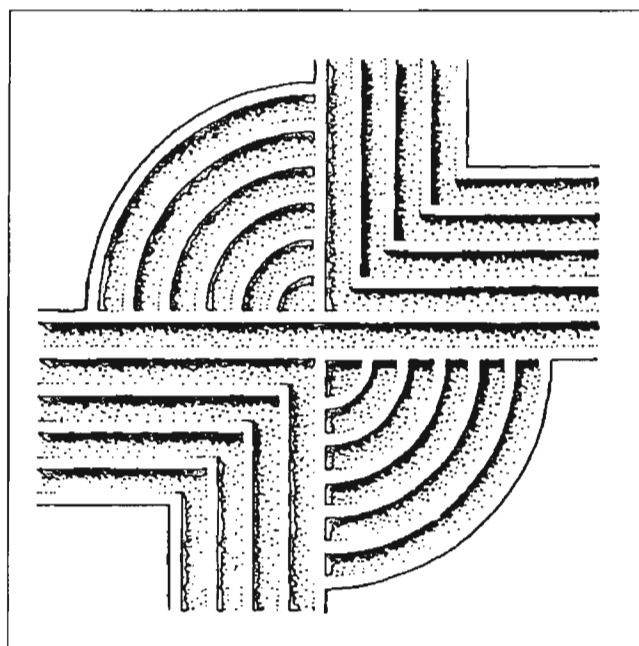


RECONNAISSANCE OF THE
BROWN CEMETERY, 38CH1619,
MARYVILLE AREA, CITY OF CHARLESTON



CHICORA RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION 185

**RECONNAISSANCE OF THE BROWN CEMETERY,
38CH1619, MARYVILLE AREA, CITY OF CHARLESTON**

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CHICORA RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION 185

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted as a result of a report that the Brown Cemetery, in the Maryville area of Charleston, west of the Ashley River, had been damaged. A brief reconnaissance to the cemetery allowed the condition to be photographically documented. Subsequently, a brief examination of archival and ownership records was conducted at the Charleston County Register of Mesne Conveyances and the South Carolina Historical Society.

The examination of the cemetery revealed that approximately one quarter of the cemetery, or about 0.7 acre, had been damaged by tracked equipment, most likely a bulldozer. It appears that initially a number of trees, some measuring at least 6 inches in diameter, were removed by chainsawing. Afterwards heavy equipment was used to push the cut trees, associated understory vegetation, and about 0.3 to 0.5 foot of soil southward to the edge of a water-filled borrow pit or marsh area. Incorporated in this spoil were fragments of monuments, bricks, shells, and probable grave goods. Portions of at least two damaged stones were found in the cleared area. Shells are present. A large number of fragmentary grave goods, including primarily ceramics and glassware, are also present. There is significant damage to nearby monuments, including breakage and displacement. It is also likely there has been damage to associated vegetation, although at present the only vegetation which can be identified as displaced, damaged, or destroyed, are flowering perennials.

Another push or spoil pile was found at the south-southwest edge of the site, although a large quantity of construction debris were incorporated, suggesting that this pile reflects primarily recent garbage which had been dumped on the edge of the cemetery.

The part damaged appears to be an original, or older, portion of the cemetery. The

remnants of this old portion are still found between the bulldozed area and the marsh to the west. No estimate of the number of graves either damaged or remaining is currently available. The portion of the cemetery which has not been damaged is recommended as potentially eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places based on the property's historical significance, its potential to contribute to research on African-American mortuary behavior, and for its ability to provide biocultural data.

Based on the available information, it appears that the damage was inflicted as a result of the cemetery's caretakers' efforts to "clean-up" the cemetery. It is highly unlikely that the equipment operator failed to realize the damage being inflicted to the stones and grave plots, although it is clear that some effort was made to avoid at least some monuments. As part of this reconnaissance, this cemetery was recorded with the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology and has been assigned the statewide site number of 38CH1619.

This case should be referred to the Charleston County Sheriff's Department and the Deputy State Archaeologist at the S.C. Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology for further investigation and possible criminal charges.

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INTRODUCTION

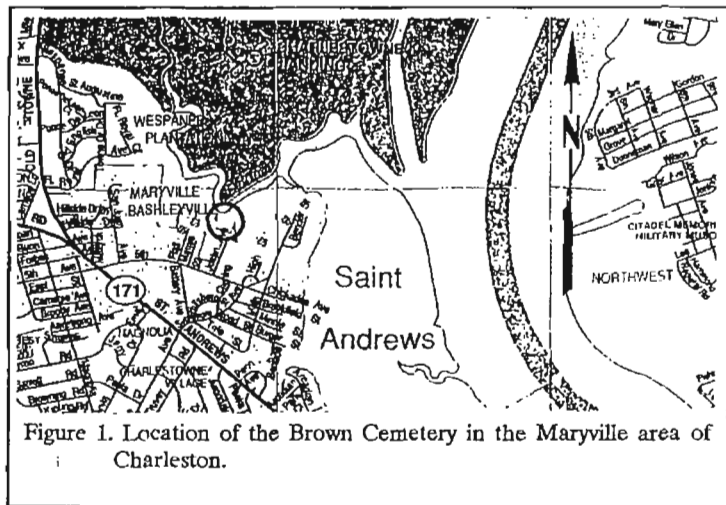
On Wednesday, February 21, Chicora Foundation received a report from a concerned citizen that an African-American cemetery had been heavily damaged by "bulldozing." Located in the Maryville section of Charleston west of the Ashley River, the graveyard was known as the Brown Cemetery. It was reported as being situated off Fifth Avenue, at the end of Justin Street on the marshes of Old Town Creek (Figure 1).

