

A VISIT TO USF DEC 2023 - E FERNANDEZ-SACCO

WHAT LIES BENEATH

What Lies Beneath: The search for unmarked burial grounds in Hillsborough County

The Waterman Exhibit Gallery, Institute for Forensic Anthropology & Applied Science, Social Science Building (SOC), USF 15 Sep 2023- 30 Jan 2024

<https://www.usf.edu/arts-sciences/institutes/ifaas/programs/what-lies-beneath-exhibit.aspx>

**Why did so many
federal works
projects
build over
cemeteries?**

**Why are there
so many unmarked
cemeteries?**

**What can we do
to perserve
cemeteries under
structures
homes and
roadways?**

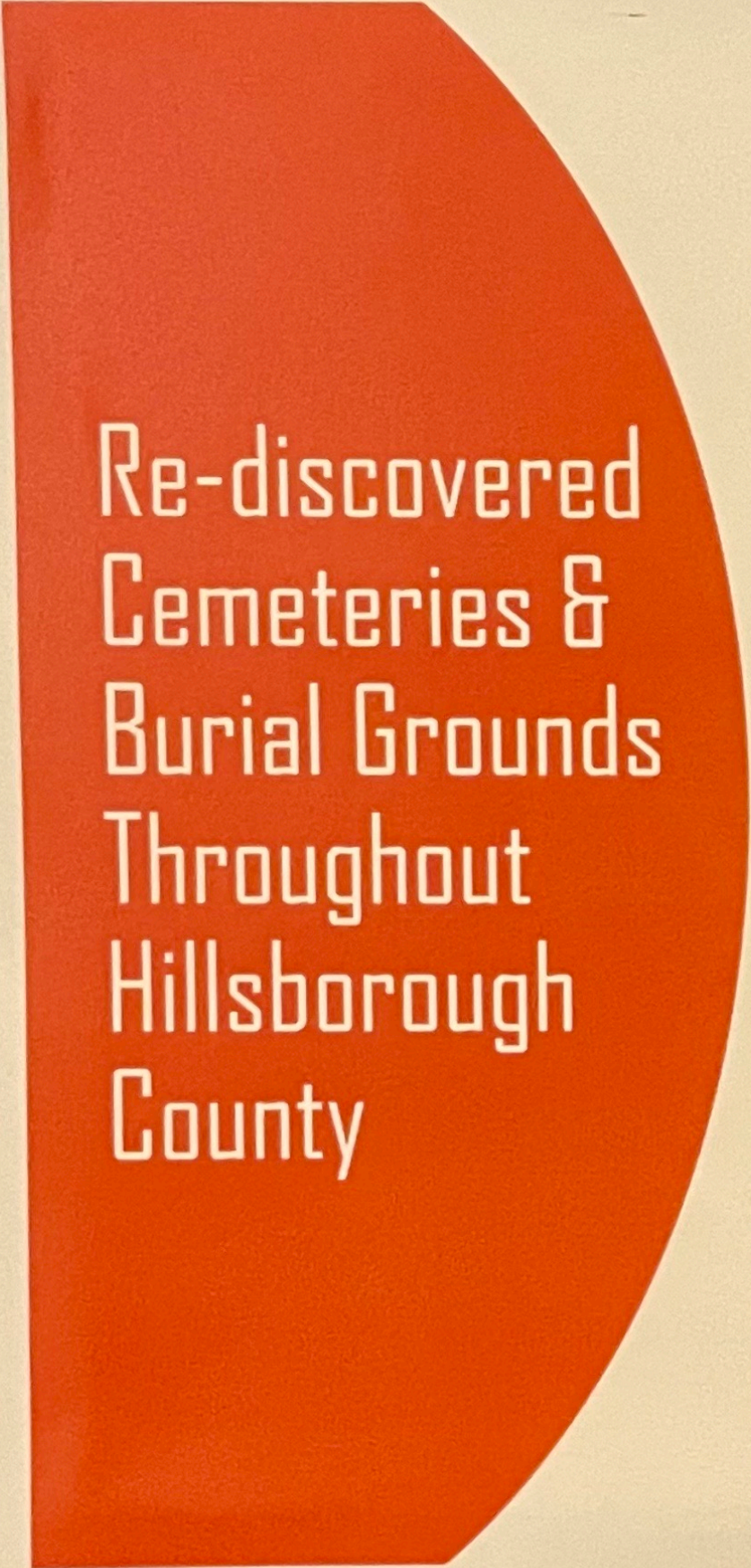
**How do we
prevent
cemeteries
from
disappearing?**

**When was the
cemetery moved?
Or was it?**

**What about
private property
rights?**

**Who will
maintain the
graveyards into
perpetuity?**

What lies beneath...



