

# WOODLAND CEMETERY AND AFRICAN AMERICAN BURIAL GROUND HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROJECT

FEBRUARY 2023 *Monthly Newsletter* VOLUME 3, ISSUE 2



Completed demarcation of teal ribbons on the white flags in Woodland Cemetery. Photograph by Marquise Drayton

The Woodland Cemetery Preservation Project seeks to tell the stories of the known and previously unknown burials located in Woodland Cemetery on the Clemson University campus. Through research and community engagement we intend to uncover as much as we can about this historic space and to properly commemorate all who are buried here.

In this issue we will provide information about virtual cemetery tours offered in Spring 2023, inform on similar memorialization work at Fort Bend ISD in Sugarland, Texas, provide research, community engagement updates, and highlight some upcoming local events.

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## Virtual Tours of Woodland Cemetery offered in Spring 2023

Because the Pathways Project will temporarily close Woodland Cemetery at Clemson University in January 2023, the cemetery team would like to bring our free cemetery walking tour to you virtually during the Spring 2023 semester. The Woodland Cemetery Preservation Project and Historic African American Burial Ground team will present one-hour virtual tours to classes, local organizations, and campus and community groups. With the help of our Creative Inquiry team, we have developed this experiential storytelling tool to share the history of the cemetery, including the recently recovered unmarked burials of hundreds of marginalized people. If you would like us to present, please contact us via our main email address [afamburials@clemson.edu](mailto:afamburials@clemson.edu) or email the Community Engagement Assistant [mdrayto@clemson.edu](mailto:mdrayto@clemson.edu).

So far this semester, virtual cemetery tours scheduled on the calendar include

Clemson Housing, Phi Sigma Pi National Honor Fraternity, Peace Church, UCC, North Anderson Community Church, Clemson Department of English, Department of Anthropology, Department of History, Center for Student Leadership and Engagement and Lexington-Richland School District.

Between July 2020 and January 2021, hundreds of unmarked graves were recovered using ground penetrating radar (GPR) in Woodland Cemetery on the Clemson University campus. We believe these burials are those people of African Descent with long connections to Clemson's history including those who were free and enslaved, sharecroppers, tenant farmers, domestic laborers, convicted laborers, and wage workers and their families. Schedule a virtual tour to learn about the history of this site and how to get involved with efforts to protect, preserve, and memorialize this sacred ground.

**Virtual Tours**  
**Woodland Cemetery and the African American Burial Ground at Clemson University**

While the Pathways Project temporarily closes Woodland Cemetery this Spring 2023 semester, the Woodland Cemetery and African American Burial Ground team will offer free virtual walking tours of the cemetery to classes, local organizations, and campus and community groups. With the help of our Creative Inquiry team, we have developed this experiential storytelling tool to share the history of the cemetery, including the recently recovered unmarked burials of hundreds of marginalized people.

Between July 2020 and January 2021, ground penetrating radar (GPR) revealed hundreds of unmarked burials in Woodland Cemetery on the Clemson University campus. We believe these burials belong to people of African Descent with long connections to Clemson's history, including those who were free and enslaved, sharecroppers, tenant farmers, domestic laborers, convicted laborers, and wage workers and their families. Schedule a virtual tour to learn about the history of this site and how to get involved with efforts to protect, preserve, and memorialize this sacred ground.

If you would like to present a virtual cemetery tour, please contact us via one of these email addresses: [afamburials@clemson.edu](mailto:afamburials@clemson.edu) OR [mdrayto@clemson.edu](mailto:mdrayto@clemson.edu)

[www.clemson.edu/cemetery](http://www.clemson.edu/cemetery)

Sponsored by The Legacy Council,  
Woodland Cemetery and African American Burial  
Ground Historic Preservation Project

For More Information:  
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Website: [www.clemson.edu/cemetery](http://www.clemson.edu/cemetery)

## Cemetery History Series #2

### Sugar Land 95: Found and Not Forgotten - Chassidy Olainu-Alade, Director of the Sugar Land 95 Memorialization Project for Fort Bend Independent School District (ISD)

This is part of an ongoing series highlighting various aspects of Woodland Cemetery history.

February, the month nationally recognized as Black History Month. For most people, Black History Month is a great time to recognize the accomplishments of notable African Americans, to reflect on the struggles and successes of our ancestors, and to celebrate Black culture. In Fort Bend County, Texas the month of February and Black History Month has a more somber tone as February 19th was a pivotal point in county history.

