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The Stevenson Legacy – The Grandchildren of Former Slaves

The work of history is most frequently done in archives, libraries and dusty cupboards. The task is to connect disparate facts into a narrative that reveals an insight or at least tells a good story.

On rare occasion a historic figure comes forward and tells their story. In December 2003, on a bright and warm winter day, we encountered such a historic figure.



Annie and Ed Stevenson - former slaves

Thanks to Ira Lott, a fellow researcher, who we regularly encountered at the Texana Department of the San Antonio Public Library, a meeting was organized at the **St. Hedwig** Cemetery in east Bexar County. The purpose of the meeting was to explore the prospect of having the site designated an Historic Texas Cemetery.

As the group of about a dozen individuals gathered, Ira Lott introduced us to these descendants and loved ones of the African-Americans buried in the cemetery. Among those we met were Ms. Voris Brumfield from California, Ms. Geraldine Smedler from San Antonio, Marion Elizabeth James and Ms. Allee Mitchell of Houston, Texas.



Map of St. Hedwig, Texas

Together we walked the cemetery and listened to stories about parents, aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters. A number, like Elsie Brahan born in 1825, had first come to the area over 150 years before as slaves.

At the eastern edge of the cemetery, Allee Mitchell pointed out the grave of Voris Stevenson James, her brother, a Tuskegee Airman. His story, including his tragic death near Schertz, Texas in a plane crash was recounted.



Allee J. Mitchell

It was a singular experience filled with humour, goodwill, discovery and a delightful lunch. Everyone was drawn to Allee Mitchell as she shared her knowledge and experiences. It was a memorable event.

The following day, we called Ira Lott to thank him for organizing the outing and especially for introducing us to Allee Mitchell. Ira chuckled and said “truly a great lady and modest. She would never tell you she has a building named in her honor at a university.”

Since that visit, Allee Mitchell and Marion James have died. Of the many things they told us on that day, one observation about former slave settlements by Allee Mitchell seemed especially poignant:

...one of the things that I've observed about the settlements (former slave settlements), they served a purpose for a period of time; people found shelter and home and that type of thing for a period of time. But it gave you an experience of safety for that period of time so that when it was time for you to move, at least you had a choice of moving away

Below, are brief biographies for Allee Mitchell and Voris Stevenson James, Ernestine James and Marion James the grandchildren of former slaves Annie and Ed Stevenson.



Stevenson grandchildren (from left to right: Marion, Voris, Allee, and Ernestine)

ALLEE WINIFRED JAMES MITCHELL

Allee Winifred James was born June 1, 1911 in St. Hedwig, Bexar, Texas. She was the daughter of Rev. LeRoy James and Carolyn Stevenson James. Her preschool years were spent on the farm of her grandparents, Edward and Annie Short Stevenson. The family moved to Seguin, where her mother taught school and Allee attended school. Both of her parents stressed the need to obtain an education. She graduated from Ball High School. Allee attended Guadalupe College in Seguin, and the Prairie View A&M, where she received a Bachelor of Science Degree. After graduation, Allee began teaching home economics. Deciding to earn her Masters Degree in Home Economics, Allee attended Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas. There was not a university in Texas where an African American could do graduate work at that time.





Sign at Texas Southern University

In November of 1946, Allee married Leonadus H. Mitchell in Seguin, Texas. In 1948, Allee began teaching Home Economics at Texas Southern University in Houston, Texas. Allee studied child psychology to begin a child development laboratory at Texas Southern University. Allee became one of the driving forces in the development of the Head Start Program. In honor of Allee, the THSA (Texas Head Start Association) awards two Allee J. Mitchell Scholarships each year to Head Start/EHS staffs that are furthering their education. The Texas Southern University Allee J. Mitchell Center on the Family is named in her honor.