We were told only that the cemetery had apparently been damaged sometime between February 18 and February 21 by an unknown party. We understood from this initial telephone conversation that many stones had been bulldozed and were now in a large spoil pile. We also understood that many trees had been cut down and either pushed to the edge of the site or possibly trucked away. We were told that the portion bulldozed was the oldest portion of the cemetery, which was thought to date at least back to nineteenth century, although there was a local belief that it might be much earlier, perhaps dating from the eighteenth or possibly even seventeenth century. It was reported that grave goods were widely scattered across the bulldozed area.

We advised the citizen concerning the South Carolina law protecting cemeteries and, based on the limited available information, we recommended that the citizen contact the Charleston Coroner and Sheriff/Police to report the damage, file a complaint, and request a criminal investigation. We also advised the citizen to contact Dr. Jonathan Leader, the Deputy State Archaeologist with the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology.

On the evening of Thursday, February 22 we had the opportunity to speak with Ms. Lynette

Strangstad of Stone Faces, who was also advised of the damaged and who visited the site earlier that day. She reported essentially the same level of damage, noting that she observed several broken and/or fragmentary stones. She also had been told that the damage was apparently done by an individual hired by the "cemetery's caretaker" to "clean-up" the "old section."



Examination of Chicora's map files revealed that while the 1958 Charleston USGS topographic map, photo revised in 1979 shows the cemetery and identifies it as "Brown Cemetery," the 1943 edition fails to reveal its existence (Figures 2 and 3). The 1863 "Map of Charleston and its Defences" revealed that the cemetery was situated on a plantation owned by Brown. This suggests that the cemetery may date from the plantation and may have originally been used by African-American slaves.

With this limited information, the site was visited by the author of this report on Friday

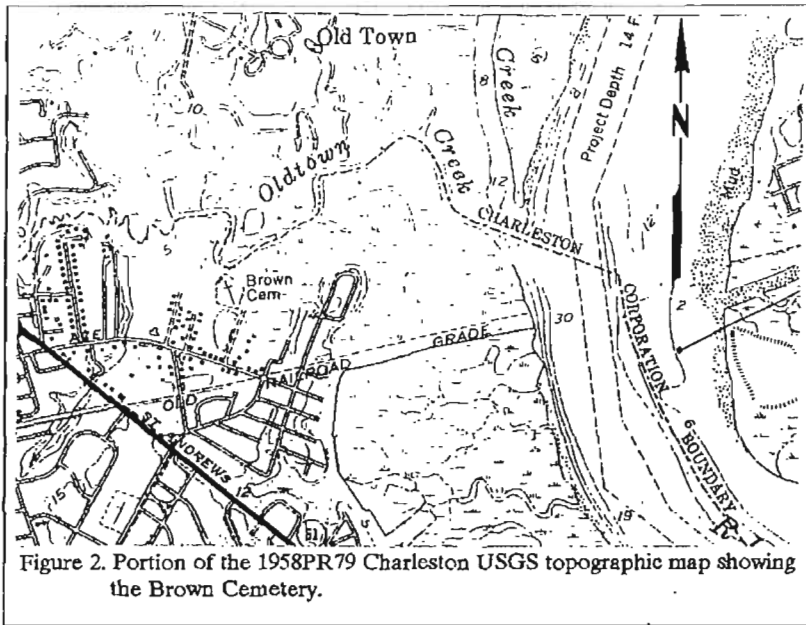


Figure 2. Portion of the 1958PR79 Charleston USGS topographic map showing the Brown Cemetery.

of the cemetery and evaluation of the damage. Hopefully this will be of assistance to those conducting a more detailed investigation of the cause of the damage.

morning, February 22, 1996. Approximately two person hours were spent walking the site, taking photographs, and examining the spoil piles. A sketch map of the site and a general inventory of grave goods were made. The amount of damage was estimated.

Afterwards the Charleston County Tax Assessor's Office was visited to determine the property owner of record and the Register of Mesne Conveyances was visited to review the most recent deed for the property. In addition, the South Carolina Historical Society was consulted for additional background information on the Maryville area of Charleston. Neither effort was exhaustive, but was only intended to provide some generalized background on the project area and confirm information provided by the local informant.

This report has been produced immediately after this initial visit of the site. The goal is to provide an overview