#### BACKGROUND ON THE HISTORIC DISCOVERY

On February 19, 2018, a contractor at the construction site of Fort Bend Independent School Districts, James Reese Career and Technical Center (Sugar Land, Texas) uncovered the first human remains. Under the guidance of the Texas Historical Commission, an archaeological firm lead in the exhumation, and was granted permission to study the remains for further analysis. Extensive historical research was also conducted to gain a better understanding of the property and what was found.

What was unearthed during the study was shocking. In total, there were 95 African Americans exhumed from this forgotten cemetery. Through archival research, exhumation, and intensive laboratory studies, the cemetery was found to be associated with the 19th century convict leasing system that operated in the state of Texas. It was concluded that the remains were of 94 men and 1 presumed woman, who labored and died on the Sartartia Plantation, land owned and operated by Little A. Ellis between 1879 and 1909.

The remains showed signs of disease, repeated injury, and gunshot wounds likely sustained during escape attempts. They endured the indignity of corporal punishment, hunger, insufficient clothing, exposure, and severe overwork. The study of their remains was an opportunity to reveal

the results of another form of slavery that lasted for nearly 50 years past the end of the Civil War.

#### HISTORY OF CONVICT LEASING IN TEXAS & LABOR CAMPS IN SUGAR LAND, TEXAS

By the time the Civil war ended in 1865, there were approximately 1,000 prisoners housed in the Huntsville, TX prison. To offset the costs of maintaining the prison, lawmakers explored ways to make it more self-sufficient. Private companies were given the right to lease the labor of prisoners to individuals and corporations and in exchange they were to be responsible for feeding and clothing the prisoners. Typically, Anglo convicts were sent to the wood-cutting camps of East Texas and Hispanic convicts were sent to work on the railroad. Black convicts were sent to cultivate crops — primarily cotton and sugarcane — often on the same plantations from which they were freed only six years prior.

In January 1878, the State awarded a five-year contract to two partners, Edward H. Cunningham and Littleberry A. Ellis. The men made a fortune in lease payments, much of which they put into the acquisition of more land. Cunningham, a resident of Bexar County, began acquiring land in Fort Bend County, Texas that would eventually total 12,500 acres. Ellis,

purchased active labor camps and agricultural fields in Fort Bend County. Eventually, Ellis owned 5,300 acres, which he named Sartartia Plantation.

Using the labor of convicts, Cunningham and Ellis were able to create one of the largest sugar plantations in the country following the Civil War. Convict leasing reached its peak during Cunningham and Ellis' reign over the prison system. Together, by 1880, Ellis' Sartartia Plantation and Cunningham's Sugar Land Plantation utilized 365 convicts, while leasing out hundreds more to local plantations in need of low-cost labor.

Although they were only about 30 percent of the Texas population, Black people made up 50 to 60 percent of the prison population during the convict leasing period from 1871 to 1911. The prison camps established by these men did not cease operation when their lease of Huntsville Penitentiary ended in 1883. Prison labor persisted on newly minted state prison farms across Texas.

#### SUGAR LAND 95 MEMORIALIZATION PROJECT

In 2019, the Sugar Land 95 was reinterred into their original resting places and their graves were marked as "Unknown" temporarily. The cemetery is now named the Bullhead Convict Labor Camp Cemetery and is officially designated as a historic cemetery in Texas by the Texas Historical Commission.

Currently, the work to properly memorialize the Sugar Land 95 is incomplete. There is still much to do to honor their lives and legacies, and to educate our community about the contributions of convict laborers across the nation.

FBISD now has an education exhibit within the James C. Reese Career and

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Sugar Land 95 Exhibit on Convict Labor at Fort Bend Independent School District (ISD)'s James Reese Career and Technical Center in Sugarland, TX. Photograph provided by Chassidy Olaino-Alade.

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### Cemetery History Series #2

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Technical Center that serves as a permanent memorial to foster education and community engagement. In 2021, the MASS Design Group was contracted by the district to engage in landscape design visioning, with the intent of creating a proper memorial grounds and outdoor exhibition in honor of the Sugar Land 95.

Independent researchers are also conducting ancient DNA studies and genealogical research, with the hopes of reuniting the Sugar Land 95 with their families.

