

Grandchildren of last person buried in cemetery visit Conroe

Contributed by John Meredith

James and Meriel Pitts, the grandchildren of James C. Pitts Sr who was the last person to be buried in the Conroe Community Cemetery in 1966, visited their grandfather's grave on Jan. 28 at the Conroe Community Cemetery.

They visited as did James' wife, Anna.

Many volunteers have come together to clean and refurbish the Conroe Community Cemetery.

The restoration process is one that started for historian and researcher Jon Edens in the fall of 2016.

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.

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



Photo courtesy John Meredith

James C. Pitts Sr. is pictured. His grandchildren came to Conroe to visit his grave at the Conroe Community Cemetery Jan. 28.

side of the fence of the property. He climbed the fence and discovered several graves among the overgrown property.

The Conroe Community Cemetery Restoration Project was launched and a group of volunteers banded together to clean the property and identify as many graves as possible there. In the summer of 2021, the cemetery was designated a Historic Texas Cemetery by the Texas Historical Commission.

In their visit to Conroe, the Pitts shared with vol-

unteers about the Pitts ancestors and his experiences visiting the cemetery in 1992 to participate in cleaning the cemetery.

James Pitts III is mentioned in an article on the cleanup in The Courier dated Aug. 3, 1992 and written by reporter Tim Wessleman.

Also buried at the cemetery are their great-grandparents George and Jane Pitts which were marked with only a footstone with their initials. They were born prior to the Civil War in Alabama and Mississippi and so they would have been enslaved persons.

See an interview with James and Meriel Pitts on the CCCRP YouTube channel at <https://youtu.be/qnPw5WWVnqE>.

James Charles Pitts Sr. was an early Black educator from Conroe. He graduated from Prairie View State Normal College. He was the first principal of the first Black school in Jefferson, Marion County, Texas.

It opened in 1904 with 152 students. By 1941, there were 620 students. He re-



Photo courtesy John Meredith

Pictured are Anna Pitts and James and Meriel Pitts beside the headstones of their grandparents James and Ollie Pitts at Conroe Community Cemetery. They visited the cemetery Jan. 28 and spoke with volunteers.

tired in 1960 as principal after 54 years of teaching. By 1910 he owned his home and farm. He was a member of the Knights of Pythias, the Bruce Masonic Lodge, the Court of Calanthe and the American Woodsman.

In 1942, the State of Texas recognized him as the

leading educator of Black students. He stated that his method of education may seem "old-fogeyish," but not one of the students who passed through the school's 41-year history had ever run "afoul of the law." He would start each school day with a prayer, a song

and a reading from the Bible before continuing with the daily education.

You can learn more about the Conroe Community Cemetery at their website <https://cccrp.org>.

Also see the group's Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/cccrp>.