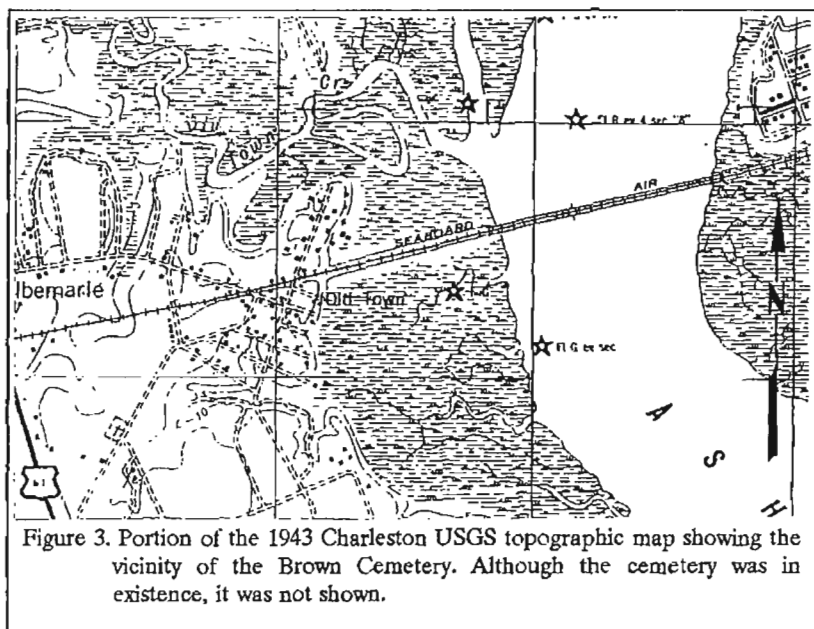
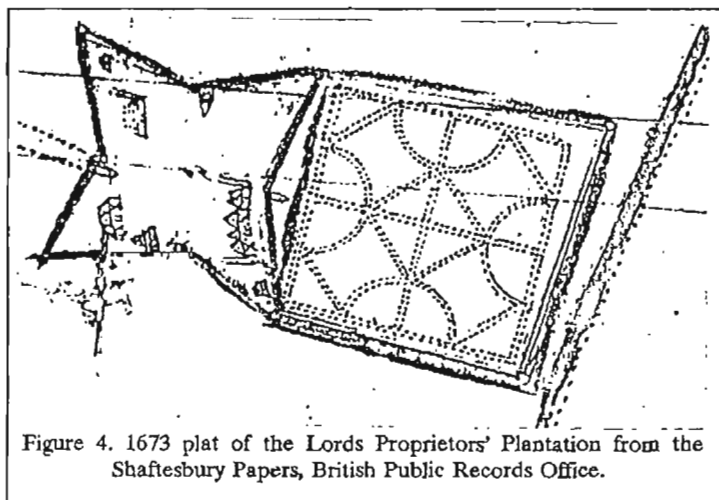


Figure 3. Portion of the 1943 Charleston USGS topographic map showing the vicinity of the Brown Cemetery. Although the cemetery was in existence, it was not shown.

BACKGROUND RESEARCH

The Brown Cemetery has not been previously recorded as an archaeological site, nor has it apparently attracted any previous attention outside of the community which has used it at least for the past 100 or so years. Even the Maryville area, in spite of its rich and unique history, is relatively unexplored. Although a portion of the Maryville area associated with the Lords Proprietors Plantation was documented for a National Register of Historic Places nomination in 1974 (form on file, South Carolina Historical Society, 30-15-157), it was apparently never processed and there is no listing on the National Register (Anonymous 1991). Nor is the area mentioned in the *Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Historic Preservation Plan* (Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Regional Planning Council 1972).



Piecing together at least a portion of the area's history, however, is not difficult. The general area is variously referred to in the early records as the "Proprietors' Plantation" or the "Governor's House," with the initial ownership under three of the Lords Proprietors — Ashley, Carteret, and

Colleton. It included a star-shaped palisade, in which Governor West had his "mansion" and around which were a number of additional buildings and gardens (Figure 4). The palisade may have encompassed something around 30 acres, although the total plantation ranged up to about 500 acres. Although no archaeological study has been conducted to identify this plantation, the palisaded fort is thought by some historians to have been situated in the Maryville area near the intersection of Main Street and Fifth Avenue and an abandoned railroad bed (Jaycocks 1973).

In 1675 the Proprietors attempted to divest themselves of the plantation and offered it to West as partial payment for his service as "store-keeper or agent." West declined and in 1696/7 and again in 1699 the plantation was included in grants to John Godfrey (Smith 1915). Although there seems to be little indication of the subsequent use of the tract, it continued to be called either "Governor's Point" or "Governor's Creek." Ownership continued in the Godfrey line, becoming known as Hillsborough Plantation in the eighteenth century. One of its owners, Dr. John Lining, was likely buried on a small island, known locally as "Ghost Island," in the marsh (Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Regional Planning Council 1972: 58). Lining is best known as a leader in colonial science.

About 1834 the property left the Godfrey line and was held by several different owners and this nineteenth century occupation has not been very carefully researched. The 1863 "Map of Charleston and its Defences," however, reveals that the owner at the time of the Civil War was "Brown" (Figure 5). It is likely from this antebellum owner that the cemetery took its name, suggesting that the cemetery was used by African-American slaves at

After the Civil War the property was apparently owned by C.C. Bowen, a sheriff of Charleston County during Reconstruction. In the 1880s the property, still known as "Hillsborough Plantation," was sub-divided and sold to local

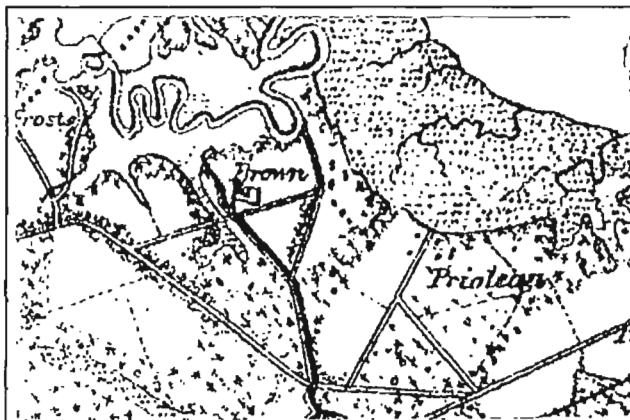


Figure 5. Portion of the 1863 "Map of Charleston and its Defences" showing the Brown Plantation.

blacks by General W.N. Taft and the widow of C.C. Bowen.

