Black folks had to be off Folly Beach. So it became a really good hangout spot for Black people, especially on the weekend.

From Friday, Saturday and Sunday, people didn't want to go home, people were sleeping all in their cars, cars would be line up all down the side of the road, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. And it was good times, good dancing, [00:29:00] good eating, good everything.

And that went on for a long time until segregation took place in '65, '66 when King and Johnson signed the civil right bill, and it went on. Now some of the Blacks went to test it, after they signed the bill in '67 or somewhere around [00:29:30] there, some of the Blacks went over to Folly Beach, and they were lucky to come back alive, they got attacked. They went in the water, they put it to test, equal rights, and they were attacked, some guys right from here, and they got beat up. And then it made the newspaper and stuff like that. You can go check that out in Post and Courier.

Paige Regna:
Yeah.

Cubby Wilder:

And they got attacked, and I think some of them got sugar [00:30:00] poured in their gas tank, they got beat up, stuff like that. So then they came back, made the newspaper, but they didn't give up, they went back again and it went on. So about in 1967, '68, they could go to Folly Beach and have a good time and go into the ocean water. Mosquito Beach is not a beach [00:30:30] per se, it's just a little place to hang out, the water inlet. So anyway, all that took place in 1969. Like me, when I graduated, I graduated from an all-Black school. The white high school was James Island High School. We were called W. Gresham Meggett. Our school was named after the white superintendent, W. [00:31:00] Gresham Meggett. Matter of fact, he just ran for the mayor of James Island. His heir, W. Gresham Meggett's heir ran for mayor of Town of James Island, he didn't win though. But anyway, we got a new mayor on James Island now, Lyon, L-Y-A-L-O-N. Lyons?

Paige Regna:
I don't know who the James Island mayor is.

Cubby Wilder:

Yeah, I can't think of her first name right now. But [00:31:30] anyway, Mayor Woolsey's gone, we got a new mayor on James Island. So Mosquito Beach, in 1953, all this went on, opened up, good times. And it had its up and downs. The one thing about it is, I guess the white folks who heard about Mosquito Beach, and some of them, they were coming down [00:32:00] to have a good time too, and dance and all that stuff that was going on down there. So a lot of them, as you could tell, have been on Mosquito Beach back in the days. And after integration came about, it tailed off and people could go wherever they wanted to go, they could rent motel rooms and stuff like that. And then a lot of storms came through. The storm that took the first [00:32:30] pavilion that my uncle built, my uncle was name was Andrew Jackson Wilder, but his nickname was Apple. Everybody over

here go to Apple's, like, "My nickname is Cubby." Matter of fact, he the one that named me Cubby. He said when I was a small, little tot coming up, I looked like a little cub beer. So they started calling me Cub, and then they went to Cubby. So that's how I got the nickname Cubby. And I went all through high school, everywhere, some people didn't even knew my name was William G. Wilder.

But anyway, everybody got a nickname over here on the island. So I went through high school and stuff as Cubby. And Hurricane Gracie in 1959 took the pavilion that he had built over the water. And he built the pavilion over there after the big pavilion there [00:33:30] on Folly Beach. And then my uncle built another pavilion, not in the same spot, but a little further down, and Hurricane Hugo took that one. Hurricane Gracie took the first one, Hurricane Hugo took the second one. And that was when I got involved with trying to get the pavilion put back. And I had everything approved twice, [00:34:00] but the first time when I got approved, there was no sewers down there, septic tank, and the land was not perked. So I lost, they gave me three years to put it back, that's when I turned around and started fighting for the sewage. And we got the sewage put through.

When I got the sewage put through, the OCRM, the permit gave me three years to put it back, and I missed that [00:34:30] deadline. So I went back at OCRM again to fight again to get the pavilion back over the water. And they, "Well, if you want to put the pavilion back, you will have everything in place. You need to have everything in place." Like money, funds, who going to do this contract and all that. So every time I would try to go to the bank to [00:35:00] try to get the pavilion back, I was declined. And then Mosquito Beach, no lie, they had a few shootings down there, some guys got killed down there. And every time I would go to the bank, seemed somebody would get killed. And when a killing happened down there, it'd make the front page, "Killing on Mosquito Beach." Publicity was very bad. So [00:35:30] the bank, if they think things are not right, they're not going to invest in that. Anyway, I never gave up though. I kept fighting with the county government to save the hotel. And I did get some money after Hugo, to try to restore some [00:36:00] stuff. Then the zoning changed on us, they put us in the most severe flood zone, V15, and your house had to be elevated up.

Paige Regna:

Oh wow, that is a V15.

Cubby Wilder:

Yeah. You know about zoning, right?

Paige Regna:

Yes.

Cubby Wilder:

They put the whole community in V15.

Paige Regna:

Wow.

Cubby Wilder:

And if you look around, all the houses was like that old house over, there's a really old house over there. That's where most all the houses over here were [00:36:30] built. This is the Jim Waring home right here. And you see the elevated it up, because this was the latest townhouse. So all our younger people, when they talk about the elevation 15, how they had to go up, and when you try to put a foundation in, you out of \$20,000 with [inaudible 00:36:52]. Or that wooden piles over there, but if you use concrete piles, it'll be even more. [00:37:00] So a lot of the younger people left and moved out of here because they couldn't afford the foundation. What happened, why we got so much heirs' property, the older people believed that if you go away and make some money, you come back and you want to build a house, you asked for a spot, they give you a spot, you was going build your house. That's the way it were set up. And they didn't get the land cut up, [00:37:30] where people get their own deed and title. They kept it under heirs, but the heirs' property became detrimental to us because the bank ain't going loan you no money with no heirs.

So there was no money being made like that. And a lot of the younger Blacks like me, they left here and went to New York, a lot of them went to Florida, because the wages was so low, you couldn't [00:38:00] make no money. No matter how hard you work, you're making two or \$3 a day, not no hour, by the day. So a lot of them left and went to New York, Florida, everywhere, Atlanta. A lot of them went to Atlanta and Charlotte where the wages was better. So a lot of the land became vacant. And what happened, why the Blacks are losing so bad now, with heirs' property, you can't borrow no money to build a house. So many of them now with this Heirs Property Foundation that just came about, they're trying to help you get your land cut up, because there's a lot of money involved with cutting up property nowadays. So the community is getting really old, because the young people are not coming back to the community and missing out on their cultural heritage, but we're just getting better [00:39:00] now, people will start moving back to try to be inclusive in their community.

Paige Regna:

Yeah, hopefully. What are some of your other goals with your work at Mosquito Beach?

Cubby Wilder:

Well, once I get it back, I want to serve the public with some good food, good dancing and culture. I mean, it's a rich culture, and I've done hundreds [00:39:30] of interviews, and someone asked the same question, "If you get Mosquito Beach back, what's going to happen?" We are going to have good eating, good food, good dancing, and good socialization. So that's my plan. And it is on the National Record of Historical Places, people could learn about the culture and the history. And it wasn't easy for the people back here [00:40:00] to make it, some people think it was easy, but it's not easy. And you could admire the older people for what they did and try to hold onto the land so the younger people could have a chance to enjoy their culture and history. And I try to share with the younger people their culture and history.

And when we got this on the National Record of Historical Places, [00:40:30] I had to convince the people that it needs to go on, "Why you want on the National Record?" That way you could try to get it preserved. "Why you want Mosquito Beach on the National Record Historical Places?" To try to preserve their culture and history, because once it's gone, gone with the wind, it's gone. And now I'm in the process of... I showed you the old school down there we got. I got [00:41:00] another one, a student down there with Clemson, we just went through and we got it nominated, the old school, to go to the National Record of Historical Places.

Paige Regna:

Oh, okay.