Re-discovered Cemeteries & Burial Grounds Throughout Hillsborough County

Through this investigation, more than forty sites were identified as possible burial grounds. Several sites were later found to associate with other known cemeteries.

Due to the imprecise location data of some burial grounds, only their general vicinities could be determined and none have clear borders.

This map plots the locations, known at this time. Research into these sites is still on-going and all of the sites listed here were identified through the IFAAS-DHHC-HBCC collaborative effort (2020-2023).

Persimmon Hill Golf Course & Pepin Beverage Distributor
402 N 50th St, Tampa

This parcel sold in 1956 and again 1987, becoming the Persimmon Hill Golf Course and later the Pepin Beverage Distributor. The 1946 plat map shows this parcel with a cemetery marked on the map.

Several residents in the community told USF researchers that they golfed at Persimmon Hill and that burials did extend across the road onto this parcel. They further stated that headstones were still evident along the fence on the south/east side of 50th Ave, and that it was an African American burial ground.

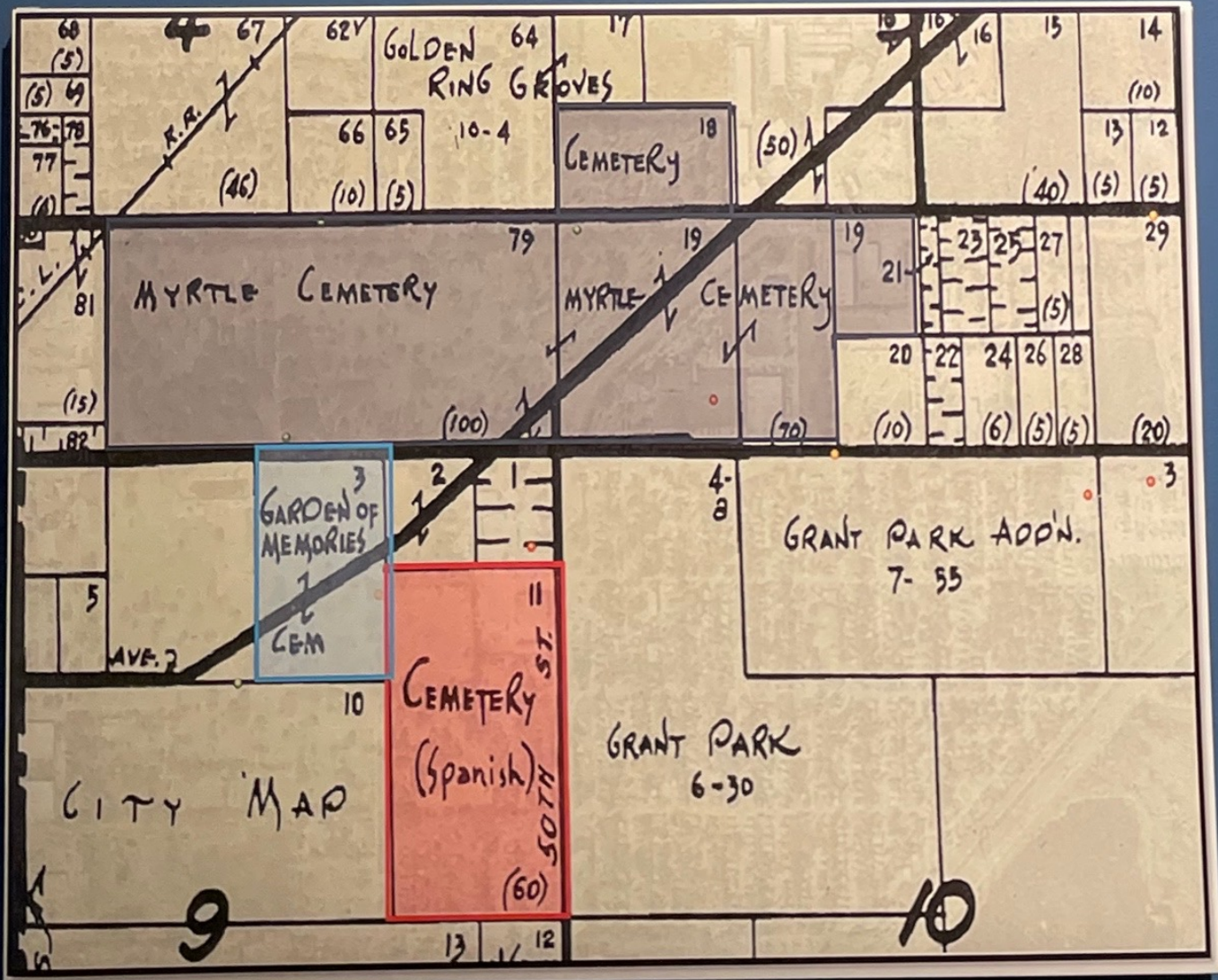


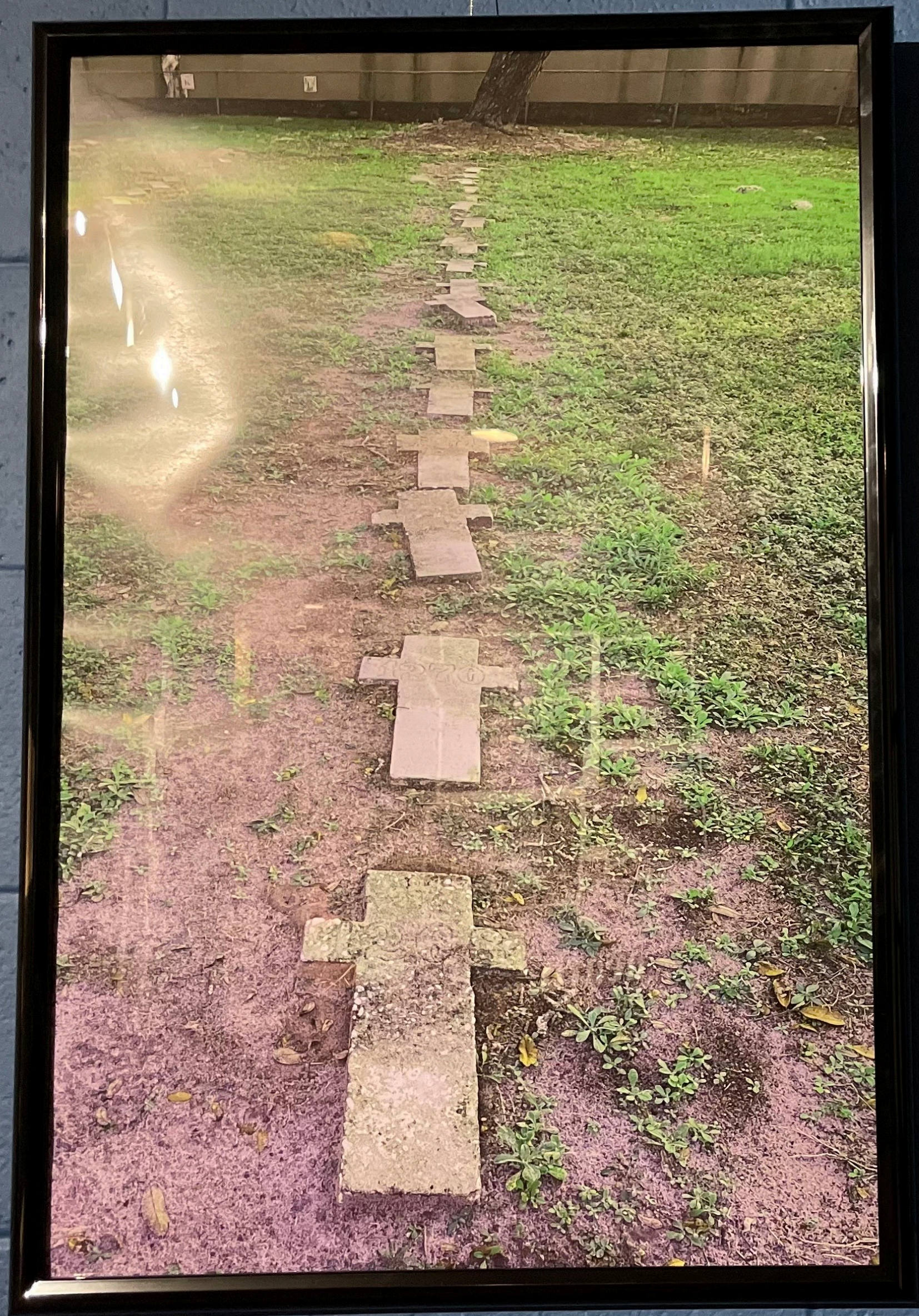
Myrtle Hill Cemetery
(aka Myrtle Hill Memorial Park and Myrtle Hill Burial Park)

The Myrtle Hill Cemetery was created in 1917 on 105 acres and later expanded. More than 50 acres of cemetery land were sold to several entities by Myrtle Hill Park, Inc. and developed. Numerous land records for these parcels were located, but not all could be found. Several deeds state a cemetery was on the property at the time of the sale.

