

Speaker 1: So, I'm over here, and I'm rolling here. So [inaudible 00:00:06]

Reneé D.: All right, Mr. Parks can you please spell your first and last name for us?

Ernest Parks: My name is Ernest, first name is Ernest, E-R-N-E-S-T. Last name is Parks, P-A-R-K-S.

Reneé D.: Thank you. And are you or is your family from James or Johns Island?

Ernest Parks: My family's from James Island, South Carolina. Actually, Sol Legare Island, South Carolina, to be more specific.

Reneé D.: Okay. And how long has your family been on Sol Legare?

Ernest Parks: Uh, since the end of the Civil War, which is 1865.

Reneé D.: And, okay, so if they got here at the end of the Civil War, are you a part of the Harrison Wilder-

Ernest Parks: Estates, yes.

Reneé D.: Okay. Okay.

Ernest Parks: Harrison Wilder who fought, uh, in the 104th USCT out of Beaufort, South Carolina was my great-grandfather.

Reneé D.: Okay. Very cool. And all right, so get to you. What, what was it like growing up here on Sol Legare?

Ernest Parks: It was a very protective because we were kind of not a part of the outside world. Little did we, we know, that we were segregated. Um, once you turned down on Sol Legare Road off of Old Folly Road, you... into the community, where you basically had everything you needed. Years ago, it was all Black, it was everything we needed, because we had stores, we had, uh, entertainment centers, we had churches, we had schools. And the great part, some of the first schools, uh, here in the Charleston area was here on Sol Legare.

Reneé D.: Okay. So I know that Sol Legare was also a plantation.

Ernest Parks: Yes, it was. Uh, it was the, it was plantation of Solomon Legare. And Solomon Legare, um, his, his family, his property is still here, but it's on the other side of the Stono River off of Johns Island right now. So if you go down to the end of Sol Legare-

Reneé D.: Mm-hmm.

Ernest Parks: ... you would look over the other side of, of the Stono River, and that would be the Legare farms.

Reneé D.: Okay.

Ernest Parks: Owed by Solomon Legare-

Reneé D.: So-

Ernest Parks: ... and his descendants.

Reneé D.: ... if it was a plantation at one point in time, and then emancipation happened, and by the time you were growing up, had the whites all left Sol Legare or were they still, the few of them that were... were they still here? Or-

Ernest Parks: No, there were no whites in Sol Legare.

Reneé D.: Okay.

Ernest Parks: Uh, a- a- and Sol Legare was sold to the African Americans, and, um, to a great degree, nobody wanted to live down here in Sol Legare because it was full of mosquitoes, there was a swamp, there was... But so, wh- what we did as African Americans is we made it out of a business. We had the, the, the, the, the sea became our, our, our, our farm. We would farm the sea, and we would farm the land, and then we would take those good collectively, ferry it down to Charleston, South Carolina, [inaudible 00:03:15] the Peninsula, ferry over to Charleston, go to the market area, and sell those goods. Some of the guys were really businessmen in and of themselves. So when we would ask them, "Well who did you work for?" "We don't work for nobody. We work for ourselves."

And they would take, literally, the nickles and all the dimes and all those pennies, and they built their own little homes by their own hands. So when we were restoring this lodge, this Seashore Farmers Lodge here that we're in now, when we were restoring it, I have to question to the older gentlemen, the oldest gentleman there at that particular time was about 95, and I asked him and he says he was a little boy when they were building this lodge. So I said, I asked him a question, "So what did you guys do to, um, um, build a lodge after work?"

He gave me this weird look, like, "Work? We, we don't work for nobody else. No. Once we did all the harvesting in the sea and the land for that day, then we can at any time come and work on the old lodge," because they built it with their own hands because they were craftsmen as well. And then everybody else, if you were a craftsman, if you did electrical work, if you did plumbing work, if you did woodwork, any kind of work you did, penning, they would be the ones that built it. So they built it by their own hands. And then when it became a lodge, we actually got into the lodge system, uh, in 1912.

Reneé D.: Okay.

Ernest Parks: I think officially, September 12th, 1912, officially into the lodge system. Be reminded, though, we were there prior to the 1912 date, it just took us that long to get officially noticed as a lodge. I think we were the mother of all the lodges that were birthed here on James Island. [inaudible 00:04:48]

Reneé D.: Okay. And, okay, so you said... So for your parents, they didn't work for anyone, they just-

Ernest Parks: My grandparents.

Reneé D.: Okay.

Ernest Parks: My grandparents didn't work for anyone. My grandfather did. He was a boat maker and he was a fisherman and he was a, and he was a, uh... he would catch, uh, fur and make and sell it.

Reneé D.: Hmm. There's mink here?

