

# Come Back to the Land

**An Exploration of James and Johns Islands African American  
Settlement Communities**



New South Associates

# Hello!

We are New South Associates, Inc.  
a Cultural Resource Management  
Firm

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# How did this **study** come about?

## Who Hired Us?

South Carolina  
Department of  
Transportation (SCDOT)

Charleston County

## What Services Were Requested?

SCDOT and Charleston County are completing this study of historic African American Settlement Communities (AASC) on James and Johns Islands in response to comments received for the Mark Clark Extension project. The intent of the study is to gain a better understanding of these settlement communities and their families, histories, and geography, through oral history interviews and archival research.

## What Were the Expected Outcomes?

The study recorded local voices in order to preserve them for the future and to provide them a public forum in the present.

The resulting documentation increases the understanding and awareness of these communities and of their contributions.

# “ African American Settlement Communities Studied in the Report ”

## What is a Settlement Community?

Following the Civil War, throughout the Lowcountry many formerly enslaved African Americans and their descendents maintained strong connections to the land on which their ancestors had lived and worked for generations. These freedmen created their own self-sustaining communities that farmed the land with crops and that harvested things like crab, fish, and shrimp from the surrounding waterways both for profit and to provide food for their families.

- Historic Areas with Urban Enclaves
- Urban Growth Boundaries



# Process for study

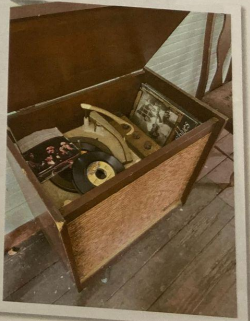


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(Opposite) The Seashore Farmer's Lodge on James Island, interior of the Second Floor (NSA 2022). (Right) Victrola Inside the Seashore Farmer's Lodge, James Island (NSA 2022)





# Research is key!

## Background

Charleston City Plan (2021)

*A History of James Island Slave Descendants & Plantation Owners* by Eugene Frazier

*A Brief History of James Island: Jewel of the Sea Islands* by Douglas Bostick

*Ain't You Got A Right to the Tree of Life?* by Guy and Candie Carawan

Survey Report: James Island and Johns Island Historical and Architectural Inventory

Historical Background Study and Archeological Reconnaissance of the Spring Grove Property, Charleston County, South Carolina

## Archival

Charleston Public Library Map Collection

South Carolina Historical Society Archives at the Addlestone Library (College of Charleston)

Avery Research Center (College of Charleston)

- Esther Pivnick and E. Stringfellow Papers

- Mosquito Beach Community Papers

Caroliniana Library (University of South Carolina)

Online Archives - Lowcountry Digital Library

# Oral Histories

- Important Connection Makers:
  - Councilwoman Anna Johnson
  - Mrs. Toby Smith
  - Mrs. Elaine Jenkins
  - Mr. Cubby Wilder
- Common Themes in Interviews
- Important Information Gathered, and Clarification on Names and Locations of AASC

"That's one of the stories I wanted to touch on about my Wadmalaw family, you know, 'cause I didn't just want to talk about the Johns Island family and then, um, and I have family on James Island too."

-A. Geddis

"If if you're in a battle, there's not a whole lotta time to, 'Let's explain.'  
No, you gotta duck...  
But when you got time, take the time, look at the facts.  
Look at the facts."

-N. Roper



# James Island common themes

1

## Water was Life

Fun with swimming, fishing, jobs, boats to access Charleston

2

## Family and Religion

Each neighborhood was close knit and church was key

3

## The Great Migration

Lots of residents sent their children to New York or New Jersey

# James Island Highlights

"Parents generation may have been less educated, but they were highly skilled and paved the way by being entrepreneurs, and our generation 'got a good education, got a good job' but were also told to come back to the land that our parents had spent their lives improving. Gentrification pressures in Charleston have reached Sol Legare and \$500K houses built in the area then raise the tax base and tax rates of original modest homes."

-Mr. Ernest Parks



# Johns Island common themes

1

## Church and Family

Life was sheltered and church was a must

2

## Farm Life

Tenant farming, truck farming, decline of farming

3

## Fewer designated neighborhoods

Each street was a neighborhood with all necessities



## Johns Island Highlights

"...coming from a place where it was farmland to a place to where it is right now, it's depressing almost. And, it seems as if there's no stopping, because I have heard, we've been to meetings and stuff, even since the bridge and quoting one of the people there that says every green area that we see vacant over here is going to be built up with something, and that was said to me almost 10 years ago, and you could see it coming and it's very depressing because you don't even recognize this place anymore."

