

[MUSIC PLAYING]

- We're in the Mars Bluff section of Florence County, near the Pee Dee River, and I'm speaking with Terry James. Terry, we're on property that has great value and historical significance to your family. Tell me about Jamestown.

- Well, yes, I'm a descendant of Ervin James, and this property was purchased back in 1870 by a former slave. Five years out of slavery, he decided he didn't want to be a tenant farmer or a sharecropper. He wanted his own land. So he collaborated with Eli McKissick and Miss Mary Poston to purchase this place. And later documents read that Eli McKissick bought this land. He bought 230-plus acres. I think he paid \$300 for it, but he ended up selling it to Ervin, a part of it for \$700. So it was a business transaction for him.

And it was very dangerous for both Ervin and Eli McKissick and Mary Post to sell an African American properties, And the story that my grandfather told me, the Reverend Tony James, who's in the Senate as well. Is that they had to leave town because it was a lot-- it was hostile during that time period, and so they had to leave. And I heard that they went to Augusta, Georgia for a while.

AMANDA MCNULTY:

Then it stayed active as a farming community. They survived the area after Reconstruction when things were so difficult, managed to hold onto the farm property, and it was actively in farming until about when?

TERRY JAMES:

Until about 1945, somewhere along there. And they said it

started a major decline, because it was difficult for African Americans to find employment.

AMANDA MCNULTY:

From 1870 to 2017, that's a lot of children who have been born. You have a lot of heirs with a connection to this property and that can become a problem for families who have a piece of property. You recognize that and wanted to address that. So tell me what you've done to try to see to it that this property remains intact.

- Well, what we've done, we've done a foundation. It's now the Jamestown Foundation. So to keep the property intact, we do history, heritage, and culture. And so it kind of pushed back against all that, we want to sell. We want to get rid of the property. And there are more people now who are understanding that this place is very valuable to our history as African Americans to the Pee Dee area.

AMANDA MCNULTY:

So now, as a way to enhance the educational activities and to really reinforce the value of the property with the people who come, you have a three-day festival, and let's talk about some of the things that happen there.

TERRY JAMES:

Yes, ma'am. On the first day, we do a prayer group and a health fair, because we understood that the Pee Dee is the leading in the nation in strokes, heart attacks, and renal failure. So we live in the Stroke Belt, and 11 states is a part of that Stroke Belt, and the Pee Dee is out of those 11. So we want to do a health fair to educate people on the health factor. Because in the African American communities, there's a lot of hypertension, high blood pressure, heart attacks, and different things like that. So we want to focus on the health of the African American.

And also, that afternoon, we do a play. And it's

dramatization of African American life. We may deal with Reconstruction. We may deal with slavery. We may deal with things from Africa.

AMANDA MCNULTY:

And then on Saturday, you have a full day that's right here on the Jamestown property.

TERRY JAMES:

Yes, on Saturday, we start off that morning, we'll be on this property, and we have presenters coming out. Miss Arianne King Comer, who does a beautiful job with indigo dye. And we all know that indigo was a part of the African American culture and came from Africa here. And so that's why we bring her in, to educate people on indigo, because a lot of times people don't know what indigo is. So we want to educate them and give live demonstrations. And I think once hands-on and live demonstrations, people are able to see and touch and feel.

And so we also have open-flame cooking in the big black pots, hoppin' John and those kind of things. We give demonstrators the chance to cook and to show how it was living in that time period. Even though we can't allow the public to sample it because of health reasons or DHEC, but we still want people to understand, you know, that this is a very vital part of how African Americans lived and how they survived on this land.

We have Mr. Jerome You Bias, who's out of North Carolina. He comes in and does handmade furniture. And a lot of African Americans back in the days had to make their own furniture.

- Anything that has to do with wood that you see in this area, I have made with my own hands. And I think the most important thing of telling this story, when you are talking about the life of enslaved people on plantations,

who wanted their own humanity and their own identity.
There's a strong, powerful statement that I always use.
The enslaved people might have come here empty-
handed, but they didn't come here empty-headed.

AMANDA MCNULTY:

And then you all have some re-enactors, too. Tell me about that.

TERRY JAMES:

Yes, we have Miss Caroline Gibbons, and she does a beautiful portrayal of Miss Harriet Tubman. She is an awesome actor, interpreter. She does an awesome job. And she makes it real, because she gets, she makes the public interact with her. She'll get the kids and run them around and try to hide and do some of those things that Harriet Tubman would have done.

AMANDA MCNULTY:

Really give them an idea of what that experience was like for her.

TERRY JAMES:

Yes.

- I remember that like it was only yesterday. Must have been late 19th century, oh, yeah. I would part all of them. Helped to build a church. You see, if you've been through what I've been through, and God lifted you up, you have something to sing about, too. Because I come, well, as my friend, Sojourner Truth say, I come from a different field, the field of the slave.

- The last words I heard my boy say, but not my boy, too. Carried me from Virginia all the way here to South Carolina. If'n my Ma walks up right now, wouldn't know who she is, because I forget what her face looked like.

TERRY JAMES:

But we try to educate people, you know, how we're connected, and how we still do some of the same things that they did in Africa. We're still doing some of those

same things.

- Sweet potato come from Africa, you know? We calls 'em yam, that's the African name for it. We can even grow okras, that there, and that soup that you had there, call that gumbo. And us can even grow peanuts. You see, them African folk call them goobers. They good, too.

AMANDA MCNULTY:

And then what is the 54th?

TERRY JAMES:

The 54th Massachusetts, which I'm a part of, was the African American regiment, who was first, officially, a group of men of African American descent who fought in the Civil War, fought right down in Charleston at Fort Wagner. And so we do that interpretation as well because that's a part of this landscape.

AMANDA MCNULTY:

And that I imagine on Sunday there is prayer.

TERRY JAMES:

Yes, we fellowship at the church, and then we feed them. And then we allow them to depart and go home safely.

AMANDA MCNULTY:

With many wonderful memories and with ideas of what their family went through in order to protect this property, and hopefully, with the goal of joining and even being more supportive of the Foundation and your efforts.

- Yes, ma'am.

- And if people want to know more about the Jamestown Foundation, is there a place to go to get that information?

TERRY JAMES:

They can go to jamestownfound.org, and also, they can go to Jamestown Foundation's Facebook page, or they can hit me up on Facebook, Terry James, and you'll see me in the 54th uniform, of course.

AMANDA MCNULTY:

Well, I want to thank you for taking the time from your busy schedule this weekend for visiting with us and telling us about the activities. And I look forward to coming back in the future. And I hope one day I'll see that you've been successful in your goal of restoring this cabin to the days when one of your ancestors lived here productively and happily, working this family land.

- Yes ma'am. Thank you for coming.

[MUSIC PLAYING]