For more information and updates on the Sugar Land 95, please visit [www.fortbendisd.com/sugarland95](http://www.fortbendisd.com/sugarland95).



Cemetery Exhumation at the Reese Center Construction Site in Sugar Land, Texas (2018).  
Photograph provided by Chassidy Olaino-Alade.

### Research Update

Dr. Mandi Barnard has been following up on research questions at the Clemson Special Collections Library and has been working on Gantt materials for the public viewing of a documentary on his integration of Clemson that we hosted on January 31, 2023.

Dr. Sara Collini is continuing to work with the undergraduate students in the Creative Inquiry in History class for the project. All of the students in the Spring 2023 class are returning from the fall. The students will be conducting their own research projects on the history of the cemetery. The class recently visited Special Collections and Archives at Clemson to analyze various primary sources, including committee meeting minutes, IPTAY parking brochures, deeds, and letters from the antebellum period. This semester the students will also be visiting several local cemeteries and historic sites near campus in order to learn more about local history, as well as consider Woodland Cemetery and African American Burial Ground in a broader context. Additionally, Dr. Collini is working on the database for the project with Jessica Foster, Graduate Research Assistant.

Deborah Robinson, Genealogist, will be presenting a paper at the Universities Studying Slavery Conference in Florence, SC. The topic will be Black Genealogy in the Upper Piedmont Region: Using Jim Megginson's Work and the Clemson University Archives to Aid in Research of Cemetery Hill. The paper will discuss how these two major resources can be used to create a family history and genealogy structure for the Woodland Cemetery and African American Burial Ground and Historic Preservation Project. The program structure must benefit the university's preservation plan as well the surrounding Black community by developing best practices that begin



Harvey Gantt en route to Lee Hall to show his architecture portfolio to Dean Harlan McClure. Source: Clemson University Special Collection and Archives, Series 100, Box 3, HGantt, Architecture003.

to research the almost 700 African Americans interred in the cemetery, without benefit of an engraved headstone, recently uncovered using ground penetrating radar equipment. Moreover, it will collaborate closely with the cemetery project's community outreach and oral history sectors to seek the descendant population's participation and buy-in knowing their needs and concerns are being addressed and their voices heard.

Several other members of the cemetery team will be presenting at the conference, including Dr. Rhondda Thomas, Dr. Collini, Marquise Drayton, as well as Lucas Debenedetti and Alleyia Bailey, two of our undergraduate research assistants.

## Community Engagement Update

Follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#)

On January 9, 2023, Marquise Drayton led a cemetery tour for the Clemson Resident Advisors during their Development Summit to kick off the spring semester. At first, the original medium for the cemetery tour was virtual inside Brackett Hall. But seeing that the cemetery was yet to be closed for the Pathways Project, Drayton asked the group of 23 students if they would like to attend in person for what could be the final time this month. The students enthusiastically agreed to go beyond the classroom walls into experiential education in the campus cemetery.

On January 26, Drayton presented his ArcGIS StoryMap on Harvey Gantt's journey to Clemson in the Watt Innovation Center. It is the same presentation he showcased last November for the Pickens County Library System. First created by him as a digital history class project in 2019, it explains the significance of Harvey Gantt's impact left at his alma mater.

The same year, his class project won first prize at the Clemson GIS mapping contest. He also compares Clemson with the experiences of other desegregation efforts in the South. The event included a privilege walk and activities illustrating barriers that still exist for students of color in higher education. Harvey Gantt's court-mandated entry into Clemson is related to Woodland Cemetery by enrolling, he effectively desegregated the entire school. Beginning in 1963, Black Clemson employees who met the eligibility requirements could request a plot in Woodland Cemetery, until the trustees changed the policy after

hundreds of unmarked burials were recently recovered in the cemetery.

Drayton also attended the 60th Anniversary Gala benefitting the Harvey Gantt Endowment Scholarship inside Cooper Library on the evening of January 28. As a component of the later event, he assisted Dr. Otis Pickett, Clemson University Historian, and Mari Noorai, Curator of Education and Interpretation for Historic Properties, with the cemetery stop on a historical tour of campus for Clemson Black alumni earlier that day. Lastly, he helped the Woodland Cemetery and African American Burial Ground Historic Preservation Project with their documentary event in the Hendrix Center on January 31. Along with Dr. Mandi Barnard and Dr. Rhondda Thomas, they engaged with the audience about the commemorative documentary for Harvey Gantt that was produced during the 50th anniversary of desegregation. They also analyzed historical documents from Clemson's archives that could tell a different story from "the conspiracy for peace" narrative that has been constructed for integration in 1963.