-Ms. Amelia Washington





# James Island AASC

## Cut Bridge

- Cross Cut
- Down Cut (Ferguson Village/Turkey Pen)

## Grimball Area

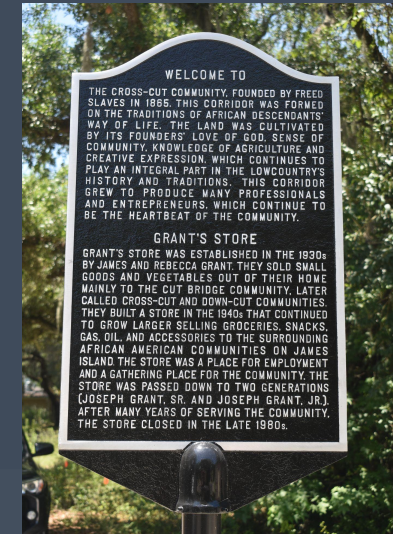
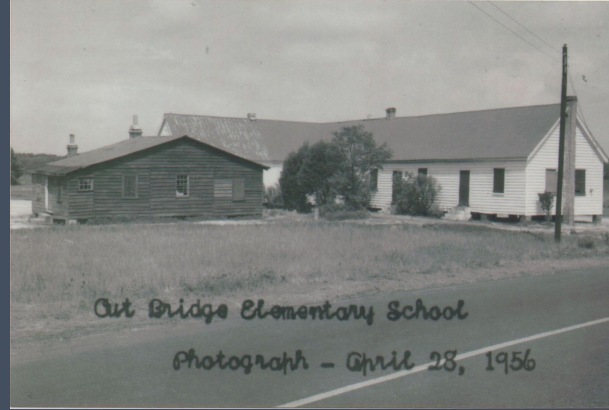
- Beeffield

## Honey Hill

## Peas Hill

## Westchester

## Sol Legare





# Johns Island AASC

Blake Hill

Cape

Cedar Springs

Geddis

Hickory Hill

Legareville

Road

North Johns

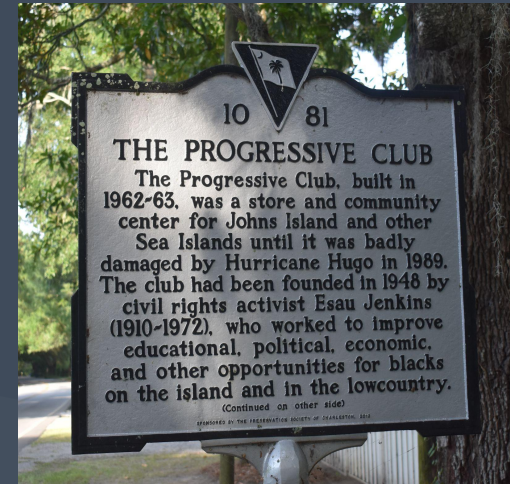
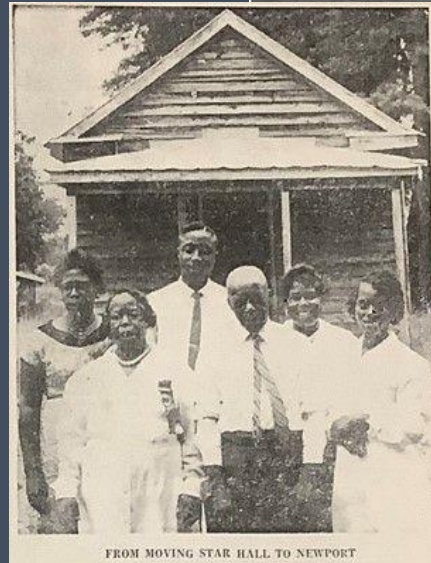
Island

