

SUNDAY, JUNE 7, 2009

DETAILED FORECAST

TODAY
Mostly sunny. Highs in the upper 70s. Northwest winds 5 to 10 mph.. becoming southwest with gusts up to 20 mph in the afternoon.

Tonight
Mostly cloudy. A chance of showers.. mainly after midnight. Lows in the upper 50s. South winds 5 to 10 mph.. becoming east after midnight. Chance of rain 30 percent.

Monday
Partly sunny with a slight chance of showers. A slight chance of thunderstorms in the afternoon. Highs in the mid 70s. South winds 5 to 10 mph with gusts up to 20 mph. Chance of rain 20 percent.

Monday Night
Mostly cloudy. A chance of showers and thunderstorms.. mainly after midnight. Lows in the lower 60s. Southeast winds 5 to 10 mph. Chance of rain 50 percent.

SKY WATCH TODAY

6 DAY FORECAST

UNITED STATES

NATIONAL FORECAST

LEGEND

ALLERGY REPORT

WORLD

LONG ISLAND SOUND

SHELLFISHING

NATIONAL SUMMARY

Slave cabins were home to family through '60s

By Bruce Smith
ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHARLESTON, S.C. — Eighty-six-year-old Johnnie Leach leaned on his cane as he sat in warm sunshine on the steps of the old slave cabin where he raised 13 children four decades ago.

Despite the humble setting and the terrible history of the place, living there is a time he and his family remember fondly.

"The good Lord blessed me. I sent three of them to college from here," he said, reminiscing about his old home.

The building is one of four former slave cabins at Magnolia Plantation and Gardens that have been restored to show visitors the path of blacks from slavery to freedom.

"The time has come to tell this story," said Preston Cooley, a tour guide who helped with the cabin project. "All this beauty you look around and see at this plantation was created by the people who lived on the slave street."

The cabins at the plantation, which attracts tens of thousands each year to the banks of the Ashley River, have been restored to reflect different eras of the black experience. One appears as it would have during slavery in 1850, with limewashed walls and a loft where sleeping

mats were stored. A second shows how freed men lived after the Civil War, some of their furnishings cast off from the plantation house.

The poverty of blacks in the Jim Crow South of the 1920s, walls lined with newspapers for insulation, can be seen in the third. The Leach cabin is restored to how it looked during the civil rights era.

Visitors with cameras and knapsacks pass through the cabins with their wooden shutters and old brick fireplaces. The buildings say only so much. The real stories belong to those who lived in them.

The Leach family worked on the plantation for four generations, staying on the street until 1969, nearly three centuries after the plantation was built. They were the last to live in a cabin without modern conveniences, only a single electric line powering a couple of light bulbs. They got water from a pump, cooked on a wood stove that heated the house and used an outhouse. Leach added two small rooms as the family grew.

Their cabin and two others were used into the late 1900s by others, but electricity, running water and toilets were added. Those conveniences were removed as part of the \$500,000 restoration.

"It's very good to have it the old way so some of the young ones can see what they didn't see," said Leach, a combat engineer during World War II who later moved into the cabin to work as a gardener at Magnolia. Leach speaks with the lilting accent of the Gullah, the culture of slave descendants who live on the sea islands and the coast of the Carolinas.

"To me it don't have the old looks. It looks like a brand-new place," said Leach, who was married and widowed twice, as he looked along the restored slave street.

Now more open, the street used to be wooded with trees and bushes, ideal for playing hide-and-seek at night.

"Everybody loved the place, and it was real good for kids. We played in the dark in the moonshine. I loved the place," recalled Hector Maxwell, 61, Leach's brother-in-law, who lived here for several years in the 1960s.

The hardships weren't really hard, or at least they didn't feel that way, said Leach's 52-year-old son Isaac, who also works at Magnolia.

"With me it didn't matter because this was my home, and my father had made the best of it for the kids and the family."

Indeed, he said he misses



Johnnie Leach, 86, walks through the home where he raised 13 children at Magnolia Plantation and Gardens in Charleston, S.C., in April. The cabin is one of four that were built in the 1850s and originally used by slaves.

some things about the cabin.

"We had the wood-burning stove with the oven, and the thing to me was everything tasted better," Isaac Leach said. "You would cook your meat, and then you would put your potatoes on the coals when the fire dies."

As the family grew, the

older children moved in with relatives or struck out on their own.

"When it got too crowded the way it was, some were large enough to go out," said Johnnie Leach, whose children range in age from 37 to 53.

Although no one lives on

the slave street anymore, it will always conjure home for the Leach family.

"I have a son who just turned 12, and we were approaching the plantation the other day and just getting ready to turn in," Isaac Leach said. "He said, 'Dad, I can't get enough of this place.'"

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