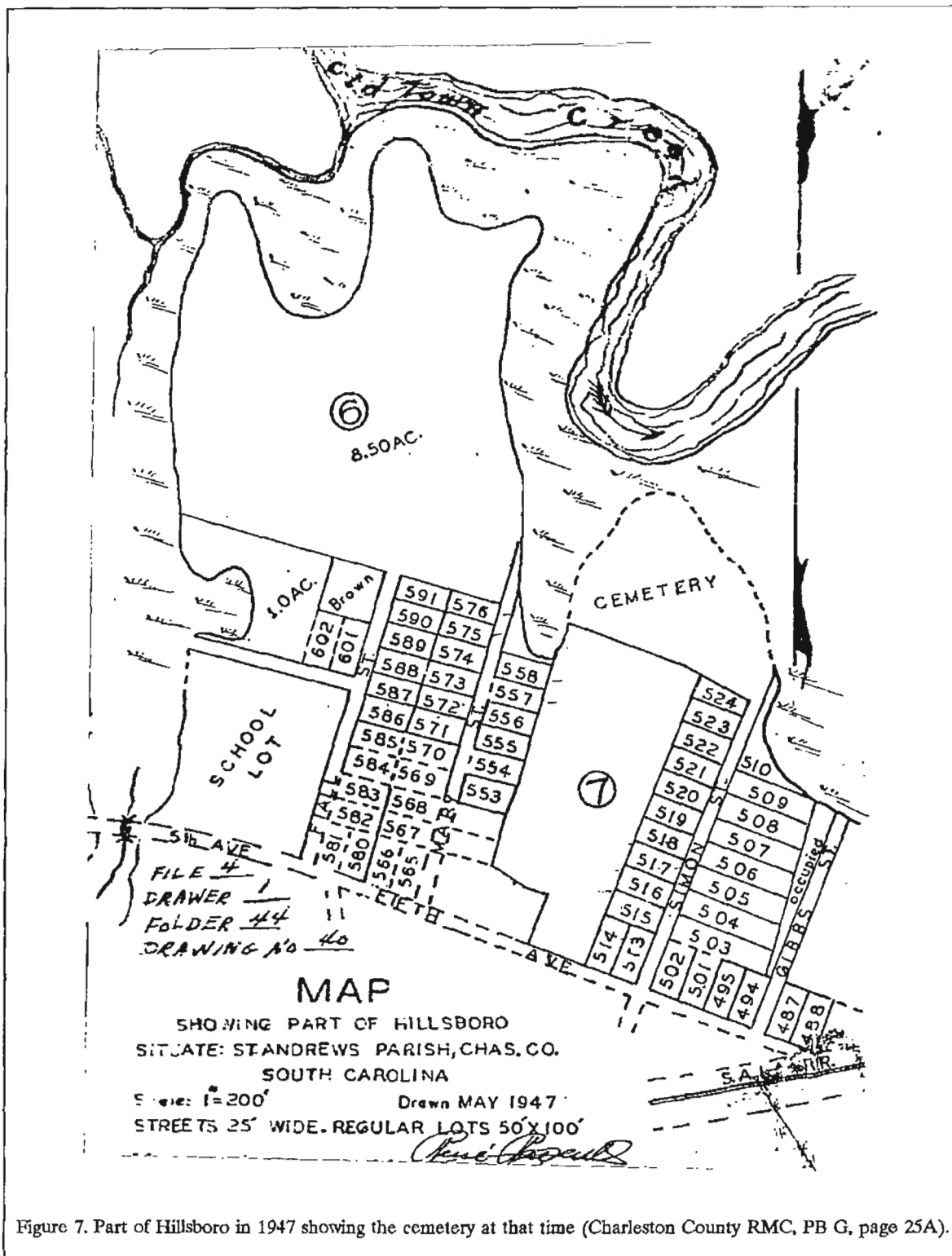
Taft is a rather interesting individual in his own right. He was born in Providence, Rhode Island and served as a private in Company B of the Third Rhode Island Heavy Artillery and was stationed in Charleston when released from active duty. He acquired a bar on East Bay and a small dry goods store. He also became active in Charleston politics, holding a variety of local offices ranging from alderman to coroner. Eventually he was elected to the State Senate, serving from 1876 through 1880. In 1881 he married the widow of C.C. Bowen. He served as the Charleston Postmaster, Supervisor for Charleston Schools, and Commissioner of the Charleston Orphan House. As an owner of considerable property in St. Andrew Parish (west of the Ashley River), he is also credited by some with the founding of Hillsboro and Maryville (Bailey et al. 1986:1574-1575).

There is, however, another side to the Maryville story. Mary Mathews Just is credited by many as the more immediate leader and founder of the Maryville community (which was named after her). Manning (1983:14-17) provides a brief

overview of her life, noting that she was an exceptionally strong black woman who went to work in the phosphate fields, unheard of during the period. She invested her substantial savings in real estate, purchasing a substantial holding. She is reported to have persuaded the other residents to "transform the settlement into a town" (Manning 1983:15). Manning notes that Maryville, "was one of the first purely black town governments in the state, a model community for blacks not only in South Carolina but throughout the United States" (Manning 1983:15). Mary went on to organize both religious instruction classes and educational opportunities for the Maryville residents. Little more is currently known about the community.