Cubby Wilder:

What's the young lady's name? It'll come to me. So then, when we got into the real history of Mosquito Beach, we found out that the 54th, the Black regiment, they fought in this area right here. We didn't even know that. And me coming up didn't even know. We to hear the [00:41:30] old folks talk about the soldiers used to march down Sol Legare Road, but we didn't know what they mean, because as you child, you don't know, they're talking about the old people, the soldiers. And then the monument right there is in memory of the 54th, and the battle was fought in this area right here.

So when I give a tour right there, everybody... Oh, the flag came down. I got to get Ernest to put it back up. I tell everybody, "You on sacred ground," [00:42:00] because that battle, when they engaged the Confederate right in this area right here, we used to see the guys come through with metal detectors, and they was finding stuff, we see them all on our property. I said, "What these guys doing there?" And came found out, they said they were finding old relics from the Civil War. And then one guy, Vance's brother, [00:42:30] found a 54th ring from the soldiers. And I don't know what happened to the ring, but I think he turned it into the museum downtown. But anyway, I sure wish we get that ring and put in this museum here. But anyway, the battles were fought here, and I tell everybody, "You're sacred ground, try to preserve history," because me coming up, going to an all-Black [00:43:00] school, what we learned about, Frederick Douglas, Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves, Bookie T. Washington and George Washington Carver during the month of February. We didn't know about all that other stuff that was going on, and how Abraham Lincoln got the Black soldiers to fight to help him win the Civil War. So it just was a lot of history left out the history book, and people need to know the history.

So right now, Mosquito Beach is on the revitalization program. Hopefully, when we get everything updated, from an oyster factory, to now on the National Record of Historical Places, it's an honor, and to know your history and your culture. And it wasn't easy. Listen, when I used to go to county council, when I walk that building, they said, "Here comes the troublemaker." [00:44:00] They called me the troublemaker because they knew I knew, and there was a lot of people who do a lot of reading and keep up to time with what's going on with the government and all that stuff. But being my worldly travel, and being in the Air Force, I've been everywhere, all over the world, and I've seen a lot, and I see how people look, not to say [00:44:30] look, but I see their culture and their heritage. And everybody's trying to preserve their culture and their heritage.

And I said, "Wow." We were poor and didn't even know we were poor, because listen, the old folks, they kept food on the table. But I seen people, like in Thailand, in Korea, people fighting every day to try to get something to eat. And I said to myself, "I wish I could just bundle up a whole bunch [00:45:00] of my young people and put them in one of them little poor country so they can see what's really going on. Sometimes I struggle to get something to eat." And as you know, things are getting better now, but in this poor country there's a lot of people, you know they not eating properly, because you see some of them kids on TV with the big pot belly, some of them, no teeth, they got all kinds of deformality, [00:45:30] not form correctly.

And I see that, and I even think with the American Indians, they was desecrated, but when I do a little more reading and see what was going on, the American Indian, they were desecrated. And my grandmother, they used say she was a Cherokee Indian, but I realized that, not my grandmother, [00:46:00] my great-great-grandmother, I realized that she couldn't have been a Cherokee, because the Cherokee in South Carolina was back west of here. So if she was an Indian, my grandmother, they said she had her hair all the way down here. And her name was Ma Patience, they got her tombstone in the Grimboll Cemetery. She married Harrison Wilder. Harrison Wilder was a Civil War veteran. If you look it up, you will see that [00:46:30] he was a Civil War veteran, but he was awfully young. But then, the people matured young back then, but he was a Civil War veteran. And he came in, he bought a lot of property up from Mr. Seal and Georgie Brown. He bought 30 acres up there, he bought 17 acres down here. And we got a little piece of island, we own Sea Island up there. We don't own it, but we got shares in the island. I'll show it you when we go to Mosquito Beach, that little island that my family got a piece of heirs' property over there, 60 acres.

And listen, he bought the land for \$100 back then, it cost \$100 back then, but he had money when he came in. And guess what, this is my great-great-grandmother, his wife, because he died right before [inaudible 00:47:28]. \$20 a month [00:47:30] from the government, she was getting a little check, and they were feeding everybody in the community. I said, "Wow." So back then, that's going to show you, because I remember when a penny used to be a penny. Now people don't even pick up a penny, you know?

Paige Regna:
Mm-hmm.

Cubby Wilder:
So what else you want to-

Paige Regna:
I was going to ask, do you consider yourself a preservationist?

Cubby Wilder:
Oh yes, many times over, because I give a lot of tools. I didn't even go down and look at myself [00:48:00] in the IAAM, basically they got a little photo of me in there.

Paige Regna:
Really?

Cubby Wilder:

Yeah.

Paige Regna:

I'm going there on Friday.

Cubby Wilder:

Yeah, they got a photo of me talking about Mosquito Beach. But really, I need to be talking about the Lodge hall too, but what they try to do, they try to... Well, Ernest is the curator for the museum, but the legwork [00:48:30] to get this place restored, Corie Hipp, me, Michael Riff. Michael Riff was the contractor, he's the contractor of my hotel down there. I got him because he did the good job on us, putting this back together, because you saw the pictures of it, right?

Paige Regna:

Yes.

Cubby Wilder:

You been inside there?

Paige Regna:

Yes.

Cubby Wilder:

Okay. Yeah, that's right. So I mean, it's not perfect, and we got a lot more work to do, like we got to stain this porch before it gets too [00:49:00] bad. Definitely when it dry up, we going to stain it and lay some Sheenlac or something like that to try to preserve it. But yes, I consider myself a preservationist, and I love telling the story. I'm probably a little out of sequence, the timeline of how everything happened, but being a world traveler, and [00:49:30] being where I came from, and seeing how hard... I worked the farm when I came from New York. I didn't tell you my New York experience, but from six to 13, when they moved me back, they needed to send me back down here because I was going on the wrong track. I was raised up in Harlem, but all that experience was good. All that experience was good, because when I left New York, I was going on the wrong side. And when I came down here [00:50:00] with my parents, my daddy used to sell a little moonshine, and he had a little bank there. And I went in his bank, took a quarter out, a

quarter. He had a bunch of change in there. That man knew I took a quarter out of his bank. God, he missed that quarter.

He called me one day, called me aside and said, "Son, I know you went in my bank and you [00:50:30] took some money out of there. You don't have to steal from your dad. If you want something, you come ask me." I turned my whole life around, because in New York I was going down the wrong track, but I came down here and turn my life around. They were Christian people, every Sunday we had to go to church. All of these benches, they had these pews, this is one of the church pews, you had to sit on that pew bench, and that bench was [00:51:00] hard as a rock. And then you couldn't chew chewing gum, you couldn't talk, because kids had to be seen and not heard, because if the [inaudible 00:51:08] you see you, you're in trouble.

Paige Regna:

I was told that as a kid.

Cubby Wilder:

So you had to be a kid in church. And church was long, the preacher preached forever, being redundant. But anyway, things are changing up now. But anyway, [00:51:30] yeah, those folks came a long way and instilled in me to be honest, tell the truth, and help other people. It's good, when you got the knowledge, you can help people. And that's me, I help a lot of people. Just the other day, the settlement community over there in Mount Pleasant, Ten Mile, they had a [00:52:00] seminar right there in Summit Library Saturday morning, I went to that. They put me up on a little pedestal, and I'm looking for that pedestal, but I just tell them, "Get organized. Get a charter from the Secretary of State. Try and get your 501(c)(3) from the IRS. And stay organized. And [00:52:30] if you've got a cause, you got to fight for it, because nothing comes easy."

