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Welcome to the Official Texas State Historical
Marker Dedication Ceremony
honoring the

“Sugar Land 95”

State Convict Lease Labor Camp Cemetery

Thursday, June 19, 2025

10:00 a.m.

James Reese Career and Technical Center
12300 University Blvd, Sugar Land, TX 77479



“SUGAR LAND 95” STATE CONVICT LEASE LABOR CAMP CEMETERY

In 2018, evidence of human burials were discovered during the construction phase of the James Reese Career and Technical Center. Further investigations revealed a large, unmarked cemetery. The vast majority of those interred were convict laborers leased to area plantation owners Edward H. Cunningham and Littleberry A. Ellis from 1878-1911, until the site was converted into a state prison farm.

Archival data suggests at least 95 individuals were buried here from 1879-1909, known during rediscovery as the “Sugar Land 95.” Archival names for the site include J.A. Freeman Camp, L.A. Ellis Camp #1, L.A. Ellis Camp #2, C.G. Ellis Camp #1, and Imperial State Prison Farm Camp #1.

Convict labor developed after the Civil War, due to a serious deficit of farm labor after the emancipation of enslaved people and the death of a quarter million men due to war. To find sources of cheap labor, lawmakers began passing laws, such as the Texas Black Codes (1866). These laws took advantage of loopholes within the 13th Amendment, allowing criminal conviction of freedmen for petty crimes or behaviors such as vagrancy. These actions overwhelmed the prison system. State lawmakers turned to convict leasing to provide the state with income and planters with labor, while relieving prison overcrowding. African Americans, who made up 30 percent of Texas’ population but 60 percent of the convict population, were leased to local landowners to cultivate crops, primarily cotton and sugarcane, many times on plantations where they performed the same labor earlier as enslaved people. Corporal punishment guidelines were ignored and food and clothing quotas rarely met. In 1911, the era of convict labor camps gave way to a new era of state-owned prison farms. The discovery of this cemetery is instrumental in developing a full understanding of the convict labor system and its effects in this area.

Dedication Program

INDOOR CEREMONY

National Anthem	Soloist Derrick Black
Welcome	Chris Godbold <i>Chairman, Fort Bend County Historical Commission</i>
Invocation	Pastor Trey Allen <i>The Vineyard Church</i>
Acknowledgements & Recognition of Dignitaries	Marilyn Moore <i>President, Friends of the Sugar Land 95</i>
Remarks	Kristin Tassin <i>FBISD Board President</i>
Remarks	Alicia Costello <i>Texas Historical Commission</i>
Presentation of Proclamations	Elected Officials
Keynote Presentation	Chassidy Olainu-Alade <i>Chief Communications Officer, FBISD</i>

PROCESSION TO GRAVESITE

Amazing Grace	Gregory “Saxman” Daniels
“Echoes in the Earth”	Jade Coleman
Recognition of the Cemetery & Descendants	Catrina Banks-Whitley & Abigail Fisher <i>Principal Research Group</i>
Undertold Markers Program	Ana Alicia Acosta <i>Vice-Chair & Markers Committee Chair, FBCHC</i>
Marker Inscription	Johnnie Sue Davis <i>Sugar Land 95 Relative</i>
Unveiling of Marker	Relatives of the Sugar Land 95
Call to Action	Honorable Judge Tyra McCullum <i>Presiding Judge for Fort Bend County Court at Law No. 2</i>
Call to Action & Benediction	Pastor Ira Coleman <i>Christian Community Church</i>
Closing	Chassidy Olainu-Alade & Marilyn Moore