

Wilson W. Moran

Board Member

Harris Neck Land Trust LLC

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It really started for us in 1863. General William T. Sherman issued Field Order 15, giving us ownership of all the islands starting from the southern tip of North Carolina, through South Carolina, Georgia and to the northern tip of Florida. Including some land up to 30 miles inland on the mainland. My great grandfather Mustapha D. Shaw son of Edward Delegal, a white land owner, having been injured while fighting in the Union Army, jumped at the opportunity to own land. Owning land was a form of freedom. He went to live on Ossabaw Island, just southeast of Savannah, GA. He did well utilizing his skills as a farmer and fisherman but it was short lived as President Lincoln was assassinated during this period in Mustapha's life. President Johnson became the new President. The power people convinced President Johnson to rescind Field Order 15. Thus my people lost everything. My grandfather refused to become a sharecropper. A warrant was issued for his arrest. Armed with his army issued Revolver, Rifle and Bowie knife, he fought his way off Ossabaw Island, got into a boat and disappeared. He escaped to his grandfather's old plantation which was situated near Harris Neck. Once again he was back to zero. Then another strange thing happened. Margaret Harris, an heir, was given ownership of most of the old plantation homes. She was elderly and her son was mentally ill. Because her white overseers were cheating her, she employed a black man, Robert Delegal to be her overseer. She made a will and testament. In this Will, Robert would agree to take care of her and her son. In turn he could sell land to the black people already living on said property. Eventually, Robert sold most of the land to about 75 black families. Now we have to start again. By the late 1800's, we are doing extremely well. We have a church house, firehouse, school house, crab factory and oyster factory. We are buying and selling. We are quickly learning that freedom is closely tied to economics. After much blood, sweat and tears we are beginning to reap some of the benefits of our hard labor. After many years of hopelessness we now have hope. In 1942 it happened again. It's World War II and the German U-Boats are blowing up our merchant ships. The war department needed a place in which to build an airbase. Our white county leaders steered them to the community of Harris Neck. Our government claimed Imminent Domain, giving us two weeks to move out. In a blink of an eye, we were wiped out. We lost everything, including our culture. Now we are back to zero again.