The government ain't going to give you anything, although they're using your taxpayer money, and they act like that money is theirs, but there's a lot of things these indigent communities need to be fighting for because it was left undone, especially the Black community, because they didn't have no spokesmen. And when I told him, I said, "I formed three Towns [00:53:00] of James Island." I wanted my community in the town, a small government, because you don't need to be in that big government, like county council, like I told you, run from McClellanville all the way down to Edisto, 30 miles in. And when Jim Clyburn formed the Gullah Geechee Corridor, I was so proud about that. I think that was formed in 19... It either was 1976 or '80 somewhere, Jim Clyburn formed

that, [00:53:30] I don't know exactly, but it's to recognize the Gullah Geechee people. And all these, if you're traveling, I don't know if you travel 17 too much.

Paige Regna:
Oh yeah, I do.

Cubby Wilder:
Yeah, but if you run... Oh, I didn't tell you about Atlantic Beach. Atlantic Beach is the real beach. And then we used to charter a bus back in the days, [00:54:00] the church used to charter a bus. And I think that was from the 1950, after '60, 1960 or '65, charter a bus and drive all the way up to Atlantic Beach, which is in North Myrtle Beach. Atlantic Beach has since gone a little down, but that used to be the place, along with Mosquito Beach, another Black beach. Did I take with the five black beaches?

Paige Regna:
You didn't, but I have done my research.

Cubby Wilder:
Yeah, the five Black beaches was Riverside Beach, that was located at Remley's Point, at the foot of the Cooper River Bridge. Guess that's that's the new Ravenel Bridge now. But that old bridge was... I guess you heard about the old bridge.

Paige Regna:
I've heard of it, yeah.

Cubby Wilder:
That old bridge, oh God, that was something scary, whoa. But anyway, Riverside Beach, then there was Peter Miller's, which is on 17, it wasn't really a beach, just a little pavilion over the water, there [00:55:00] was another pavilion over the water. Frasier Beach, which was on Johns Island, way down River Road, way down there. I think they got the rural mission down there now, that used to be Frazier Beach. And then Edisto Beach, which was a real beach, but Edisto Beach, what they did, they discriminated, the good part of the beach, they had a line there where the Blacks couldn't come across. And then the Blacks had to go on the end down there with all the rocks and no lifeguard. So nobody wanted [00:55:30] to go to Edisto Beach. And so those were the main five beaches. And Mosquito Beach after five. And Mosquito Beach is still existing.

Atlantic Beach, people don't go to Atlantic Beach like that no more. When I went up there last time, when was it? About three months ago, six months ago, I went to Atlantic Beach to see how things are going, how goes it. [00:56:00] And it's not near when we used to go up there years ago. They had a little more activities, and they had more dance hall and pavilion. A big part of the Black community's culture was dancing. See they talk about the shag, we used to call it swing dances, take them girls and swing them around, and throw them onto your leg and bring them back up. So it was a good old days, dancing was the thing, and socializing, and good eating.

Paige Regna:

Yeah.

Cubby Wilder:

And good music.

Paige Regna:

Mm-hmm.

Cubby Wilder:

Yeah.

Paige Regna:

For your projects at Mosquito Beach, has it been important to restore the buildings to a specific time period?

Cubby Wilder:

Yes, very important. I mean, I was so happy when HFC, historical-

Paige Regna:

HCF.

Cubby Wilder:

Yeah, HCF, when they helped me get that grant, I had half a million [00:57:00] dollars to restore the old hotel. And then SHPO called me, they called me now, they called me and said, "Wilder, did your building get damaged by Irma?" I think it was Irma, one them was Storm, Hurricane Gilbert then Irma. But they said, "There's a grant eligible ranging from \$250,000 all the way down." And they said, "You qualify since Mosquito Beach on the

National Record of Historical Places." [00:57:30] I wrote it up, put in, they gave me \$250,000 to restore the Lake House and Island Breeze. So with these preservation groups joining the cause and helping out, and very concerned about the African American history that was left out the books, and the community who wouldn't know about Mosquito Beach now. If it didn't get restored, it would've [00:58:00] been something that people talked about going with the wind, because Riverside Beach is gone, they got a little market on the side of Riverside Beach, and they had another hotel over there called White Paradise. If you drive Remley's Point, on that road down there, you'll see White Paradise.

Now that's where James Brown used to stay at, because them entertainers, even Fats Domino, when they [00:58:30] come, they were not allowed to go to the white hotel. So they had to go to the Black hotel, motel. And they had a big Black hotel downtown, Hotel James. That's where most of the Black entertainment used to stay at when they come to the town. And have you seen any of those Black movies where entertainers used to ride the bus from one city to the next to do the entertaining? They had to sleep on the bus or [00:59:00] in their cars, because they couldn't go in no hotel like that. So when you young people like you, y'all say, "Dad, how could that exist?" What you think about it?

Paige Regna:

It really blows my mind because I can't picture it now.

Cubby Wilder:

Right.

Paige Regna:

I can't picture things being like that now.

Cubby Wilder:

When I left New York City, I got the tail [00:59:30] end of the discrimination with the bus. Now, they used to have a bus, there was a store, this PUD that's right there on the head of the road, public unit development right there, there was a little grocery store right there, that we always used to walk down this road and go to the grocery store. It was owned by a white guy. And the bus used to come right there and stop [01:00:00] and pick up the workers early in the morning, whole bunch of us be out there to get on the bus, to ride the bus to Folly Beach so we could work. I used to cut the yard, I used to use a little push lawn mower, cut the yard, use a sling, slinging the thing to cut folks' yard and stuff like that.

My mama was a domestic worker, so I used to normally go with her, [01:00:30] because her workers used to get me to cut their yard. [inaudible 01:00:37]. And we used to put our little 10 cent, when you get in the bus, you put your little 10 cent in, it was 10 cent to get to Folly Beach, then go to the back of the bus. And it'd be crowded with us going to Folly Beach early in the morning, seven, eight o'clock in the morning. And if a white person come in and you sitting down, you have to get up. I got [01:01:00] the tail end of that. [inaudible 01:01:03]. I just came from New York. And when I was in New York, I could go anywhere I wanted to go. And when I got the tail end of that, I said, "What?" They said, "You can't make no noise. You can't make no noise, go on back, and no lip service." You couldn't say anything to these white folks back then, or anything like that. But anyway, that's a era long gone, but [01:01:30] like you said, you can't visualize that. It allowed me to visualize it now, but I don't live it, I've lived through that because...

And I was wondering, I said, "Dang, if I caught the tail end of that, what did my parents go through?" But I know one thing, when I came from New York, they tell me, "Listen, whatever you did in New York, don't bring that here, because you may not go home." [01:02:00] And my daddy used to tell me, we always would get together on Saturday and go to the city, and when you go down in the city, and go to King Street, King Street is the main shop in the area in downtown, you had to go to King Street. And when I get on the city there, my dad used tell me, we walking down the street, [01:02:30] he said, "If you see any white folks coming on towards you, you just get off the sidewalk and let them come through." Seriously, "And please don't look no white woman in the eye." So when I go in the city, we'll go do our little Easter shopping, Christmas shopping and stuff like that, when I see folks coming, I'll just get off the sidewalk, let them go through and go in the store.

But anyway, it is been [01:03:00] a change. I've seen a lot of things in my Air Force experience, that's a whole other matter there, because in Air Force I was always being tested. I know I don't have perfect diction, but I know what I know. And when I learned a job, I know that job. And I got tested a few times. And [01:03:30] they found that the color of your skin doesn't matter. What you got up here, they can't take it away from you. What else?

Paige Regna:

I guess you've talked about partnering with HCF. Have there been any other organizations that you've partnered with for your work?

