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JOHNS CREEK

Johns Creek to acquire, preserve slave cemetery on Medlock Bridge

By **Adrienne Murchison**

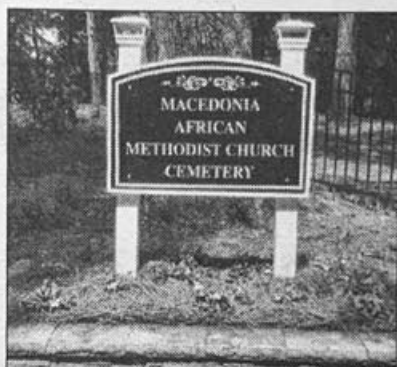
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Johns Creek will use eminent domain to acquire and preserve the graves of former enslaved people and their relatives.

Johns Creek City Council approved the \$52,000 purchase of Macedonia African Methodist Church Cemetery property Monday, though the owner of the nearly two-acre property is unknown. The funds will be kept with Fulton County Superior Court, an official said, and would be forwarded to the state if the city doesn't find an owner.

The cemetery on Medlock Bridge Road near State Bridge Road contains at least 53 marked and unmarked graves and became a concern of Johns Creek residents as it fell into disrepair.

Records from old Milton County said the property was sold to Black residents for a church lot in 1905. A Johns Creek memo on the city's acquisition said graves could date to 1881. The city



Johns Creek City Council OK'd the \$52,000 purchase of the abandoned cemetery.

COURTESY OF KIRK CANADAY

has maintained the site since 2017.

Kirk Canaday, a member of the Johns Creek Historical Society, said he wants the abandoned cemetery restored and turned into a memorial garden. Recently, restoration specialist Chaunce Braun repaired two headstones.

Canaday pressed the city to purchase the cemetery after a headstone was stolen and others started breaking apart. The retiree said he wants the cemetery to be designated as a historical

site but first he wants to use ground-penetrating radar to locate graves he believes are outside the fence surrounding the property.

Canaday met descendants of two people buried at the site, he said, as well as Charles Grogan, a Black historian who focuses on early metro Atlanta gravesites. Grogan's research has assisted the Roswell Historical Society.

Grogan, an Ellenwood resident, started researching Macedonia Cemetery 10 years ago and has found copies of death certificates for 25 people buried there. He shared the information with Canaday on Saturday.

"I'm just interested in cemeteries where Black people are buried," Grogan said, adding that a priest sparked his interest years ago during a Christmas mass.

"The priest said there's two deaths and one is worse than the other," Grogan recalled. "The second death is when you die and no one remembers you were here."