

THE COURIER OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY <https://www.yourconroenews.com/neighborhood/moco/events/article/Genealogist-seeking-help-to-restore-preserve-9975878.php>

Genealogist seeking help to restore, preserve historic black cemetery

By Sondra Hernandez, shernandez@hcnonline.com Published 9:24 am CDT, Monday, October 17, 2016



IMAGE 1 OF 9

Jon Edens talks about Dora Griffin Armstrong, an African American who lived in the Conroe area in the 1800s at her grave site at Conroe Community Cemetery Thursday in Conroe. Edens, a genealogist, has ... [more](#)

It's been noted in local history as "the cemetery without a name," but an area genealogist is seeking to bring recognition to a forgotten graveyard on 10th street in Conroe.

The cemetery exists between the **Oakwood Cemetery and Old Normal College** property. It is said to be one of the oldest burial grounds in Montgomery County serving as a final resting place for dozens of blacks who settled here during the post Civil War era.

However the cemetery, that many called the "Conroe Cemetery" or "Community Cemetery" has existed in relative seclusion, while the tombstones wore away and the grounds became overgrown.

To bring attention to this historic cemetery, Edens, a genealogist, formed a nonprofit organization to organize the clean up, restoration and preservation of the cemetery. Now he is trying to recruit volunteers to be on a board for the Conroe Community Cemetery Restoration Project.

The group meets Tuesday at 6 p.m. at the Genealogy Room at the **Conroe Central Library**.

"There are people in place who will assist with the physical part of the cleanup and restoration," He said. "But we are in need of people who are willing to donate a few hours per year to be on the board of directors in order for the organization to be able to officially function."



Stumbling upon history

Edens was transcribing graves at the adjacent Oakwood Cemetery in the fall of 2011 when he saw a grave on the north side of the fence of the property.

He climbed the fence and discovered several graves.

"I began researching it and couldn't find any records of the cemetery," he said.

He did eventually find a list of burials that were cataloged by Oveta and Horace Wright in April 1978.

His research lead him to find that **Henry Runge**, who lived from 1888 to 1923 was the last owner of the property. Runge never married and had no children, so there were no heirs for the property.

"There are groups from the **University of Houston** and **Sam Houston State University** and other groups who are willing to help, but only with an owners approval," Edens said. "There is no owner of the cemetery."

More Information

Conroe Community Cemetery Restoration Project meeting

In order to seat a board for the Conroe Community Cemetery Restoration Project, Jon Edens is hosting a meeting on Tuesday, Oct. 18, at 6 p.m. for the creation of a board to assist in the preservation, restoration of the Conroe Community Cemetery, a historic African American cemetery in Conroe. The meeting is at 6 p.m. at the Conroe Central Library, 104 I-45, Conroe in the Genealogy Department.

Buried at Conroe Community Cemetery

So in order to do work on the cemetery, he had to form a nonprofit organization - the Conroe Community Cemetery Restoration Project.

Edens is also still working to try and locate any living heirs of Runge.

The people interred there

Edens has identified approximately 35 to 38 of the people buried there, but knows there are many others in unmarked graves.

"There's a lot of history there," he said. "Some of the people buried there were very influential in the African American community in the early part of the 20th century," he said. "These are people who should be recognized

Genealogist Jon Edens has done extensive research on the Conroe Community Cemetery on 10th Street between the Oakwood Cemetery and Normal College property. He has been able to identify 35 gravesites. These are the gravesites he has been able to identify:

Armstrong (First name unknown); Dora Griffin Armstrong; Mittie J. Washington Campbell; Tom Campbell; Lottie Carter; Ella Colbert; Jacob F. Cozier; Martha Davis; Baby Boy Denman; Agnes Dibbles; Martin Dibbles; Emma McDade Dorsey; Luther James Dorsey; Little Luceil Drake; Eliza Evans; Hanna Foster; Steve Gemight; Maude Ruth Gilder; Lucy Green; Thomas Griffin; Edwin Harncy; Laura McNeese Henderson; Carrie Johnson; Evaenex Jones; Jonas Jones; Bertha Dorsey Mapp; James Charles Pitts Sr; George Pruitt; Simon Roberson; Sarah Scott; Major Somerville; Jessie J. Turner; Leon A. Williams and Agnes L. Woodworth

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and honored for what they have done for Conroe and the community at large."

Probably the most notable person buried there is Buffalo soldier, **Luther James Dorsey**. He served in the Company E, 10th Cavalry from 1873 to 1878. Records suggest his wife and daughter are buried there also.

"He was a pretty remarkable man," Edens said. Not only was Dorsey a cabinetmaker, he also served as Conroe's first trash man and would pick up trash with his donkey and cart.

Life-long Conroe resident **Caroline Cryar** was a girl when she knew Dorsey.

"She told me she used to sit down on the curb and talk to him for hours," Edens said of an interview he had done with Cryar.

Edens lists an extensive record about Dorsey, who died in 1939, on the nonprofit's website - www.cccrp.org.

Edens also lists more extensive information for **Dora Griffin Armstrong** and **Jonas Jones**. Of interesting note, Edens' research indicates Jones was listed as a laborer at a saw mill in rural Montgomery County in 1940.

Another well known person buried there is **Mittie J. Campbell**. Campbell is credited with opening the first school for black students in Conroe.

According to information from the **Heritage Museum** of Montgomery County, the school was built in 1919 across First Street between Ave. K and Ave. M.

Prior to **Campbell High School** was completed, classes for black children were held at **Central Baptist Church** located in Madeley Quarters.

In "Montgomery County History - Texas" published in 1981, a passage tells of Ms. **Robin Goffrey's** experiences at the school.

According to her, the school accommodated grades one through 11. There were 11 rooms with one teacher in each. Goffrey graduated in 1931 at the peak of the Depression.

Campbell resigned as principal of the school to become a Montgomery County Home Demonstration Agent, according to the museum's information. The same year, the Campbell School name was changed to **Booker T. Washington School**. The school burned in 1933, but the name continues on as Washington Junior High in the Conroe school district. Campbell died on Nov. 3, 1933 in Freestone County in Texas.

He said getting to know the stories of these people through research has been the most interesting part of the project.

Jones; Jonas Jones; Bertha Dorsey Mapp; James Charles Pitts Sr; George Pruitt; Simon Roberson; Sarah Scott; Major Somerville; Jessie J. Turner; Leon A. Williams and Agnes L. Woodworth

"Like Dora Griffin Armstrong, the first grave I came upon. She died in Houston but is buried in Conroe, so Conroe must have meant something to her," he said. "We can learn so much from our ancestors. It just saddens me to see people forgotten like this."

Those wanting to help with the effort or who have more information on people buried there, may contact Edens at info@cccp.org,

huntingforebears@gmail.com or call him at 832-510-7850. Also visit the nonprofit's website www.cccrp.org or search Facebook for the Conroe Community Cemetery Restoration Project.

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