Spanish Park East Cemetery
4601 E Lake Ave, Tampa, FL

This parcel (red box) appears to have been divided between the HC School Board & Centro Espanol de Memorial Park, a Mutual Aid society & cemetery. Deed records indicate burials were present. Historic maps and burial records (1911 burial records and 1913 City of Tampa Directory) show this entire space as a cemetery.





“Lost and Abandoned”

Burial grounds and cemeteries are recognized as important public spaces and links to the past, but we lose track of them all the time. The perception of recently re-discovered cemeteries is that they represent “Abandoned & Neglected” cemeteries. The category “Abandoned & Neglected” is a familiar problem throughout the United States and Florida Statutes provide guidelines for documentation, protection, removal, and access rights.

A portion of the burial grounds and cemeteries identified through this research fall within the category of “Abandoned and Neglected.” In other words, they were family burial plots or early pioneer burial grounds that fell out of living memory as descendants either died or moved away.

There are also cemeteries that were in use until modern times and then removed, or erased, from the landscape and omitted from maps and written documentation through a number of land transactions that essentially forced them into a state of abandonment. In such cases, the cemeteries or sections of cemeteries are often Africa American, Afro-Cuban, Black Seminole, or were classified as “Colored” during segregation. The important difference is that such cemeteries were actively in use during the 20th century and living descendants have direct first-hand knowledge about the burial ground or even remember visiting the site when the graves were still marked in their youth (i.e., the *Keystone Memorial Park Cemetery*).

In 2020, USF faculty Erin Kimmerle, Christian Wells, Lori Collins, Ben Mittler and their students were asked to locate the burial ground. Extensive fieldwork consisting of non-invasive methods, ground penetrating radar and soil probing, were undertaken. There has been extensive disturbance to the site due to the planting of an orange grove, construction of a horse barn and cabin, buried septic, driveway, and horse pasture. To-date only the general vicinity of the graveyard is known. Archaeological fieldwork, ethnographic interviews, and genealogical research in collaboration with families and the descendants are ongoing.

Historic census data and plat maps (as shown above) are used to geo-reference original property boundaries and determine who may be buried in the cemetery.



The Funeral

Funerals took place in the home, typically in the parlor. Later, the movement to host funerals in commercial spaces advocated for the term "living room" rather than parlor as part of their campaign. During this time, it was also common to use family burial lots purchased in private cemeteries or family burial grounds located on their own private property.



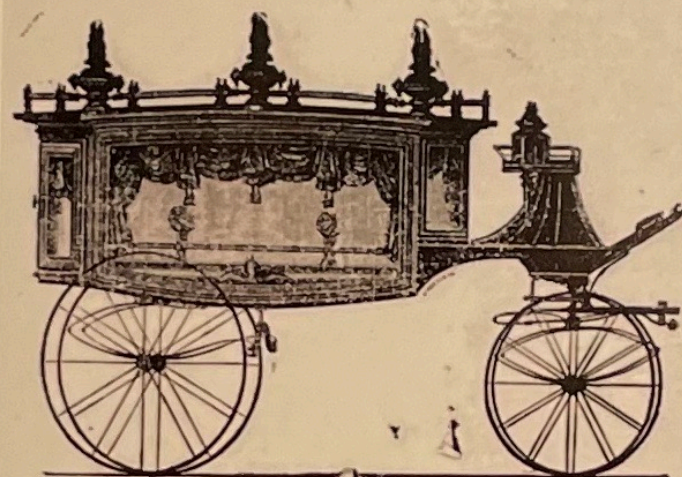
The Funeral Procession

Until the early 20th Century, caskets were often carried in a funeral procession from the home to the burial ground, either by hand or in a horse drawn carriage. As a result, every town and every neighborhood within larger cities, had a burial ground nearby. The average was about one burial ground every two miles.

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balming a specialty—Can furnish carriages or Landau—Owns
cemetery in West Tampa and Ybor—Also have a Receiving Vault



The Undertakers

In the 19th Century, cemeteries were often owned by the undertaker, a church, or the city. Tampa was once comprised of several different city governments and each incorporated city was required to manage their own burials when it came to paupers, the indigent, and unclaimed remains, including *Ybor City, Fort Brooke City, City of Port Tampa, City of West Tampa, Palma Ceia, City of North Tampa, and Gary City*



African American Pioneer Settlements

The Freedman's Bureau helped over 3,000 Black families purchase land throughout Florida following emancipation. These homesteads often served as the central point for emerging new Black communities such as Beallsville and the Garrison. Early graveyards associated with newly formed churches became sacred spaces, binding settlers to the land and one another. Several more settlements and possible churchyards re-discovered through this investigation represent some of these early Black pioneering communities including the Simmons Hammock, Keystone Memorial Park, and Fortune Settlements.

