

# Work on restoration of historic Black Conroe cemetery begins

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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.



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 underway.

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 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.

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 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 ancestors. 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 County 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 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 nonprofit project, as donors or as volunteers or as a 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.