Ernest Parks: [inaudible 00:05:13] Yeah, mink fur. Uh, yeah. He'd sell it. And, um, and so he didn't, no, he didn't work for anybody else. Now, the next generation was my mother because she's the Wilder. My dad is from Georgia, but my mother's a Wilder. And, uh, and, and they bought the land I have. But bear in mind that back in the day, post-Civil War, uh, everybody bartered. Nobody had no money, particularly us African Americans, we didn't have any money. So we bartered, well, I'll plow your field if you give me some fish. You know, so we bartered with one another.

But what happened, upon us, um, joining the war and becoming a fighting man for America and becoming a free man, we became warriors and they gave us money. So now we got the money, now we got money, so the first thing we, the African Americans did after the Civil War was to buy land, because land was freedom to us. And then we had the, what you call skilled hands, because prior to, we were slaves and we did the farm and we did the, we did the building and we did the f- masonry work and we did all the works. So, so our hands were the skilled hands so we knew how to do everything ourselves on our time and our own skills.

And because my grandfather who were the, uh, did work for, um, the white people, didn't work for anybody. They'd run their own businesses. And, you know, to a great degree, w- we missed out because they were, even if they were, uh, as we considered them not educated, they were far more smarter than we were because they were their own businessmen. And n- now th- th- th- this job for the next generation was to go out, become educated, get a job, a good job with benefits, take care of your family.

But we add to that caveat, once you get a job and once you become sure, make sure you keep this land, this property that we've gotten, because we put all our properties into heirs estates. That mean everybody and the family has a piece of that pie. Okay, you can't just sell it unless everybody s- everyb- unless everybody signed off on it. But they put that in there, and they always [inaudible 00:07:24] drilled in all, all our lives, d- drilled in our heads, keep this property, keep this property, keep this property.

And similar to where it's located, we were out on the Atlantic Ocean. And when the breeze coming in the house, it's, it's beautiful now and we have really seen people who've coming in now and they say, "Oh my God, look at what we got. Look at what [inaudible 00:07:42] got here. I want a piece of this action." And we've seen in the last 10 years, the gentrification of Sol Legare, South Carolina. But everybody sees it, this beautiful spot to live.

Reneé D.: So that's [inaudible 00:07:58] what can you tell me about what makes Sol Legare unique from other areas on even James Island?

Ernest Parks: Okay, well, let's look at, let's look at, let's look at a [inaudible 00:08:12] picture.

Reneé D.: Okay.

Ernest Parks: Uh, uh, uh, little did I know, 'cause I was never taught this in American history through all my high school, college, postgraduate [inaudible 00:08:21] education, I- I- I- I never learned this, but when you look at Sol Legare, when America decided that the African American getting in a fight, for being fighting man, and we had to fight the fight, when they decided to let us become fighting man for America, well, we all know that the Civil War started in Charleston, South Carolina. But let's correct that a little bit. The Civil War started with James Island, South Carolina, when the Confederates fired from Fort Johnson all to Fort Sumter, thus started the Civil War.

So how a war [inaudible 00:08:49] when the African American finally get the first chance to fight for America, to fight here in Charleston, South Carolina. To be more specific, to fight here on Sol Legare. That's the Battle of Sol Legare Island, July 16th of 1863. There were African American troops of the 54th came down, and we thought we were allowed to fight up until June, we thought we were allowed to fight. But what happened? They burned down Georgia.

Reneé D.: Mm-hmm.

Ernest Parks: And when they burned down Georgia, then they said, "Oh, your men wanna fight, huh? Okay, well, let's... we gonna, we gonna send y'all on down here to Charleston." They got us down here in Charleston, when we first a- we saw our first skirmish here on Sol Legare Island. Now, to the, to the fighting soldier who was hard and had some big battles, that a- that, that, that a skirmish was just a skirmish. Uh, but for me as an African American man who had never fought and

then finally getting a chance to fight for America, that was a big deal. It was more than a skirmish.

So this is the fact that the first battle that the [inaudible 00:09:50] 54th fought was here on Sol Legare Island, that's historic in and of itself to the Americas at large. Okay? Now, two days later, we g- we ferry over to Morris Island and fought at, uh, Battery Wagner. And if you ever look at the movie Glory, you'll see that with [inaudible 00:10:09] basically, we got slaughtered. Full frontal assault. Guys got the guns pointed down on us, shooting down on us, bombs coming off of everywhere, basically it was a slaughter. But it was a slaughter that we had to do because we, at that time, were looking at the future. And we knew we had to do that for future p- for our future.

That's why I look at Sol Legare as a unique place. Edge of America, first of the Civil War, African men [inaudible 00:10:39] and I was blown away by just the fact that that happened. I was living in Atlanta, Georgia at the time and I was looking at the movie Glory, and it said James Island, South Carolina, July 16th of 1863. I was looking at this, James Island, South Carolina, wait a minute, that's where I'm from. And I studied it, and I got addicted to studying, and Robert Gould Sh- Robert Shaw, Robert Gould Shaw, who was a criminal of the 54th, because I'm a reenactor, um, uh, b- Robert Gould Shaw, he has it in his writings, the Battle of Sol Legare Island, and his writings are at the Library at Harvard University.