Redlining

Many burial grounds have been destroyed because of predatory land practices that redlined American cities ca. 1930-1950s, enabling city governments and developers to confiscate property deemed "slums" or "blithe" through eminent domain, forcing active cemeteries into a state of abandonment. Within the Tampa Bay area, this happened repeatedly with the construction of parking garages, sports arenas, condominium developments, schools, highways, and public housing projects.



Family Portraits

Gracious Shared by Michele Houston Hicks

Top Row (starting from left to right)

1. Rollie Allen Sr. Eldest son of former enslaved Savilla Allen and slave owner William L. Mobley. He and wife Barbara owned 81 acres in Keystone/Citrus Park
2. Barbara Hamilton Allen. Wife of Rollie Allen Sr.; Business Owner, one of Citrus Parks first Citrus Growers and Matriarch of Citrus Park Black Community
3. Beatrice Lewis Johnson (sitting) & Mable Lewis Walker (standing)- Daughters of Harry Lewis Sr. & Claudia Allen Lewis
4. James Dave Allen Sr. 2nd son of former enslaved Savilla Allen and slave owner William L. Mobley He and wife Callie owned 80 acres in Keystone-Citrus Park and Pretty Lake Picnic & Fishing Resort for Blacks in the surrounding communities.
5. Callie Allen- wife of James Dave Allen Sr.
6. Clyde Allen Graduation- son of JD Allen & Callie Allen
7. Raleigh Allen Jr. & Thelma Greener Allen
8. Richard & Beatrice Lewis Johnson

Middle Row

1. 1957 Mt. Pleasant AME Church Easter. Given Manning-Cross, Richardene Johnson-Cass, Edith Robinson, Doris Lewis Sherman, community members, & Michele Houston Hicks. All grandchildren & great-grandchildren of the Allen & Lewis family
2. 1966 Claudia Allen Lewis and Beatrice Lewis Johnson at Mt. Pleasant AME
3. Harry Lewis Jr. & Claudia Allen Lewis: Harry is the great grandson of former enslaved Harry Lewis Sr. and son of Toney Lewis (Builders/Owners of property original Mt. ME Church-rebuilt as current Mt. Pleasant AME Church and Hidden Cemetery). The church also served as the first unofficial school for the Black community(rebuilt as the Historical First Colored School of Citrus Park)
4. Hardy Lewis, cousin of Harry Lewis Jr.
5. LaGrande, Clyde, Fred, and Wayne Allen- sons of JD Allen Sr. and Callie Allen
6. 1967 Easter Sunday- GM Cross, Michael and Kevin Houston, Michele Houston Hicks at CA Lewis Homestead Gunn & Racetrack Rd.

Bottom Row

1. Claude Robinson & Arthur Richard Johnson working on family homestead in Keystone-Citrus Park
2. J. Dave Allen Sr.
3. Beatrice Lewis Johnson, Shady Richardson Hunter (infant) & Colleen Walker Shannon (child standing)
4. Raleigh Howell Allen III, son of Raleigh Jr. & Thelma Allen- 1st Black Veterinarian in Florida to pass exam and 1st Black vet in Keystone-Citrus Park with Fred Allen, former B school bus driver for HCSO
5. Lewis and Manning family members
6. Arthur Richard Johnson-MacDill AFB
7. Mable Lewis Walker, former supervisor of Hillsborough County Elementary Schools, owner of Walkers Motel with husband James S. Walker- first motel beach resort for the Black community
8. Saffner family member (last name DeVaughn)- Locomotive train detective who passed for white and later lost contact with the family

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7. Janice Walker Myers
8. 1960 photo of Mt. Pleasant AME being rebuilt: CA Lewis, JW Myers, Claudette Johnson Mack, ML Walker, & BLJohnson

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Metal Cross from the Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys Metal and Stone Sculpture

Following disturbance to unmarked graves at the former Arthur G. Dozier School for Boys in Marianna, Florida during agricultural development, thirty-one white metal crosses were placed in 1983 to memorialize the burial ground. A 2012-2016 investigation lead by Dr. Erin Kimmerle, Dr. Christian Wells and Dr. Antoinette Jackson, USF graduate students, and volunteers from over 20 agencies worked together to locate and excavate 55 unmarked burials. The remains of those who could be identified were repatriated to the families.