Pinckney

Stanyarne

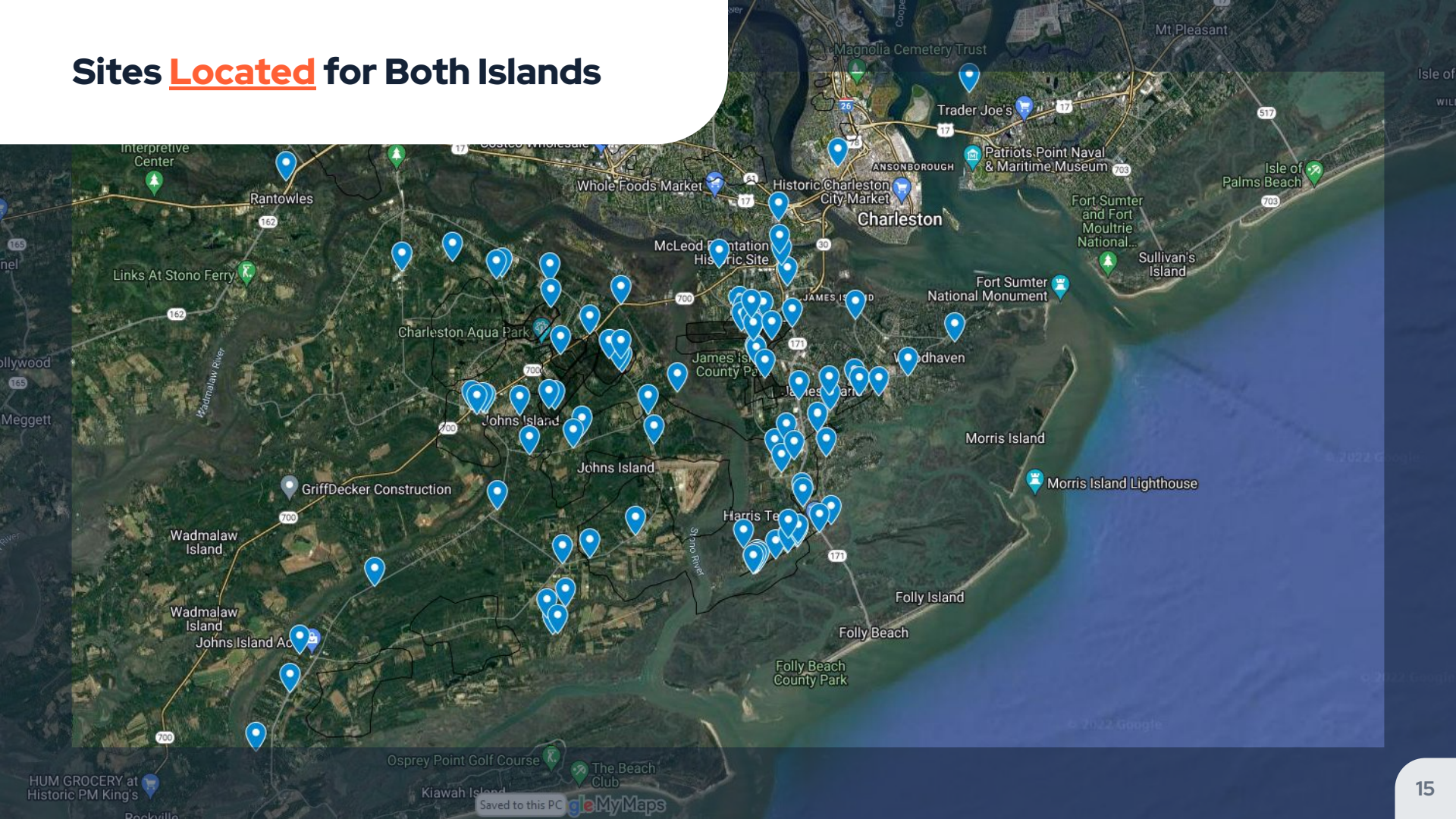
Stevens

Whaley





## Sites Located for Both Islands



A blue welcome sign for James Island. The sign is shield-shaped with a white border. Inside the shield, there is a circular emblem with a blue background. The emblem features a white bird, possibly a heron, standing in water. Above the bird, the words "WELCOME TO" are written in a semi-circle, and below the bird, the words "THE TOWN OF" are written in a semi-circle. Below the emblem, the words "JAMES ISLAND" are written in large, bold, white capital letters. The sign is set against a background of green trees and a blue sky.

# James Island Locations

Let's take a closer look...



# Cut Bridge Sites



Cut Creek Bridge



Grant's Store

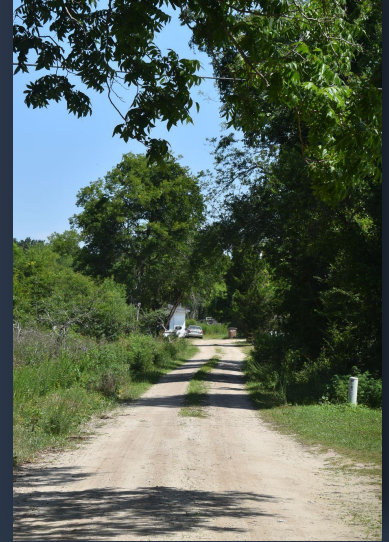
# Sol Legare Sites



Holland Creek



Stem Point Cemetery



Old Sol Legare Rd.