Cubby Wilder:

Right now we are thinking about Donnelley, but I don't [01:04:00] know if Donnelley would consider us, they more or less work with Clemson, so I don't know. But we do need some more funds to try to finish up our project. We need to partner up with the community based foundation, the Charleston Community Foundation, [01:04:30] I may not be pronouncing that, but we had to get a lot of grant for the Lodge hall from them. Right now, the Mellon Foundation. Mellon?

Paige Regna:
Mellon Foundation.

Cubby Wilder:
Yeah, we're trying to partnership with them, see if they want to work with us since we've run a little short on funds, because we have to make a lot of changes. [01:05:00] When you got a historical building and it's old, and you try to bring it up, and then you're going to try to bring it up to the modern-day code. Right now we are stuck on getting a sprinkler system for those nine rooms I told you about. We need a sprinkler system if we're going to support the public. And that sprinkler system was not in the budget. So we are looking to try to get about \$100,000 more [01:05:30] to try to bring the building up to meet the county standards. Well, safety standard really.

Paige Regna:
Right, because you guys have received some grants. Do you ever receive private donations?

Cubby Wilder:
Oh yeah.

Paige Regna:
Okay.

Cubby Wilder:
Oh yeah. I think Corie, her parents had a little bit of funds, and she got a lot of money from her parents to help us along with this, not Mosquito Beach, [01:06:00] but Corie dropped off because she got married, and she's got two fine boys. She stays in touch with me, we stay in touch with each other. But she said, "Cubby, I love Sol Legare and I love Mosquito Beach." So I'll be hooking up with her pretty soon, yeah. But right now her family, her boys seven and 10, or something like that. But she always [01:06:30] got Sol Legare and this community in mind, yeah. I can't think of no... Well, I'm reaching out to a

couple of the organizations, I have not done it yet, and see if they want a partnership with us, to see if we can find some more funds to get things done, there's a lot of work that need to be done. I would like to see Mosquito Beach [01:07:00] have a private road. Right now we are wide open to the public, and it's a county road. You familiar with the highway?

Paige Regna:
Yes.

Cubby Wilder:

Okay, this is the state highway here, DOT responsible for Sol Legare Road. So Mosquito Beach was a state road. So when I fought to get Mosquito Beach Road, to make it private, I had to write the DOT, I wrote them a letter, and they relinquished control of Mosquito Beach Road, but then they turned it over to the county. So now Mosquito Beach is the county road. And I wrote letter after letter to try to get Mosquito Beach Road out of [01:07:30] county so we could put a gate there. Charleston County Park right there on James Island, Riverland Drive, you got to go through a gate. In the morning time when I wake up, I don't sleep late, [01:08:00] I'm down on Mosquito Beach riding around looking, people are on Mosquito Beach. And it's all different [inaudible 01:08:11], Black, white, everybody down on Mosquito Beach. And we have no privacy and no control, no security.

And I think being that it's on the National Record of Historical Places, I'm getting the place updated. There should be some kind of privacy, but having a gate there [01:08:30] so you could open up Mosquito Beach at a certain times and close it down a certain times. And I'm going to fight for that, and I have to get probably the press on my side. Yeah, I got to reach out, but first, we got to make sure that we get it beautified a little bit. And we want to serve the public. And being that it's got so much history, it needs to be preserved, [01:09:00] it needs to be protected, and it needs security. We have cameras all over the place, but we still don't need to have everybody that's driving down there all the time of night, all the time of day.

Paige Regna:

Mm-hmm. Going back to the press, do you think that you've been able to use the media to get more attention?

Cubby Wilder:

Oh yeah. Yeah, I think Post and Courier gave me some good press. There was a guy named Pehree, I think, he likes historical stuff. [01:09:30] P-E-H-R-E-E.

Paige Regna:
Oh, Robert Behre.

Cubby Wilder:
Yeah, Robert, that's my buddy. You ask him about Cubby, he know me. Yeah, if you talk to him, you're like, "You know Cubby Wilder?" He did a lot of storytelling story on the Lodge hall and Mosquito Beach. Then he sent a surrogate out now, because he up here now, he's a big dog now up there. But yeah, he did a lot [01:10:00] of stories. But yeah, the press helped me out quite a bit, because when the county inspector said, "That building need to be demolished," they put that on the front page, and that opened up a lot of stuff. And that's when all these preservation groups came down, said, "That hotel do not need to be demolished." And they wrote up the article, and told the history from 1953 to the present, [01:10:30] it opened up a lot of avenues for people to come forth and assist me in my whatever journey I'm going. I'm on the journey now. Yeah.

Paige Regna:
To do all of these preservation initiatives, what tools have you used? You've talked about grants and partnerships and the media. Are there any others to add to that?

Cubby Wilder:
Well, [01:11:00] the grant thing is great. To get a grant, you have to put money up to get that grant, because you got to find a grant writer. I had to come out my pocket was some money to get the grants, but it assists you with finding [01:11:30] the avenue to find these grants, and to see... You can't partnership with everybody, because some people don't have all the same motives that you do, but the press have helped tremendously in my venture to get some of these places [01:12:00] updated. And I found out that Clemson had reached out quite a bit. I got a grant from the College of Charleston one time through Avery Institution, I put in for a grant when I first started to venture to try to update the Lodge haul. And they gave me a little, I think it was either a 2,000 or \$1,000 grant to check the foundation, to see if the foundation [01:12:30] was steady enough.

And it was a professor, he was a Black professor at Avery Institution, working for the College of Charleston. Can't think of his name now, it's on the grant. I got a copy of that grant somewhere. And we got that \$2,000 to check out the foundation to see if this Lodge hall would be able to sustain being upgraded. But yes, the press, the news, media,

[01:13:00] all that helps. The publicity towards us getting updated and getting Mosquito Beach, Lodge hall, now the old school down the way, getting these things updated and get it noticed or publicized, let them know that really this community is very historical.

Paige Regna:

Mm-hmm. And have you been able to find any other [01:13:30] colleagues or counterparts who are doing this work in other areas in the Lowcountry?

Cubby Wilder:

Well, that meeting that I attended last Saturday, and that wasn't the first one, I had attended a other meeting, 10 miles, four miles, all them settlement. I was even on Johns Island years ago. I don't know, you ever heard of a guy named Bill Saunders? [01:14:00] No? He lived on Johns Island. He was a big-timer, he owned a radio station, one of the few Black men to own a radio station. He's up in age now. And on Johns Island, I was trying to tell Bill Saunders, since he had some influence, Johns Island should be incorporated, but at the time, he didn't have the vision to see. He said, "I [01:14:30] got a 501(c)." I said, "Listen, you need to get Johns Island incorporated because Mayor Riley's coming."

Mayor Riley done ripped Johns Island. I know you live there now, but Johns Island was a farming community, we used to farm there. And as a little boy, we used to go on farm over in Johns Island. The truck used to come through here and pick us up and we'd go farm. And listen, I used to go and [01:15:00] farm, and to pick beans and stuff like that. It looked like that row of beans so long, it'd be from here all the way to the Bulls Island over there. And that thing be loaded down with beans, and you have to pick them beans. And that was not my cup, so I started playing with the girls. 57 bushel, we pick that [inaudible 01:15:20] beans. I started stealing the girls' beans, when they pick their beans, the bushel basket, I get their beans and go cash it and [01:15:30] go buy something to eat.

But anyway, I was trying to get the outsiders and some of the Black leaders to incorporate. With an incorporation you have more control of who you are, and you have your own government. And I said, "Johns Island have a lot of indigent people over here. There's grant money out there to help the indigent folks if you incorporate it and form a municipality." [01:16:00] They didn't see it. And me and Mary Clark went over here, and Berkeley Electric, where y'all get your electricity from, they done moved, they used to be right on Maybank Highway, they moved up on Main Road now, the new building was up there on Main Road now. Yeah. I don't know what they do, that Berkeley Electric on Maybank. What do they use that as now, the community building?