So that ch- that, that, that, that confirms that this place is history, um, to America. [inaudible 00:11:19] has to be fact, but all the same, um, important. You know, sometimes it's not, uh, it's not, uh, uh, uh, it's not the loudest person that you hear. Sometimes the c- you got to keep an eye on the quiet person because he's quiet for a reason. He's is adept. And Sol Legare is kind of a quiet fighter. Um, but when you come to [inaudible 00:11:40], we will be there fighting with you and standing with you. Yes, ma'am.

Reneé D.: That's a very unique perspective. I like that.

Ernest Parks: Well, thank you.

Reneé D.: Yes, that's, that's good. Um, okay. And so would you say that Sol Legare was a little bit more isolated than the rest of James Island?

Ernest Parks: Yeah, we were, we were. We were isolated and we well known, because we were well known because like I- like I mentioned earlier, once you turned down here on Sol Legare Road, you know you have to go up, to schools, churches, uh, Mosquito Beach was the entertainment center because Folly Beach is two minutes away by car, five minutes, 10 minutes away by walking. But we weren't allowed there because of segregation laws, we weren't allowed to go to Folly Beach. So we, we... Mosquito Beach, uh, became our, uh, our entertainment center. They had clubs all the... Th- Th- They call them, uh, uh, [inaudible

00:12:33] low down bar, they call them, uh, [inaudible 00:12:37], they call them, you know, uh, (laughs) the low down bar, you know? They got, you know, holes in the walls, they call it all that.

But it was all that, and it got so well known, particularly in the '50s and the '60s, it got so well known that people from all around the Southeast started to having bus excursions to come down to Mosquito Beach. And then, as we started going out in the world, uh, uh, military college, we would spread the word too that, "Oh, man, you got to check out Mosquito Beach, man. It's a happening spot." And the moonshine, we make it... we make our own moonshine, we catch all the fish, we [inaudible 00:13:08] all the fish.

So, you know, come down there and, you know, you come down there and you all preppy, you come there, "I'm from New York City." No, let's, let's, let's back this up here. Where are you really from? L- Let's check into the history books here, because eventually, they said that 80 to 90% of the African Americans that came into America came through the ports of Charleston, South Carolina. So when I went away to college, you know, I went to college in Nashville, Tennessee, and I w- I w- and I would ask the guys that, you know, I mean, we've... Oh, I'm from Chicago, oh, I'm from LA, oh, I'm from New York. Oh, you from Charleston, South Carolina, well, ain't nothing down in Charleston.

I said, "Hold on, wait a minute now. Where are you from? Let's check our, let's check on the... let's check on your history, you see where you are really from." And if we get back into the roots of where you really from, I think you will find out that Charleston is your home as well. (laughs) And they were always ragging about it, but it was a true rag, you know what I'm saying? (laughs)

Reneé D.: So where did you go to school?

Ernest Parks: Well, I was educated here. Uh, I started school in 1961 at, um, um, Gresham Meggett e- uh, Elementary School. Well, the elementary school was both the elementary, the middle and the high school, because we were segregated.

Reneé D.: Mm-hmm.

Ernest Parks: So it was all. And then we... they built another elementary school, uh, Baxter-Patrick Elementary, and I went to Baxter-Patrick Elementary from the second grade to the seventh grade, still integrated. And then I went back to [inaudible 00:14:38] Gresham Meggett, uh, because it was eight through 12 there, high school was eight through 12 there. I only went there one year from '67 to '68. Well, in '68, integration came into play and then we had to integrate the schools. So two weeks prior to going to school in 1968, we get a card in the mailbox saying, "You will now be attending James Island High School." And that was the white high school on James Island.

So when, when the [inaudible 00:15:06] we had to change, and the white guys didn't go from their high school to ours, we went from our high school to theirs, and it was like, wowee. Now, the first day we go in there, we literally kind of first day of school, we kind of Blacks on the side, watching them. We had to, we had to check each other out. We had to look at each other and figure out how we gonna do the thing, how we gonna intermingle, how we gonna mix, how we gonna gel.

So that's James Island High School. I graduated 1973, then I left James Island High School and went to Tennessee State University in Nashville, Tennessee. Okay? I graduated from Tennessee State University, upon graduating Tennessee State- State University, I went to, to, uh, uh, the National Center for Paralegal Training. Okay? And then I did my postgraduate work in theater now, and that's how I got into theater and I got into film and I did... I got into, you know, the arts. Yeah. But I was all of a sudden a historian. I always wanted to be able to tell my history. I always wanted. I don't know why I didn't major in history 'cause I was coming with a public affairs major in TSU.