Bubba Pinckney's Store

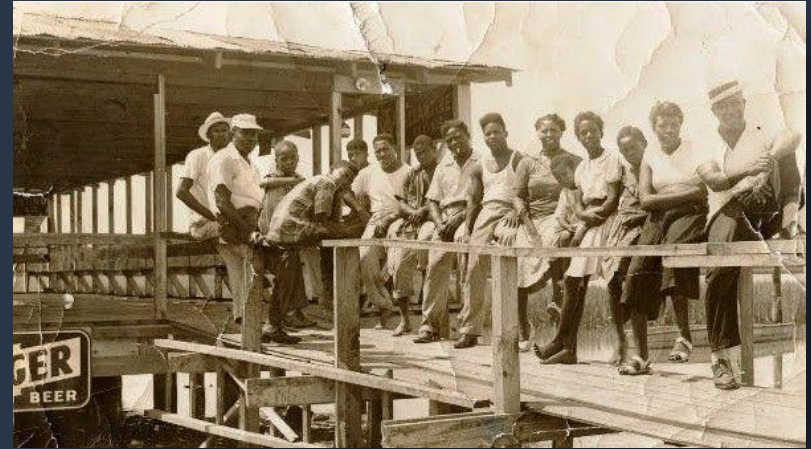


Sol Legare Seashore Farmer's Lodge No. 767

# Mosquito Beach Sites



**“Beach” at Mosquito  
Beach**



**Historic Image of People Gathered  
at the Harborview Pavilion**



# Mosquito Beach Sites



Laura's Snack Bar (1960s)  
&  
Island Breeze Restaurant (21st Century)



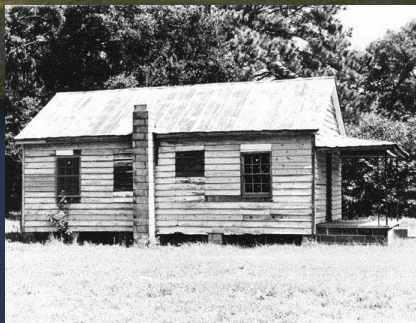
Pine Tree Hotel  
Reconstruction  
Effort



# Johns Island Locations

Let's take a closer look...