In 1950 Lawrence M. Pinckney, Estelle McN. Harris, Ferdinanda I. Legare Waring, Hermena B. Legare Kerrison, Julia Gadsden Legare Porcher, and Lila Rhett Birthright signed a quitclaim deed transferring a cemetery lot, known today as the Brown Cemetery, to the St. Paul A.M.E. Church, the Emmanuel A.M.E. Church, the First Baptist Church, and the Jerusalem Church R.M.E. The tract was described as being "a part of Hillsboro, called Maryville" and as containing "2.8 acres of Highland, more or less, and 2.5 acres of Marsh land" (Charleston County RMC, DB B53, p. 453). A plat prepared at that time shows the parcel butting lots 7 and 524 to the south with Simon Street (today Justin Street) dead ending on the property line (Figure 6) (Charleston RMC, PB H, p. 20). This plat, in turn, references a 1947 plat showing portions of Hillsboro, including the cemetery (Charleston RMC, PB G, p. 25A) (Figure 7).

The Charleston County Tax Assessor lists the property as "Hillsboro Cemetery" at the end of Justin Avenue. The owner of record is St. Paul AME Church, et al., in care of Mrs. Victoria Stewart, 930 Main Street, Charleston, SC 29407. The only St. Paul A.M.E. Church listed in the Charleston directory is on Rivers Avenue, although the Emmanuel A.M.E. Church is still listed at 1057 Fifth Avenue in the Maryville community.



FIELD METHODS

The cemetery was visited on the morning of Thursday, February 22. The road leading to the cemetery is undeveloped, although numerous piles of construction debris and other refuse were observed on the west side of the road. At the entrance to the cemetery there is a locked metal gate, although there are no identifying signs nor is the property posted (Figure 8). This gate allows access to the southeastern edge of the cemetery, with the tract extending as a finger of land into the marsh to the north and to the west.

The access road opens into what appears to be the newest portion of the cemetery. Here the landscape is reminiscent of Euro-American cemeteries, with cut grass, occasional stones, and relatively few trees aside from several ornamental plantings (Figure 9). This "modern" portion of the cemetery accounts for the eastern 50% of the tract. To the west of the access road, along the southern border of the "modern" cemetery there is a large pile of debris. Some of this material is clearly associated with the cleaning and maintenance of the cemetery and includes dead flowers, old wreaths, and grass clippings. Much of the pile, however, represents construction and landscaping debris which are likely *not* associated with the cemetery, but which have apparently been dumped on the edge of the cemetery by an individual or individuals with keys to the gate (Figure 10).

Prior to the recent disturbance, the western 50% of the cemetery was apparently overgrown by both overstory trees and understory herbaceous vegetation. The area recently affected represents about 25% of the total cemetery or 50% of the "older" portion. It occurs as a linear strip running from the southern boundary northward to the marshes of Old Town Creek. Just beyond this strip to the west there is the remnant of the "older" portion of the cemetery still undisturbed.

The disturbance is quite severe. Approximately 0.3 up to 0.5 foot of soil has been

stripped off of the cemetery (Figure 11). This is evidenced by the "pedestaling" of some grave areas where the heavy equipment operator recognized monuments and sought to avoid them (Figure 12) and by the remnant soil staining on markers where the soil was removed from around them (Figure 13). All vegetation has been removed, creating a totally denuded landscape (see Figure 11). In some cases very large trees were cut and simply rolled into the remnant portion of the old cemetery (Figure 14).

The massive amount of ground disturbance has not only destroyed the vegetation of the cemetery, but has also displaced a large quantity of grave goods, including shells (Figure 15) and ceramics or glassware (Figure 16). A number of the stone and brick monuments have likewise been damaged, displaced, or destroyed (see Figure 13; Figures 17-19). Even markers off the stripped tract were apparently damaged by the operation of heavy equipment (Figure 20).

Many of the broken monuments, grave goods, and planted vegetation were simply pushed into a large pile at the southern edge of the tract (Figures 21-23). Portions of broken monuments were found in this spoil pile, as well as still scattered in the open area (see Figure 17). A secondary spoil pile was found at the southwest corner of the cemetery (Figure 24). While this pile included some earth spoil from the cemetery, it was dominated by construction debris apparently dumped on the cemetery and subsequently bulldozed to this point. Much of this material appears to be very recent, perhaps being dumped at the time of the "clean-up" or only a few weeks earlier.

Further to the west there is a portion of the older graveyard which is still intact. Although this survey did not explore the woods, it was possible to see a number of stones in the



Figure 8. Entrance to the Brown or Hillsboro Cemetery in Maryville. View is to the North.

