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5 Siblings secure \$10.1M settlement for Hammocks Beach land

Brother and sister Harriet Turner and John Hurst, a paralegal and landfill attendant, respectively, became millionaires when the state and an independent conservation group wrote them checks totaling \$10.1 million for 290 acres of unspoiled coastal land near Hammocks Beach State Park in Onslow County.

After the siblings successfully sued to claim the land, originally deeded to an association of black educators at the siblings' grandparents' behest, the state asserted, after twice refusing to do so, that it would be the land's trustee. (At the time, its owner, white neurosurgeon and philanthropist William Sharpe, who befriended the family, actually tried to give the land to the Hurst family.)

According to the deed, if the state declined the trust, the land was supposed to revert to the Hursts' heirs.

"The state purported to take this land and not pay Harriett and John a dime," said one of the siblings' attorneys, Charles Francis of Raleigh.

In the early days, black teachers and their students frequented the beach and built roads and camps that thrived there, just as the Hursts and Sharpe had intended. But after the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964 the property gradually lost its popularity and stopped being maintained properly.

Desegregation gave longtime Hammocks Beach visitors the opportunity to go to other camps, said Hammocks Beach Corp. attorney Frank Emory Jr. of Hunton & Williams in Charlotte, and funding provided by the black teachers' association dried up when it merged with the white teachers' association.

The plaintiffs are convinced that they could have made much more money by selling the property to developers rather than the state, but as part of the settlement deal, the state agreed to lease a portion of the property that includes the camp to Turner for 25 years for \$1. She said that resurrecting the camp is her way of carrying on the generous vision of her grandparents and Sharpe.

"This was something that Dr. Sharpe believed in and my grandparents believed in," she said. "I just want to keep that going."



SETTLEMENT REPORT

REAL PROPERTY/TRUST AND ESTATES

Amount: \$10.1 million

Case name: Harriett Turner and John Hurst v.
Hammocks Beach Corporation, et al.

Court: Wake County Superior Court

Case No.: 06-CVS-18173

Judge: Carl Fox

Date of settlement: June 2014, paid April 31

Attorneys for plaintiffs: Charles Francis of Raleigh and Michael Weisel, David Coats and Adam Olls of Bailey & Dixon in Raleigh

Attorneys for defendants: Frank Emory Jr. of Hunton & Williams in Charlotte, for Hammocks Beach Corporation, and James Gulick and Thomas Ziko of Raleigh for the North Carolina State Board of Education