Marquise Drayton leading a cemetery tour of Woodland Cemetery for Black alumni as part of the 60th Year Celebration of Integration at Clemson. Photograph by Corrine Grant.

## Upcoming Events

More detailed information and registration for Zoom events can be found on the cemetery web page and our social media. Email [mdrayto@clemson.edu](mailto:mdrayto@clemson.edu) to suggest an event or get involved. Please also visit the websites for the [Clemson Area African American Museum](#) and [Bertha Lee Strickland Cultural Museum](#) to find other events going on in the community.

**Black History Month at the Clemson Area African American Museum (CAAAM), February 1, 8, 15 & 22, 2023, Wednesdays, 6PM, 214 Butler Street, Clemson, SC 29631**

Please join the Clemson Area African American Museum on Wednesdays at 6 PM as they commemorate Black History Month for the city of Clemson, South Carolina. These events are free and open to the public.

On February 1 at 6PM, local Black artist Robert Spencer will be at CAAAM to discuss his "Pilgrimage Vibration" art exhibit in the gallery of the building. On February 8 at 6PM, Alexander Mitchell of the Littlejohn Community Center will have a Red Table Talk in the museum's auditorium. On February 15 at 6PM, Marquise Drayton of the Woodland Cemetery Preservation Project at Clemson University will showcase his

Digital History StoryMap of Harvey Gantt's journey to Clemson as its first Black student. On February 22 at 6PM, CAAAM will host a screening of the film *Invented Before You Were Born*. This film chronicles the descendants of a Kentucky slave-owning family's reckoning with their racial past.

These events will culminate in a Black History Month Luncheon at Littlejohn Community Center on February 28,

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## Upcoming Events

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2023. The guest speaker for the occasion will be Dr. Le Datta Grimes, Oral Historian at Clemson University. Registration is required. For more information, please visit [here](#).

**"Call My Name" 5K Run, February 19, 2023, 8-10AM, Carillon Garden, Clemson University, Clemson, SC 29634**

All over the country, various groups are inviting the public to explore Black history through walks, hikes, and runs. On Sunday, February 19, 2023, Call My Name will sponsor its first 5K run at Clemson University. Call My Name is a research project dedicated to telling the stories of Black men, women, and children throughout Clemson University's history whose lives and experiences have been largely overlooked in the University's public history. The route will start at the Carillon Garden and then take participants past sites of significance to Black history on campus. Participants are welcome to run or walk the route. All participants will receive a pamphlet with information about important sites along their way and will be invited to take a guided Call My Name walking tour of the historic campus immediately after the race. Sign up for the CMN walking tour [here](#). Proceeds will support the CMN project research, programs, and community outreach initiatives. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.



## Meet the Research and Community Engagement

- Dr. Rhonda Thomas, Calhoun Lemon Professor of Literature, Call My Name Faculty Director, and Coordinator of Research and Community Engagement for the African American Burial Ground and Woodland Cemetery Historic Preservation Project
- Sally Mauldin, Board of Trustees Office Staff
- Dr. Mandi Barnard, Research Historian
- Dr. Sara Collini, Postdoctoral Fellow in University History
- Deborah Robinson, Genealogist
- Dr. David Markus, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Criminal Justice, Registered Professional Archaeologist 5174
- Marquise Drayton, Community Engagement Assistant
- Ka'tia Reyes, Undergraduate Communications Assistant
- Jessica Foster, Graduate Research Assistant
- Alleyia Bailey, Undergraduate Research Assistant
- Lucas DeBenedetti, Undergraduate Research Assistant

## And Meet Our Community Engagement Council

- From Anderson: J. T. Boseman, Jack Henderson, Nekaun Swinger, Dr. Beatrice Thompson
- From Clemson-Central: Rosa Grayden; Dalphine Jameson; Pastor Dr. Zackary Johnson
- From Pendleton: Terence Hassan
- From Oconee County: Shelby Henderson; Kathy Jenkins; Helen Rosemond-Saunders

## Questions?

Questions about the cemetery project?

Email [afamburials@clemson.edu](mailto:afamburials@clemson.edu) or call (864) 656-8855