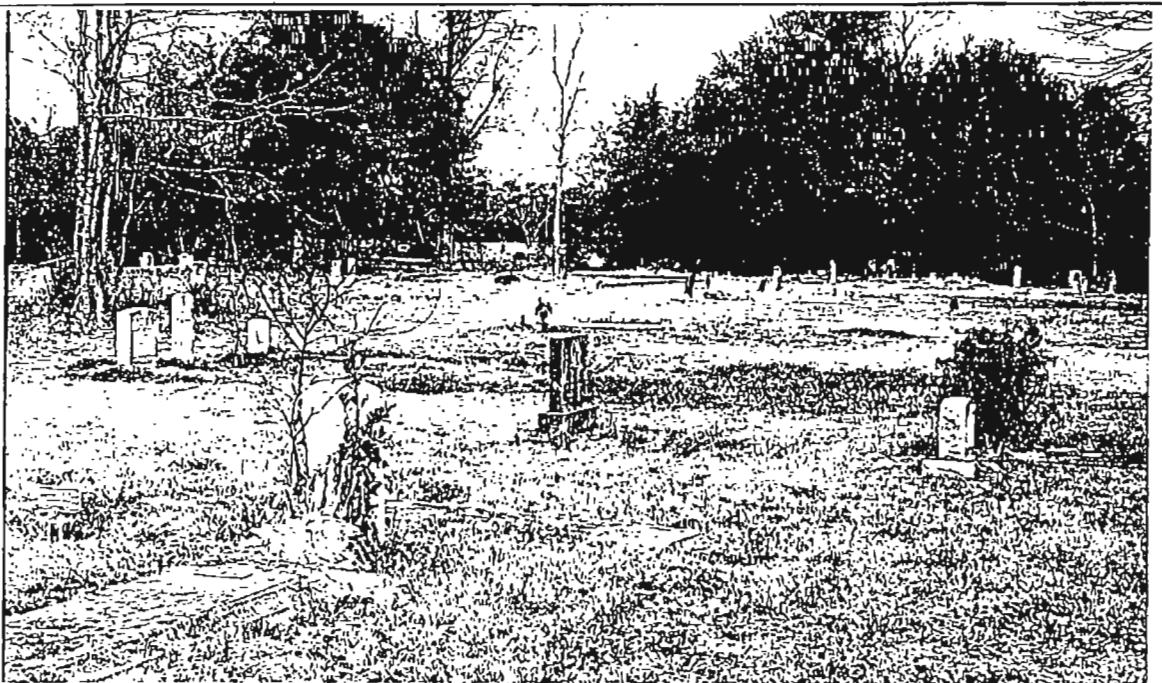


Figure 9. New section of the Brown Cemetery showing park-like landscaping with individual graves and associated plantings.



Figure 10. View of trash and debris piled up at the southern edge of the cemetery, just west of the gate. These materials include debris from the maintenance of the cemetery, as well as construction trash.



Figure 11. View of the damaged section of the cemetery looking to the north. To the right (or east) is the new section of the cemetery. To the left (or west) is the remaining portion of the old section of the cemetery.



Figure 12. Graves just east of the cleared section showing how they were pedestaled while the surrounding ground surface was lowered about a half foot.

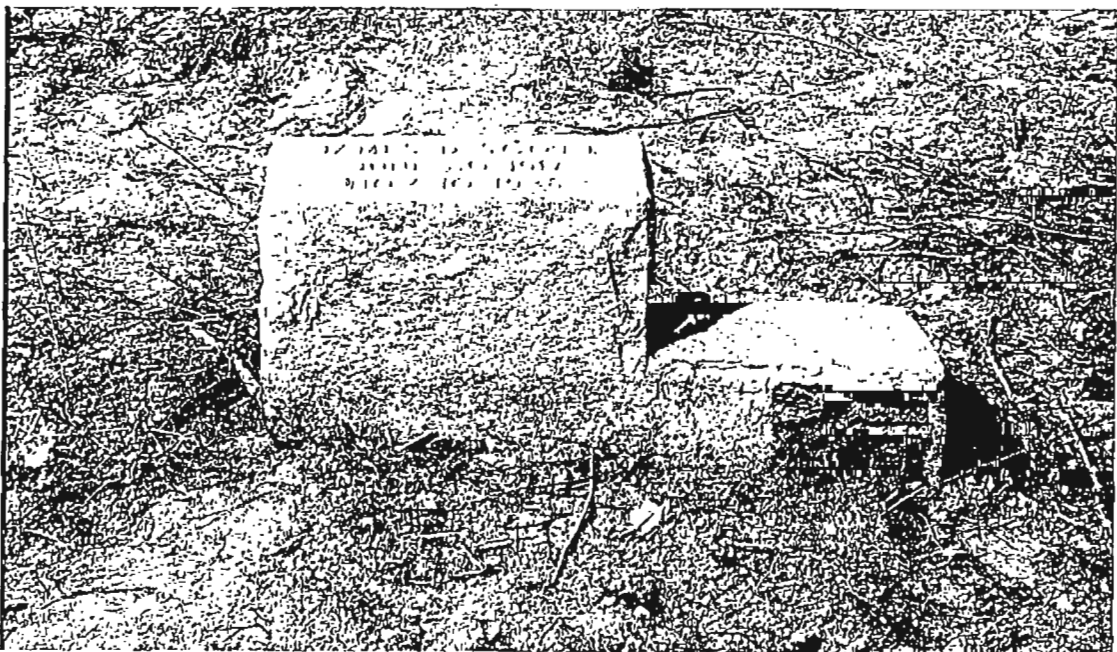


Figure 13. View of stone and associated damaged brick feature in the "clean-up" section of the graveyard. Notice also how the ground level has been lowered by at least 0.5 foot around the monument.



Figure 14. Edge of the damaged portion of the cemetery, showing large tree cut and rolled into the remnant old section. Notice how *all* vegetation has been removed.



Figure 15. Example of shell grave good left displaced by the heavy clearing and grubbing conducted at the graveyard.



Figure 16. Example of ceramics and glass grave goods broken and displaced by the clearing and grubbing.

