

# Cleanup uncovers cemetery

By **TIM WESSELMAN**  
Courier staff

Community Cemetery, a historic landmark that for years was hidden beneath a thick blanket of trees, brush, and briars is being rediscovered by citizens helping clean it up.

The cemetery, located next to the Conroe College on North Tenth Street was dedicated to the community by Clarence Lewis Jr.'s great-great-grandfather Luther Dorsey, said Lewis, 26.

The predominantly-black cemetery is located right next to Oakwood Cemetery, which is one of the oldest predominantly-white cemeteries in Conroe. It too was started by a donation of land, made by the Sante Fe Railroad, Oakwood Cemetery Association members report.

Lewis' aunt, Luzella Richards, remains a trustee of the Community Cemetery property, which has been used by several local funeral homes in the early and middle part of this century.

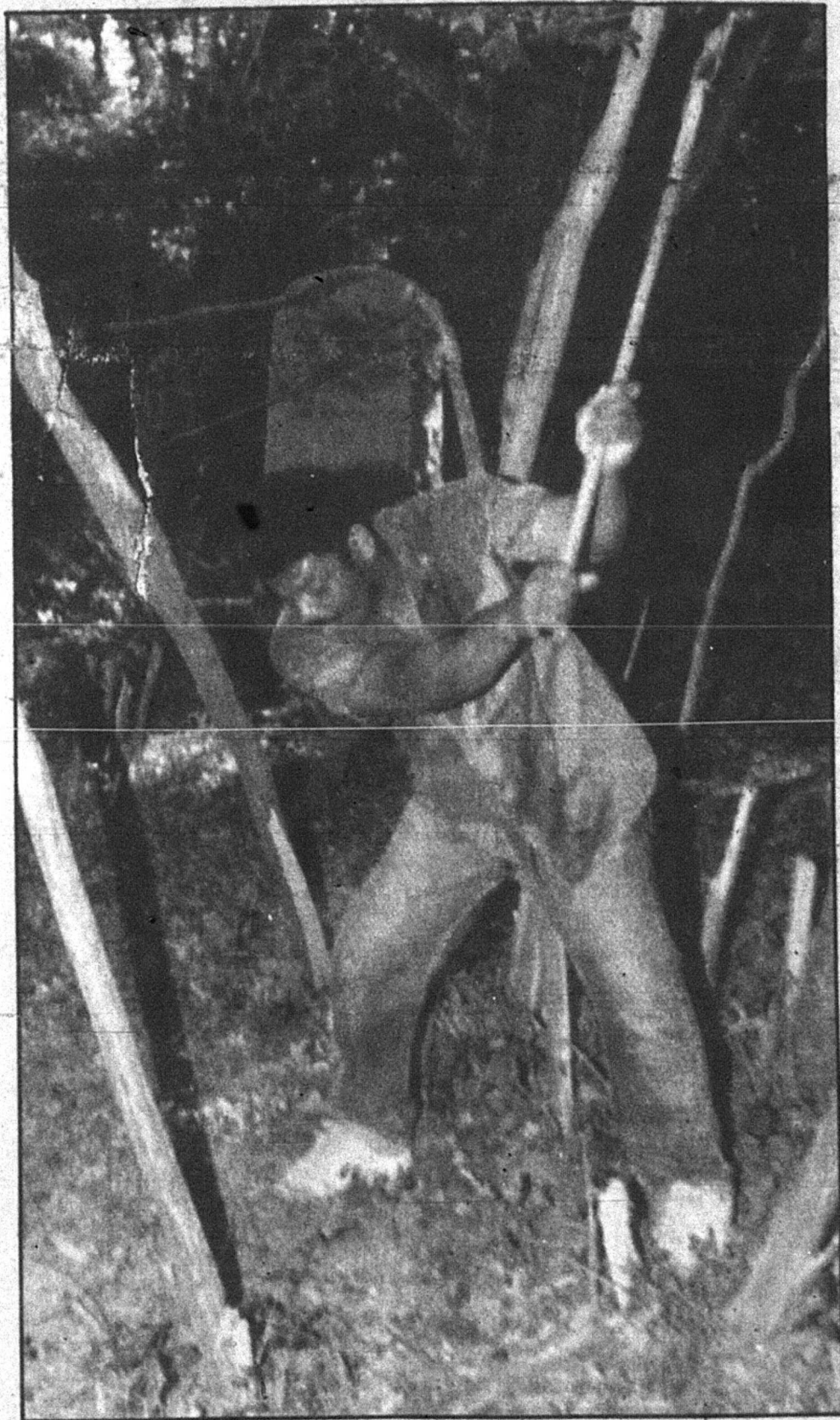
The job of keeping up the old cemetery became too much for the Lewis family years ago and it has been difficult to get help on what is now a daunting project, he said.

