

---

**THIS WEEK IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY HISTORY**

---

# Restoration of historic black cemetery begins

## From the Community

Jon Edens, president of the local Conroe Community Cemetery Restoration Project, announced this week that the group's eight-year effort to restore the historic cemetery on North 10th street is under-way.

The overgrown cemetery, located beside the Oakwood Cemetery, was the site of burials from 1892 through 1966 of Black citizens, including educational and religious leaders and other prominent residents of Conroe.

The grave of Luther James Dorsey, the only Buffalo Soldier in Montgomery County, is located there.

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 in a 2016 Courier article. Not only was Dorsey a cabinet-maker, 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.

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.

Campbell resigned as



Courtesy the Conroe Community Cemetery Restoration Project

**Pictured from left to right, board members of the Conroe Community Cemetery Restoration Project, Treasurer John Meredith, left, and President Jon Edens, right, were delighted at the beginning of the clearing and restoration of the Conroe Community Cemetery. It's been an eight-year journey to this day.**



Jason Fochtman / Staff photographer

**Workers clear the right of way section of North 10th Street in front of the Conroe Community Cemetery between the Oakwood Cemetery and Old Normal College property for a fence to be installed Sept. 3 in Conroe. The densely wooded property is the final resting place for dozens of black who settled in Montgomery County during the post Civil War era.**

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.

"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 an-

cestors. It just saddens me to see people forgotten like this."

An anonymous donor to the nonprofit CCCRP provided the funds that enabled the group to hire Top Cut Tree Service to begin clearing the front of the cemetery and to remove dead and fallen trees from the property. That work began this past week.

The Montgomery Coun-

ty Historical Commission, chaired by Larry Foerster, approved a grant at its August meeting to put a fence at the property.

"After many years of work securing the consent of the property owners, our group is proud to actually begin the work of clearing and restoring this historic cemetery. This place is part of the historic heritage of the African





Jason Fochtman / Staff photographer

**Jon Edens talks about Dora Griffin Armstrong, an African American who lived in the Conroe area in the 1800s at her grave site on Oct. 14, 2016, at Conroe Community Cemetery. Edens, a genealogist, has identified 35 graves of African Americans from the Conroe area so far who lived from the mid-to-late 1800s in a wooded area on the north side of the Oakwood Cemetery. He hopes to restore the overgrown and damaged graves to their original conditions.**



Courtesy the CCCRP

**Pictured left to right are board members of the Conroe Community Cemetery Restoration Project, Vice President Jean Smoorenburg, Treasurer John Meredith and President Jon Edens were thrilled to be at the beginning of the clearing and restoration of the Conroe Community Cemetery.**

American community and deserves to be preserved in the memory of those who rest there," said Edens.

Eden said that the CCCRP group meets at the Conroe Central Library at 6 p.m. on the second Tuesday of each month. He encouraged anyone interested in helping with this project to attend the next meeting on Sept. 10.

The group has set Oct. 12 as their first general clean-up date for the cemetery. Volunteers must be over 18 and must go through training before they can participate.

According to John Meredith, the historic nature of

the property requires that volunteers use hand tools and respect the unique burial practices of African American cemeteries. These practices often include plants, objects, and offerings that the volunteers should be careful not to disturb in the restoration.

People interested in being involved with this non-profit project, as donors or as volunteers or as members, should contact CCCRP at [cccrp.org@gmail.com](mailto:cccrp.org@gmail.com).

More information about the group's purpose and goals can also be found there. Also visit [cccrp.org](http://cccrp.org).