

# Researchers seek correct procedures for headstone

The headstone of an Augusta educator who died in 1888 will soon be returned to its rightful place.

The long-lost tombstone of Cora Freeman was found several months ago in an isolated area within the River Island development off Blackstone Camp Road in Evans.

Freeman's 3-foot headstone had been moved from its original resting spot in the Summerville Cemetery to the Lucy Craft Laney residence, where it vanished after a fire destroyed the home in 1986.

"What we have to do is make sure we do it historically correct and follow the guidelines of preservation," said Christine Miller-Betts, the executive director of the Lucy Craft Laney Museum of Black History. "We've been doing a lot of research in that area."

Freeman, a Massachusetts native and friend to Laney, started teaching at Haines Normal and Industrial Institute in Augusta in 1885. Freeman was just 26 years old when she died from an illness.

After discovering where the headstone rested, Augusta historian Dr. Jimmy Carter and Miller-Betts both wanted to see the marker moved back to the original burial site in the Summerville Cemetery on Fitten Street in Augusta.

Developers of the Evans property recently delivered the nearly 300-pound stone to the museum, Miller-Betts said.

"It's nice to have it here where we know where it is," Miller-Betts said. "When we find out what the proper thing is to do, then we'll do it."

Initially, the developers weren't aware that such a headstone even existed on the site.

"I wasn't aware of anything," said Vic Mills, of Blanchard and Calhoun. "It never showed up on any survey maps, but you know, sometimes people miss things."

If a site contains human remains, developers must follow a complex process outlined in state laws.

"It varies by state," Mills said. "But there's a formal process you go through, and it's one you never want to have to go through."

The tombstone will remain inside the museum until Miller-Betts and her staff have time to properly review their research. They're also awaiting responses from experts they contacted at the University of South Carolina in Columbia.

"The only thing that we are waiting for now is to finish our research in regards to should we do anything to change it or should we leave it as it is?"

she said.

Miller-Betts hopes to move Freeman's headstone into the Summerville Cemetery by the end of April.

"Everybody's happy and will be happier when it's back in the cemetery," she said.

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