

Pine Hill African-American Cemetery, Thorsby

By Derric Scott, August 7, 2025.

The Pine Hill African-American Cemetery is in the woods about 300 feet northeast of the Thorsby Memory Gardens Cemetery on US Hwy 31 in Thorsby, Alabama, in the center of the SE ¼ of Section 36 Township 23 Range 13 East.

In the 1870s-1880s the community of Pine Hill was located between the current towns of Jemison and Thorsby and was predominately a timber settlement. Near the end of that timeframe the community activities were moving to the Jemison area and/or the Thorsby area (then called Strasburg). While the Pine Hill community was active a white cemetery was established in the northern part (near Jemison) called "Pine Hill Cemetery" and an African-American cemetery was established in the southern part (near Thorsby), called "Pine Hill Cemetery - Colored." The earliest known grave in this cemetery (near Thorsby) is that of Jessie Davis, son of John and Matilda Davis, born May 5, 1897, died June 15, 1898. The last known grave is that of WWI veteran Dave Campbell, born Nov 20, 1892, died Apr 8, 1960.

The Pine Hill African-American Cemetery was in active use until the 1960s and the names of the burials are representative of most of the African-American families of central Chilton County. Jemison Mayor Eddie Reed said it was likely owned at one point by his great-grandfather, Andy Reed, when he pastored a nearby church in the early 20th Century. Mayor Reed's father Curtis maintained the cemetery while he was able, at least into the 1970s. It was likely not cared for at all after that point. Mayor Reed said his grandparents and great-grandparents were buried in the cemetery and that, as a child when the property in-between was all farm land, he could see the headstones from US Hwy 31.

For many decades this was perhaps the primary African-American community cemetery in the Jemison/Thorsby area. There are three known World War I veterans buried in the cemetery (Dave Campbell, Martin Hatchel, and Sam Williams) and there is a strong possibility that a U. S. Veteran of the Civil War from the U. S. Colored Troops is interred here (Owen McDaniel). In addition to the 18 visible memorials, research of death certificate burial locations indicates there may be as many as 100, or more, graves. It is believed that burials in the cemetery slowed and stopped as other church cemeteries became more widely used in the 1950s and 1960s, such as Holly Grove Baptist in Jemison.

Today the cemetery has no documented owner, although it is a separate plot from the surrounding properties. There has been no recorded deed found for it in the research to date. Very little documentation has been found of the possibly associated church, or where it may have been located, but it is speculated that the church building was the former white Baptist Church building at Pine Hill and that it was bought after that congregation moved into the town of Jemison in the 1880s. One anecdote said that the church was destroyed in the devastating 1932 tornadoes – and there are newspaper reports that an African-American school was destroyed in that specific area (which may have also been the church building).