Uh, but, uh, life goes on. I married, had children, and, um, lived in Atlanta where I became a manager for the bus corporation for about 20 years. Then I- I had an opportunity to come back home to Charleston, South Carolina, so I took a job as an investigator with the South Carolina Department of Transportation, to which I, uh, I retired a year ago. So now I'm finally free to do my thing, be it in the arts, be it in history, be it in curator, be it whatever.

When we got the opportunity [inaudible 00:16:42] to renovate this building, well, I can show you a photo where she was dilapidated to the point of almost falling in. And I came here and I was sitting out here in the front yard, and I wondered to myself, "Lord, have mercy, what are we going to do in order to save this building?" Because... And I came to [inaudible 00:17:01] that on, because they had the burials here. And people were being come here and b- and would be... lie and stayed here before we buried them in the ground.

And be reminded, a white burial was different from a Black burial, because see, the guys that would go away to New York, Chicago, e- wherever they at, the bodies had to stay in the ground for a week or two till they figure out how they gonna get from where they're at to get here. But then fu- and funeral homes will come on, prepare the bodies, then the bodies would lie and stayed here at the Seashore Farmers Lodge Museum [inaudible 00:17:31] which is the Seashore Farmers Lodge, because they would [inaudible 00:17:31] the bodies would lie and stay there.

And a part of the tradition was for the families to stay with the bodies, all through the course of the time that the body is there, you know? They would go over there [inaudible 00:17:32] when the, when the, when the lodge opened up and the body was laying [inaudible 00:17:32] family here, then people would come in and view the bodies and, you know, pay respect to the bodies like that,

uh, here at the Seashore Farmers. It's a very interesting, uh, part of, uh, of our tradition here on Sol Legare, very much.

Reneé D.: Two things I wanna ask you about, you mentioned the... like, this was kind of a funeral home in a roundabout way?

Ernest Parks: Well, well, it was, it was, w- not, not, not the funeral home, but it was the body would lie and stay there.

Reneé D.: Okay.

Ernest Parks: Now, Fielding who is a old, um, um, funeral home here in Charleston, South Carolina, Fielding f- the Fielding Funeral, uh, did come out here and I got to give them all the credit in the world because everybody basically when they died, got... went through Fielding to get properly prepared to be died... buried. Then Fielding would come out here and bring the body down here and send it up to Lyons Estate. And we have a tradition here, that the youngest child of every family, um, would be passed over the body, at Lyons Estate, we'd pass it over and that's supposed to give that child wisdom and not be afraid of death.

And, you know, and I come to find out later on that I was that child in 1955 that was passed over my grandfather's body who lied and stayed here at Seashore Farmers Lodge, and I always wondered, why is this building keep calling me? I [inaudible 00:19:05] the question. Well, low and behold, when we got an opportunity to redo her, I- I was [inaudible 00:19:11] to bits 'cause I wanted to get in there and do what I can do, whatever I can do. Every, um, artifact as it's in this building come from the families here on Sol- It's a unique museum because everything in here come from Sol Legare.

The people, we go... we went in their barn, we go in their yard, [inaudible 00:19:30] the yard. And one guy found a 1863 Confederate sword literally, he literally picked up off the ground. He would be the kind of person that would go to-

Reneé D.: Is that it?

Ernest Parks: No.

Reneé D.: Oh, okay. (laughs)

Ernest Parks: No. It's the other one we got downstairs. In matter fact, they curating it right now.

Reneé D.: Oh.

Ernest Parks: He literally, he would go around looking for, um, [inaudible 00:19:49] to sell. So one day, at the, at the, at the base of a tree, he picked up this metal piece that

was sticking out of the ground. He picked it up, and it, and it just kept coming, and it kept coming, and it kept coming. When he got through, and it was a sword so we went and had it appraised. Come to find out it was an 1863 Confederate sword that further confirms that Sol Legare was the battle, battle place of [inaudible 00:20:13] America, the 54th. So those kind of things that I- I- I- we put out, uh, to America.

And, and, and at one point when we, uh, renovated the building, oh, that's the guy, okay, we need some artifact from y'all, come on over and give us some of your artifact. Well, it got to be so overwhelming, so I had to tell the people, "Hey, no, we, we don't need no more. We- I- let's stop." We- I- I can't... (laughs) We didn't have any room, you know? So it got like that. Yes, ma'am.

Reneé D.: And-

Ernest Parks: [inaudible 00:20:40]

Reneé D.: I think that's really cool. Um, where, where are the cemeteries on Sol Legare?

Ernest Parks: Oh, we have the Stenpoint Graveyard which is at the top of Sol Legare.

Reneé D.: Okay.

Ernest Parks: Now, if you go to the top of Sol Legare here, then you get to Folly, Road, you, you keep straight across Folly Road, and it's the cemetery about less than a quarter mile on the right side. All our ancestors are buried there. Or on Grover Road at Evergreen, um, um, Graveyard. And we have another one, um, on Grover Road as well. So we have about three burial grounds here.