Paige Regna:

I don't know.

Cubby Wilder:

Yeah, but the old Berkeley Electric, they might still be utilizing Berkeley Electric, but I know they moved on main road and got a nice big building up there. But anyway, I was trying to get them to incorporate, and me and Mary Clark and some others went over there to meet with Bill Saunders and some other folks to incorporate Johns Island so Riley couldn't rip the place. When I say rip, the airport there, when we was working out [01:17:00] there, that was not Charleston Municipal Airport, that was Johns Island Airport. Now he done incorporated that, he got all over the place. And that's why Seabrook and Kiawah, they got their own government. Yeah, they got their municipality, Seabrook, Riley can't touch that. And then if you go down Wadmalaw, they got Rock [01:17:30] Hill Incorporated, but Rock Hill incorporated all of Wadmalaw, but them people out there. And if the City of Charleston ever come cross that Bohicket Creek, they're not only [inaudible 01:17:45] now, they chose Charleston County. Wadmalaw will be gone, all them farms and stuff they got over there, all of them mostly Johns Island, all them big farms there.

Now the Fields, the Greens, those are Black family, they got farms, Fields, [01:18:00] the Greens, what's the other family over there? They still got their properties, they still farming it. But what's the other big plantation? Because that used to be the tomato capital over there on Johns Island, before you could move over there. Really good, nice tomato. Now the tomato and stuff like that, the farmers' gone. So [01:18:30] I just think, you just see an era that's going by because Johns Island is really gone. Every place you look, there's a subdivision. Then they don't think about the infrastructure. Listen, River Road, Maybank Highway, River Road is both sides, Maybank then Bohicket Road.

I mean, just dump people, and they didn't even think about putting a freeway [01:19:00] through there. And then the people said, "But you're not going to destroy these farms." So the people resist them on that, but they're going to have to do something for that infrastructure over there because it's bad. We got primarily on James Island, and the town was formed to hold all the density and development. And Riley didn't care about none of that. And we got problems with Folly Road, and now Riverland Drive, and [01:19:30] all the back roads now, Harborview, they didn't think about the infrastructure, just dumping people over here. And people, I understand that the island's a beautiful place, but we got problems.

Paige Regna:

Yeah.

Cubby Wilder:

I was thinking, now when I go down to Florida, I see Florida, but we're a poor state, we don't have the money, but build the roadway around the border of the island. [01:20:00] I don't know, but build a freeway, it takes money to do that, but run your roads and stuff to the heart of the town, and they could hit some of the border. When I take you down here, Kiawah [inaudible 01:20:20]. We got the Stono River. They thinking about maybe building a bridge from Sol Legare to there, but the people ain't going to agree with that. [01:20:30] Johns Island right across the Stono River. When you go up Maybank Highway, a bridge right there. Well, down there. And then Kiawah right down there, I fished down there.

But look at what you got to do. You got to go all the way down 17, go all the way down Bohicket Road to get down to Kiawah, Seabrook. Well, if you could build a bridge right there, you'd be right there, or build something, but we're such a poor state, [01:21:00] and they don't think about the infrastructure. Maybe the border of the river, they'll stopped the flooding too, if they build a bulkhead, put the roadway on top of the bulkhead head, stop the water. Two weeks ago when we had that last flood, we got flooded over here on the low area. This is high ground here. So topographic run like this.

Paige Regna:

Yes, I've looked at it.

Cubby Wilder:

And that water came, I got flooded out.

Paige Regna:

Oh wow.

Cubby Wilder:

Had my washing machine and dryer in my barn. Water came up [01:21:30] this high. So I had to get a new washing machine to dryer-

Paige Regna:

Oh my God.

Cubby Wilder:

... because I had it in my barn area. But anyway.

Paige Regna:

Well, I'll ask the last question here, do you have a vision for the future of preservation of African American heritage in the Lowcountry?

Cubby Wilder:

Yeah. I mean, we just need to try to preserve our culture and heritage so people can know, it wouldn't be an era gone with [01:22:00] the wind. And I see that they're restoring an old school that was built back in, I think that's [inaudible 01:22:10]. Is that Remley's Point? One of them places, they restoring an old school over there. And they need to preserve their history because the thing about it is, a lot of young people like you, y'all move here, y'all really don't know the history and the culture. People get so upset how [01:22:30] some folks are losing their land. Our younger people, they don't have the money to afford a nice home. The land is here, but some of them, and because you got heir's property, you can't can't build or get no money from the bank, but if you go out there and save your money [01:23:00] like I did, I'm very conservative when it comes to my funds, so I came home, I built. But I should have bought a house when I came home, I saw this house up the street, they never finished it, but that was on heirs' property.

Then I found out that even though I'm retired military, I can't borrow no money on heirs' property. So you can't borrow no money on heirs' property, but you [01:23:30] got to save your money, and then you can build, but I had enough money to build my house back then, but now it's a different story. So yes, I want to continue as long as I can to preserve African American culture and heritage, and let the story be told that we contributed a lot to American history, we are the true American. I do feel [01:24:00] really sorry for the way the Indians or the Native Americans were treated. When I look at these stories and read these stories. How about the Seminole, I saw something about the Seminole, they moved the Seminole down in and took them out West. They didn't know nothing about the West. They moved the Cherokee up in Greenville, all them places, moved them out west, [01:24:30] and put them on land that was almost like wasteland. So those people, they were treated terrible. And I give donation every once in a while, but it's just that you need to preserve your history and let people know about your culture and your heritage, that's

very important. [01:25:00] And yes, I consider myself a preservationist, and I'll continue to do that until I die. Yeah.

Paige Regna:

Well, thank you, Cubby. I'll go ahead and stop the recording, but thank you for speaking with me today.

Cubby Wilder:

Sure.

Appendix E

Transcript: Pernessa Seele

Transcribed on January 11, 2024, by Otter.ai

Paige Regna:

Okay, Dr. Seele. Well, thank you for joining me today and taking the time to speak with me. Can you please confirm your preferred title with respect to your work in Lincolnville?

Pernessa Seele:

Dr. Seele.

Paige Regna:

Okay. Are you also part of the Lincolnville-

Pernessa Seele:

I am the founder and the president of the Lincolnville Preservation and Historical Society.

Paige Regna:

Great. And I know you have had quite a successful career. What skills have you drawn from your personal or professional experiences for your preservation work here?

Pernessa Seele:

Hmm. Well, that's a big question. I would say that my, I draw from the fact that I grew up here in Lincolnville. Number one. That I grew up here, and I went to school in this, this little place that we're sitting in now with all of those pictures on the wall, were the same pictures here, when I was in school, from first to seventh grade. They're still here, except that one. That was just put up, and that's the founder, Richard Harvey Cain. And my great-grandmother was one of the-- and my father-- was the early settlers. My mother wrote her master's thesis on Lincolnville in 1955, my uncle was the mayor for 44 years. So, Lincolnville lives in me. So that's, that's the foundation.

And then, you know, I truly was blessed to have gone away, and I was a research scientist at one point in time and did well. Got a little idea 36 years ago, to mobilize the faith community to address HIV. And that little idea became the Balm in Gilead, an international organization. And, and I'm still doing it, I don't think I'm ever gonna retire. And so I bring all of those global skills back to Lincolnville. I never thought I would be back in Lincolnville, you know. I was running from my mama's house when I was 17. So, the fact that I'm running back home and enjoying being back in the Lowcountry is just absolutely amazing to me.

Paige Regna:

Do you think you'll always stay here now?