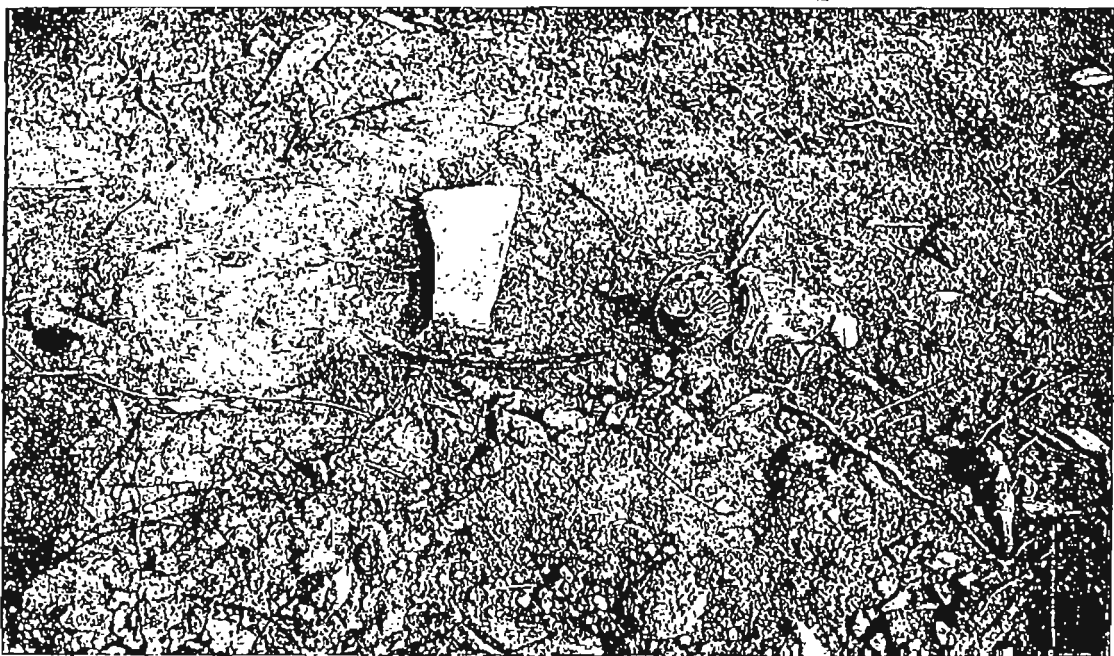


Figure 17. Example of marble tablet broken and scattered by the clearing and grubbing of the old section of the cemetery. Also shown are several displaced grave goods found nearby.



Figure 18. Example of a broken tablet, showing fresh breaks, recovered from the spoil pile south of the graveyard. It has been stacked on another damaged vault in the cleared and grubbed area.



Figure 19. Tablet marked "F.J. Stewart" broken in two and recovered from the spoil pile. Note not only the break, but also the chipping and fresh incisions in the marble as a result of heavy equipment damage.



Figure 20. Example of engraved stone used to outline a grave outside the bulldozed area. This grave has been damaged by heavy equipment running over it, breaking and displacing the stone.



Figure 21. Spoil pile containing soil, vegetation, bricks, shells, grave goods, and monuments pushed up at the south edge of the cemetery. Notice the truck and bulldozer tracks in the loose soil. View is to the south.



Figure 22. Mortared bricks used as a grave edging found in the spoil pile.



Figure 23. Small fragment of grave stone found deep in the spoil pile. Nearby are bricks.



Figure 24. View of spoil pile at the southwest edge of the cemetery. This pile contains primarily soil and very recent construction debris probably deposited in the cemetery within the past several weeks.

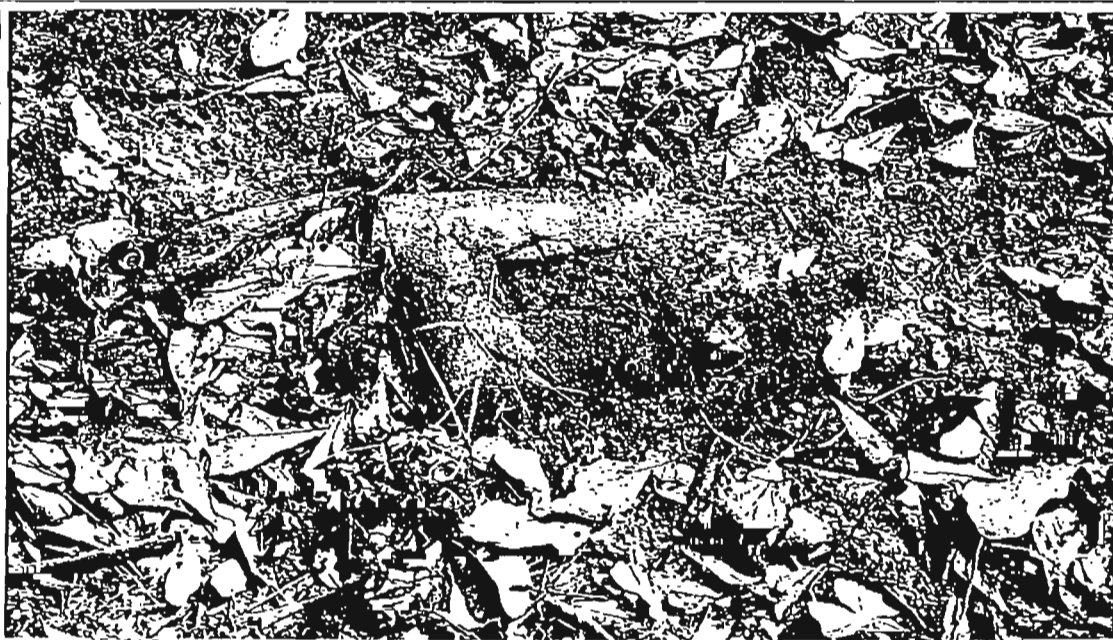


Figure 25. Stone base support found in the roadway on the west edge of the cemetery. This suggests that virtually all portions of the cemetery have been heavily used over time — even areas which are today thought to be roads.

