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Marker back at educator's grave

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By Jenna Martin

Staff Writer, Twitter @JennaNMartin

As the headstone of a 19th century educator and aide to Lucy Craft Laney returned to its rightful resting place Friday, many of those attending the ceremony hoped it would close the chapter in a 25-year mystery.

One man has his doubts.

"This is what we call a traveling tombstone," Dr. Jimmy Carter, an Augusta historian, said with a smile. "We'd better keep our eye on this thing, because it might start walking again."

A ceremony was held at the Fitten Street Summerville Cemetery in Augusta to recognize Cora Freeman, who died of illness at just 26 years of age in 1888.

Freeman, a Massachusetts native, started teaching alongside Laney at Haines Normal and Industrial Institute in 1885.

After her death, Freeman was buried in Summerville Cemetery. Her 3-foot-tall granite tombstone, however, had been resting on the back porch of the Laney residence for years.

In 1986, the marker vanished from the residence after a fire destroyed the home.

The stone reappeared in 2009 when developers cleaned up an unkempt area near River Island off Blackstone Camp Road in Evans.

Developers soon gave it to the Lucy Craft Laney Museum of Black History.

Carter was among the few people who knew that Freeman's headstone disappeared from the Laney home after the fire.

After he was contacted by museum Director Christine Miller-Betts, they paired up to make

◀ 1 / 2 ▶



Jenna Martin/Staff

Those gathering Friday at the Summerville Cemetery ceremony for Cora Freeman bow their heads for a dedication prayer given by the Rev. Nathaniel Irvin of Old Storm Branch Baptist Church.

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sure Freeman's marker returned to where it belonged.

From there, Miller-Betts and museum historian Corey Rogers researched what needed to be done to properly take the stone, which remained wrapped up in the museum's storage room, back to the cemetery.

"We wanted something to represent her as well as to fit in with the fabric of this cemetery," Miller-Betts said.

Though the whereabouts of Freeman's actual grave in the cemetery are still not known, cemetery records document that she was buried there in 1888, said Andrena Carpenter, of the Sand Hills Neighborhood Association (Summerville Cemetery is in Sand Hills).

As a tribute to Freeman, her headstone was positioned near the front of the cemetery, where it sits on a new granite base. Plans to add a cobblestone walkway to the stone and into the cemetery are under way.

"This marker had been traveling from place to place, so we decided that the main entrance would be a nice place for this trailblazer," Carpenter said.

Pupils from Murphey Middle and Lucy Craft Laney High schools attended the ceremony, which included prayers, remarks by those involved in returning Freeman to the cemetery and a short musical performance.

For Miller-Betts, the program gave closure to her nearly two-year quest to bring Freeman's tombstone to its initial resting spot.

"It's awesome ... that we could pull it from a pile in Columbia County and bring it back to a place that represents her the way she should be," Miller-Betts said.

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