Pernessa Seele:

Well, I go back and forth between here in Richmond, you know, and I've been doing this now for about two years. And now I am going, I can see myself gradually going to Richmond less, you know, but I have an organization there that I run. Thank God for zoom. And, you know, the world has changed now because of electronics and digital stuff, so you can do whatever you need to do from anywhere. But yeah, I see myself spending more time here now than in Richmond.

Paige Regna:

Yeah. And will you please talk a little bit about Lincolnton and why this place is so special, and why it needs to be preserved?

Pernessa Seele:

Well, well, where do I begin? I should've brought you my historical book. You know, what's exciting, is that, for me, it's exciting and frustrating, but let's go with the excitement, is that the history of Lincolnton for me, I'm uncovering new history every single week. There's something big that I'm finding out that I did not know about. Just this building, I did not know that this building was a Rosenwald building, was a Rosenwald school. You know, I'm sure you know the story of Rosenwald. So, you know, they didn't talk about this, but this was just elementary school, you know.

So that alone and to be a part now of-- South Carolina is looking at developing Rosenwald school trails, connecting all of the schools, there were 500 Rosenwald schools in South Carolina-- 5000 altogether. And those that are still standing or in use, the state is looking to create a trail and now be working with those folks. To put this school building on that trail is fascinating for me, as well as important to the history of Lincolnton and the history of Rosenwald and that partnership with Rosenwald and Dr. Booker T. Washington.

So, we start there. And then, two years ago I was blown away when I discovered the railroad track. I lived on the railroad track down there, and the railroad was built in 1832. Well, who knew? You know, I mean, that track, and the train still comes like four times a day, but the track was built in 1832 pre-Civil War. And in 1832, it is a part of the Charleston-Hamburg line. And when it was built, it was— it's 136 miles from Charleston to Hamburg. Hamburg doesn't exist. Hamburg is now North Augusta. And it was the longest in the world. It was the first steam engine came through there, the first passenger train in the country came through there, the first train that took the mail came through here, you know. And it went from Line Street, the passenger train went from Line Street up to Summerville. And who knew?

So, at that time, this area was known as Pump Pond. So if you read the history of the Charleston-Hamburg Railway, it talks about it has 12 water stops, and one of those water stops was Pump Pond, which was here. And so then we realized that two presidents have come to Lincolnton: President Roosevelt, he was the first president after the Civil War to visit Charleston. And our second postmaster, because we had a post office, she actually wrote a letter, we have copies of the letter in her book. Who knew? Because this professor in Philadelphia was doing research on African American female theologians in the north, couldn't find anything in the South. Well, she went to Wilberforce University and found this manuscript in the rubble. And she picked it up, redid it, and now you can get it at Barnes & Noble.

Well, that woman, Charlotte Riley, was perhaps, perhaps the first female of any race, female preacher in the South. Who knew? And she lived over there where I live, you know, where the community garden is. And then you have all of her history of being the second Postmaster General, her history is just, just rich. And then you have an 1860, you know-- The story was Richard Harvey Cain, who came down to restore the churches. Because after Denmark Vesay had revolted, all the Black churches were burned in Charleston, and the AME Church sent Richard Harvey; he came down to restore the mother church, you know, and it was Emmanuel. He renamed what we know now as the Emmanuel AME, he renamed that church. And he became one of the first congressmen for the state and congressional leaders. So that itself is history.

He's our founder, along with some other folks that are listed as founders. Well, the story went that he came up and he bought 620 acres of land from the railroad company. Well, that's not holding up. So now we're finding all these deeds and plats, that he just bought land from anywhere. So about three weeks ago, we find he was up here, buying land in 1863. And he bought an area that was known as the Village of Pine Ridge. Village of Pine Ridge? And it's now documented in the plats, we have an actual map. The name of the streets are the same as in 1863. The names-- right now, we can actually go to them. And so, he was up here, just buying, he bought all kinds of land. Charlotte Riley sold him some land, and it's like, what? But, in 1863, when he was up-- this black man was up here, and he's clearly a black man, when he's up here buying land, the Civil War is raging in Charleston. I haven't figured that out yet, you know.

And so, you have that whole piece of it, and now, I got the town as a part of the Reconstruction Era Network. We are now, the Lincolnton Preservation Society is a member of the Civil Rights Network. And, you know, when it comes to civil rights, who knew that Mayor Charles Ross, he hosted the United States Black Mayors Convention right here in this building. You know, who knew that? And Herbert Fielding, the Fielding Home for Funerals in Charleston, which was, you know-- Their father built a house in Lincolnton, and old man Fielding and my grandfather were very good friends, and Herbert Fielding, the Senator, and

Bernard, the attorney, he was the attorney for Lincolnton for many years. But Herbert Fielding, he was he was the first Black elected official in South Carolina, 100 years after Richard Harvey Cain. And that building, that home, which is across the street from my home, is where Herbert Fielding had all the Democratic organizing meetings. So, young Clyburn, when he's talking, he's like, you know, I know Lincolnton. I used to come to Lincolnton all the time, because he was a young Democrat, sitting under the feet of these, you know, these new giants like Herbert Fielding. So, you know, we have that whole political arena going on, who knew? And then you have John McCrae, who was a journalist, and started the Informer, he was the co-founder of Democratic Party of South Carolina, and all of his work is archived at the University of South Carolina in Columbia. And he's from Lincolnton.

It just goes on and on. And so it's not just oh, women, women. So, Dot, John Dot, there's only one library in Charleston named after this Black man, John Dot, and his family still owns their property in Lincolnton. And Charlotte Riley, who I just mentioned, her son, David Riley Hill, was the first Black principal of any public school in the country, and that public school happened to have been Burke High School. John Dot, he was the founder. He was-- it was vocational something something, then it became Burke, something, something, something, but he was the founder of Burke High School. So, there's a connection in Lincolnton, between the founder of Burke and the first principal of Burke, and that just happened to be the first black principal in the United States. All of this is happening in Lincolnton, you know, so it's not just local history. It's not just state history. It has national significance that's just been uncovered. And nobody knows about it.

Paige Regna:
That's wild.

Pernessa Seele:
It is!

Paige Regna:
Because I read the 620-acre thing, like buying from the railroad. But that's interesting that now with new research, you're figuring out new stuff.

Pernessa Seele:
Right. We are in those archives. The sister you saw me talking to, she is my researcher. And she, she just she fell in love with me, fell in love with Lincolnton. And she's all up in the archives every day. I mean, God bless her, God bless her. And, you know, we went on a hunt, to look at, okay, well, where did the Railroad get the land from? And let's go find, where did Richard Harvey Cain buy the land? Well, not yet. We haven't found that yet. But we found all of these deeds, and plats, where he was buying land from people, you know, what I mean? And who are these, you know, because you can't understand what these things are actually saying. But, you know, the next step is, okay, let's identify

who these people were. And some of them we do. Mariah Eaton was a woman and she was all invested, she had more land. And just uncovering, like some of these lands that we know, because we know Lincolnville, and where it came from, and clearly, Mariah Eaton did not get founder status because you know, it was six, seven men. But she didn't get founder status because she was all up in it because she was a woman, you know? So, it's just a lot.

Paige Regna:

Well, what motivated you to move here and start doing this work?

Pernessa Seele:

Come back home?

Paige Regna

Yes.

Pernessa Seele:

Well, again, it goes back to you know, I grew up with this history. I grew up with, these people loved this town. You know, it wasn't. It wasn't a few people who loved the town. The folks who I grew up with, the old folks, they loved this town. This was, you know, and this was our second school. The first school was the William Brayden School. So, the Rosenwald school was the second school built here. And when they came, the founders came, they had two things. They had education, and religion. So I have folks who come and you know, looking at national registry, they're like, Well, we don't understand the idea, because they're looking for those staples in the sea islands. They're looking for sweetgrass, they're looking for fishing nets, they're looking for all of that. And we had the Gullah food way, but it was all about education for us, you know what I mean? We got teachers, my mother was a school teacher, Miss Baron was down the street, the principal of the school, Miss Cox, you know. Our teachers lived in Lincolnville, you know, and that also set us apart, and Lincolnville was incorporated in 1889.