Moving Star Hall

The Progressive Club





Headstart School and Community Center



Haut Gap School and Site







Bohicket and Main Roads

Koger's General Store





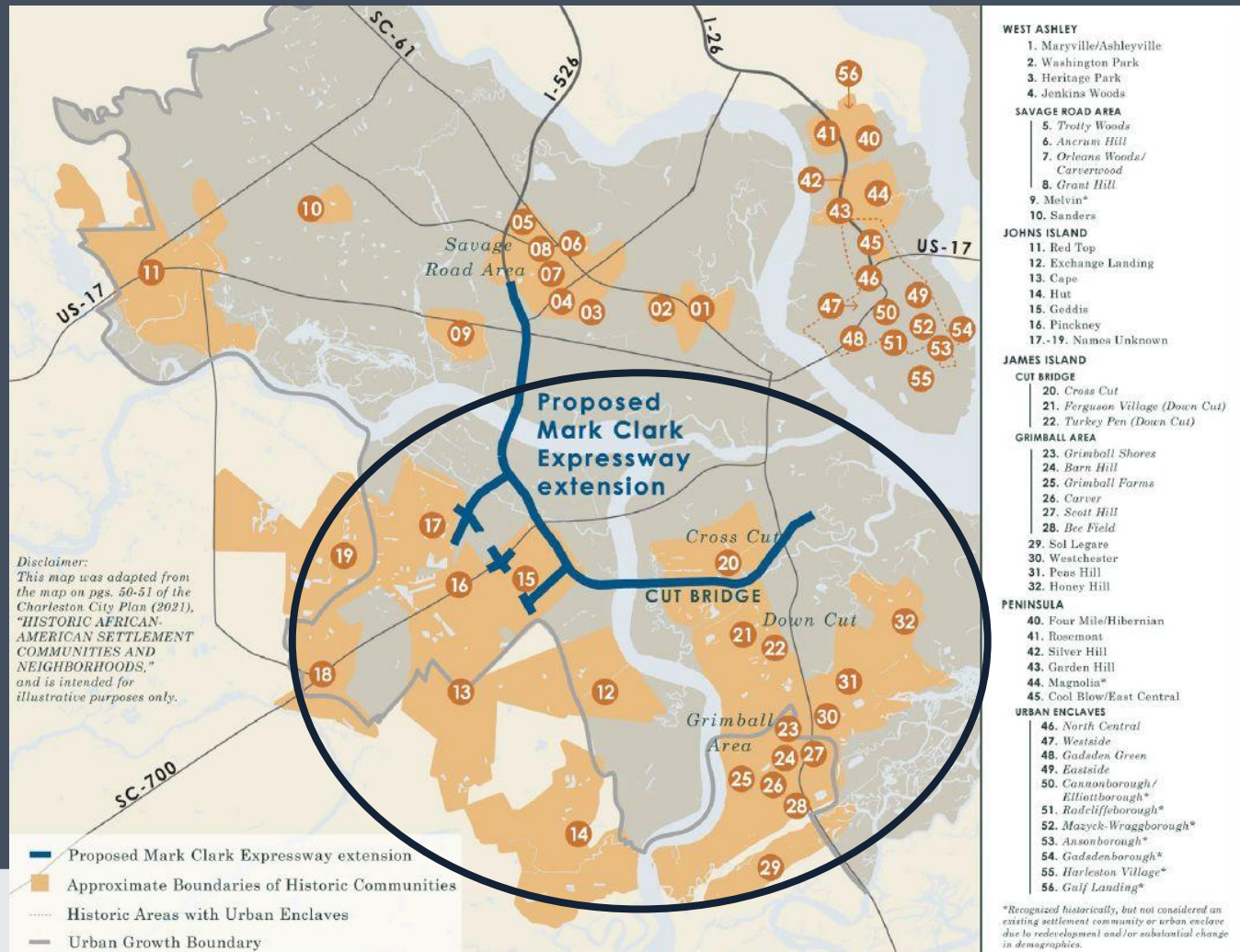
# Amendments to AASC Names and Locations

Oral History Interviews Made these Findings Possible



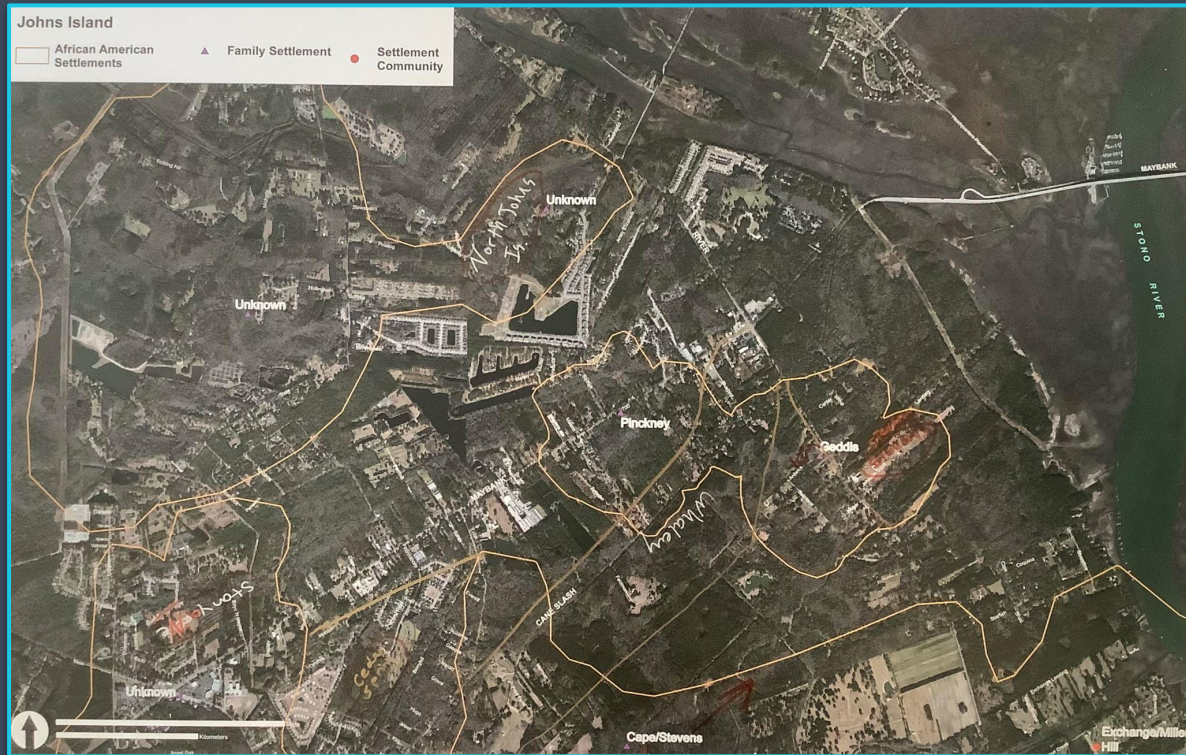
# African American Settlement Communities