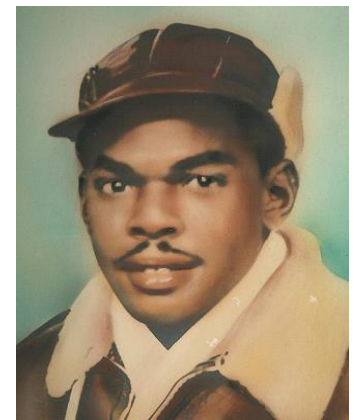
Allee and Leon Mitchell had a daughter, Voris Steene Mitchell Brumfield born in 1947 in San Angelo, Texas.

Allee died February 18, 2005 in California; she is buried in the Paradise North Cemetery in Houston, Texas.

VORIS STEVENSON JAMES

TUSKEGEE AIRMAN

According to his death certificate, he was born to Rev. Le Roy James and Carolina L. Stevenson in St. Hedwig, Bexar, TX on April 11, 1919. He attended Guadalupe Jr. College and Prairie View State College.



Tuskegee Airmen Patches for the 99th FS, 100th FS, and the 332nd FG

On April 25, 1941, he enlisted in the Army Air Corps. He trained at San Angelo, Texas and Chanute Field, Illinois as an aircraft armorer, and was attached to the famous

99th fighter squadron at Tuskegee Army Air Field in Alabama, under then Capt. B.O. Davis, Jr. (later General and Commander of the WWII Tuskegee Airmen). He also served with the 100th fighter squadron, attached to the 332nd fighter group at Selfridge Field, Michigan. Commissioned 2nd Lt. in December 1944, and served as a B-25 bomber pilot. He also served with 477th. In July of 1946, he returned to inactive status, and was assigned to the 178th at Brooks Field in San Antonio, Texas.

On November 4, 1942, he married Geraldine Williams (daughter of Mr. & Mrs. G. Williams) at the East End Baptist Church. They had 2 children, Alfred and Carolyn.

Voris was killed on Sunday morning, December 8, 1946 when his plane an AT-6 Trainer crashed near Schertz, Texas. He is buried with his parents in the St. Hedwig Cemetery in St. Hedwig, TX.

In 1947, the Voris S. James American Legion Post 245-A of Seguin, TX was named in his honour.

ERNESTINE JAMES

Ernestine was born in St. Hedwig, Texas on August 18, 1907 in St. Hedwig, Texas to Rev. LeRoy and Carolyn Stevenson James. She graduated from Ball High School in Seguin, Texas. Ernestine earned a Bachelor of Science from Tillotson University and a Masters of Education from Texas Southern University. Ernestine taught for many years in Seguin, Texas.

On February 18, 1933, she married Henry Farrington Sheppard, who was also an educator and school principal. They had a daughter, Winifred Sheppard. Ernestine died on August 22, 1959 in Seguin. She and her husband are buried in the St. Hedwig Cemetery with her parents and brother, Voris.

MARION ELIZABETH JAMES

Marion was born March 30, 1909 in St. Hedwig, Texas to Rev. LeRoy and Carolyn Stevenson James. She began school at the Midway School in St. Hedwig with her sister, Ernestine. Marion's mother was the teacher for grades one through three at Midway. She next attended school in Seguin, graduating from high school there. Marion attended Guadalupe College in Seguin. Marion became an educator like her sisters.

About 1933, she married Lorenzo E. Kelly, a pharmacist. They had two children, Jean and Reginald. Marion died November 11, 2005 in Houston. She is buried in Paradise North Cemetery in Houston with her husband and her sister Allee.

Black History Month Article List

- **Born in Slavery: Felix Haywood**
 - **Born in Slavery: Rev. William Green**
 - **Declaration of Secession**
 - **Freedmen – Black and White**
 - **Lucy and the Indians on the Elam Plantation**
 - **Bexar County Slave Patrols**
 - **Runaways - San Antonio**
 - **San Antonio Slave Ordinance**
 - **The Plantation Comes to Bexar County**
 - **The Stevenson Legacy – The Grandchildren of Former Slaves**
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