So, like a lot of Black settlements, we're all coming together now because we're all dealing with a lot of the same issues. What also separates Lincolnville is that Lincolnville is an incorporated town, incorporated in 1889. So these founders, they had a vision, you know what I mean? They were clearly of the W.E.B Dubois thought that you need to come in, get your own land, build your like Wall Street, you know, your Oklahoma, Wall Street African American community. Come and get your own. Let's do separate, but let's grow, you know, that was clearly their thinking. So, it lives in me. And even though I went away, and no matter where I went in the world, I was always from Lincolnville. And so after a while, it was like, okay, it's time to go home and start doing this because I got to, you know, I can't die until this was done. The ancestors. I tell folks every day I said, you know, Jesus is good, I'm good with Jesus. I'm good. Getting into heaven? I'm good. But my ancestors like hell, no, she can't die. She gotta make sure Lincolnville is

good. I have to make sure that the town is preserved in a way that it can be all that it needs to be for the next century.

Paige Regna:

And because the Lincolnville Historic Society is a nonprofit, right? It's a 501(c)3.

Pernessa Seele:

It is.

Paige Regna:

Have you found that that has helped you at all? Instead of it just maybe being you doing the research without an organization?

Pernessa Seele:

Yes, yes. In terms of mean, you know, I mean, I'm a nonprofit guru. So yes, having a nonprofit helped in terms of applications to the National Park Service, you know. Getting this designated reconstruction, have a grant from them. Did you see the article yesterday in the Post?

Paige Regna:

I just saw it. From what, two days ago? The grant for the park.

Pernessa Seele:

Yeah, right. So, we wrote that. And so yeah, in that perspective, absolutely. Yes. But at the end of the day, even with the organization, it's people who do the work. So having that structure is critical, but it doesn't prevent anybody from doing the research and the work.

Paige Regna:

Right. Do you consider yourself a preservationist?

Pernessa Seele:

Today? Yes. Over these last three years, I truly believe I have been carved up by the fire. Yes.

Paige Regna:

Because this isn't something that you've always done. Like, like I said earlier, you've had a very successful career.

Pernessa Seele:

And I have my head is my I'm in public health. So, the Department of Health and Human Services, I know like the back of my hand. I'm having to learn the Department of Interior, you know. The Department of Interior, they're a completely different government agency, works differently. It's quite daunting. Yeah, but work is work and passion is

passion. You know what I mean? And the same skill set that it requires to build the Balm and Gilead for 36 years, it's the same skill set that's required over here.

Paige Regna:

What are your biggest goals for your work that you're doing here?

Pernessia Seele:

I think the ultimate biggest goal is to really preserve the legacy of Lincolnville, to make all this information known, to document it. You know, in the last year, we found boxes that just been somewhere, you know, and in bad shape that needs to be, you know, getting the National Park Service to bring up Rangers over and you know, and move them and getting them archived to actually be able to now use the available tools, presentation tools, that we have to make sure that this town is preserved.

And in addition to that, also be a part of the future, you know, because we're not going to grow if we're always looking at our pasts, you know. The past and preserving the past is critical, but it's also important that we do what we need to do to grow Lincolnville for the future and bring people in, who are going to, you know, be the mayor, be the town council, you know. Lincolnville is still run by Black folks, which is 157 years, we still run by Black folks. Amen. Hallelujah. Praise the Lord. And that in itself is a story, but without a strategy of bringing new people and new voices into the conversation, it's not going to be sustained, you know. To let folks just like me, you know what I mean? I'm back because I was raised understanding-- I didn't know all the history, but the people who loved this town, they loved it. They wanted to preserve it at the level they know. And I'm not too sure that my mama and them, they knew history, even because my-- look at my mother's thesis. The people that she thought were the early settlers, you know, we thought that well Old Lady Manse, Old Man Keller, that they were the-- I thought they were the early settlers. Well, my mother thought that their parents, and she grew up here, so she probably knew their parents, were the early settlers. Well come to find out, that it was their great-grandparents, right, who were the early settlers, you know.

So we found another old cemetery, you know, and that old cemetery-- when we went out there, it's Miss Amelia Williams. Well who's Miss Amelia Williams? Amelia Williams was the great-grandmother of Miss Emmeline Manse, well Miss Emmeline Manse was the Old Lady Manse, you know what I mean? This was her great-grandmother, and she was the wife of the third mayor here in Lincolnville. I mean, it just goes, it's just unbelievable, you know, so documenting that longevity of history that now we know goes back, pre-Civil War, you know, but at the same time, building a future that's going to sustain the history and move it forward in the future. That is the ultimate goal.

Paige Regna:

And you, we, mentioned the park, but what are some of your other projects that you've been doing here?

Pernessa Seele:

Well. Well, we are working, haven't started yet, but the first fire station, we are working to in time, to make that a library/museum. We have an economic development project that we're working on to bring, you know, economic retail stores into Lincolnton. We're working on that as we speak. We're working with the mayor on how to, you know, in addition to the park, walking trails, how to tell the story of the train, economic development, library/museum. Yeah, all of that. Restoring the three historical churches, all three of them were built in the late 1800s. You know, restoring them, you know, they're still in use, but they're falling down, you know what I mean? And repurposing them.

Paige Regna:

Have you been able to receive grants for the restoration projects for that?

Pernessa Seele:

Not yet. Not yet.

Paige Regna:

Okay. And have you been able to list anything on the National Register of Historic Places?

Pernessa Seele:

We have South Carolina markers, but we have not, I've had them up here. We have not gotten to the National Register yet.

Paige Regna:

Okay.

Pernessa Seele:

But you know we're gonna get there.

Paige Regna:

I know you will.

Pernessa Seele:

Oh, yeah.

Paige Regna:

That's exciting that you've done so much, but then there's still so much in the works.

Pernessa Seele:

You know, I've only been doing it for two years. Going back and forth to Richmond and running my international organization.

Paige Regna:

It's impressive.

Pernessa Seele:

I would say so myself.

Paige Regna:

I think it's really impressive.

Pernessa Seele:

Oh my God. Oh my God. Yeah.

Paige Regna:

Well, to do all of this preservation work, what tools have you used? Grants?

Pernessa Seele:

Well, you know, we got connected to Reconstruction National Park Service the first year. That was huge. And we got connected to the Gullah Geechee Corridor. Victoria Smalls was the ED then. And thank God it was her. That was a big connection. And those two entities really helped in terms of well, you know, if I ask questions, they had called Jon, you know what I mean? Call this person, use my name. The National Park Service and Victoria Smalls, Nathan, and then Jon, so I brought Jon in and he said, hey, call this person. And so getting tapped into the network of preservationists in this area was really the blessing of being able to move it forward.

And the skill set, you know, you cannot deny that I bring some skill sets that I got in life. Because you can get a number, but if you don't know how to use that number, you know what I mean? It doesn't, doesn't go anywhere. If you cannot get Clemson to come and look at this cemetery and look at the jail, and understanding it's a long process, but the process is going to work. So, I think those were, and are, the tools, and we have political tools too you know. And we're learning how to use those political tools as well.

Paige Regna:

Right. So really, your partnerships have helped a lot.

Pernessa Seele:

Extensively.

Paige Regna:

Yeah. I've heard that from other people, too, like, the partnerships that you make, and the connections you have, that plays a huge role.

Pernessa Seele:
That's right.