Identified  
by the  
City of Charleston  
(2021)



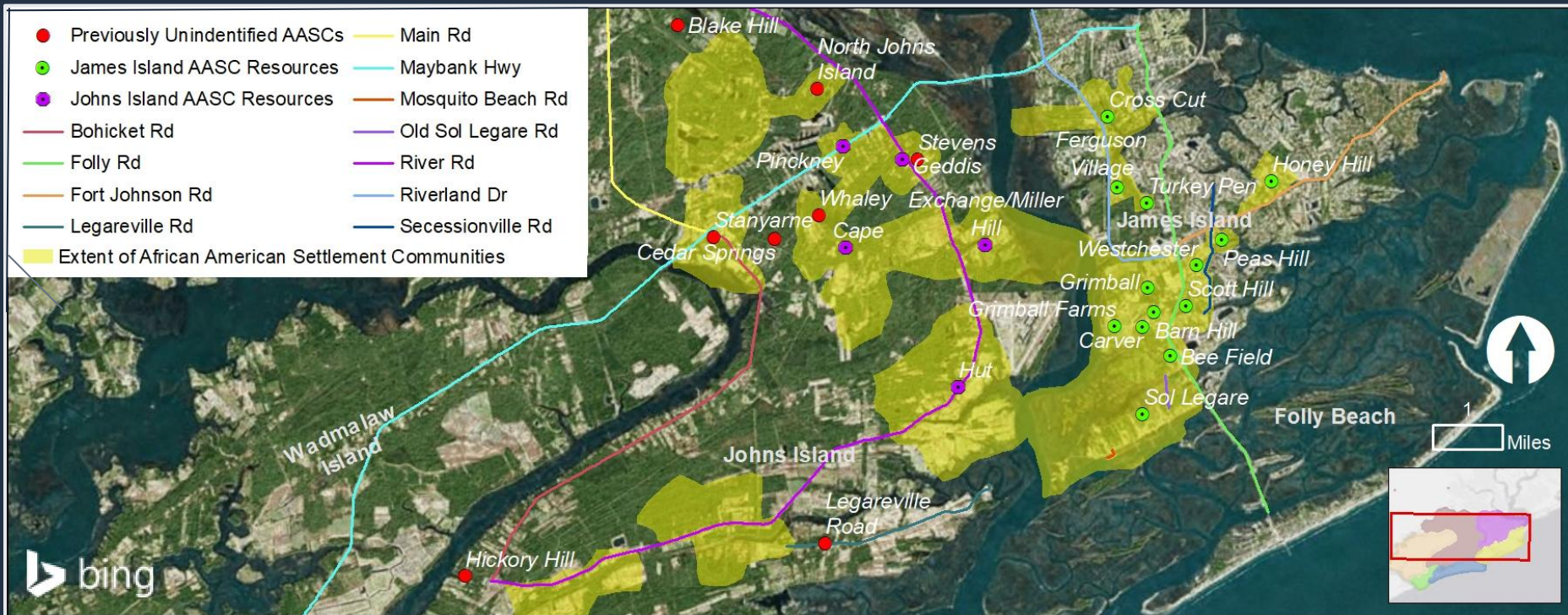


# What We Learned!





# What We Learned !



# Conclusion

- Oral history interviews provided valuable information about the African American Settlement Communities on James and Johns Islands.
- These insights provide more knowledge on place names, important places, and community boundaries.
- This study revealed there is a rich history and locations that are still standing that deserve recognition through public history and preservation efforts.



# Preservation Considerations

Future efforts for these important areas should consider:

- Conducting additional new and follow-up oral history interviews;
- Conducting a historic resource survey of the communities and consider National Register significance;
- Making this history accessible to the public through story maps, heritage tours, placemarkers and interpretive signage.
- This information is currently available to the public!

# Thank You!

Any questions or comments?