Reneé D.: And what was the name of the one at the top of Sol Legare?

Ernest Parks: Stenpoint.

Reneé D.: Stenpoint.

Ernest Parks: S-T-E-N-P-O-I-N-T. Stenpoint Graveyard. And that's where most Sol Legaretians are at.

Reneé D.: Okay. Um, are people still being buried there today?

Ernest Parks: Yes.

Reneé D.: Okay.

Ernest Parks: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. And it amazed me because people... it's right there on the water, and sometimes I get to worrying about because it's so close to the water, the water would come in and rise in and then wash the bodies up. But it hasn't

happened as of yet. And Sol Legare is a unique place in and of itself because we are kind of, we are kind of, uh, the Barrier Islands that are, that are alongside with Folly Beach and some of the other, Battery Island, [inaudible 00:21:58] Island, it kind of buffers us from the, from the tidal push. So a lot of times when people get flooded out, just g- would the Sol Legare flood? Uh, no. Sol- Sol Legare didn't, didn't flood out.

Now, Hugo hit us hard, 'cause Hu- Hugo was not, not so much a sea pusher as it was wind and storm and stuff like that. But, uh, we, basically we're pretty protected over here. I don't know whether our forefathers were knowing that, or whether it was God that kind of protects us. Don't know, but I'm not arguing. I'll take what I can get. (laughs)

Reneé D.: Um, so you mentioned earlier in here that the... that Sol Legare was really isolated and it was mainly just Black people living here. And then, what was it like when you saw your first, I guess, white person?

Ernest Parks: Uh, well, you know, I mean, uh, uh, well, I mean, we saw white people on the island. As far as living was concerned, nobody would, no- no- no white person would come down here to live. They didn't wanna live down here because it was Black.

Reneé D.: Mm-hmm.

Ernest Parks: And because some of [inaudible 00:23:09] South Carolina and South Carolina has these, these policies against intermingling, you know, I was, I- I was fine with it. Now, we would see white people going through and come back, in and out, and all Sol Legare is, is Black, you know? So, but to answer your question more specifically, uh, uh, it's a, it's a, it's a good thing, it's a good thing that it... people are seeing the beauty of Sol Legare [inaudible 00:23:37] and they're seeing now what we have for centuries. And they're loving it, they love the history of it, they love the history of Sol Legare, they love the s- the location that it is, and it's a beautiful thing.

And it's not only white, 'cause we got, uh, uh, [inaudible 00:23:49] everybody kind of popping in on Sol Legare Island, buying properties up and, and, and, and living here and building here. And it's really bringing some beautiful [inaudible 00:23:57] holes here on Sol Legare, uh, which [inaudible 00:24:00] gonna pull us in another direction, because you, y- you got a house that you built by your, or by your hand for four, \$500 by hand, you and the boys [inaudible 00:24:14] together. Might take you 10 years to build it, but when you put that last nail in, it's yours, you don't owe no mortgage, you d- you don't owe nothing, you pay utilities. Okay.

Fast forward to now, that house compared right next to it now, is a house that's half a million dollar home. So our tax base goes up.

Reneé D.: Mm-hmm.

Ernest Parks: And that's where the struggle comes now, but... and we have the problem with that. Because y- my home is here and we're not a historical district, uh, official, we're not a historical district. Now, if we were, [inaudible 00:24:45] can't, can't be, but on, on the flip side of us being a historical district, for the historical home, when you have to rebuild it then you got to go get that same kind of material, you got to go, everything has to be explicit to what you, what your house looks like.

And now it costs more money to build those materials 'cause they don't make some of the materials no more, so now it cost- so it costing you, as the person who builds that home for nothing, in order to get it restored, the next generation or two generations down, or three generations down, they're restoring the home now it costs them a lot of money now. [inaudible 00:25:14] to worry about.

But no, um, uh, white people, they knew about Sol Legare 'cause a lot of white people used to come in here to buy the goods, they buy the oysters, they buy the crab, they buy the fish, you know? Th- They come down and they go there back with seafood, go there back with seafood. We had Mosquito Beach, we had, we had, we had, uh, the Sol Legare Schoolhouse, we had, we had Baba Pinkny Store, we had Baba Richardson Store. We were self-contained. You know, so we didn't even have to go out. So when the white people would come in, then they, then they started learning about it. Then when we integrated, then of course, white, white, white kids, uh, became our friends and they came visiting us. So that kind of opened the doors a little bit to see what Sol Legare was kind of like about.

Reneé D.: What was the name of the store you said?

Ernest Parks: We had a couple stores. We had, uh, Baba Pinkny Store, [inaudible 00:26:06] name was Baba, I wonder why, Baba Pinkny Store, we had Baba Richardson Store, okay? We had, um, we had, uh, Backman's Seafood. We had, uh, Mosquito Beach with all the stores down there, be it, um, um, um, the Pavilion.

Reneé D.: Mm-hmm.

