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ACADEMY STUDENTS UNRAVELING MYSTERIES  
OF BLACK CEMETERY

by Phillip Taylor

Studying the C. C. Moore family burial plot at Glenwood Cemetery, Jeremy Murdock and his classmates from the Academy for Science and Foreign Language walked around the cement border of the site trying to figure the ways in which the bodies might lie. Surviving family members had told the eighth grade students that only six bodies were buried in the plot, but Jeremy, 13, was convinced it could hold at least three more.

But the academy students have their work cut out for them as only one tombstone—that of a son, Antonio Maceo Moore—remains in the burial plot. "Why is this tombstone all the way back here?" Jeremy asked as he outlined how nine sites could easily fit in the plot. "They probably buried someone here and there and there."

Unraveling some of the mysteries lying in Glenwood Cemetery, a black Huntsville gravesite tucked between West Clinton Avenue and Memorial Parkway exit ramps of Interstate 565, is one of the goals of the academy's Heritage class. According to Principal Ollye Doyle Conley, academy teachers formed the class to encourage students to research and enjoy history, particularly the history of their families and community. And they combined the talents of science teacher Robert Rice, social studies teacher Barbara Stevens and English teacher Sheryl Lee to do so.

But for their first project—documenting the African-American presence in Huntsville from the 1800s to 1910—the students and teachers found that little information besides slave records is available.

Science teacher Robert Rice said eighth-graders were concerned that knowledge of early African-American contributions to Huntsville could be lost, especially after a tour of Maple Hill Cemetery and downtown Huntsville. "We found that it hasn't been documented very well," Rice said. "There is very little shown in written Huntsville history."

So the class collects information from several different resources. Classroom visitors have included local historian Dr. Frances Roberts and Brenda Webb, manager of cemeteries for the City of Huntsville. And support has come from the community, the school's PTA and others. The detective work eventually led to on-site observations including visits to Glenwood Cemetery.

"Too bad they kept such bad records and didn't maintain this place," Jeremy said during a recent visit. "Only half of the hundred graves have records and only half have tombstones."

The class started with the family burial plot of C. C. Moore—Huntsville's first African-American postal worker—mainly because his grandson, Ronald, lives in Huntsville. Ronald Moore, who lives in the white Victorian home on Pulaski Pike which his grandfather purchased in 1903, met with the class to offer photographs, records and an oral history for their research. From Moore they learned that C. C. Moore was an entrepreneur who operated a fruit stand, cafe, drugstore, shoe shop and restaurant at various times. The branches of his family tree included a son who fought in the Spanish-American War, another who fought in World War I, and a daughter who died in college from a dormitory fall.

But answers, the students found, often lead to more questions. Why were tombstones never placed over the sites of the other family members buried in Glenwood? Who is actually buried there? Why did Moore hold so many jobs? What connections did Moore and others in Glenwood have with people who were buried in Maple Hill?

By answering some of those and other questions, the students will have the feeling of making a contribution to their community, said Roxanne Wysock, president-elect of the academy's PTA. "We tell them, 'You'll be a part of history if you gather this information. And you can take some credit for this.'" Mrs. Wysock said. "They will feel some ownership with this cemetery."

The academy continues to search for information, documents and photographs which illustrate early black history in Huntsville. Those interested can call the school at 851-4100.

*(This article courtesy of The Huntsville Times)*



*(Photograph by Alan Warren, Huntsville Times)*