

AROUND THE REGION

Canines help discover forgotten history



Photos by Jason Fochtman / Staff photographer

Emmett, a Labrador mix with K-9 Search and Rescue of Texas, works to locate unmarked graves Saturday. Many early burials in the 181-year-old site are believed to have had wooden markers.

Cadaver dogs Emmett and Bean sniff out five unmarked graves in Old Methodist Cemetery, but many more are suspected

MONTGOMERY — Specially trained dogs sniffed around at the Old Methodist Cemetery on Saturday morning to identify forgotten and unmarked graves at the historic site.

The project is an effort from the Montgomery Historical Society to locate unmarked bodies that have been buried for more than 100 years. The cemetery stopped allowing families to bury people after 1868.

Ann Meador, a society spokeswoman, said there are “a lot more” people buried at the cemetery than there are markers.

“Back in the day, oftentimes, they had wooden crosses or markers which have deteriorated over time,” Meador said. “Eventually you have a cemetery that has a few tombstones, but the wooden markers have gone.”

The so-called “cadaver dogs,” who trained with the K-9 Search and Rescue Unit of Texas, were also used to help identify bodies at the Conroe Community Cemetery last March.

Mary Jane Boyd, founder of the canine organization, said she viewed the invitation from the historical society as a community service opportunity.

“It’s good training for our dogs and good for us,” Boyd said.

She said the dogs have been trained to pick up on the scent of human remains. After two dogs pick up on a scent, a person will mark the spot with a flag.

Boyd noted that the condition of the ground at Old Methodist made it more difficult for the dogs to pick up on the scent.

By Noor Adatia

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“When something in the soil is really dense and hard packed, it’s hard for the scent to get out,” she explained.

Despite the density of the soil, the two dogs, Emmett and Bean, were able to identify five new graves.

The spots marked at the Montgomery site will later be confirmed using ground penetrating radar, which can detect an underground mass. The system, which costs tens of thousands of dollars, is a more definite way to determine where an unmarked body is buried.

Meador, who also serves on the board of the Conroe Community Center, said it is important to acknowledge the existence of the

people buried in the graves and recognize their contributions to society.

Old Methodist Cemetery currently has two cenotaphs, monuments or empty tombs that honor people buried elsewhere.

One recognizes Methodist preachers who established churches in Texas and the other honors Revolutionary War soldier Owen Shannon who is said to have been buried in Montgomery.

“We think it’s important to recognize the culture that existed here before the present day people did,” she said.

“These people are the people who have made the community what they are now. We’re standing on their shoulders.”

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Mary Jane Boyd pulls out gear Saturday to locate unmarked graves at Old Methodist Cemetery in Montgomery.