Ernest Parks: Um, we had, uh, Maxwell's Store, M-A-X-W-E-L-L Store, Mr. Maxwell's store. Um, and those guys had everything, they had... 'cause back in the day, we used the kerosene oil and they would have kerosene, the truck that would come with the kerosene and it would fill the store- the stores up and everything. And, and, uh, so like I said, we were pretty well contained down here on Sol Legare.

Reneé D.: Do you know where the Baba Pinkny Store and the Baba- Baba Richardson Stores were? So-

Ernest Parks: Yeah.

Reneé D.: Okay.

Ernest Parks: Yeah. Matter of fact, I lived right next door to the Baba Pinkny Store right now.

Reneé D.: Oh, okay. (laughs)

Ernest Parks: Now it's just another house there because that store is gone.

Reneé D.: Okay.

Ernest Parks: And, uh, and Baba Richardson Store, he, uh, went... once he closed it down, he built a home there. Okay? And Mr. Maxwell's, um, um, store was right across the street here. There's a pink house right there, next to the pink house was a trailer that's torn down on the right.

Reneé D.: Uh-huh.

Ernest Parks: That was Baba- that was Mr. Maxwell's store.

Reneé D.: Okay.

Ernest Parks: And so that, so that was Backman's Seafood right there, that building there.

Reneé D.: Okay.

Ernest Parks: Yeah, that's, uh, Backman's Seafood right there.

Reneé D.: Sorry, I'm trying to...

Ernest Parks: Yeah. And then we used to make moonshine, our own liquor. [inaudible 00:27:54]

Reneé D.: Tell us about it.

Ernest Parks: Now, don't get it twisted, that was a big business for us. It was such a big, t- big, big, such a big business to the point where the government used to come and hunt us down and blow the, the, blow the stills up. We used to call in the federal, the fed, the fed's coming, the federal coming. And it was... that's the [inaudible 00:28:16] sometimes when they would find the still, they would blow it up. I have some pictures on my phone, all the time with a phone in your hand, but anyway, uh, well, we went way back the field, um, surveying our property, and well I- I saw three stills that were still blown, like it was sitting there I had known since the '50s and the '60s.

Reneé D.: Hmm.

Ernest Parks: Still sitting there. And I took photos of it, but I do [inaudible 00:28:38] for the museum. I blew the pictures up, put the pictures on the wall and be able to tell a story about what is that? Well, that's the old still, we used to make moonshine. And then we would take those goods [inaudible 00:28:46] 'cause our route here in Charleston, particularly in Sol Legare, was the way we were living, Sol Legare, we would shoot up to New York, Harlem. That's the most [inaudible 00:28:57] My brother left here, s- straight to Harlem. And, uh, all [inaudible 00:29:01] to Harlem was by our uncle because when he left here in Charleston, he went to Harlem, he had become the superintendent of a building, he became the super in the building.

So that mean when every time, somebody would leave that building, he would call down here to Charleston and said, "Hey man, got an apartment, you all wanna come to New York and need a place to stay?" And that's how most of the guys on Sol Legare got up to New York and Harlem. 127th Lenox Avenue was just two blocks from the Palace Theatre at 125th, uh, uh, Lenox Avenue. And so that how we got, that's how I got... And then the family would go, and all of that was go to New York, work, find a job, save your money, and then come on back down here to Sol Legare and build your homes.

And that's still kind of the rhythm right now, that's still kind of the rhythm right now. They still kind of do it, [inaudible 00:29:46] and none of that, that's not necessarily New York anymore, Harlem anymore, it's, it's America.

Reneé D.: Mm-hmm.

Ernest Parks: Because we were [inaudible 00:29:54] out in the world now. But that was kind of the route of how we got from here, via moonshine. And I might add, any other illegal product that we could make on our own and sell [inaudible 00:30:04]

Reneé D.: Okay. And what were some of the festivals or what were some activities that you partook in?

Ernest Parks: Well, they had, particularly, uh, here in Sol Legare, Easter Sunday was a big Sunday because we had, uh, Bruny Chapel, Bruny Chapel was our church here. We called it Bruny Chapel 'cause Ms. Bruny ran it. And be reminded now that the women on Sol Legare are strong women, they really, (laughs) the women of Sol Legare ran the show, you know, because they were the ones that were the teachers, they were the ones that were the, the preachers of [inaudible 00:30:44] they were the ones that were taught the school, they're the one that, you know, h- h- set up the churches, you know? They ran the businesses. And so the women v- very, played a very big and strong part here in, in, in, in, in Sol Legare. We had May Day-

Reneé D.: Mm-hmm.