Paige Regna:
And we've talked about grants. Do you ever receive any other funding sources? Or like private donations?

Pernessa Seele:
Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. We have, you know, private-- of all levels, you know, and we're getting ready to do a fundraiser. We take money however it comes. If it's clean. We take all clean money.

Paige Regna:
That's funny. We've touched on this, but have you found any other colleagues or counterparts doing this type of work in related places?

Pernessa Seele:
Oh, absolutely. We are part of the, you know, there are hundreds of Black settlements in the Lowcountry, you know. We are now meeting and learning about each other's townships when we don't know each other. I think that's the number one beauty of just learning all of these, as Lincolnville was being founded and developed, so was Liberty Hill or so was Sol Legare or Mosquito Beach or Red Top. And who knew these places? And I think, you know, this moment of Black settlements in the Lowcountry coming together, and we're all fighting developers. Because everybody else's land has been developed. So now they're looking at, you know, but let's go see if we can finish developing the Black people's land. So, I think that's very, very important and critical right now.

Paige Regna:
I was going to ask about the threat of development and if you've felt that here.

Pernessa Seele:
Oh, my God. Yes. Oh, yes. I mean they've gotten away with so much for so many various reasons. And Lincolnville, where Lincolnville is situated, you know, they've taken Ladson they've taken Summerville, so this is the only little town with trees and forests. I mean, this is a real town. You look over there, there's a forest. You look over there, there's a forest. You go back there, there's a forest. There's a forest over there. I mean, you know, it's like, wow, this is a town. It's not a going through, it's not a pass through, you know. Once you can go through, but once you turn, you know what I mean? They have a church over there, a church over here, and a cemetery over there, and a cemetery

over here, and a school is over here. And we have over 50 historical homes in this area. Yeah, it's a historical community. If Richard Harvey Cain came back to Lincolnton, he would recognize his town.

Paige Regna:
That's crazy.

Pernessa Seele:
Yeah, it is.

Paige Regna:
There aren't many other places that can be said about.

Pernessa Seele:
That's right. Richard Harvey Cain would recognize his town, and the name of the streets are the same. The name of the streets, it's like, my goodness, the names of the streets. This is Broad Street on all those old maps. That's Front Street on all those old maps. The name, the names of the streets are the same. Amazing. He would recognize this town. Isn't that something?

Paige Regna:
That's, that's wild.

Pernessa Seele:
That's history.

Paige Regna:
Yeah. But I guess, I'm thinking what's protected Lincolnton for so long?

Pernessa Seele:
I think that incorporation. We are an incorporated town, you know. Other Black settlements in Charleston, we're in Charleston County, but they've had to rely on Charleston County's policies and protecting them. And they're fighting new zoning laws right now that a settlement doesn't get to set. The County gets to set. Lincolnton, an incorporated town, sets its own laws, you know what I mean? So, I think that has been the biggest piece that has saved us. Now, I must say that, you know, depending on who has been at the helm, we have lost a lot in my opinion, you know, but we still got the town. We still got the fabric of the town. The town has not, it has not progressed economically, but we still got the town. And I think that's because it's an incorporated town, we're in Charleston County, but we are governed by our own laws.

Paige Regna:
Yeah, I think you're right, because when I look at Johns Island, they're part of the City of Charleston, for the most part, and developers are just going through there like crazy.

Pernessa Seele:

Right. There's also Maryville, that is now west of Ashley, I think they were incorporated. They were incorporated around the same time as Lincolntonville, but they lost their incorporation in the 30s. I don't know, politics, development, and they got swallowed up. So, those are one of the folks that are now part of the Black settlement coalition, that they still live in that Maryville area, but it doesn't exist. West Ashley, you know. But Lincolntonville is up here. We're on the borderline of Dorchester County. Some of them have stolen land. They've been inching on our borders for quite a while, and they're still doing so. And again, over these years, depending on who's at the helm, you've been able to inch. Politics is politics, but I think the fact that we incorporated town in 1889, and we have not lost that incorporation, has been the number one factor. I think so. And our location because we're 20 miles from Charleston.

Paige Regna:

Right. You're not along the marsh or the coast.

Pernessa Seele:

Right. We're not along the coast. When I grew up, North Charleston was Charleston. So, you've got to come a little bit, you got to come at least 15 miles from North Charleston. You've got to be coming to Lincolntonville to find it. We're kind of tucked up here. And we're high land, you know, we're not low land, we're high land. So, I think the location, but first, the incorporation has really been very key.

Paige Regna:

And then the last question here, it's a broad question. Do you have a vision for the future of preservation of African American heritage in the Lowcountry?

Pernessa Seele:

Absolutely, absolutely. I think that it's exciting that we're now coming together. We're looking at our similarities, and there are more similarities than differences. I think we're all struggling with archiving our history, we're all struggling with uncovering the history. Because we didn't grow up believing that our history was important. We didn't grow up, you know, we tore shit down, we threw things away. Old papers, we didn't necessarily keep. It burned down in the house. We didn't do oral history back in the day, you know, so all of us are struggling with uncovering history that is now so important. African American history in this country has not been that important until now. And thank God.

And I think most of us who are championing it, we are not in our early 20s and 30s. So, the urgency for us to preserve the past, as well as make sure we have generations behind us, you know, being able to take it on and build a future. You know, again, I think that it's important that, you know, we have to have a balance. We have to have a balance

between making sure that history is set, and we build upon our history. But we have to have eyes on the future as well. Everything I do every day is about the future. I say, you know, I put 36 years into Balm and Gilead. I ain't got 36 years to do Lincolnton, so I got to do it fast.

Paige Regna:

Do you think that partnering with the National Park Service and the Gullah Geechee Corridor will help with that? Do you think that the Reconstruction Era Network that NPS is working on—

Pernessa Seele:

Oh, absolutely. I think that that was a major partnership, and the Gullah Geechee Corridor introduced me to the National Park Service because they are a part of the National Park Service. So, Victoria Smalls introduced me to Nathan. And I went to a meeting and he said, I want to meet you. Like, oh, me? Really? And there it went, so that's a major resource with local implementation. They're gonna come and help me move these boxes. You know, park rangers, I don't know nothing about no park rangers. It's a whole other world. What they can offer you at the local level, I was clueless. But I'm learning you know, and I think that there are other partners that are yet to be uncovered in preservation that I don't have a clue about. But I'm excited and looking forward to meeting them. And because once people come to Lincolnton, it's like, Oh, my God.

Paige Regna:

There's so much history.

Pernessa Seele:

There's so much history. And it's not just local, it's nationally significant history, you know, and the story must be told.

Paige Regna:

Yeah, I think there's so much potential for National Register listings here.

Pernessa Seele:

I brought the guy here. And he's like, I don't see it. What? Are you blind? What do you mean, you don't see it? Anyway, he's looking for sweetgrass. Yeah, he's looking-- it's a mindset that if you all are Black in the 1800s, and you're part of the Gullah Geechee Corridor, and we are because of our descendants, then where are your sweetgrass? Where's your fishing nets? Where's your this? This was about education. I can tell you where our school teachers were. All of them educated with masters degrees. That was a whole other mindset of people. You know what I mean? Richard Harvey Cain was an educated man. And he and his friends who have found this, it came out of Emmanuel AME Church, so the first mayor of Lincolnton is buried. He was a big pastor at Emmanuel, and him and his wife are buried under the steeple of Emmanuel. He was the

first mayor of Lincolnton. So, there's a whole other history of how this town was birthed out of Emmanuel AME Church. So, it just goes on and on and on.

Paige Regna:
Yeah, well, thank you for this.

Pernessa Seele:
You're welcome.

Paige Regna:
I'll go ahead and stop the recording.

End of Recording.

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