[Title: Episode 1 - The Family Homestead]

>> Narrator: In this audio diary, you'll hear from Lee descendants and family members - Earl Adams, Raymond Lee, and June Acha-Morfaw.

[nature sounds]

>> Earl Adams: You know, back in the day, I think the old slave master, he left the property to them, you know.

>> June Acha-Morfaw: Yeah, Sarah Lee was given the land by Evan Shaw in his will.

>> Voice Actor: I give, devise and bequeath in fee simple…

>> Narrator: With these words, Evan Shaw gave about 160 acres to Sarah Lee…

>> Voice Actor: to my servants Sarah, Eliza Ann, George Emmanuel, Mary Elizabeth…

>> Narrator: …and the seven of her ten children who were then under 18. Shaw was a wealthy white man who owned many tracts of land on either side of the border between Prince George's and Montgomery counties. He also profited from enslaving 20 African Americans, including Sarah Lee. In 1854, seven years before the outbreak of the Civil War, he included freedom for these individuals in his will.

>> Voice Actor: I…liberate, manumit, set free and discharge from slavery, from and after the death of my wife the following named Negros…

>> Narrator: It would be over a decade before Shaw's wife passed away, the paperwork for his estate was settled, and Sarah Lee was able to take control of her land. She was around 55 years old and a grandmother. Owning land meant Sarah, her husband, children and their descendants had a place to call their own.

[nature sounds]

>> Narrator: The first home on the property was likely built in the late 1870s and by the early 1900s, three homes lined a small dirt lane. Only one home remained by the mid-20th century.

>> Raymond Lee: It was a one-story house. One, two….It had five rooms in it. Three bedrooms, a living room, and a kitchen.

>> Narrator: It is this home that family members recall visiting in their youth.

>> Raymond Lee: My father, his cousins, and my grandfather, and his sister. They all lived in that one house. I used to go over there and play all the time, and see my grandfather. Aunt Kate grew a pretty good garden up there.

>> June Acha Morfaw: And Aunt Kate is Sarah Lee's sister, right?

>> Earl Adams: Yeah, yeah

>> Raymond Lee: She had apple trees, peach trees. She used to grow vegetables in a little garden up there and everything.

>> Narrator: In addition to the fruit trees and vegetable garden, Lee's descendants raised animals, like pigs and chickens. Food was smoked, canned, and stored. The nearby spring and creek provided water.

[tense music begins]

>> Narrator: Still, there were challenges. County records show the Lee family sold pieces of the land to settle tax debts on three separate occasions in the late 1800s.

>> June Acha-Morfaw: They were saying that she sold it, she lost it for taxes. But we know that the taxes had been paid.

>> Narrator: By the turn of the century, only 36 of the original 160 acres remained in the Lee family.

>> Earl Adams: They had acres and acres of land.

>> June Acha-Morfaw: Yeah, cause Calverton…

>> Earl Adams: But people beat them out of their land cause…My father told me the men couldn't read or write or nothing, so they'd make their mark on a paper, and they'd just take their land from them.

>> Narrator: Over the first half of the 20th century, the remaining Lee property faced the pressures of suburban development.

>> Raymond Lee: First they were digging gravel pits over there — that was good gravel back in there….Then, in the '50s they started dumping trash up there.

>> Narrator: By 1962 all the Lee property was out of family hands.

[music ends]

>> Raymond Lee: I didn't find out until I came home from the military that they had sold all this land. Which really hurt me, but I didn't say nothing about it because, what can I do? I still hold a grudge against them for it. I still hold a grudge against them today. Cause that was a lot of land. Sarah Lee was the richest black lady in Montgomery County, with all that land.

[piano music begins]

>> Narrator: Starting in 1965, the land was the site of a county landfill. Then in 1980, Calverton-Galway Local Park was established. For descendants of Sarah Lee, the land still holds powerful memories.

>> Raymond Lee: You know, I feel good cause I know used to play over there. I used to run through the woods, go down to the pond. It was them good ol' days. Those days will not be again, them good ol' days.

[music fades]

[Title: Episode 2 - Preserving the Burial Ground]

>> Narrator: In the late 1800s, the land where you're standing now was covered in trees. After Sarah Lee took ownership of this land, her family gradually cleared a narrow dirt lane, a space for gardens, a few cabins, and a cemetery. As Earl Adams recalls, burial practices were different then.

>> Earl Adams: They used to bring people's bodies home when they died. It wasn't like now, like they have it at the undertaker's place or somewhere. People, when they died, their body was laid to rest at home.

>> Narrator: Raymond Lee, Yvonne Adams, and other Lee family elders remember seeing the cemetery when they'd visit the home-place as children in the 1940s and 50s. But the details of the site remained a mystery.

[quiet music begins]

>> Yvonne Adams: You know, old people didn't let you go in the graveyard and stuff. It was disrespectful.

>> Raymond Lee: We never asked Aunt Marion or Pop-Pop who was buried in that land. So they didn't take time to tell us anything. Me being as inquisitive as I used to be, I should have asked questions. But it never hit my mind, who's in this grave? I might have asked them sometime…but nobody really explained who was in those graves.

[music fades]

>> Yvonne Adams: Some of them might have had stones, but most of them had like markers.

[new music begins]

>> Narrator: In the years after the park opened, Raymond Lee's sister Bernadette…and her husband Elwood King…would return to visit the resting place of her ancestors.

>> Elwood King: Cause she was in a wheelchair then, we went around that lower side and came up that walkway up there. And everything was kind of on a little hump. Where they got the marker and stuff, that's where I saw the headstones at. But then I went

back later and they got a plaque there and no headstones, so you don't know whose name was on those headstones or nothing.

>> Narrator: Thanks to the efforts of Bernadette Lee King, who passed away in 2024, and her family members, more steps were taken to preserve the cemetery beginning in the 2010s.

[music fades]

>> Narrator: Today Lee family descendants and their relatives have been searching burial records and working with historians and archaeologists to fill the gaps in this family history.

>> June Acha-Morfaw: We know that Emory Lee that lived in Colesville, his set of twins are buried there. My grandmother, Marion, her twin daughter that she had is buried there…Aunt Effie Lee, she might have two kids that are buried there. But I know one for sure we got a death certificate on…

>> Narrator: In an effort to learn more, archaeologists analyzed the land's evolution using tools like ground-penetrating radar and magnetometry. These studies found that while the surrounding land was heavily disturbed by mining and landfill activity, the cemetery land itself was not altered. The radar survey found at least 30 likely unmarked burials within the cemetery fence.

[music begins]

>> Narrator: This area may look different than it did in Sarah Lee's time, but it continues to serve as a place of reflection for family members and other visitors.

>> Raymond Lee: I sit over there and meditate with them myself. I say Grandma, you know, "I hope you're alright, I hope you look over me and everything." A lot of people that are over there leave flowers. Because I sit over there and talk to them. And they ask me, why you sitting here? And I give them the story and they're very surprised. I said "my great-grandma used to own all that land.

[music fades]