vegetation, as well as a few grave goods. There is a road extending around the western edge of the site, adjacent to the marsh. While walking this road the base of stone was observed (Figure 25), revealing that even this road has been used for burials.

Evidence of the operation included the remains of wood chips produced by the use of a chain saw, the spoil pile, the damage to the cemetery, tracks such as produced by a bulldozer, and the tracks of a truck. We understand from our local informant that this damage was done earlier in the week, apparently by an individual or firm hired by the caretaker of the cemetery to "clean-up" the old portion. Although we have not pursued this issue, there seems every reason to believe that the individual responsible for this damage can be identified.

This survey included only a pedestrian examination of the graveyard. No excavations or probing were conducted. No grave goods were collected or otherwise disturbed. All materials were left where they were found and no effort was made to repair or replace any monuments. The only exception is that a fragmentary human parietal (skull) bone was found on the surface of the cleared and grubbed portion of the cemetery. It was reburied where found.

CONCLUSIONS

Even this reconnaissance level investigation has been adequate to document: (1) that the Brown cemetery likely dates back at least to the antebellum period, (2) that the cemetery contained an older and a more recent section, (3) that the older portion of the cemetery, in spite of its proximity to urban settlements, maintained a close connection with older African-American cultural and mortuary rituals, (4) that the cemetery contained many African-American grave goods and a number of graves, and (5) that the cemetery was under the care and supervision of at least one church.

We have been told, *but have not independently confirmed*, that the caretaker of the graveyard hired or contacted some other party to "clean-up" a portion of the cemetery. Whether this work was conducted under the direct supervision of the caretaker has also not been determined. Likewise, we have not determined whether the large quantities of construction trash were placed in the cemetery before or during the "clean-up."

We have documented extensive damage to approximately 25% of the cemetery, or 50% of the old portion. This damage includes: (1) clearing and grubbing of all vegetation ranging from small understory plants to large overstory trees, (2) removal of between 0.2 and 0.5 foot of soil from much of the area, (3) damage, destruction, and/or displacement of grave stones and cemetery plots, (4) damage, destruction, and/or displacement of grave goods including shells, ceramics, and glassware, (5) dispersion of probable grave outlines or markers, and (6) removal of physical evidence of graves such as depressions. While large or easily recognizable stones were left seemingly more or less in place, a great amount of information was destroyed by the "clean-up." This work was accomplished using minimally a chainsaw, truck, and bulldozer or similar tracked (not rubber-tired) piece of equipment.

There is reason to believe that the work conducted in the cemetery may have violated the South Carolina law protecting cemeteries (South Carolina Code of Laws §16-17-600 et seq.). Specifically, this law makes it a felony to destroy or damage human remains and a misdemeanor to damage or destroy a grave, gravestones, other monuments, fences, or vegetation.

This has not only affected the integrity of this site, but it has also made it impossible to easily identify grave locations. There is no longer the potential to use the placement of grave goods, the location of plantings, or grave depressions to identify probable grave locations. Location of grave locations is now considerably more complex and would require either extensive probing and augering or possibly even stripping of the overlying soil to reach clear grave shaft stains.

While it would be possible to salvage, and repair, the vast majority of the monuments damaged by the "cleaning" this would be a costly undertaking requiring the skill and expertise of a stone conservator such as Lynette Strangstad. Even after the work was accomplished, however, it is no longer possible to associate these monuments with any specific grave.

The complete removal of trees creates a very different landscape than was present prior to the cleaning, or which was probably present during the entire use of the cemetery. Restoration of the vegetation, while possible, would be costly and would likely cause additional damage to below ground remains.

Since the damage is so great, and the exact causes are still not clearly known or understood, it remains our opinion that the damage should be reported to the Charleston County Coroner and the appropriate law enforcement agency. A criminal investigation should be conducted to determine the appropriateness of filing charges

against those responsible for the damage to the cemetery. This effort should be coordinated with the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, which has responsibility for overseeing the archaeological protection of cemeteries in this state.

Some effort should be made to stabilize the damage to the cemetery. Minimally, this may mean carefully sorting through the spoil pile to recover grave goods and monuments. Although these cannot be returned to their correct location they can be placed at some safe location in the cemetery.

The remaining spoil, and trash, should be trucked off the cemetery site. Leaving it in place will only encourage additional dumping and inappropriate use of the cemetery.

The newly opened area should be stabilized with a rapid-growing, drought-resistant ground cover to minimize soil loss through wind and water erosion. Currently the totally denuded soil is at risk to severe erosion.

Finally, no additional clearing and grubbing should be allowed in the cemetery. Any future "cleaning-up" should be accomplished *only* by hand.

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Cemetery Preservation Plans

Historical Research

**Identification of Grave Locations
and Mapping**

Condition Assessments

Treatment of Stone and Ironwork



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