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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
Chairman, Fort Bend County Historical Commission

Invocation..... Pastor Trey Allen
The Vineyard Church

Acknowledgements & Recognition of Dignitaries..... Marilyn Moore
President, Friends of the Sugar Land 95

Remarks..... Kristin Tassin
FBISD Board President

Remarks..... Alicia Costello
Texas Historical Commission

Presentation of Proclamations..... Elected Officials

Keynote Presentation..... Chassidy Olainu-Alade
Chief Communications Officer, FBISD

PROCESSION TO GRAVESITE

Amazing Grace..... Gregory “Saxman” Daniels

“Echoes in the Earth”..... Jade Coleman

Recognition of the Cemetery & Descendants..... Catrina Banks-Whitley
& Abigail Fisher
Principal Research Group

Undertold Markers Program..... Ana Alicia Acosta
Vice-Chair & Markers Committee Chair, FBCHC

Marker Inscription..... Johnnie Sue Davis & Sherra Aguire
Sugar Land 95 Relative

Unveiling of Marker..... Relatives of the Sugar Land 95

Call to Action Honorable Judge Tyra McCullum
Presiding Judge for Fort Bend County Court at Law No. 2

Closing Remarks Chassidy Olainu-Alade & Marilyn Moore

Benediction..... Pastor Ira Coleman
Christian Community Church