Ernest Parks: ... where we do the pole, make the pole. We would have Easter Sunday where we would come in here and we... everybody get sharp and then [inaudible 00:31:04] for the times, and we'd go and have our little speeches and our little parts in the play. And the lodge would have, um, here at the lodge, we would have, um, uh, uh, uh, festivals. We would have, um, we called it a Tea where after church, you would put on your Sunday best and come out here and everybody would make pound cakes and fruits, and just have a s- just a jovial time, the community coming together [inaudible 00:31:25] their fine wear, and just intermingling with one another, getting the news, happening, and talking community affairs, and eating. Kind of break and breading, um, so to speak.

Reneé D.: And that, you said, was kind of a every Sunday kind of thing?

Ernest Parks: No, it wasn't every Sunday. Uh, it was maybe once a month.

Reneé D.: Okay.

Ernest Parks: Once every couple of months. Um, but, uh, now, the meetings at the lodge was, um, on the second Tuesday, second Sunday of every month, excuse me, second Sunday of every month. Until... Uh, and, uh, matter of fact, we're still doing them right now. Once we renovated the lodge and brought it back up to speed, we still held the meetings the second Sunday of every month. Still doing that to this day right here.

Reneé D.: Who uses, like... I know he was saying that there was a fraternal order here.

Ernest Parks: Yes. Yes, ma'am. Yeah.

Reneé D.: Is that still who's doing the meetings every-

Ernest Parks: Yes.

Reneé D.: Okay.

Ernest Parks: Seashore Farmers Lodge 767, Fraternal Order.

Reneé D.: Okay.

Ernest Parks: Yes, ma'am. We still do that. 1912, September, when we officially became a charter in September 1912. I know the fact that we could still, uh, give the, not only the children, but give the community at wide, uh, that history and we can actually tell [inaudible 00:32:43] and it's still happening. Come on down to check it out, 'cause you can kind of touch history, uh, through that. And this room that we're sitting in right here was basically how the elders had it set up and had their meetings with the people of Sol Legare. Now be reminded, if you weren't a part of the lodge, officially a member of the lodge, you couldn't come, but now,

you could bring the money up there for the dues, they'd let you up here to bring the money to that door over there, but you couldn't come in.

To the point where we renovated and we were telling the people, "Okay come on, [inaudible 00:33:15] we'll show you what we did upstairs," they revered what the elders told them to do such that they would not come up there. They would actually... I had to really do a lot of [inaudible 00:33:24] for people to actually come up here because they were told all their lives, "You can't walk there unless you belong to the lodge." But we eventually drew them in there 'cause we wanted to show them all the work we had done, because all this was torn up, it was ragged, it was falling in.

And, you know, but God works in mysterious ways and I am just so glad that the community came in and the people came in, who came in at that particular moment in time and history, to redo this lodge, man. Because we started, initially we started the project, we were getting figures like 300,000, 400,000. Where am I gonna get a half a million dollars [inaudible 00:33:56] do this? But people started coming. Electricians came in, we had a contractor who wanted to sign off on being a historic builder. And I think to date, when we finally opened up and people can come in and we can walk on here again, I think to date, I think we only spent like \$150,000. That's a far cry from the half a million, 300,000, 400,000. That's a [inaudible 00:34:18] far cry.

And that's because, once again, people came together then, and that's the idea of Sol Legare. Togetherness makes it easier on everybody. You know what I'm saying? [inaudible 00:34:31]

Reneé D.: Um, are there any names that don't occur on maps or transportation, um, listings or roads that are... that people here still reference?

Ernest Parks: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Reneé D.: Okay.

Ernest Parks: Yeah, yeah, yeah. We got, uh, Big Field.

Reneé D.: Mm-hmm.

Ernest Parks: Oh, we got, um, Old Sol Legare here, they... Well, they got, you know Old Sol Legare Road, but Sol Legare is kind of a historical name down here. We got, um, Down Cut, Cross Cut, we got Down Lijah, which is part of Sol Legare now, Down Lijah. Sol Legare is separated in two parts, [inaudible 00:35:06] there, but we got Stenpoint, that's part there by Stenpoint Grave which is on this part of the northern part of Sol Legare going up.

Reneé D.: Mm-hmm.

Ernest Parks: F- From here on down, it was called Stenpoint. And from back [inaudible 00:35:19] all down the end of Sol Legare is called Lijah, Down Lijah, L-I-J-A-H. It's like Elijah but take the E off.

Reneé D.: Okay.

Ernest Parks: Down Lijah. So every... when somebody come in and, and they would say, "Oh, where you living?" I'd say, I would tell them, "I'ma go Sol Legare," but I'd say, "I live Down Lijah." If you from Sol Legare, you know where I live at because [inaudible 00:35:40] But if I tell you that and you're not from here, where the hell is Down Lijah at?

Reneé D.: (laughs)

Ernest Parks: What's Stenpoint? You know? But yeah, there's a lot of names they still reference today people don't know. Uh, and people, we still at the next generation, two, three, four generations down the road, still reference those names and people who are in that generations don't know what we're talking about. Yeah.

Reneé D.: Okay.

Ernest Parks: Yes.