He is glad to see the interest that has surfaced in the wake of a recent newspaper article on the cemetery.

The Clarence Lewis and Son Mortuary's last burial there was for James C. Pitts, who died at the age of 90 in 1966, Lewis recalled.

Pitts' grandson, James C. Pitts III of Austin, 27, and his

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Staff photo by **KIM RICHARDSON**  
John Franklin chops away the overgrowth, clearing the cemetery.

# •Cemetery

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brother Michael Sweet of Houston, 15, both decided to come clean up the family plot Saturday.

By coincidence, this is the same day Willie M. Collard, 57, and close to 10 among her family and friends sponsored a cemetery cleanup day.

This sweaty dozen used machetes and axes to clear brush and chop down trees on the cemetery grounds. By noon a large clearing stretched close to 100 feet into the dense woods.

However it was clear there was much more work to be done.

"We'll be out here every Saturday until it is done," Collard said.

"We just want to do something to beautify our neighborhood," said Collard, who lives nearby on College Street. "And it's right next to the Conroe College," she said. The college has been long known as a civic, cultural and educational center for the black community.

On Aug. 15 the group will be barbecuing donated brisket to help feed volunteers, Collard said.

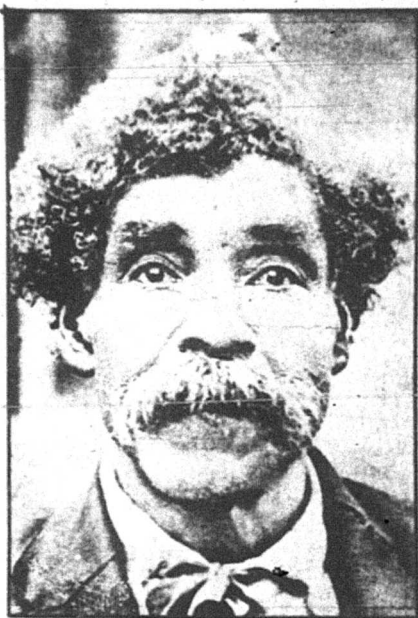
Collard said the group plans to sell sandwiches and have other fund raisers to generate money for the long-term upkeep of the cemetery. The group would also like to erect a fence around the cemetery, she said.

Pitts said he was glad to see the community pitching in to help clean up the cemetery, but he thought it would be nice if the city public works crews could help out as well.

He noted that with the few hand tools the small group of volunteers had at their disposal, they could be there until Thanksgiving getting the lot cleaned up.

"It is good that the community is doing something. People should take care of their own," he said. "But if they pay their taxes, the city should also assist," Pitts said.

As he and his brother cleared brush they uncovered a little bit



LUTHER DORSEY

of their family history.

"Every time we clear a little, we find another one (family grave)," Sweet said.

Pitts recalled his grandfather moved away from Conroe although his wife, who died in 1942, was buried here in a plot next to his grave.

His grandfather was a principal in the East Texas town of Jefferson for several years before moving across the state to Midland, where he died. The younger Pitts recalls visiting Conroe with his family to clean up the grave and spread salt to keep the brush back.

His family hasn't been out to the cemetery in about eight years, he said. He was not aware of interest in the cemetery that surfaced recently, but came to Conroe on his own accord.

He noticed the first thing he and his brother had to do was clean up a bunch of auto parts strewn all over the graves.

Others who have visited the area have also noticed refuse has been thrown on graves.

Billy Coile, a young Conroe man in his 20s, did some work by himself at the cemetery after reading a newspaper article on the place. He recalled that even as a child he would go by the cemetery and think that someone should take care of the resting place.