Reneé D.: Awesome. And, um, when you said that, um, to get to Charleston, you had to take the ferry?

Ernest Parks: Yeah, to get from James Island onto Charleston Peninsula.

Reneé D.: Okay.

Ernest Parks: Yeah, we had to take the f- we had to take the ferry and Wappoo, Wappoo Cut bridge.

Reneé D.: Okay.

Ernest Parks: At the Wappoo Road, we h- had to cross over. Now, at the, at, at the, at the foot of the Wappoo, uh, Wappoo River is McLeod Plantation.

Reneé D.: Mm-hmm.

Ernest Parks: To which a great amount of, uh, a lot of the African Americans here on, on James Island came off that plantation. You had the Dubla Plantation, they had, uh, McLeod Plantation, and we had the Drake plantation. We had all the plantations, but most of, a lot of the African Americans particularly come off of, uh, off of, um, Dubla Plantation. And yes, we had to ferry over. So the name of the game was to load up the old mule, load up the old donkey, pack up the,

pack up the wagon with all the goods that we had, be it fish, vegetables, whatever, make whatever, 'cause my grandfather made, he made boats-

Reneé D.: Mm-hmm.

Ernest Parks: ... to sell. And so they... and they would ferry it over to Charleston Harbor. And then from Charleston, from, um, Wappoo Cut River to the market area downtown, it's, by car now, it's relatively fast, five minutes, seven minutes, eight minutes. But then, you had a horse and buggy then. But it was still a relatively short ride taking [inaudible 00:37:32] by horse and buggy. And then we would sell those goods in the market area.

Now, the market area where we were selling all our goods off, it was like a Black thing because, you know, for white people... for Black people, we used to, we used to draw them in to the market, with, "Oh, come and get your greens, got your teas, got your melon. Got [inaudible 00:37:55] got that old [inaudible 00:37:58] right here, got it right here." And they would be battling each other. [inaudible 00:38:00] from Johns Island would battling 'cause you got the same kind of products that normally get the people to pay attention to him. You'd be yelling [inaudible 00:38:06] so he can come on and buy, buy these products from him.

That was like a no-no for white. That would be kind of like... But they would come and buy the goods. And they'd then kind of like get into the selling thing down at the market area. Now, some people are, are... think that the market area downtown right now are where the slaves were brought in and sold. But [inaudible 00:38:25] right down there with the new soon to be open [inaudible 00:38:32] American museum [inaudible 00:38:32] now.

Reneé D.: Mm-hmm.

Ernest Parks: Around the cobble streets down there, the whole area, [inaudible 00:38:36] We would quarantine over on Sullivan's Island, where if we came from Africa, we had to quarantine over there, they would put the [inaudible 00:38:43] on us, make sure that we clean that we're not bringing any kind of diseases into America. And then they would take us down to the market area where people from Americas, all around Americas, would then come to Charleston and buy the slave in there. That's how we spread out among the, among the country, particular the Southeast, Alabama City, Georgia, Florida, [inaudible 00:39:01] Kentucky, you know, states like that.

Reneé D.: Um, okay. Is there anything else, this is my last question for you, is there-

Ernest Parks: Yes, ma'am.

Reneé D.: ... anything else you would like to share that you think I didn't ask the right questions about?

Ernest Parks: Well, I think you did a very good job at [inaudible 00:39:20] questions I wanted to share, but I just wanted to share that an- u- it's such a touching moment for me and the people here on Sol Legare and Charleston at large, to see all the people from around the world coming to see our gift to America, you know? Like I said, the quiet person is the person you got to keep your eye on, 'cause he's quiet but he's doing the work. I remember my days, they always said, "Man, boy, shut your damn mouth and just do the work."

When they said... When we were doing our work over there, "Oh, I saw Ernest Parks over there." Now, Ernest Parks ain't said a word when he was working. But when you say who did it, "Oh, I seen Ernest Parks doing that work," "Shut your mouth and just get busy and do the work." And the work speak for itself. And I think that Sol Legare for the great degree is a quiet little neighborhood and a cultural neighborhood [inaudible 00:40:05] corridor, and it kind of speaks for itself when you actually get into the history of what she's doing.

And this museum kind of speaks to that, independence, business ownership. We were [inaudible 00:40:17] with the insurance policy, 'cause we can't, we can't get insurance policy from the white people. So we th- this was our insurance policy. You paying them dues, but you need taxes for [inaudible 00:40:27]? Taxes won't [inaudible 00:40:28] here. You got to pay your dues here. You need money for your feed, your seeds? You [inaudible 00:40:32] here. You got to pay your dues here with us. So this became the, the center of the neighborhood, the heart of the community, and that's what Sol Legare, to me, represents to America at large. That's how I feel about it. Okay. Thank you, guys.

Reneé D.: Thank you.

Ernest Parks: Yeah.

Speaker 1: Cut.

Reneé D.: It was fun-